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Urban Fungi - interesting fungi from parks and gardens of West London

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In 2011 I carried out a survey for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea of the main parks in the borough, of which there are nine.

As with my previous articles on fungi of the Royal Parks (Overall 2010, 2011a, 2011b), the aim of this article is to highlight some of the more interesting fungi found during the survey. Before doing so, I give a brief description of two of these parks.

Seven out of the nine parks are what I would consider to be amenity parks, some of which consist of only one small area of grass bordered by shrubs. People and their dogs heavily utilize all nine parks. Holland Park and Little Wormwood Scrubs are large and composed of various habitat types such as woodland, grassland and water features, as well as possessing a quantity of dead wood.

Holland Park

The habitats that comprise Holland Park today, originate from the creation of woodland park upon open pasture, during the 18th and 19th centuries. It is now considered, at 21.74 hectares, one of the largest areas of semi-natural habitats in central London. In recognition of the importance of this habitat, the park has been designated as an Area of Metropolitan Importance, and a Site of Nature Conservation Importance. The 11.8 hectares that are the wooded areas of the park, considered 'wilderness' by inhabitants during the 17th century and more recently the Northern Woodlands, are a result of planting by successive owners. These woodland enclosures of mainly non-native trees, Horse chestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum* and sycamore, *Acer pseudoplatanus*, mixed with native trees, such as English oak, *Quercus robur* and beech, *Fagus sylvatica*, seem to have endured a fair amount of neglect during their 393-year existence.

Little Wormwood Scrubs Park

Little Wormwood Scrubs Park is an open public space of 7.2 hectares, mainly situated in the northern part of the Royal Boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, with the eastern margin in Kensington. The park is 125 years old and is of local importance for nature conservation, a designation based upon the large areas of locally uncommon semi-improved neutral grassland and scrub present in the park. Importantly, the park fits together with a group of local areas that together comprise an important wildlife habitat. The park lies entirely upon London Clay.

The neutral grassland contains a good range of grasses and a small amount of young bramble and hawthorn. A number of ant nests are also evident here.

The western and northern margins of the park consists of more scrub and semi-mature trees, shrubs such as Crack willow, *Salix fragilis*, White willow, *Salix alba* and Goat willow, *Salix caprea* all of which support mycorrhizal fungi. There are also stands of hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna* and Grey Poplar trees, *Populus* x *canescens*. The eastern side has a small line of willow, behind which runs a shrub border. Slightly west of the shrubbery and willow trees are a few large trees, including a mature Turkey oak, *Quercus cerris* and common ash, *Fraxinus excelsior,* surrounded by a large, dead, fallen tree cut into sections. The central area of the park is dominated to the south by amenity grassland and to the north by semi-improved neutral grassland and scrub.

The Fungi

Pluteus cinereofuscus – Little Wormwood Scrubs (Fig. 1).

On first impressions I really thought this to be an *Entoloma* but once under the microscope, both

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the smooth (rather than angular) spores and prominent cheilocystidia proved it to be *Pluteus*. It is known to fruit singly on decayed wood of deciduous trees or on woodchips, upon which this collection was forming small troops. It is not a common species; to date there are 162 records in the FRDBI of which none are from Middlesex, making this the first known record for the county.

Details of the illustrated collection

Cap 20–65 mm across, convex, applanate, grey-brown with darker centre that becomes more evident with drying out, also leaving an olivaceus tint. Margin striate to almost half the width, abrupt. Stem 45–82 x 10–18 mm, white to greyish, especially toward the base, longitudinally striate. Gills white initially, becoming pinkish-brown with maturity, differing lengths, fairly crowded with complete, white floccose edge. Spores subglobose 6-7 x 8-9 µm, cheilocystidia broadly club-shaped without apical ornamentation.

Tricholomella constricta – Holland Park (Fig. 2)

This is a species that is rarely recorded although widespread. It is described as fruiting on soil among grass in woodland scrub or woodland edges with either deciduous or coniferous trees. This collection was found in soil under a wooden fence where a concrete path bordered the soil. There are 133 records currently held in the FRDBI; this record constitutes a first for Middlesex. I have subsequently recorded this from my back garden during the summer of 2012. It does make me wonder whether I carried spores from this collection into the garden. This species is known to favour urine-enriched sites. So more probably the common factor is merely the presence of dogs.

