North Eastern Fungus Study Group

Newsletter 19 December 2000

Rhodotus palmatus Photo Keith Cunningham see page 6

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Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held at Durham Wildlife Trusts Headquarters at Rainton Meadows on the Saturday 6th January 2001 at 11am.

Subscription reminder 2000

Subscriptions are due for payment at the AGM in January, but if members are unable to attend could they please sent their subs [£6 individual - £8 couple] to me;

Babs Walton
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Darlington DL2 1DS

For those subs not submitted by February I will send a reminder, but unnecessary letters do increase expenditure. If subs have not been submitted by April we must assume membership will not be resumed and no further newsletters are wanted.

Draft AGM Agenda for 6th Jan 2001

1. Apologies.
2. Minutes of Last AGM.
3. Matters arising.
4. Provisional 2001 programme:

March 10 - Hewitt Ellis slide Show?.

May 12 - Foray?.

July 21 - Hamsterley Foray - Gordon Simpson?.

Sept 22 - Thornley Woodlands – Andy McLay.

Oct 13 - Hawthorn Dene - Keith Cunningham, Andy McLay.

Nov 10 - Rainton Park Woods/Microscopy?.

5 .Gordon Beakes BMS Upland Foray Rothbury – one week. Interested members?.

6. Group Leaders Meeting –Members approval.

7. Treasurers Report.

8. Recording.

9. Member confirmations of receiving newsletters.

10. Members addresses – postal & e-mail?.

11. Newsletter to Kew?.

12. A.O.B.

Volvariella bombycina

By Tom Kirby

Volvariella bombycina is one of those fungi which though rarely found will be instantly recognised. When you see it illustrated, in any reference book, its name becomes linked irrevocably to its image. Much the same thing happens with *Amanita muscaria* or, for me anyway, *Flammulina velutipes*. In fact, if I really think about it, there is probably an established "set" of specimens which represent my "personal" stock of instantly recognised fungi. When I say "recognised", what I really mean is that I can name them with a high degree of confidence and so impress lesser mortals when foraying or enjoying an autumnal walk. Just briefly, and without any great effort, I would include in this "set" such commonly found species as *Polyporus squamosus, Piptoporus betulinus, Lepista nuda, Lycoperdon pyriforme, Auricularia auricula-judae, Coprinus comatus, Marasmius oreades, Laccaria laccata, Pholiota squarrosa, Hypholoma sublateritium and fasciculare, Polyporus sulphureus* etc. There are many others but they all share two features:

1) They are locally common.

Volvariella bombycina (Photo Tom Kirby)
First found September 3rd. 1999. On living Ash trunk. Height above ground 2.2 metres.
This photograph, same tree, still living, August 22nd. 2000. Height above ground over 3 metres. Grid ref. NZ 389173. Location of tree on verge of minor road. Rural/urban boundary. At entrance to arable pasture land. Lightly wooded verge, mostly Hawthorn, Ash and Crack Willow.

2) They present a clearly identifiable image.

It may come as some surprise if I admit, dear reader, that I do not include the common field mushroom in this "set". Why? Well, to my shame, I cannot be certain on sight that I could identify *Agaricus campestris*, getting it confused to often with *Agaricus arvensis* when the specimen is young. I have, however, on several occasions lifted *Agaricus xanthodermus* (in quantity) from the bulging plastic carrier bags of several locals who have come to share their good fortune with me. The conversation always begins with the offering of the poison chalice, a flatteringly disarming " Have a look at these, will you, and take some for yourself." Which opener translates as "If I die, you die...but its your fault."

This anecdotal tale leads me neatly to the second "set". The group which has as its defining parameter "distinguishing feature". *Hydnum repandum* comes immediately to mind, along with *Cantharellus cibarius* and *Sparrassis crispa.* I mention these three because I have found them on several occasions but they are not *commonly* found. Everyone who sees them in a book is in no doubt that they would be able to identify them, no ....."recognise" is a better

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word, if found. The finding "glues" the name to the image so that when next found there is no hesitation. Confidence is high. This is even more the case when the identifying feature is an unusual or pronounced smell, as is the case with *Clitocybe odora* or *Agaricus xanthodermus*. Once smelt, never forgotten.

