

FSO NEWSLETTER 2023-4

FROM THE PRESIDENT

2023 marked the end of a collaborative project centred on the ancient ‘forest’ area of High Park, in the grounds of the stately home at Blenheim, Woodstock. This is one of the most important UK sites for ancient oaks – indeed, it is one of few tracts of medieval wood pasture surviving in Western Europe. Oak trees up to 800 years old become characters with massive trunks but with reduced crowns from which dead stag’s horn branches extend into the sky.

Each old oak has its own personality; they carry on for centuries in this condition. The expert on such oaks is Aljos Farjon, formerly of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, who initiated a project to investigate the biological richness of this special habitat. Fungi were assessed alongside flora and fauna to estimate the total conservation importance of this special site, drawing on teams of experts, both amateur and professional. The results will be published in 2024 under the title *The Natural History of Blenheim’s High Park* (Pelagic Publishing). One chapter is wholly devoted to our fungal summary, with Martyn Ainsworth, professional mycologist at Kew, as lead author.

A small group from FSO had been visiting this site for the previous five years making collections to further the project. Only one public right of way passes through High Park, and many of the ancient oaks are well away from it, so we had permission from the Estate (via Dr Farjon) to go ‘off piste’ in our search for fruit bodies, if there were no shooting parties in competition. At the end of the survey, 428 fungal species were identified from collected specimens.

These included both saprotrophs and mycorrhizal species, many of which could be positively associated with the oak trees that make High Park so interesting. In addition a further 34 species were detected from below ground surveys – essentially by identifying the ectomycorrhizal species living on tree roots from their DNA profiles. Amongst these fungi were some of particular interest as associates of ancient oaks. Since Britain is the most important European site for these veteran trees the relevant fungus species are also of maximum conservation interest for Oxfordshire. The Oak Polypore (*Buglossoporus quercinus*) is a bracket fungus superficially resembling a yellowish version of the common Birch Polypore (*Fomitopsis betulina*) and only found on the dead wood of very old oaks; during our survey it was found on twenty individual trees, making Blenheim an important site for the survival of this rarity (Windsor Great Park is probably the only more prolific site; (photo left © Aljos Farjon). The much commoner Beefsteak Fungus plays an important part in hollowing out veteran oaks, which actually helps their survival into very old age. The Zoned Rosette (*Podoscypha multizonata*) with its curious, almost bath-sponge appearance, is found on the ground around ancient oaks, where it apparently grows from decaying roots. Two oaks in Blenheim yielded its distinctive fruit bodies. Both Oak Polypore and Zoned Rosette are priority species for conservation.



The survey also recorded the first British occurrences of two species of ectomycorrhizal toadstools *Cortinarius alboadustus* and *Inocybe jucunda* (neither with common names). Both are typical small, brown mushrooms but the DNA evidence critically confirmed their identity. A longer list of fungi comprised ‘firsts’ for Oxfordshire.

The total number of species recorded still fell far short of figures for areas that had been studied thoroughly over longer periods of time such as Windsor Great Park and Dudmaston Hall, Shropshire; Martyn Ainsworth contends that had the survey continued our list of species could have been much longer. Nonetheless, we now know much more than we did five years ago.

For every new discovery, fungi typically throw up more questions worthy of investigation - and High Park is no exception. While we found rare species that we considered ourselves lucky to come across, we also failed to find other species that we had fully expected to discover with no difficulty. One of the commoner



brackets on fallen oak trunks is the Mazegill, *Daedalea quercina*, whose large, greyish, corky fruitbodies persist in recognizable form for months and are unlikely to be missed. This species was not found during our survey, and we are at a loss to explain why, since its appropriate habitat abounds everywhere in High Park. The same applies to some of the agarics that are staples in our regular forays. Many of these are ectomycorrhizal associates of trees, including *Quercus*. That iconic toadstool, the Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) and the False Death Cap (*Amanita citrina*) are cases in point. Normally abundant, they did not show up in our surveys. *Russula* and *Lactarius* species were less varied than one might have expected. On many of our Oxfordshire forays the most abundant *Russula* is the Blackening Brittlegill (*R. nigricans*), which often almost carpets the leaf litter in autumn. It appears to be absent in High Park. Could it be that the High Park ancient wood pasture has aged to a stage beyond that which is suitable for many of our common woodland agarics? After all, most of the commercial woodlands in our county are middle-aged at most. Perhaps the common records we make from the Chiltern Hills just record a certain stage in the evolution of a forest ecosystem that is rarely allowed to play out to its completion. Such notions may only suggest themselves as a result of the close examination of such exceptional habitats as High Park, Blenheim. It certainly suggests that such places should be cherished, especially at a time when the effects of climate change are still the subject of speculation.

