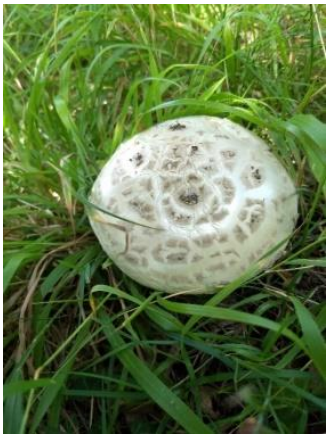
FSO NEWSLETTER 2021

From the President, RICHARD FORTEY

Every year that I report on the year's fungus season for the FSO I make some claim about how peculiar the last twelve months have been compared with some years in the past. I think I am beginning to realize that there is no such thing as a "typical" mushroom year at all, and it is simply a fact that every year is different. 2020 was certainly different in *one* respect: Covid 19 put a brake on our communal foray activities, so that much of the peak season had to be solitary exploration of pastures and woodland—nothing against the rules in sampling on one's own ...

However, we were at least able to get something done for National Fungus Day in October, even though our regular foray around the Harcourt Arboretum was clearly impossible. Thanks to a concerted effort by our members we were able to assemble a wide variety of fruitbodies together to allow me to present a virtual fungus foray - filmed inside an open barn - which was subsequently made available online through the Oxford University Botanic Garden website. Thanks are due to the Arboretum for making this happen. Judging by the fact that is has been viewed more than 1000 times by the time of writing this report, it was something of a success. Highlights of the presentation were a prodigious specimen of *Amanita strobiliformis* (Warted Amanita) found by Judy Webb and a colossal *Ganoderma resinaceum* from Molly Dewey's garden. Some say that the star of the show was actually a ground beetle that kept on reappearing throughout the shooting of the video, moving from fungus to fungus alongside the presenter!

Assorted *Russula* species + a few *Lactarius* (Molly Dewey)



Amanita strobiliformis (Judy Webb)

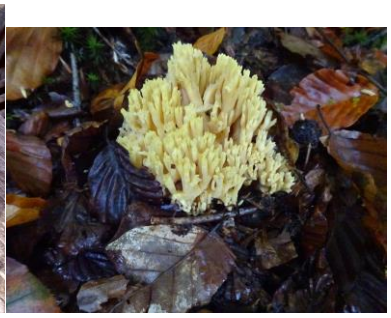
2020 was unusual not only for the 'lockdown' and its aftermath but also for the long, sunny, and very dry summer. Very little was found, or indeed expected, during the drought. The county had a distinctly Mediterranean feel from June to August which served to soften the Covid restrictions somewhat. However, when the rains finally came they were very heavy and stirred all the fungal mycelium into life. In the south of the county at least this prompted an exceptional year for fruiting boletes. The normally scarce Summer Cep (*Boletus reticulatus*) came up in prodigious numbers under beech in places where it had never been seen before. Presumably, it had been lurking as mycorrhiza for years awaiting just the right conditions. There were records during September of the much more unusual red-stemmed boletes, such as *Rubroboletus legaliae* and the 'devils bolete' *R. satanus*. The inedible Bitter Bolete, *Tylopilus felleus*, which is normally found in ones or twos, was so abundant in one of the woods near Henley that it outnumbered the Ceps themselves (*Boletus edulis*) with which

it can so easily be confused. Although the mission of the FSO is scientific the attractions of some of these excellent comestibles could not be resisted.

There were other interesting variations among the mycorrhizal fungi of the beech woodlands. Normally, the Blusher (*Amanita rubescens*) greatly outnumbers the Panther Cap (*A. pantherina*). This year the pattern was reversed; panther caps were as numerous as False Death Cap *A. citrina* in some woodland. Usually common *Lactarius* such as the Beech Milkcap *L. blennius* were thin on the ground, while the Pale Milkcap *L. pallidus* was commoner than usual. The genus *Ramaria* is usually only represented by the Upright Coral *R. stricta* growing from buried wood, but this year the beautiful golden *R. aurea* joined the parade (I had not seen if for several decades), growing in beech litter. Even the lignicolous fungi seemed to respond to the weather: the usually abundant Oyster Mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) was less common than usual, but the normally elusive Veiled Oyster (*P. dryinus*) had several records.


Plentiful boletes (R. Fortey)


Rubroboletus legaliae (R. Fortey)


Ramaria aurea (R. Fortey)

Meanwhile, in open grassland, 2020 proved to be an exceptional year for Agaricus, with great fairy rings of the Macro Mushroom *A. urinascens* (*A. macrosporus* of yore) producing large numbers of fine examples from August onwards. In my local, low-nutrient grassland it was joined by Field Mushroom (*A. campestris*), and *A. langei*, *A. essetii* and *A comtulus.* On the other hand, *Hygrocybe* did not get going until well into October, and then with a limited variety compared with that elusive 'average' year. With the exception of Silky Pinkgill *E. sericeum* the grassland Entolomas took a holiday this year.