You may be wondering where all this is leading so I'll tell you. On every foray I have attended several enthusiasts come to me and say " I think this is a ..... a....." and don't quite get the word out! Its a little like dealing with a stutterer where you *know* you mustn't (or in my case, can't!) complete the sentence. I know that when the season begins, like many of us, I have to remember what I learnt the season before because it all goes during summer. In my case its an "age" thing. I do know, however, that the best way of remembering names of fungi is NOT to sit in an armchair looking at your books but to get out and see, feel, smell, taste the real thing. On forays, when proffering an identification say what you think it is with confidence! If you're wrong, the chances are you will be gently corrected. Say the correct name out loud, to yourself, and visualise the fungi. With luck, you will be able to add another find to your personal set. If you don't think you could produce a "set", just try listing those fungi you feel you are sure of. You will be surprised by how many fungi you can include with high confidence.

I have only found *Volvariella bombycina* twice in grassland and the field crossed to approach the beginning of the walk.

Fungus forays depend on the enthusiastic diligence of the forayers and there was plenty of this in evidence as usual. Finds came steadily as we progressed from one dominant tree to the next and amongst trees of differing ages. It was soon obvious that a respectable total number of species would be amassed and no surprise when this total was found to reach 135, the best so far achieved by our Group.

As usual, of course, most of these were common species but there were plenty of these to provoke oohs and aahs from even the most experienced amongst us. My most lasting memory of this foray will be that it produced no fewer than three species of earth-fan, the common if well-camouflaged *Thelephora terrestris*, the much less common *T. palmata* and the definitely uncommon *T. spiculosa*. Gordon Simpson was well-acquainted with the disgusting smell of the second of these and I had personally seen the second and. third only once each before.

Along with *T. spiculosa*, there was also a first County record of *Inocybe posterula*. Memorable too were the colourful *Otidea onotica* found by Chris Ellis, the large roll-rim *Paxillus atrotomentosus*, and a second VC66 record of *Amanita porphyria*.

Derwent Reservoir Foray

16th September Alan Legg

For a few days, it looked as though our September Foray was going to have to be cancelled because of the petrol crisis. Indeed, this probably prevented several regulars from attending. I'm happy to report, however, that a fairly large group managed to make it to the spacious Carricks car park at the western end of Derwent Reservoir for our exploration of the mixed woodland along the southern shore. Our thanks go to Keith Cunningham who planned and prepared for this outing and obtained permission from Northumbrian Water. We were also blessed with one of the few unfailingly fine days of the early autumn. The site was especially interesting because of its range of broad-leaved and coniferous trees. A few grassland fungi were also added to the list from the car park picnic site

Kepier Woods Foray

14th October Alan Legg

For the second time this year one of our forays took place at a site I had never visited. I hope this will happen more regularly now that some of you are in a position to explore and assess sites independently. Despite an ominous forecast, the weather remained dry and reasonably mild and the rain began only south of Sedgefield on my homeward journey.

At the beginning of the walk, records came rapidly from the remnants of mature oak Woodland at the valley edge and from planted beeches along the path. They began to fall off in frequency and interest only towards lunch-time as we entered a stretch of sycamore-dominated woodland below quarries. From the valley-bottom it was possible to see a thin line of oaks with a few beeches along the quarry edges and one or

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two intrepid forayers risked, life and limb to make hazardous upward sorties to the more accessible of these areas.

At lunchtime it was decided, under Andy's guidance, to back- track rapidly upstream to look at the woodland towards Durham, beyond the point where our downward track had reached the riverside path. This strategy provided some more records interestingly supplemented by a short list of wax-caps and other pasture fungi from the field at the end of the wood. A grassy track and its steep embankment neatly demonstrated the relative mycological richness of even small areas of "unimproved" grassland compared with the lush but barren field below. We found *Hygrocybe reidii* amongst other more common species and Gordon Simpson pointed out a black earth-tongue (a group for which he knows I have a particular weakness). This turned out to be *Geoglossum fallax*, probably the most "frequent" in our region. I quickly spotted another which proved to be of a different species as yet not categorically identified. As I write these words at the beginning of November, earth-tongues are turning up all over the place and, with some prompting from me, are being found by naturalists with no mycological bent. I have already written one short paper on this 2000 phenomenon. (My records of earth-tongues average about, one every 5 years - and that includes collections by other people!) It will be interesting to see if their rapid colonisation of the north-eastern lowlands this wet autumn is a flash in the pan or part of a more lasting phenomenon possibly to do with climate change.