Richard Fortey

SURVEY AND WALK REPORTS

Watlington Hill, 30th September, Survey

On the way through to our target habitat, the strip of woodland next to the car park provided a good range of brackets, including a fine colony of *Bjerkandera adusta* (Smoky Bracket) on a fallen tree, and some Yellowing Curtain Crust to complement its congener Hairy Curtain Crust, and the ubiquitous Turkeytail (*Stereum subtomentosum*, *S. hirsutum*, *Trametes versicolor*). Heather found a lovely cluster of *Calocera viscosa* (Yellow Stagshorn) in a gloomy niche under a log. The usual woodland fungi were found, including the ubiquitous *Mycena crocata* (Saffrondrop Bonnet) which was prolific.

However, our goal was the unimproved hillside grassland. And sure enough, Waxcaps and *Entolomas* were discovered including the beautiful *Gliophorus psittacinus* (Parrot Waxcap), some *Hygrocybe chlorophana* (Golden Waxcap) glowing in the sunshine, and *H. conica*, Blackening Waxcap, already living up to its name.

In previous years the FSO has aimed to visit later in the year, for the waxcaps and other grassland specialists. A visit nearly two months earlier than customary was both rewarding and challenging. Another regular favourite already fruiting was the diminutive *Entoloma incana*, with a turquoise base to its green stipe, and an odour that justifies its common name, Mousepee Pinkgill. More puzzling Pinkgills were on the menu, though, including two dainty species with dark blue tones which none of us had seen before. The first of these



is most likely to be *Entoloma asprellum* and the other *E. serrulatum*. Its darkening gill edges were not apparent in the field, but developed later. Previous records for blue *Entolomas* on this site are conspicuous by paucity, perhaps because, in the case of the FSO at least, the surveys have been too late to catch these ephemeral fungi, or perhaps because their appearances are few and far between, and this was a season notable for its production of rarities. (Photos above, CJH)

An even tinier and even more puzzling charmer was a fragile, shining funnel in crowded little groups (see right, above, CJH). Heather Banyard worked assiduously in the field to find a picture link on the spot, which produced a tentative diagnosis of *Arrhenia obscurata*, *sensu* Phillips, but there are several other possibilities. Identification is complicated by trying to track the material through the mazes of four different versions of generic name, and alternative specific epithets as well. Moreover, the NBN Atlas gives one record

under this name, and it is at the top of Snaefell! At least we can be encouraged that this well-known site has some mysteries still to be resolved.



Enthralled by the unfamiliar miniatures, most of the group elected not to stay beyond the finishing time to explore for the larger species further along the hill. However, Linda Seward and Richard Newcombe did venture further, and added others, including *Clavulinopsis corniculata* (Meadow Coral) and one of many rare species associated with Rockrose as a woody species. This was the pale, statuesque *Amanita simulans*, well worth their effort. (Photos LS)

C. M. Jackson-Houlston & Linda Seward

Aston Rowant, 14th October. Joint Survey with Thames Valley Fungus Group

Abundant rain preceding this foray, and the shared skills of two groups, ensured a long list. Cowleaze wood car park (beech on clay) produced 26 species before we even got across the road to the NNR. This is the year when Buttercaps (*Gymnopus butyraceus*) were everywhere with good showing of The Blusher (*Amanita rubescens*) and Clouded Funnel (*Clitocybe nebularis*).

Once within the reserve, 42 species were encountered including at the start a very puzzling yellowish *Amanita* (still undetermined) associated with roots of oaks on clay. Note the golden decoration on the base and underside of the ring, and also moderate ornamentation round the base of the stipe in CJH's painting. (The specimen was repatriated to the site later, and a small chip sent off for DNA analysis, but unfortunately it was contaminated by a mould.) As we proceeded through the wooded top of Flinty Piece, I remember the



strikingly bright Orange Milkcaps (*Lactarius aurantiacus*) and there was an amazingly good showing of the uncommon Whiskery Milkcap (*Lactarius mairei*) associated with roots of oaks on clay, with more fruitbodies than ever seen here before.



Whiskery milkcap *Lactarius mairei* (photo JW)

It was obviously too early for chalk grassland fungi, with only Snowy and Blackening waxcaps but there was also a good showing of big white Amanitas associated with the roots of Birches at the north western end of the hillside, *Amanita strobiliformis* being the biggest.



