FSO NEWSLETTER 2022

Report from the President

2021 was again affected by Covid, but not so much as to prevent a full foray programme for the year. As we have seen over the history of the Survey, every year is different. 2020 was one of the most prolific for mycorrhizal fungi like boletes, which seemed to spring up everywhere. By contrast, a very dry September last year had the effect of suppressing fruiting of the same fungi in 2021. In my own patch of the Chilterns there was an absence of familiar brittlegills and milk caps. Even the common blackening Russula,, *R nigricans*, had virtually vanished from Nettlebed Woods, in places where in the past it had almost carpeted the ground. An extended warm dry period dried out lying wood on the forest floor, so that the kinds of poroids that usually commonly occur on the underside of logs became something of a rarity. Rain in October almost restored the 'season' until by the end of October and early November we recovered a satisfying variety of agarics from the Aston Rowant Reserve, including the uncommon bearded milk cap (*Lactarius mairei*, below).

Fungi have changing fortunes, and one purpose of our Survey is to record these changes. Some species that were formerly common seem to have become rarer. This seems to apply to several *Hygrophorus* species. Twenty years ago the gold-flecked woodwax *H. chrysodon* was not uncommon in the Chiltern beech woods, along with the matt woodwax *H. penarius*. It has been some years since we recorded these species. The ivory woodwax (*H. eberneus*) continues to be common, but only those with a long memory become aware of what is *not* there any more. More than twenty years ago I wrote an article in *Field Mycology* about old churchyards as 'conservation areas' for waxcaps (*Hygrocybe* sensu lato), which were many and varied in such places as St Nicholas, Rotherfield Greys. This has no longer been true of the last few years, and, since the churchyards themselves have apparently not changed, the cause must surely be climatic or atmospheric. Is it the result of atmospheric nitrification? We know that fertiliser is a 'fungus killer' and maybe there is enough raining down from the atmosphere to change the habitat. On the other hand, the end of the 2021 season proved to be rather good for waxcaps, as if the earlier scarcity of fungi gave them a late advantage. But this was in places like Watlington Hill and Crowsley Park, which are calcareous unfertilised grasslands. It did not apply to the churchyards. One could speculate that the chalky ground neutralised whatever came down from the sky, but these interactions are not fully explored.

On the other hand there are species that are certainly becoming commoner. One example is the delicate little soft, crimped gill fungus *Plicatura crispa*, which forms ranks of small brackets along dead branches and fallen logs. Not so many years ago it was an exciting find – sufficiently so as to become the 'cover species' for our foray programme. Now it has become almost common. It seems to have a particularly liking for cherry wood – at least in the Chilterns, although this was apparently not one of its original hosts. It can be found there alongside the toothed resupinate *Basidioradulum radula*.

Alick Henrici had noticed its advance already in 2018. By 2021 it was an almost routine discovery. *Plicatura* may be the beneficiary of global warming since it was apparently commoner in southern Europe. What is surprising is how quickly such changes occur compared with flowering plants. Fungi seem to be more sensitive to environmental shifts. What is to be hoped is that the overall biodiversity remains sufficiently rich – it would be sad to think of our local mycota being deprived of a range of attractive and interesting fungi because of climate change, or as a result of atmospheric pollution, even if new species were to appear to add new records to our survey.

2021 also saw some special finds. In November Edward Droscher discovered the rare golden, spinose *Sarcodontia crocea* inside a hollow, ancient apple tree at Astons Eyot, Oxford. This exciting species seems to be confined to this very special habitat in *Malus*, and since few trees are allowed to survive into old age this possibly accounts for its rarity. Somewhat earlier, the Sandy Stiltball (*Battarrea phalloides*) – surely the most peculiar of the puffball kind – appeared at Kingston Bagpuize [right, with the remains of its early cap covering (CJH)]. It was last found in Oxfordshire near Henley and reported in *The Mycologist* in 1998, and last year turned up just over the Bucks border in Hambleden, where it appeared again this year. Since its previous strongholds were in the dryer parts of East Anglia, could this, too, be a consequence of climate change? Around Henley on 12 November the writer found the extraordinary phalloid devil's fingers *Clathrus* (or *Anthurus*) *archeri,* which also seems to be spreading. It is a southern hemisphere species, often associated with woodchip mulch, but the new occurrence was in grassland.