On the return journey. Peter Manuel and I hung back and made a short detour into the oak woodland at the bank top. This proved fruitful, producing a further 10 species for the list, including *Amanita citrina* var. *alba, Cortinarius eliator*, *Lactarius chrysorrheus, Tricholoma saponaceum* and the second county record of *Clitopilus hobsonii.*

Discounting the unidentified earth-tongue for the time being, probably the best collection of the foray was of a small, dark *Pluteus* with a very wrinkled cap-centre, found by Hewett Ellis on a rotting elm log near the river. This turned out to be *P. thomsonii,* newly-recorded for VC66. When asked near the end of the walk what I thought the total species count would be, I speculated on a figure nearer 100 than 50. This was before the final detour which boosted the total to 101, demonstrating how important it is to look carefully under mature native trees (including beech!) if you want to find interesting things. As most of you will know by now, a wood full of sycamores is mycologically pretty boring!

MOORHOUSE WOOD
Nov 11 2000 Alan Legg

Numbers attending our Remembrance Day foray were somewhat depleted possibly by fear of flooding, but weather on the day was actually quite kind to us. Moorhouse Wood now contains few old trees, most of the original eighteenth century plantings having been felled during the Second World War. There is, however, enough mycological interest in this small DWT reserve to merit investigation.

Some of the 60-year-old oak stools provided ample material of the small white, stalked ascomycete, *Cudoniella acicularis*, and some piled oak-logs were covered in the black-buttons of *Bulgaria inquinans*. *Exidia albida* was flourishing on sodden branches lying in the undergrowth and *Clitocybe phyllophila* was found amongst beech litter. The only large terricolous cup-fungus found turned out to be *Peziza cerea* which usually grows, often indoors, on old damp plaster. Presumably such a heavily-used woodland has plenty of suitable material lying hidden in the soil.

Easily the most exciting find was the earth-star, *Geastrum triplex*, discovered by Peter Manuel growing at the very edge of the wood under tall holly trees. This is only the fourth county record of what is regarded as the "commonest" earth-star.

In *King Lear*, the despicable Oswald is treated to a long catalogue of insults by the loyal Kent, including "thou whoreson zed, thou unnecessary letter". Sadly this letter proved all too necessary a component of the combination allowing access to Rainton Meadows! We all misread it as "2" and so were unable to submit our finds to the planned microscopical study in the afternoon. After lunch in the car park we departed early. The morning's work produced 53 identified species, 25 of which were previously unrecorded for the site and it now has a total of over 100. We are hoping to repeat (and complete!) the day's exercise next year with a visit to the nearby Raintonpark Wood - a really

Phaeomarasmius erinaceus on Willow

by Hewett Ellis and Christine Ellis

On 28th September 2000 we found a small bright orange-brown fungus growing on a branch of a standing dead Willow tree near the Lake in Gosforth Park Nature Reserve, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (NZ 251704). The cap surface (10 mm across) was rough and scaly and the gills radiated from the short stipe. The species was new to us and the specimen was collected for further examination. The spore print was yellow-brown and the spores, which were of an unusual kite-shape with rounded corners, averaged 11.6 X 8.2µm.

We identified the fungus as *Phaeomarasmius erinaceus* from the illustration and description in Marcel Bon's book. Since Jordan states the species is "infrequent or rare" and it was the first time we had seen it, we sent the dried preserved specimen to Kew. Dr Peter Roberts confirmed our determination and informed us that the species is widespread in Britain as far north as the Orkneys and that he had himself collected it two or three times. Our material has been retained in the Kew Herbarium, where there is one earlier Northumberland specimen. Locally it would appear the species is uncommon, there being no recent records in Bramley's List for Yorkshire and none in the Durham List. Alan has informed us that he has never found it despite looking hard, and the only recent collection he is aware of in the north was from Wensleydale a few years ago.

A Season at Ryton Willows

by Andy McLay

This year I was fortunate enough to gain employment with Gateshead Borough Council as a countryside warden for Ryton Willows, a nature reserve situated on the south bank of the river Tyne 7 miles west of Gateshead. The site is quite large, covering 43 hectares and consisting of a variety of wildlife habitats ranging from mature woodland to remnant saltmarsh communities. Unimproved grassland, dense scrub, ponds, marshland and swamp habitats are all well represented. This diversity of habitats in turn supports a rich variety of wildlife and fungi are certainly no exception.

