

Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire

Newsletter 2015

Editor's News



Amanita spissa at Common Wood, Woodcote

www.fungusoxfordshire.org.uk

Our website continues to attract attention. Again, many thanks to Peter Davis (BFG) for all his help with the website. Thanks to the website we have a number of new members. Also thank you to John Woolliams and others who have contributed photos to the website, to Wendy MacEachrane and Rod for printing off this Newsletter and the 2015 Foray Programme and to Caroline Jackson-Houlston for her painting of *Amanita spissa*

As we write, we have been contacted by the County Museum at Standlake about our FSO dried fungal collection. We have been asked to find an alternate home. Kew have been approached, we hope that they can take part of the collection if not the whole.

Molly Dewey

Notes from our President

The wider view

On 20-21 June last year I attended the Group Leaders meeting in Hereford on behalf of the Oxfordshire Fungus Survey. It was a chance to meet up with those other groups affiliated with the British Mycological Society, of which I am currently Vice President. It was also a chance to position our own efforts in our county in a wider British context. There are many people working hard to record local occurrences of fungi, but where will it eventually lead?

It was interesting to hear from David Bullock that the National Trust is becoming progressively aware of the importance of their properties for fungi. Because they often come into the Trust's possession after years of comparative neglect, certain habitats have become rather optimal for our organisms. Lawns that have not been fertilized for years are prime sites for waxcaps, for example. Ancient hollow trees are favoured not only by rare beetles, but by unusual bracket fungi too. So the urge to 'tidy up' has to be resisted, within the limits of safety legislation for the public.

Peter Smith took a more historical line, showing how the word 'foray' came into use in the nineteenth century, when field mycology dominated the field. Nowadays most of the 'cutting edge' research is carried out in laboratories, so there is

always the danger of the field community seeming a little fuddy duddy and out of touch. However Marcus Yeo is convinced that the importance of groups like ours to identify sites of conservation importance has only grown with the diminution in 'professional' taxonomists. Since the meeting we have heard of traumas at Kew, and it is not quite clear

how they will work out in the end. But it is certainly clear that Fungus Groups are important in keeping areas of knowledge alive while our political masters value budgets over expertise. As Kay Yeoman reported, there is a sad lack of mycology in the school curriculum, and it must surely be the case that groups like ours are a way of enthusing the next generation of mycologists if our educators are not rising to the challenge. That is an important job in the wider context.

Much more specific is the "Lost & Found" project being organized from Kew by Paul Cannon. This will rely heavily on the participation of the field community. The project is designed to investigate the status of 100 fungus species that are considered rare. Is this really the case, or is it just that they have not been looked for in the right places, at the right time of year, or are they just difficult to distinguish from neighbouring species? The project will involve searching sites where they have been recorded in the past, to see if they are still there. Evidence of *absence* will be as important as a triumphant rediscovery of some species that has not been recorded for many years. We all remember the rediscovery of the "pepperpot fungus" *Myriostoma coliforme* in East Anglia after more than a century. The 'wanted list' is now available, and we should have an eye to some of the rarities we might find – or fail to find – in Oxfordshire. Small bursaries will be available to provide an incentive. This might provide a special focus for "mini forays" during the year! I might add that if a species turns out to be more common than might have been thought, it will be moved off the list to make way for another. So there is an agenda for us: to go out and search for species that will contribute to the bigger picture of "what is out there."

Of course, it is even more important than that. The western part of the British Isles might prove to be a haven

for many fungus species endangered in parts of continental Europe where pollution levels are higher. We still do not know the effects of atmospheric nitrification. We are only just beginning to grasp the mycological implications of global climate change. Fifteen years ago I wrote an article in the first number of *Field Mycology* pointing up the importance of old Oxfordshire churchyards as fungal conservation areas. I based my article on the old churchyard at St Nicholas Rotherfield Greys, near Henley, which at that time was replete with uncommon *Hygrocybe*, *Dermoloma*, *Entoloma* and *Clavaria* species. Not any more. In the last few years I have struggled to find a quarter of those I originally recorded. Is this a local phenomenon? If anything, there is less cultivation in the fields around, so I can rule out local fertilizer pollution. Is it just a series of bad fungus seasons? Or is something more fundamental at work? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I do know that the answers will be important. The local data feeds into a wider view, and one that will be relevant to the status of fungi for the unforeseeable future.

Richard Fortey FRS

A word from our Chairman

I am sure that all the members of this group will join me in expressing our thanks to those who have helped with last year's foray programme; in particular our recorder, Dr Julie Webb, and secretary, Dr Molly Dewey.