A new record for this compartment was this small scruffy mushroom with grey-brown gills and brown cracked top. It rarely gets highlighted but it is uncommon inland. With no common name, this is *Rhodocybe* (now *Clitocella*) *popinalis*. More frequent in seaside locations on sand dunes, it is said to be salt-tolerant.



The before-and-after photos (CJH, JW) show how different this species looked at different ages on the two occasions we found it this year, in two different SSSIs. There are only 138 records for the NBN Atlas.

Judy Webb, Richard Fortey, CJH

Nippers Grove, 18th October, Survey

This mixed woodland is apparently well off the beaten track, but much used by dog walkers and horse riders. In mid-October drizzle it looked rather unpropitious, an impression soon dissipated by the appearance of a fine range of fresh specimens of 69 species of fungi. These included 6 species of *Amanita*, 6 Webcaps (broadly, *Cortinarius*), and 9 *Russulas*. Among the first group was *Amanita porphyria*, the Grey-veiled Amanita, an uncommon species with few records in our area; it seems to favour Scotland.

It was easy for photographers to be distracted by pristine groups of Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) emerging along the path through the trees. One of the puzzling webcaps we



could identify was a juvenile *Cortinarius elatior*, the Wrinkled Webcap, looking creased even in Linda's photo (left). This fungus may not be rare, but we go for years without the FSO recording it. This season saw it crop up more frequently, and in different locations. When grown up, it is striking in its size, stem colouration and banding, as in the painting (CJH, from Pamber Forest later in the year). Other species characteristic of good sites were the small Trumpet Chanterelle (*Cantharellus tubaeformis*), a young Giant Puffball



(*Calvatia gigantea*), and the first in a series of the season's unusual Dapperlings (*Cystolepiota hetteri*). This seems to be the third record for NBN Atlas record for Oxfordshire, though the FRDBI records from out President alone suggest this is seriously inaccurate. It seems to be to this site, although also possibly cropping up on other surveys, in less identifiable condition.

C. M. Jackson-Houlston

High Wood, Woodcote, 22nd October, Walk

A beautiful sunny day at part of the complex of old woodlands at Woodcote encouraged FSO and local participation. This event was one of a series based on the annual choice of a survey site by the Commoners, who select a site and arrange permissions. Many keen-eyed and enthusiastic children attended. Indeed, even the strip of grassland between the road and the entrance attracted attention, for the ever-popular Parrot Waxcap.



In the wood, we soon encountered this large *Inocybe* species, probably *I. rimosa*, very common this year, and very poisonous, a fact youngsters always love to hear. Sadly (?) no true Death Caps were available, though False Death Cap (*Amanita citrina*) was. Two 'bleeding' Bonnets were popular, the orange-milked *Mycena crocata* and red-milked *M. haematopus*. The section of High Wood we looked at is largely beech and oak, and produced a range of other expected common species, such as three *Russulas* (conspicuous by their absence elsewhere), two corals (*Clavulina coralloides* and *C. cinerea*), Russet Toughshank (*Gymnopus dryophilus*), Amethyst Deceiver (*Laccaria amethystina*), and Beech Milkcap (*Lactarius blennius*).



Guess-the-number-of-fungus-gnat-larvae in this Rosy Bonnet (*Mycena rosea*). No prizes, but a fine example of why birds benefit from fungi!

Boletes (which fruited early in 2023 due to wet weather in the summer) were present only in an advanced state of decay, with the result that the species list contains only the bright yellow and white mould that grows on old bolete fruitbodies, *Hypomyces chrysospermus*, rather than the names of its victims. Unlike most moulds, it has a gruesome and memorable English name, the Bolete Eater.

Less common finds included a fine group of Dog Stinkhorns (*Mutinus caninus*) and, as a fitting finale, a single Hare's Ear (*Otidea onotica*).

Text and photos, C. M. Jackson-Houlston

Sydlings Copse, 25th October, Survey

This Site of Special Scientific Interest consists of five protected habitats. The round walk includes both acidic and calcareous grassland, with hillside woodland on either side of the brook that divides them. As the site is threatened by excessive visitor pressure from new housing, both actual and proposed, this was a timely visit, especially in such a fortuitously productive season.

The woods held a bumper crop of Collared Earthstars (*Geastrum triplex*) and four *Lepiota*-looking fungi, which have a tendency to appear in congeneric clusters. The most conspicuous of these was the Freckled Dapperling (*Echinoderma asperum*). There was also a small, green-tinged toadstool which (in spite of the leader's efforts to identify it as the very uncommon *Inocybe calamistrata*) finally clicked into place as the even rarer Green Dapperling (*Lepiota grangei*) with only 73 NBN Atlas records. The records are redacted to square only, but this seems from the locations stated to be the 4th FRDBI record for Oxfordshire. The green is elusive, but appears if you rotate the fungus to catch the light obliquely. For the painting, I used a translucent green wash over the middle of the cap. Sadly, this will not work with a printed picture. This was just the most distinctive of a range of mostly puzzling warted Fibrecaps and Dapperlings.