This article should really be called “two” seasons at Ryton Willows because there has been a profusion of fungi to be seen all through the summer and autumn around the reserve. The Willows has not been unique in this respect, it was a notoriously wet summer in the UK and the conditions were clearly ideal for the propagation of fungi. However, on my first visit I was struck by the amount of felled dead wood left lying to rot and on closer inspection realised that this was supporting all kinds of species. The reserve is managed for nature conservation and informal recreation and therefore no commercial extraction of timber or unnecessary “tidying up” of the wood is required, unlike many sites these days. *Hypholoma fasciculare* (sulphur tuft), *Xylaria polymorpha* (dead man’s fingers), *Lycoperdon pyriforme, Armillaria mellea* (honey fungus) and *Coprinus disseminatus* (crumble-cap) have all been abundant on the dead wood of various trees but some other species are more restricted. *Rhodotus palmatus* is a beautiful and uncommon species which only grows on the dead wood of elm trees whilst *Hypoxylon fragiforme* is common but restricted to fallen beech logs. Coniferous trees are few at Ryton Willows so the occurrence of species usually associated with conifers such as *Tricholomopsis rutilans* (plums and custard), *Gloeophyllum sepiarium, Postia caesia* and *Postia styptica* was puzzling until I learnt that the wooden path revetment consisted of logs of spruce and pine imported in from nearby Chopwell woods. Some of this revetment is very rotten now in places and I was pleased to find that one section supported good numbers of *Mutinus caninus* (dog stinkhorn). Unfortunately much of this path revetment no longer serves its purpose and will need to be replaced in the near future, so beginning a new cycle of colonisation and disintegration…

The terrestrial fungi have been less visible but an area of mature beech trees growing on a steep slope has proved quite fruitful, particularly earlier in the season.

Amanita species were well represented with abundant *A. spissa, A. rubescens* (the blusher) and *A. vaginata* (grisette). *Lactarius blennius* (slimy

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milk cap), *Russula fellea, Russula foetens, Russula nigricans* (blackening russula), *Oudemansiella radicata* (rooting shank) and *Collybia peronata* (wood woolly foot) have all been plentiful. Where the ground flora is lush with mosses the lovely *Mycena acicula* can be found. In one corner under beeches I found four impressive specimens of *Helvella lacunosa.*

The Willows itself is an extensive tract of unimproved acid grassland, part of which is covered with dense gorse and broom scrub and subject to frequent burning in the summer months. Burnt ground often supports a wealth of specialist fungi and one species in particular is nearly always present. *Pholiota highlandensis* is a "little brown job" but having grown up below the fire- ravaged Eston Hills I am well familiar with it.
The burnt gorse bushes themselves play host to several species. Of particular interest is the cramp ball *Daldinia vernicosa,* which is always smaller than its more familiar cousin but differs chiefly in its habitat. Although most books cite it as occurring on gorse only, I have often seen it on burnt silver birch trees on Eston Moor. *Tremella mesenterica* (yellow brain fungus) also grows on dead gorse quite frequently but is by no means confined to it, whilst *Flammulina velutipes* (velvet shank) has made its first appearance of the season on cut gorse stumps but should also prove more widespread.

In the short turf of the unimproved grassland, typical species have included *Hygrocybe coccinea* (scarlet hood), *Agaricus campestris (* field mushroom), *Rickenella fibula, Psilocybe semilanceata* (liberty cap) and various *Clavulinopsis* species. The grassland itself is grazed by horses during the summer and this provides another good habitat for fungi – dung. The importance of animal dung as a rich micro-habitat for both invertebrates and fungi is becoming more widely recognised nowadays. Coprophilous (dung-loving) species at the Willows include *Coprinus niveus* which prefers horse dung, *Stropharia semiglobata* (dung roundhead) and *Bolbitius vitellinus.* The latter is a fragile yellow-tinged species which also often grows in stubble fields.

At the time of writing (November 5th) the larger fungi are beginning to tail off now as the first frosts kick in, but the "jelly fungi" are coming out in force on the sodden dead logs and stumps. Never a dull moment !!

Mutinus caninus (dog stinkhorn)
Taken at Ryton Willows Photo Keith Cunningham

Auricularia auricula-judae (Jew's ear) Moorhouse Woods Photo : Keith Cunningham

Clavulinopsis spp Moorhouse Woods Photo : Keith Cunningham