Finally, I should mention our National Fungus Day event at the Harcourt Arboretum on October 3. After a virtual event in 2020 it was good to get back to a live performance. It was particularly good to see a large number of young people eager to find out about the fungus world. Every year there seems to be a larger crowd, even though the number of fungi was down in 2021 as a consequence of the dry September. The Arboretum has successfully made this a regular event on their calendar, which we hope will eventually result in more survey members to carry our work forward.

The President's talk to an audience of 118, of all ages. The specimens were collected by the Committee, often from their own properties, to illustrate various groups of fungi and their habitats. The post-talk surveys were also very popular. [Photo, Linda Seward]

FSO MEMBERSHIP

Becoming a member of the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire group has been a wonderful experience. I became interested in fungi at the end of 2020 and joined the group but didn't attend my first foray until late August 2021 at Nippers Grove. There I met an enthusiastic party of friendly people interested in my new passion—what could be better?
As the group gathered that morning our leader, Richard Fortey, expressed misgivings about the foray because it had been so dry. He was worried we wouldn't find anything but with so many eyes searching the woods, he needn't have worried. We found a variety of beautiful and unusual fungi—even a rare one, as well as some slime moulds.
It's fantastic to be part of a team of experienced mycologists who are eager to share their knowledge and expertise. I bravely had my first taste of milk from a *Lactarius*—thankfully it wasn't too hot (especially as I made sure Richard tasted it first before I tried it). I learned so much that morning, and bought a small loupe when I got home as I realised how essential that is to a mycologist's kit. I also found a basket and a knife so that I was properly prepared for next time, if it were to be necessary to take a specimen for identification.
Further forays throughout the autumn months expanded my list of fungi and firmly cemented friendships made at first day. I can't believe how much I have seen and learned as a result of joining this marvellous group. I look forward to 2022 with great anticipation.

Linda Seward

Pristine *Amanita crocea* (Orange Grisette) photographed by the author on her lawn.

SURVEY REPORTS

FOXHOLES NATURE RESERVE 25.9.2021

Close to the Oxfordshire/Gloucestershire border, Foxholes NR is not an easy site to find. A beautiful bluebell and wildflower wood in spring, it is an Aladdin's cave of fungus in autumn. The predominant tree species are beech, birch and oak.

Parking is difficult at this reserve as the BBOWT car park is accessed via an extremely potholed track. It is possible to park on the side of the nearby lane but spaces are very limited.

Our group visited the reserve on 25 September following a dry spell of weather. There are natural ponds on the site which help to provide damper areas. I think the eight participants were quite surprised at the number of fungus that were found.

Caroline was delighted to spot a *Scleroderma citrinum* (Common Earthball) with a *Pseudoboletus parasiticus* (Parasitic Bolete) growing on it. This was my first sighting of *Mycena haematopus* (Burgundydrop bonnet) which we saw on many of the surveys this season. Renee found three different *Gymnopus,* namely *dryophila* (Russet Toughshank), *fusipes* (Spindle Toughshank) and *peronata* (Wood Woollyfoot). In total we collected twenty-eight records.

Wendy MacEachrane

Scleroderma citrinum with emerging yellow-capped *Pseudoboletus parasiticus* CJH

SINGE WOOD, 10.10.2021

Fine weather greeted the total of 17 people assembled from both the Wychwood Forest Trust and the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire. Thanks to Toby and Miranda for making the arrangements for the Trust.

Rain over the previous two weeks had started to bring up the fungi. Though larger fruit bodies were still conspicuous by their absence, we found at least 39 species, though some in the more problematic groups (such as *Inocybe*) could not always be identified to species. 19 of these were new to the cumulative list, i.e. nearly half of the day's finds. One of these was a fungus only found in Oxfordshire 3 times before (*Pluteus ephebus*) and it was to prove a good year for this genus all round; the other two here were *P. cervinus* and *P. umbrosus*. All this makes the point about needing to revisit sites regularly very apparent.