We enjoyed some productive forays in 2014 and seem to be experiencing a trend where good weather prolongs the season beyond that historically covered by the Programme. Indeed, when planning the 2015 Programme John Killick proposed that we might decide to have some spontaneous forays later this autumn, if the frost holds off, to be communicated by email.

Many of us were expecting to find little still about on the last of the season's forays at Pinsley Wood near Church Hanborough. However, we didn't just end up with a brisk walk and an early lunch before the AGM and were delighted to see so many really super fungi.

This included one of the nicest examples of *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* (or *C. aeruginosum*; depending on hyphal or spore characteristics) that I have ever seen. The picture of this specimen shows clearly why the common names of green elf cup or green wood cup have been used to describe the fruiting bodies. This species contains a quinone pigment called xylindein, which gives wood infected by this fungus a characteristic bluish-green stain that is observed very much more commonly than the fruiting bodies.

The use of this *Chlorociboria* infected 'green oak' in decorative woodworking dates back to the 15th century, when the Italian Fra Giovanni da Veroni used 'green oak' in intarsia panels. In the United Kingdom the Tunbridge ware industry, based around the spa town of Tunbridge Wells in Kent, produced an extensive range of mosaic and inlaid wooden souvenirs from the 1830s-1930s



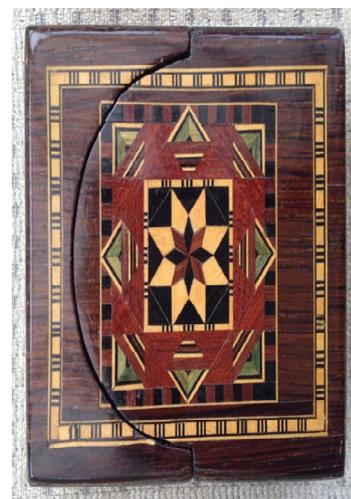
Chlorociboria aeruginascens Photo. John Banham

The industry was proud to state that only timbers in their natural colours were used and Edmund Nye was credited with originally using 'green oak' which was commonly collected from parkland in the Eridge area. This use of green wood was reported as a new introduction in his successor's (Thomas Barton) exhibits at the 1864 Tunbridge Wells Industrial Exhibition.

One of my hobbies is collecting Tunbridge ware and over lunch we looked at one box where *C. aeruginascens* infected wood had been used quite extensively.



A couple of smaller examples, including a watch stand and small pot are illustrated below.



I hope that the weather is good for fungi in 2015 and I look forward to seeing you all later in the year.

Prof Alison Banham

2014 Foray round up news from our Recorder

We managed 11 forays in 2014. The autumn ones in September were unfortunately low on species because of the warm dry weather, but numbers of fungi began to pick up with the rain in October and November proved to be the most fruitful time for fungi. One of the best forays was in fact a last minute re-schedule to Sydlings Copse SSSI. We were planning to go to Stow Wood, but when we arrived, hearing the pheasant shooting inside the wood, we decided to go to Sydlings copse, just down the road as a much safer bet. The new site of Nettlebed Common proved very interesting, with the interesting and uncommon waxcap *Hygrocybe flavipes* noted from the cricket pitch.

Do look at all the lists from the forays which are now on the website.

Apart from the planned forays, during the year I was contacted over a number of fungal issues. Two truffle specimens were sent to me. The first was in April 2014 which was a supposed Summer truffle (*Tuber aestivum*) in a Kennington garden under trees. Although the specimen was too young to have the characteristic sculptured spores, the black warty outer layer indicated that this was indeed most likely a summer truffle.

An unknown truffle sent to me from Kingham, near Chipping Norton was sent in March. It was described as 'when fresh smelling of gas-leak' and was apparently associated with the roots of a Beech tree in a garden. The dried specimen sent to me proved to be the Stinking slime truffle *Melanogaster ambiguous* confirmable by the combination of distinctive smell and its characteristic lemon shaped spores under the microscope.

A fascinating Red Cage Fungus (*Clathrus ruber*) photograph was passed on to me in September 2014 from a garden in Harwell Oxfordshire. The species was first noticed as remains of a cage in 2013 but dismissed it as man-made, thinking it was the inside of one of the children's balls. This year it was observed to emerge as a white egg-like fruit first then the red cages followed. This is a species that is increasing, in 2013 we were informed of a sighting of this in Oxford City.



Clathrus ruber –Harwell Apple orchard, 2 September 2014
Heather Coates

Keith Cohen found the rare *Rhodocybe gemina* in his personal foraging at Tackley Heath. Obviously a good site that needs a future foray from the whole group. He also found *Lepiota ignivolvata* in Nettlebed woods, always an excellent site when we manage to get there.