Although the Birch-dotted heathland was thin on Russulas one might expect—just two common ones were found—one small fungus masquerading as a Russula button turned out to be one of the rarities (138 NBN UK records) that also cropped up on a second site this year. Growing out of a stump on the limestone grassland was a fine colony of the leathery tongues of the Shoehorn Oyster, *Hohenbuehelia petaloides*. There are even fewer NBN records of this (103). However, in both these two cases there are previous occurrences noted in Oxfordshire.



Another good find was the Sticky Bolete, *Suillus viscidus*, with 332 NBN records, and 6 FRDBI ones in the county, including one previous one at Sydlings. Since it grows with Larch, it is usually found on acid sites, which are uncommon in Oxfordshire. The large Larch on the calcareous grassland has been regarded as an unwelcome intruder, and of course its needle litter can create its own acidity. Heavily glutinous, greyish, and looking as if it has been attacked with a hammer, it is hardly the most beautiful of the boletes, but interesting all the same, and new to all the group. 54 species were found.

C. M. Jackson-Houlston (text and illustrations)

Bladon Heath, 29th October, Walk

On a very rainy late October day twenty of us including several visitors met at Bladon Heath. Despite the muddy conditions and heavy rain this mixed woodland proved to be a good site for records and forty-one different fungi were found. Sadly last year's *pièce de résistance*, the pin-up for the 2023 survey card, *Calcipostia guttulata*, had passed into history. We found only its disintegrated dead log, though CJH reports there was one fruitbody earlier in the year (and Julia Huggins found another colony at the Warburg reserve.)

There were other unusual finds this year including *Phleogena faginea* (Fenugreek Stalkball) found by Eloise (see also the Ditchley report, below) and the uncommon *Hygrophorus cossus* which Renee spotted. The intriguing Purple Jellydisc, *Ascocoryne sarcoides*, a gelatinous lilac to red disc suggesting the looming weirdness of Halloween, was found by Ariane. Interestingly, this species has been found to contain the antibiotic compound ascocorynin which can inhibit the growth of some Gram-positive bacteria. The magic of mushrooms.

Wendy MacEachrane

Aston Upthorpe, 5th November, Survey

As I was unwell on this date I'm grateful to Richard Fortey for stepping in as leader, to Rod d'Ayala for supplying help with local knowledge and directions and Julia Huggins for recording. This SSSI grassland site is well known for its flora, particularly a population of rare Pasque flowers and its notable big Juniper population. To my knowledge it has had no fungal surveys, despite having high quality chalk grassland flora which would be expected to have a range of associated fungi. I was therefore very pleased to see the range of fungi reported.

Good finds included the very uncommon Toasted Waxcap (*Cuphophyllus colemannianus*) and I was especially pleased to see findings of the Big Blue Pinkgill (*Entoloma bloxamii*, *s.l.*) which is actually a complex of four species according to DNA analysis). This last is an important record as this is UKBAP Priority species (now termed a Section 41 species or 'Species of Principal Importance'), one that I would expect in such an ancient, low nutrient grassland habitat. Some members may remember it is also to be found on similar quality chalk grassland at Watlington Hill and Aston Rowant NNR. It is pictured on the left (photo CJH). Other 'good old grassland' species include the Earthy Waxcap (*Cuphophyllus fornicatus*), Dark Crazy Cap (*Dermoloma pseudocuneifolium*), Mouse-pee Pink-gill (*Entoloma incanum*) and the white and yellow fairy club fungi *Clavaria acuta* and *Clavulinopsis helvola* (this last confirmed microscopically by its round spores with spikes like World War II mines).



Judy Webb

Ditchley Estate, 19th November, Survey

Late in a generally wet autumn, a group of FSO members and interested locals met at Ditchley Estate. The survey explored two wooded plantation strips dominated by beech trees. Both of these had been visited by FSO in 2021 and 2022 which were much drier autumns. Previously, the first had yielded very little, though the second was always productive. This year, it was a pleasant surprise that the first area was productive enough to take up most of the foray. Finds were mostly saprotrophs, litter and wood rotters. 75 species were found this year, though not all confirmed to species, compared to 51 and 40 on the previous visits; the running total is about 115 species. In a good year for *Echinodermas* and *Lepiotas* we found several this visit not previously observed, thanks to the efforts of our President in identification beyond the field. One of these was this neat *Echinoderma jacobii*. There are only 16 NBN Atlas records for this species in the UK, and 1 previous FRDBI one for Oxfordshire, on the other side of the county. However, this group of broadly *Lepiota* type fungi are difficult to identify, and this is not helped by numerous name changes which make them difficult to track.