A few other noteworthy features of 2020: the extraordinary Basket Stinkhorn (*Clathrus ruber*) turned up in a garden in Henley-on-Thames—possibly another outcome of the hot summer, as it is commoner in southern Europe. Lockdown opened up a new field for the present writer: dung fungi. I started incubating rabbit pellets collected in the wild to see what species came up. There was a whole procession of mostly ascomycete fungi requiring the use of a microscope to identify them. The result was an addition of more than a dozen species to the list of Oxfordshire mycota. It just shows that during confined times mycology can still give pleasure, and reward a persistent observer with new discoveries.

NEW YEAR'S HONOUR FOR JUDY WEBB

We are delighted to announce that our erstwhile Recorder, Judy Webb, was awarded a British Empire Medal for conservation and wildlife recording in the January Honours List.

SURVEY REPORTS 2020

Regrettably, many of our planned surveys had to be cancelled because of Covid regulations. However, a few were possible with reduced representation both from the FSO Committee and attendees from the local interest groups who had requested the surveys. In

these circumstances, it was impossible to fit in non-Committee members or to advertise the surveys beyond their immediate constituencies. We apologize to ordinary members for this; 2020 membership fees have been waived and any paid can be dated on to 2021 or refunded.

FSO SURVEY OF SINGE WOOD, 27.9.2020

This was an outreach survey designed to engage local people. Because of the Coronavirus risk, numbers were limited to six, the leader/recorder, and four members of the public, including a representative from the Wychwood Trust (the fifth person booked in did not turn up). As none of the participants from the Wychwood area had any experience of fungi, the dryness of the site mattered less than it might otherwise have done, as we had time for a general introduction to fungi and were able to look at species one by one within a social distancing format. The group was very enthusiastic, and very good at finding fungi even though nearly all of these were dried up, inconspicuous, and often impossible to identify. This was particularly true of the small boletes, though the leader was able to show a better specimen of *Xerocomus subtomentosus* collected on the reconnaissance visit some time earlier (ironically, a much more productive one, including *Amanita ceciliae*). 13 taxa were identified, 12 of them at species level. On the more positive side, seven of these were new to the list for the site, bringing the total for the two years surveyed to 81. All of the group were keen to take part in another visit when one can be arranged.

C. M. Jackson-Houlston, September 2020

FSO SURVEY OF NORTH GROVE WOOD, WOODCOTE, 18.10.2020

North Grove Wood (Hammonds Wood) is part of a complex of woods in the care of Woodcote Conservation Group. The site visited on October 18th is a Woodland Trust reserve, and forms the eastern part of the wood. The leader also visited the western half on the recce. The site consists of mixed woodland, mostly deciduous but with some conifers, and on a calcareous substrate. Beech dominates in the area surveyed on 18th.

Numbers were constrained by Covid regulations, but those representing the Woodcote Conservation group were observant, knowledgeable and active participants. A good range of beechwood species was found, including interesting and uncommon ones such as *Coprinopsis jonesii* (Bonfire Inkcap), *Entoloma hirtipes*, *Lepista irina* (Flowery Blewit), and the always-popular Wrinkled Peach (*Rhodotus palmatus*). This beautiful peach-coloured fungus has a broadly netted cap and weeps pink tears; it grows mainly on rotting elm wood, and has therefore declined after a population explosion on English Elm at the height of Dutch Elm Disease. Here the substrate was probably a fallen Wych Elm, though it will sometimes grow on other species.

The Woodcote woods are a fine, varied habitat of great interest for fungi, and we look forward to future visits to any of the sites in the complex.

C. M. Jackson-Houlston, October 2020

FSO JOINT MEETING WITH THAMES VALLEY FUNGUS GROUP, 1.11.2020
NETTLEBED COMMON AND WOODS

We managed to conform to Covid restrictions by running two simultaneous surveys in different parts of the site, ensuring that members of both organisations were included in each group. The season effectively came to an end just a few days after this meeting, but there were good fungal species totals for each group: 76 for those exploring the common on the north side of the road to Henley (led by our President) and 50 for those looking at the Highmoor Trench area of the woods on the south side of the road.