Rare fungi often turn up in my work outside the normal forays. Dried out ponds are not normally thought of as a good site for fungi but this is exactly where the rare tiny toadstool *Psathyrella typhae* grows on the rotting remains of reed mace (*Typha*) and sedges. This was found in September by Rod d' Ayala in Drayton Millenium pond during his remedial pond work.



Psathyrella typhae

Butter waxcaps *Hygrocybe ceracea* seemed to pop up everywhere in acid low nutrient grassland last autumn. I was impressed by the numbers on Frilford Heath Golf course.

The highlight of my regular fungal recording at Aston Rowant NNR last year was the Whiskery Milk Cap *Lactarius maireii*.



Whiskery Milk Cap *Lactarius maireii*. Photo: J. Webb

This occurred in the root zone of old ex coppice multi-trunked oak at the top of Flinty Piece on Bald Hill. Also this was the first year (in four years intensive surveying of this site) that the Oily Waxcap *Hygrocybe quieta* made abundant appearance. Further records of the big blue pink gill *Entoloma bloxamii* were made on Beacon hill. This was first found in 2013 here by Keith Cohen. However looking at my latest copy of Field Mycology I find that it may not be *E. bloxamii* after all. Apparently there is a very similar species called which differs mainly only in spore size (a matter of a

few micrometres) and has this been confirmed for the '*E. bloxamii*' previously recorded for Watlington hill by Penny Cullington (and by us FSO when foraging there). So I suppose I need to re-examine my specimens of this species and get measuring spores to check.

On the interesting rather than attractive range of fungal findings, I was fascinated by a host of little pearly white toadstools which were growing on what was obviously the long dead carcass of a sheep/deer at Aston Rowant. Despite the unusual substrate of hair, these turned out to be probably one of the small *Collybias* known as 'Shanklets'. I excavated the stipe bases very carefully but could find no sclerotia, therefore it seems likely to be *Collybia cirrhata*, which normally grows on rotting remains of agaric fungi.

As I write this, a request has come in via Kew from a Slovakian scientist asking for specimens of any *Camarophylloopsis* species for DNA analysis in order to determine exactly how many species there are in the genus. These are 'little brown job' type toadstools with decurrent gills, hence the common name of 'Fanvaults'. The four or five species we have are all quite rare. I have three collections from Milham Ford School (now Milham Ford Nature Park) in Oxford, one from Hinksey Heights Fen west of Oxford and one from Cothill Fen NNR near Dry Sandford. The two species found at Milham Ford contributed greatly to the protection of the site from development as both are Red Data Listed. I await the results to find out if we have two species, three species or possibly more.

Finally a big thank-you again to Wendy MacEachrane for working hard on the 2013 foray data entry to MycoRec on the group's laptop.

Judy Webb

A photo for the culinary inclined



Marketa Samalova--family Foray Pilsen, west of Bohemia, 2014

Chocolate truffles (*Tuber theobromatum*)

INGREDIENTS: main truffle

- Knob of butter
- 150 g./ 6 oz dark chocolate (40%)
- 1/4 pint double cream
- Liqueur to taste, and to match the Matchmakers for stipes, so Cointreau, Crème de Menthe or (if you're very lucky with the Matchmakers) Cassis. Probably about 3 capfuls. (You can omit the alcohol and substitute orange zest and orange essence, or mint essence).
- Sieved icing sugar (optional—can be used to stiffen mixture if it's very liquid, or for dusting your hands in the vain hope that the mixture will not stick to them as you roll the truffles).

INGREDIENTS: finishing

- 100 g. white chocolate, grated.
- Chocolate sticks with flavoured chips in to match liqueur used, e.g. Matchmaker brand, which comes in orange, or mint, or limited editions of other flavours.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Melt butter in a bowl over hot water, or a pan on the very lowest heat.
- Break up chocolate and melt it with the butter.
- Take off heat and allow to cool slightly.
- Meanwhile, whip cream till it is stiff, and add liqueur. Beat in cooled but still runny chocolate. Allow to go stiff in fridge for at least an hour; overnight is best.
- Grate white chocolate. Roll truffle mixture into balls a bit smaller than a ping-pong ball, and roll them round in the grated white chocolate. There is no way this will not be very messy, unless you have stone-cold hands.
- Allow truffles to set firm again. For non-mycological guests they are now finished. However, it is intriguing to cut each ball in half and give it a stipe made out of part of a chocolate stick. Serve on a plate scattered with chocolate leaves.

Caroline Jackson-Houlston



Photo Caroline Jackson-Houlston