Even worse are Inkcaps. Many patches of the common Glistening Inkcup (*Coprinospora micaceus*) were arising from old beech stumps and litter though few had many scales left after pushing through the damp vegetation. One similar solitary fruitbody showed what I took to be exemplary glistening scales, but it is actually another species in the section *Domestici*. Bon shows this possible suspect, on p. 273, and Phillips has it at p. 260. *Coprinospora domestica*--aka the 'Fire-rug Inkcup'--is one I've longed to see, with its fascinating bright orange-red mycelial carpet, or ozonium. It is exciting to know we might yet see *C. domestica* or similar there in future, and a good reminder to me of my continuing unfamiliarity with many, many species!

Christopher Hoskin took the photo of this attractive Ditchley inkcup.

Various *Mycena* species were seen, with the saffron-milking *M. crocata* being abundant on beech litter. Some eye-catching fungal fruiting bodies are always a delight to find, and we enjoyed both Collared Earthstar (*Geastrum triplex*) and Magpie Inkcup (*Coprinospora picacea*), neither of which is rare or indicative of special conservation status, but which are occasional or localised and bring a smile to the face.

The wonderful Fenugreek Stalkball (*Phleogena faginea* below, p.7) was new to most people, although also found this year at Bladon Heath. At first glance, just a small grey 'smudge' pointed out by Eloise and Ariane Small on a big log of rotting beech (which also hosted a species of Eyelash fungus) but their phone photo showed that close up it is a small forest of drooping whitish bobbles.



With a high power lens they look a bit like miniature stilt puffballs. A basidiomycete masquerading as a slime-mould, it is more robust, tougher than a slime-mould, has basidia with a transverse septum, and has a distinctive smell (also said to be like lovage; Laessoe & Petersen vol.2, p. 1246). In the cold air there was only a hint of the curry-spice fenugreek scent but a sample kept in a pot produced a quite vivid and appealing smell. (Photos ES and KC)



The unusual Elfin Saddle, *Helvella elastica* (lefthand photo, Christopher Hoskin) popped up near enough for comparison to the commoner White Saddle (*Helvella crispa*, typical form in righthand photo, CJH). The former has a smooth stem and less contorted cap. The Black Saddle (*Helvella lacunosa*) made up the trio; this has a dark gray cap.

Keith Cohen, Richard Fortey, CJH

Radley Large Wood, 19th November 2023. Survey

Eighteen members and visitors walked across the Kennington Playing Field to Radley Large Wood. Our leader, Molly Dewey, had been given permission for us to survey the wood by the owners, St Hilda's College. Once again the almost continuous rain that we had been experiencing for some weeks meant that conditions were not good. Much better were the number of fungi that were found. There were 70 fungi recorded plus one slime mould. We last visited this site in September 2011 when a total of 37 fungi were recorded in the wood, on the grass and on the playing field.

Mycena and *Clitocybe* were well represented. Dennis came across the distinctive smelling *Tricholoma saponaceum* (Soapy Knight), Richard found the rarely recorded *Psathyrella panaeoloides* on a rotting twig and Linda spotted *Gloeoporus dichrous* on dead wood. Richard identified the *Inocybe nitidiuscula* found by Chris in leaf litter. Chris also found *Hygrophorus penarius* in moss.

This interesting survey was followed by the AGM at Molly and John's home.

Wendy MacEachrane

REPORTED FINDS AND EDITOR'S ENTHUSIASMS, 2023

As the President's report says, this has been an extraordinary season, and this extra section is prompted by that fact. Fungi we seldom see fruiting have popped up, often on multiple sites across Oxfordshire and beyond. We have recorded a suite of rarities including species most of us have never seen before—Tiger Sawgill was one of several for your editor. Our President has rushed oop North to see a Strangler hijacking the stipe of a *Cystoderma* to produce its own fruitbody. A new Oxon site for the Sandy Stiltball (*Battarrea*

phalloides) has been reported to us by David Williams. Sharp-eyed new members Ariane and Eloise (who actually cultivate Lion's Mane fungus) spotted a smaller *Hericium* on one of our surveys, though unfortunately it was too small and dry to provide any spores, the key way to distinguish *H. cirrhatum* (192 UK records) from *H. coralloides* (91 records). Christopher Hoskin's photo makes it look fresher than it actually was because a digital camera picks up the white coloration underneath the dry dun-coloured skin. It was certainly one of the two, and both are very rare in the UK. Records for the latter are redacted, a word that appears more often in this Newsletter than it ever has before, or, perhaps, will again.