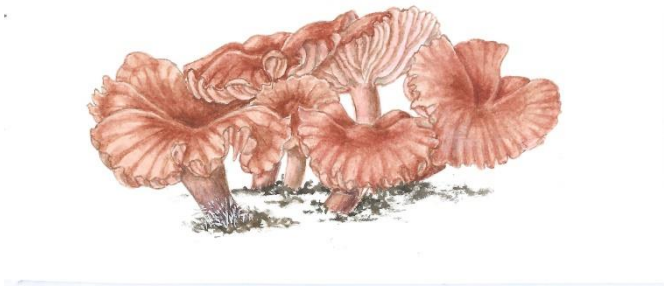
The Common is notable for the hillocks and ponds dug out for clay. It is wetter than the more southerly woodland, though there are dry, more sandy sections too, one of which is a mountain bike challenge area with no ground growth at all. It also includes some grassland, on the sports pitch, producing a more diverse range of fungi. Results demand a focus shift away from your average agaric, as among other uncommon fungi found were *Phleogena faginea*, the Fenugreek Stalkball (131 UK records) and *Gloeocystidiellum clavigulerum*, a resupinate with a name far longer than

the colony of its fruitbody, and only about 4 records. Thanks to Richard Fortey, our President, and Mike Harrison from TVFG, for these two identifications.

On the other site, which is flatter and more dominated by Beech, the fungi most of interest were the uncommon Twisted Deceiver, *Laccaria tortilis*, which is shorter-stemmed and even more contorted than the Deceiver in its many forms (*L. laccata*). Right at the end, Harold Gough of TVFG found a good specimen of the rare and distinctive Violet Webcap, *Cortinarius violaceus.*

Intrigued by the similarities and differences between the lists, your editor has compiled a synoptic list of FSO surveys on these two Nettlebed sites between 2014 and 2020, in the hope of working on a more detailed analysis of overlaps and distinctions.

C. M. Jackson-Houlston, November 2020



Laccaria tortilis (© C. M. Jackson-Houlston)

HIGH PARK BIODIVERSITY SURVEY: PROGRESS REPORT 2020

2020 was supposed to be the last year of a four-year project to survey the Biodiversity in High Park. High Park is the part of the Blenheim Estate that has always been closed to the public. It contains the most ancient Oaks (see 2017 Newsletter for background info). The project, initiated by Aljos Farjon from Kew, includes surveys of all forms of wild life notably birds, butterflies, toads, bats and fungi. The number of people allowed to enter High Park at any one time is limited by the Blenheim Estate Managers to 4 or 5. FSO committee members have been helping Aljos survey the fungi, notably Richard Fortey, Molly Dewey, Wendy MacEachrane and Caroline Jackson-Houlston also Penny Cullington from the Bucks fungal group and Martyn Ainsworth from Kew. Prior to 2020 visits were not allowed in the summer and autumn because the Estate was rearing pheasants for commercial shoots. However, in 2020, COVID-19 proved a blessing; no pheasants were raised because commercial shoots were cancelled and the Biodiversity groups were allowed to visit throughout the summer and autumn. We were looking forward to some good autumn forays but the dry weather in the Spring and Summer did not help. We found very few fungi on our visits in, March, April and July, and did not even try to do a survey in August. However, on our foray in September, we found 28 species that had not been recorded previously at High Park, 4 Amanitas and two fungi which were new records for Oxfordshire, *Flammulaster muricatus* and *Hebeloma theobrominum.* We also found *Coprobia granulata*, a little yellow ascomycete growing on Cow Pats (proof that they are allowing cattle to graze on part of the High Park area).

The scarce resupinate Oak Toothcrust (*Radulomyces bolaris*).

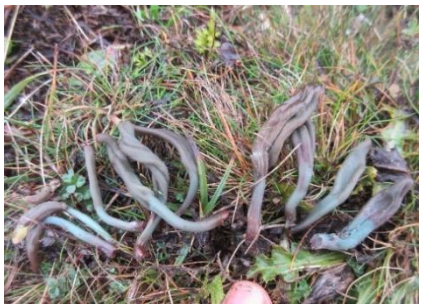
Photo Aljos Farjon.

We are hoping that the Estate Managers will allow us to continue the project in 2021 for a fifth year. The total number of species recorded so far is 330; we have several records of the rare Oak Polypore (*Buglossoporus quercinus*) associated with the ancient oaks. When the project has finished and Aljos Farjon has completed his book about the Biodiversity of High Park, we intend to share the results with TVERC and enter the results onto the FRDBI data-base.

Molly Dewey

YOUR FUNGI OF THE YEAR

JUDY WEBB was enthused by two rarities found while surveying at Aston Rowant: Olive Earth Tongues (*Microglossum olivaceum*) and the Devil's Bolete (*Rubroboletus satanas*)—her best fungal record for nine years. The latter was with Beech, its usual associate, but also Rockrose, a shrub that offers similar mycorrhizal opportunities to those found with larger shrubs and trees. Neither fungus puts in an annual appearance.