Pluteus umbrosus, underside with brown-edged gills, and velvet-dotted cap, flanking *Pluteus thomsonii*

C. M. Jackson-Houlston

COLLEGE WOOD, WOODCOTE, 17.10.2021

The keen members of the Woodcote Commoners once again took part in a joint meeting with the FSO to explore this fine woodland, dominated by beech, but with a diversity of other tree species present, plus some grassy paths and the surrounds of a pond for the latter part of the survey. The woods hosted a rainbow of typical species in good condition—the ubiquitous Rosy Bonnet, but also Blackedge Bonnet (*Mycena rosea*, and *M. pelianthina*), Ivory Woodwax (*Hygrophoropsis eberneus*), Amethyst Deceiver (*Laccaria amethystina*) and the gasworks-smelling Sulphur Knight (*Tricholoma sulphureum*). There was also a fresh group [right] of a small, bright yellow and olive *Cortinarius*, the most likely candidate being *C. croceus.* The grassland added a fine group of pristine Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) near the pond. 42 species were recorded in total. Many thanks to Liam for organising the details of the survey at the Woodcote end.

C. M. Jackson-Houlston

SHOTOVER HOUSE PARKLAND, 31.10.2021

We were delighted to be able to visit a small part of the grounds of Shotover House again, by courtesy of Alexander Stanier at the Estate Office. The previous night had seen a storm that wrought havoc with many of the trees, including a Horse Chestnut avenue, but the super-efficient estate staff had managed to clear the roadway of fallen timber even before we arrived. The Park includes many specimens of beautiful mature trees, but such were the riches of the grassland and the trees close to the house that the survey covered only a small part of the area. As this survey attracted quite a number of potential new members there were many pairs of sharp eyes to pick up the riches of the site. 54 species were identified, including the small yellow *Pluteus chrysophaeus*.

C. M. Jackson-Houlston

OTHER SURVEYS

Our first survey of the main season was at **Nipper's Grove**, a new site for us, and the realisation of an oft-expressed wish to do more surveys in August (31st). Unfortunately the very dry weather had not produced the flush of fruitbodies sometimes found in August, but among the 24 species recorded were 6 Russulas and a small *Cortinarius bolaris.*

Bagley Wood Sawmill (October 4th) is always a popular site, and as a joint meeting with the Abingdon Naturalists there were certainly plenty of eyes to spot specimens, and the recorders were working double time. Compared with the 2020 season, which was super-rich but lacking in some genera of macrofungi, 2021 saw these back in business, with 5 species of *Lactarius*, 6 of *Russula*, and 5 of *Tricholoma* out of the 59 identified.

November 11th saw a suitably small number of members at **Crowsley Park**, a productive and scenic site but with very limited parking. Even at this late date there were 48 species, including fresh Deathcaps, and rather less fresh Mosaic Puffballs (*Lycoperdon*

utriforme) along with 8 species of Waxcaps and three of Parasol mushrooms, including the scarce *Chlorophyllum olivieri.*

The survey at **Aston Rowant** (November 13th) was a joint one with the Thames Valley Fungus Group, and led by Judy Webb, whose expert knowledge of the site provided us with views of some rare and interesting species, some mentioned elsewhere in the Newsletter.


Some members of each group, and our President, on the steep hillside (Linda Seward).

The FSO seized the chance of another survey at **Ditchley Park** (November 21st) with enthusiasm, and, in spite of some problems with access and egress, were not disappointed, even so late in the season. The Park is a site kept relatively secluded by its owners and situated away from major roads. Its thriving woods provided views of a couple of fungi that could be once-in-a-lifetime finds, notably the *Hemipholiota populnea*, which grows on the freshly-cut surfaces of large poplar logs, and *Cystolepiota pulverulenta* [below]. This dapper dapperling is an intriguing and very rare denizen of old beech woods,

(CJH)

HIGH PARK, BLENHEIM

High Park is the private section of Blenheim Park and has never been landscaped. Except for a public right of way, a narrow road, running through the middle of the area, members of the public have never been allowed access. Aljos Farnon, a specialist on old Oak trees, based at Kew, received permission from the Blenheim Estate managers, for small

groups of specialists to do a four-year in depth study of the biodiversity of the area including fungi. Numbers visiting the site, at anyone time, were limited by the Estate to 4 or 5. FSO committee members who participated included Richard Fortey, Molly Dewey, Wendy MacEachrane and Caroline Jackson-Houlston, together with Penny Cullington from the Bucks fungal group and Martyn Ainsworth from Kew.

The project was due to finish in 2020 but because of COVID restrictions in 2020 and the very dry summer of 2019 plus, the limitations imposed by the Estate on autumn Forays for pheasant shooting, we were given the opportunity to continue the project through 2021. Each year of the project we managed carry out 4 to 5 Forays and by mid July 2021 had recorded 344 species of fungi. It was a pleasure to see the Oak polypore, *Buglossus quercinus* and other brackets such as the beef steak fungus, *Fistulina hepatica*. Many of the old, scraggy looking, but still live, oaks are surrounded by nettles, brambles and grassy areas. These areas are grazed from time to time with cattle. During the five years of the survey many of the common tree, grass and scrubland fungi were found but some were noticeable by their absence or found only once. For example although there were some birch trees in the area, *Amanita muscaria* was noticeable by its absence.