Details of the illustrated collection

Cap 15–25 mm across, convex, white, and velutinous-cottony. Margin incurved for some time, then plane with cottony veil remnants. Gills-white, intermediate, notched-adnexed, edge entire and pale cream. Stem 15–85 mm x 7–20 mm, deeply rooting, tapered, white, fasciculate. annulate, leaving a cottony, ascending ring-zone. Spores nodulose 8–9 x 6–7 µm (Fig. 3). Spore deposit white. Smell strongly farinaceous. No colour change.

Psathyrella cernua – Holland Park (Fig. 4)

Psathyrella is a rather difficult genus to identify to species, with limited available literature. I arrived at my determination by using the key in *Funga Nordica* (Knudsen & Vesterholt, 2008). This is a rare species in Great Britain and

Fig. 1. *Pluteus cinereofuscus* looks rather like a species of *Entoloma*. Little Wormwood Scrubs, 2011. Photograph © Andy Overall.

Fig. 2. *Tricholomella constricta* showing its rooting stem base. Holland Park, 2011. Photograph © Andy Overall.

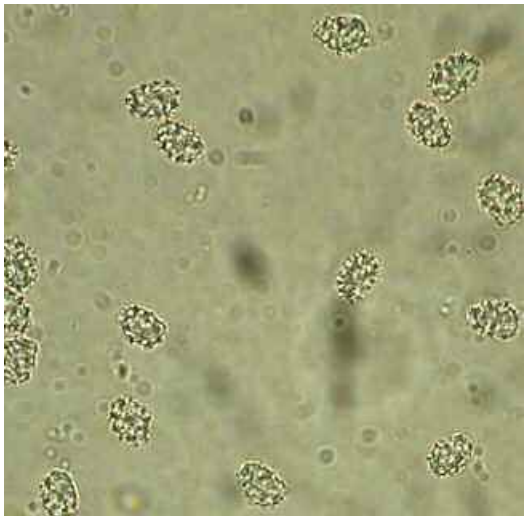

Fig. 3. Spores of *T. constricta* showing their warty-prickly outline. Photograph © Andy Overall.

Ireland with only 22 records in the FRDBI. This appears to be the first record for Middlesex. It is a species that favours decayed wood, usually on beech but it has been recorded, as with this record, on poplar.

Details of the illustrated collection

Cap 30–64 mm across, hygrophanous, greyish brown with yellowish centre, smooth with short striations at the margin. Gills, pale greyish becoming reddish-brown with paler edge, crowded and broadly attached. Stem 45–60 mm x 5–8 mm, white, pruinose on a reddish brown ground, firm but hollow. Spores 6.8–7.9 x 3.4–4.5 µm. Pleurocystidia present 34.2 x 11.4 µm, obtuse with apical crystals.

Psilocybe inquilina – Holland Park (Fig. 5)

This record highlights the importance of woodchips at Holland Park and the other main parks in kensington and Chelsea for certain types of fungi. This collection was made on woodchip debris in the grassy edges of the shrub border, on the west side of the tennis courts. This is the second record for Middlesex.

Details of the illustrated collection

Cap 11–13 mm across, convex with low umbo or broad papilla, reddish brown, grey brown, hygrophanous, becoming almost white from the centre out with margin remaining darker, striate up to 3/4 of radius, some with white velar remnants. Gills adnate with decurrent tooth in some, clay coloured to dark reddish brown. Spore print dark brown. Spores sub-rhomboid to sub-ellipsoid in face view, 6–7 x 3.5–4 µm. Cheilocystidia lageniform, exhibiting a long neck.

Fig. 4. *Psathyrella cernua* is a rare species found on old wood, especially beech but also on poplar as illustrated here from Holland Park, 2011. Photograph © Andy Overall.

Fig. 5. *Psilocybe inquilina* growing on woodchip debris in grass. Holland Park, 2011. Photograph © Andy Overall.

Fig. 6. *Ramaria curta* is commonly found on woodchip mulch. Holland Park, 2011. Photograph © Andy Overall.

Ramaria curta – Holland Park (Fig. 6)
An introduced species to this country, first recorded in 1852 yet subsequently only thirteen collections have been made to date, according to the FRDBI. This collection was made from an area that had been previously covered with woodchip mulch, beneath a fruit tree on a shrub border within park. This is the first record for Middlesex.

Details of the illustrated collection
Fruitbodies forming tight clumps that were up to 135 mm across and up to 40 mm in height, ochre brown with greyish tips, darkening with maturity, multi-branched with staghorn-like tips, which are blunt or somewhat pointed. Base white. Spores ellipsoid and warty, 3–6 x 3 µm.

References

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Useful Link

Overall, A. (2011). Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Main Parks, Fungi Survey.
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