Both photographs © Judy Webb

WENDY MACHEACHRANE recommends two different, fairly common, fungi for our appreciation:

Pas de Deux in West Oxfordshire

Two very different fungi have appealed to me this autumn.

The first, the resupinate, *Auricularia mesenterica* (Tripe Fungus) was found on a large dead branch in a predominately beech wood. This bracket-like jelly ear has two contrasting sides. The upper surface is zonal with alternating bands. One band is greyish white and hairy and the other is olive to brown. The veined lower surface is tough, rubbery and gelatinous in shades of brown and purple. There were a great many on the branch.

The second, which I found on three occasions, again in beech woodland was *Mycena galopus* var. *candida*. On each occasion these clusters of small white fruiting bodies stood out from leaf litter and bramble and seemed almost luminescent. This milk-exuding bonnet is so much more attractive than its sibling, plain *Mycena galopus*.

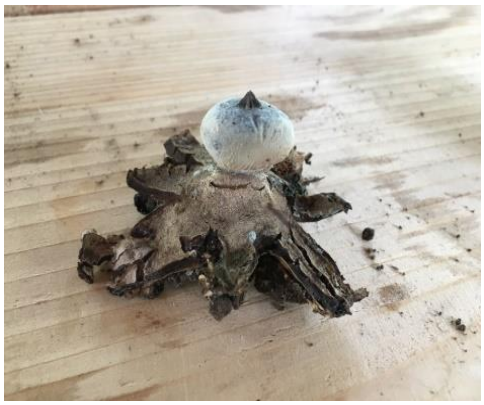
CAROLINE JACKSON-HOULSTON'S favourite was *Amanita ceciliae*, which she has fruitlessly pursued with camera and painting equipment for several years now. The Snakeskin Grisette is a large, handsome and uncommon, gold and silver fungus. 2020 was at last a suitable time for it, and it was found on three Oxfordshire sites. Second place goes to *Crepidotus cinnabarinus*, the Cinnabar Oysterling (16 UK records, none in Oxfordshire). This was on a muddy path in Horspath Common (thank you, lockdown). It is said to be spreading, but expecting a rash of records may be over-optimistic. Actual size →

Our Secretary, JULIA HUGGINS, writes:

When I began my late summer garden clearance this autumn I noticed something light grey within the overall brown conifer and plant debris at the foot of a hedgerow. I didn't think anything of it at the time as the garden is on clay and flint, and little bits of flint turn up all the time. A couple of days later I returned to pick up my debris and took a closer look, fetched a pair of glasses (!) and realized I had an outcrop of Earth stars—my favourite fungi species. This particular one is *Geastrum striatum*. Small but perfectly formed and enchanting in its simplicity and symmetry. My personal find of the year.

ELLEN LEE says:

Here's my "fungus of the year". Nothing that rare, but a big group of Stubble Rosegill [*Volvariella gloiocephala*] that I came across growing on hay bales on one of my summer evening cycle rides. This year has encouraged me to go exploring locally on my bike, finding tracks and roads that I didn't know were there. I found these fungi on such a ride, near Woodsides Meadow, Wendlebury on a balmy early August evening.



Amanita ceciliae (CJH) *Geastrum striatum* (Molly Dewey) Volvariella gloiocephala (Ellen Lee)

New member CLAIRE GOMM wrote in with an enquiry about this uncommon, elegant, white version of the Jelly Ear, *Auricularia auricula-judae*.

(Photo Claire Gomm)

SURVEY PROGRAMME 2021

The Committee has drawn up a provisional set of proposals for surveys in 2021, on the assumption that some degree of activity may be possible by the autumn. All publicity would stress the need to abide by any Covid related restrictions in place at the time.

There will be no Spring meetings.

We propose one weather-dependent survey in south Oxfordshire in August, with timing and feasibility dependent on rainfall.

The autumn season will begin as usual in mid to late September, and we will contribute to National Fungus Day at the Harcourt Arboretum if conditions allow.

Meetings with the two community groups with whom we surveyed in 2020 have been requested and will be held on a booking basis if this is possible. We also hope for a joint visit to Bagley with the Abingdon Naturalists, and will seek to combine with the Thames Valley Fungus Group at least once.

Other surveys are planned for a mixture of new and familiar sites. The AGM is scheduled for November 21st.

The programme will be issued as a separate leaflet and posted on the website once all permissions have been obtained, and as the health situation determines.

Claire Gomme has also sent us this beautiful tailpiece collage of species found in South Oxfordshire in this excellent year. (All photos by Claire Gomm.)