Aljos Farnon is in the process of editing a book on the Biodiversity of High Park which will include a chapter on the fungi. Richard Fortey and Martyn Ainsworth are writing this chapter. Richard has already written his section but Martyn is waiting for the results of DNA studies. Once Aljos's book is in print then FSO will be at liberty to publish the lists of fungi and highlight the interesting finds

Molly Dewey, fungal reporter for the High Park project

MEMBERS' CHOICE OF SPECIES OF INTEREST

LINDA SEWARD'S choice was the *Amanita crocea* growing under the silver birch in her garden, shown at the end of her article on p. 3.

CAROLINE JACKSON-HOULSTON is torn between three species as favourites. One of them was one she didn't actually see, except in a photograph which came courtesy of Peter Pool, the local naturalist who also discovered the Sandy Stiltball mentioned and pictured in the President's report. It is a smut of Sweetcorn, distinguished by being a wonderful pale sky-blue, probably *Ustilago maydis*. (Only 6 other British records so far; don't panic.) The second is the *Lactarius mairei*, a species she had wanted to meet for some time. The third is another fungus on the must-see list, the *Hemipholiota populnea* from Ditchley.

Ustilago maydis [?]

Hemipholiota populnea

WENDY MACEACHRANE writes:
A Colourful Character: *Tricholoma sulphureum*

This season was a particularly good one for tricholoma . These white-spored, solid, fleshy and often large fruiting bodies are usually found with beech and oak but do occur with conifers.

Tricholoma sulphureum (Sulphur Knight, below left) is usually a uniform vibrant yellow but there are other versions with variable cap colours. The distinctive feature is the strong smell of coal gas that it gives off, sometimes described as rotting fish, apparently, should you unwisely taste it, it has a rancid taste. It is poisonous.

There are two types that we have found on our surveys. The first is completely yellow and the second has a divided stipe which is half yellow and half mottled brownish-yellow and one such was found on the Aston Rowant survey and identified by Caroline. This variant has the title *Tricholoma sulphureum* var. *hemisulphureum*.

The Sulphur Knight is quite common and so in the autumn should be easy to spot.

JUDY WEBB plumps for two milkcaps from our Aston Rowant foray, both with oak on clay – Whiskery Milkcap, *Lactarius mairei* (what whiskers!) and the bright-coloured Tawny Milkcap, *Lactarius fulvissimus* (above, right).

Judy kindly gave CJH permission to take one specimen of the Whiskery Milkcap to paint (returned to site two days later). This painting appears on p. 1, relieving the editor of the invidious task of having to choose between the many photos taken of this species.

JULIA HUGGINS votes for the Peppery Roundhead (*Stropharia pseudocyanea*) at Woodcote.

DRAFT OUTLINE OF PROPOSED EVENTS IN 2022 (ALL TBC)

SPRING				
Sun 3 April	Survey	Bagley Wood (incl private garden; limited numbers)	MD	Rec: WM
AUTUMN				
Sat 24 Sep	Survey	Wetlands Eynsham	RW/CJH	Rec:
Sun 2 Oct	Walk	Foxcombe Wood	CJH	Rec: WM
Sun 9 Oct	Event	National Fungus Day event Harcourt Arboretum	All	
Sun 16 Oct	Walk	Woodcote woods (joint with Woodcote Commoners)	CJH	Rec: JH
Wed 19 Oct	Walk	Nettlebed Woods (joint with TVFG)	RF	Rec: JH
Sat 22 Oct	Survey	Cookley Green, Swyncombe plus AGM	RF	Rec: LS
Sun 23 Oct	Survey	Shotover Estate?	CJH	
Sun 30 Oct	Survey	Ditchley Park Estate	KC	Rec: WM
Sat 5 Nov	Walk	Aston Rowant (North)	JW	Rec: JH
Sun 13 Nov	Walk	Blaydon Heath	KC	Rec: RW

Many thanks to Linda Seward for providing all but one of the photos for this tailpiece of fungi found in Oxfordshire this year. [Beefsteak, CJH]