It was the Year of the Morel. CJH notched up 3, and other members and interested members of the public reported others, including this Thimble Morel in Kirtlington from Ian Stone (right).



Most excitingly for your editor, it was also the Year of the Cortinarius, with not only a bewildering array of singletons on just one site, but also appearing in more than one place, starting with the young *Cortinarius elatior* at Nipper's Grove. Her joint favourite fungus of the year was found on a Cotswold Fungus Group survey, picked and discarded as caviar to the general, but rescued from the trampling feet as distinctive enough to be do-able. It was pursued through Geoffrey Kibby's wonderful new book on *Cortinarius* and was a dead ringer on macro-characteristics for *C. moenne-locozii* (coloration, huge turnip-like stipe base, etc) with only 2 UK records. Sympathisers from Thames Valley arranged for DNA analyses of half a dozen corts found from the Chilterns to the Cotswolds, and this one came back as *C. luhmannii*, which it doesn't look very like at all. The blue in this picture is true; it isn't the mauve that the genus often exhibits. Assuming the DNA test is not a false friend, this shows the untrustworthiness of even an exact fit on macrocharacters for this genus. The consolation prize for my embarrassment is that this species has only 1 previous British record. The site record will be redacted. It's a pity it's not in Oxfordshire!



CJH's other favourite for the year was a lot easier to identify. It came from a Thames Valley FG survey, in an SSSI site sadly over-exploited by foragers. Someone had obviously torn up this specimen thinking it was a small edible bolete, and then rejected it because it appeared to have gills. Ironically, they were right; it is a bolete, and edible, but has folds instead of pores. It's also the only species on what passes for the British fungal Red Data list that CJH has seen (apart from the Devil's Bolete, *Rubroboletus satanas*, which is much commoner in our area). This anomalous species is the Golden-Gilled Bolete, *Phylloporus pelletieri*. The magenta of the torn stipe is as striking as the golden underside, both belying the unremarkable tan cap. It is one of the requested species for report in the region this year, as there are only a handful of UK records (65 in NBN). The colony of 3 was the only one found during a survey with another fungus group.

CJH, text and illustrations.

And now a round-up of the favourites of our members, both in Oxfordshire and around the globe ...

FAVOURITE FUNGI OF 2023

Wendy MacEachrane



Mucidula mucida and *Lactarius Turpis* : The Light and the Dark

The common name Porcelain Fungus for the first of these really suits this species as in its pure white form it is almost translucent; occasionally it can be dark clay-buff but white is the most common form. It grows in clusters and mainly with *Fagus*. This fungus was found several times during the autumn season with its first appearance being at Watlington Hill on 30 September. Like *Lactarius turpis* it has white spores and a slimy coating. The stem is tough but the flesh is thin. A beautiful fungus, as Linda Seward's picture shows.

Lactarius turpis was found several times during this year's autumn surveys and nearly always there were several fruiting bodies. Its English name, Ugly Milkcap, is appropriate as it has a dirty olive brown cap which can be quite slimy. The spores are surprisingly white and the acrid milk is also white.

It is usually mycorrhizal with birch but does have other associates. Because of its association with birch I have often found it with *Amanita muscaria* (Fly agaric) in very damp areas. It is not noted for its edibility and could even be carcinogenic. It is a fungus that is relatively easy to identify. This season it was found at Bladon Heath, Radley Large Wood and I also saw it on North Leigh Common where it appears annually.



(Photos WM, JH)

Judy Webb

My most exciting find of 2023 was the Medusa Mushroom, *Agaricus bohusii*, discovered fruiting in a typical clump on deadwood in Stratfield Brake, a small area of ancient woodland just south of Kidlington where I live, on 12th August. The very large caps, fruiting in a group, and scales on the caps are most distinctive. This is a rarely recorded species, but I heard from a friend that she had also found it this autumn in Whitecross Green Wood, so the extremely wet summer conditions obviously gave it just the right conditions to fruit.



An answer after many years. Has anybody seen the amazing photographic identification book *Fungi of Temperate Europe* by Thomas Læssøe and Jens Petersen, 2 volumes (and expensive)? Looking at a friend's copy I am almost sure I have a name for a little brown toadstool which fruited in close mown grass in 2001 and 2005 in the field of Milham Ford School in Oxford (where I used to teach, closed in 2003, now a Nature Park I help manage). There were lots in one patch. My name for it was 'Brown Dimple Fungus' and I sent specimens and description into Kew Mycology department, hoping for an

answer. Experts looked at them, saw amyloid spores and from other microscopic features pronounced ‘something in *Hydropus*’ but could go no further. Looking in this new photo guide it looks a dead cert to me for *Hydropus moserianus*. Sadly this little toadstool has not been seen fruiting at the site since October 2005, although I check every autumn. I have emailed Martyn Ainsworth at Kew to ask him to look again at the dried specimens and see if he agrees with my guess at identification. If correct it is rare. I remain hopeful it might re-appear, but changed management to longer grass, dog mess input and aerial N deposition might mean it never shows again...

Renee Watson

A voyage of discovery

The trouble with fungi is that once you get your eye in, you’re hooked! So, although I spend most of my time bottoms-up in Oxfordshire woodlands, I find that any time I am travelling, I’ll identify the closest woodland before I go and will make time for a bit of fungi hunting. This is a brief overview of some of my out of county, indeed out of country, highlights!

I’d imagine many of you, like me, have dreamed of being the custodian of some land. In 2021 I was fortunate enough to realise that dream and secured 23 acres of Devonshire woods. It’s a fascinating bit of land, with trees of mixed age and species, some ancient woodland and even a slice of temperate rainforest! Our plan for “The Hill” as we call it (it is literally a hill!) was to conduct a very relaxed biodiversity survey for a few years, watch and learn from the woods, intervening as little as possible. With other members of my family taking care of birds, trees and insects, I have been left to snuffle around in the undergrowth looking for fungi and boy, have I been rewarded!

I’ve identified over 190 species, with many more that I have been unable to ID (Russulas and Mycenas being the primary culprits!), and it has been fascinating to record the seasonal and annual changes. The highlights of my finds to date have been these gorgeous specimens:

Cortinarius sp. With the rusty coloured spores already visible on the stipe, even through that thick cortina, not to mention that violet cap!



This fascinating toothed fungus, *Phellodon melaleucus*, was an unusual find.



Some sought after mushies: A gorgeous pair of *Hydnum elliposporum*, which is a rare find, perhaps from confusion other Hedgehog fungi, with only 4 NBN records in the UK! and *Clavulina* sp. (with a bonus fly), left. Some winter chanterelles, *Craterellus tubaeformis*, right.



Incredible textures were on show including this delightfully scurfy *Inocybe calamistrata* and the felted cap and webbing on this *Lacrymaria lacrymabunda*.



Further afield I found some interesting out-of-season finds in Croatia including this “well past its prime” fungus offering a place of rest for this post-shedding damsel fly and these vibrant red-orange *Mycena*, that were barely 5mm across.

I was even lucky enough to find some incredible species in Australia. Stealing the show was *Omphalotus nidiformis*, called the Ghost Fungus because of its nocturnal luminescence. (I was very lucky to have a camera-handy husband to help me capture them glowing in the dark, as I usually only use my phone camera).



This experience was closely followed by this tiny *Mycena interrupta* and although not an uncommon find in Australia, this *Calostoma fuscum* really tickled my fancy! I think it was the little orange “beak” against the plum colour and the way they looked like they were making such an effort to put on a show!



I’m looking forward to exploring lots of new places in the year ahead and being captivated by the dash of added beauty that fungi lend to our wild spaces.



Max Peterson

Melanosporum Excitement:

I met an old friend (in fact my oldest friend from school) last night who told me about his truffles. His daughter, thoughtfully, gave him a birthday present of 120 trees inoculated with truffle mycelium about 13 years ago. We were cynical that anything would result from it but he invited a contact with a truffle trained dog to come and have a look and the excitement mounted when the dog sniffed them out and they “harvested” half a kilo of black truffles.

The owner reports that oak, Holm oak and hazel were planted, but most of the truffles were under the first species, and none detectable under the second. As truffles seem to like highly calcareous sites, this one was prepared by ploughing in crushed limestone. However, the PH level has dropped over the years and may need raising again.

Here is an extract from an email he sent me recently:

You must visit the two truffle sites and the new one in preparation. We planted oak, Holm oak and hazel. Most of the truffles were around the oak and none as far as we could tell under the Holm oak. When we prepared the original site we ploughed in crushed limestone to raise the pH. Over the years the ph has dropped to 6 or even lower. Apparently truffles like a much higher pH so we shall be working on this.

OTHER NEWS

Weaveley Furze

Early in 2023 Christopher Hoskin contacted us to say that the Trustees of Weaveley Furze, a Cherwell District Wildlife Site, would welcome any information about its fungi in addition to his own finds. This little wood is an old ‘Poor's Allotment’ for wood fuel near Shipton-on-Cherwell and has been in existence for 250 years. It is a mixture of rough grass and trees both ancient (e.g. Oak, Ash) and modern (e.g. fruit trees). Small size and being overgrown and strewn with fallen timber make it unsuitable for a group survey. It is accessible off a footpath across muddy fields, and has two entrance gates and a little bit of path between. Visitors are

welcome, as are any natural history records you may make while there. Christopher would be interested in seeing these. I am slowly building a fungus list and would be happy to add to it.

On the down side, it is not ideal for fungi, in spite of the copious fallen wood. The thick herbage and ivy don't encourage them, and most of the tree species are not ones with a rich suite of mycorrhizal fungus associates. For example, the old trees are mostly Ash (no mycorrhizal partners) and trees in the Rosaceae offer limited possibilities too (Cherry, Blackthorn, etc). On my early visits there were some nice Parasol Mushrooms (which someone, even in this remote spot, had picked before my second visit!) but little to add to Christopher's short list. However, that list includes Scarlet Elf Cup (*Sarcoscypha* sp.) Pestle Puffball (*Lycoperdon exculpiforme*) and Semifree Morel (*Mitropha semilibera*). (See left for Christopher's picture.)



Nothing much appeared in the first part of the autumn, but later the wet fallen wood produced two nice, uncommon, but sadly wet and fragile species new to me. These were kindly confirmed by Richard Fortey as *Pluteus hispidulus*, pure white apart from pretty pink gills and dark tufts on the cap, and *Volvariella hypopithys*, which is also small and white, with a fleecy cap, a small volva, and a minutely furry stipe. With 103 and 35 UK NBN records respectively, these species also suggests the site is well worth further attention.

You are welcome to visit without contacting anyone first. There is a layby on the Banbury Road around 468181, and the OS reference for the wood itself is SP4631812.

There is a blog site: <https://weaveley.blogspot.com/p/fungi-of-furze.html> Trustees

Year-round News

This is a bumper edition of our Newsletter, because it has been a bumper year for fungi, and you've all been generous with your contributions. However, like Christmas, it only comes once a year. And now, the FSO website can host a whole series of **news updates** posted by **Linda Seward**, so if you haven't met them already, look out for these updates of what is around, illustrated by her superb photos.

Further afield, Keith Cohen recommends Jason Sharp's blog at

<https://www.woodlands.co.uk/search/Monthly+Mushroom>, and also

<https://www.science.org/content/article/scientists-may-have-found-antidote-death-cap-mushroom-poisoning>.

Apparently a green dye neutralizes the toxin in the lab. One hopes that it would also neutralize it in the human digestive system, but (spoiler alert) it has been tested on human cells in the lab and on mice. And elsewhere it is claimed that the toxin can be used to treat pancreatic cancer.

2024 PROGRAMME OUTLINE (provisional)

As usual, details of site locations and directions will be available to members only via the printed Programme.

Sun 21 Apr.	Cothill Fen Woods	Leader: Judy Webb. Recorder: Julia Huggins
Wed 25 Sept.	Watlington Hill	Leader: Richard Fortey. Recorder: Linda Seward
Sun 29 Sept.	Eynsham Park	Leader: Max Peterson. Recorder: Wendy MacEachrane
Sun 6 Oct.	Harcourt Arboretum	UK Fungus Day event ALL
Sun 13 Oct.	Woodcote Woods	Leader: Caroline Jackson-Houlston. Recorder: Julia Huggins
Wed 16 Oct.	Nipper's Grove	Leader: Richard Fortey. Recorder: Linda Seward
Sun 20 Oct.	Brasenose Woods	Leader: Caroline Jackson-Houlston.
Wed 23 Oct.	Sturt Copse	Leader: Wendy MacEachrane. Recorder: Julia Huggins
Sun 27 Oct.	Wytham Woods	Leader: Caroline Jackson-Houlston. Recorder: Julia Huggins
Sun 3 Nov.	Ardley Quarry	Leader: Keith Cohen. Recorder: Wendy MacEachrane
Sun 10 Nov.	Aston Rowant (N)	Leader: Judy Webb. Recorder: Julia Huggins
Sun 17 Nov.	Ditchley Park	Leader: Keith Cohen. Recorder: Julia Huggins

Followed by shared lunch (13.30) and AGM (14.30) at WM's house.