

Dulwich & Sydenham Hill Woods
Fungi Survey Report
2023



Gymnopilus spectabilis ©Andy Overall

BY
Andy Overall

Dulwich & Sydenham Hill Woods Fungi Survey Report 2023

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BAP – Biodiversity Action Plan

FRDBI – Fungal Records Database of Britain & Ireland

Executive Summary

December 2023

During Autumn 2023 a report was commissioned by London Wildlife Trust to give an appraisal of the importance of Dulwich Wood (DW) and Sydenham Hill Wood (SHW), in terms of their species richness and the relative scarcity and status of larger fungi recorded therein. The survey is an important part of a new major project by LWT “Reuniting Sydenham Hill Wood & Dulwich Wood”. This is the first such survey carried out at the woods and will help stand as a baseline for future fungi surveys. Historic lists of species do exist. Most importantly those by Mark Spencer during 2000 – 2010.

A total of 131 species from 243 records. Sydenham Hill Woods recorded 82 species from 146 records, whilst Dulwich Wood had 54 species from 97 records. These were identified from both the grassland areas and the woodlands during October 24/26 & November 15/30 2023. Amongst these records are rare or only occasionally recorded species in the Greater London Area, such as, *Amanita pantherina*, *Pluteus luctosus*, *Flammulaster grannulosus*, and *Sagaranelia tylicolor* one *Cortinarius* species from Dulwich Wood will be sent for DNA analysis. Notable species recorded from previous visits, such as *Buchwaldoboletus lignatilis* and *Nectria cinnabarina* were not recorded during the survey.

The report concludes that Dulwich and Sydenham Hill Woods are a very important component to the natural fabric of the London Borough of Southwark and indeed to Greater London itself. Even though 4 visits are a mere ‘fungi snapshot’, the woods were still found to contain a good number of species from a diverse range of genera. These were represented by many genera of the major groups of larger fungi which are to be expected from the complex of habitats therein. Where species have been identified as being of local or national importance, from this or future surveys, these should be given protection under applicable BAP schemes.

**REPORT ON THE FUNGI OF DULWICH WOODS and SYDENHAM HILL WOODS
SURVEY CARRIED OUT DURING OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2023.**

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1.0 Introduction & Historical context

Together, Dulwich Wood (DW) and Sydenham Hill Woods (SHW) which are conjoined, form the largest remnant of what was known as the Great North Wood, which stretched from Deptford to Selhurst. Dulwich Wood is owned and managed by the Dulwich Estate, with habitat and access management works delivered in partnership with London Wildlife Trust. SHW is leased to LWT by Southwark Council. SHW has been managed by LWT since 1982.

Sydenham Hill Woods Central Grid Reference TQ 344 726 - has boundaries between Dulwich Common (N), Sydenham Hill (S & E), Dulwich Wood, and Dulwich & Sydenham Hill Golf Course (W)

Pedestrians can access at all times, via Crescent Wood Road, Dulwich Wood, Dulwich Common, Sydenham Hill and Lapsewood Walk with restricted vehicular access. from Sydenham Hill, Peckarmans Wood and Dulwich Common. The wood rises from 75m above sea level at the border with Dulwich Wood to 105m along Sydenham Hill. It is part of the Dulwich & Sydenham Hill woodland complex covering 25 ha of high ground, south of Dulwich Common. The nature reserve is mainly native broadleaved woodland and part is ancient in character. The site also contains the trackbed of the former Crystal Palace High Level railway, which now forms part of the main path system. There are other created features, including ponds, glades and ditches and the remains of a Victorian folly.

To the north and west, Sydenham Hill Wood borders open green space, including allotments, playing fields, and Dulwich & Sydenham Hill Golf Course. These are buffered from the wider urban infrastructure by large gardens in Dulwich and isolated parcels of relict woodland including Low Cross Wood, Great Brownings and Dulwich Upper Wood. South and east of Sydenham Hill Wood, there are some discrete areas of green space, such as Sydenham Wells Park and the old Upper Sydenham station site.

Dulwich Wood central grid reference TQ 34065 72471 is located to the southwest of Dulwich between Dulwich & Sydenham Golf Club and Gun Site Allotments in the north and the residential properties of Peckarmans Wood, Crescent Wood Road and Great Brownings which form the southern boundaries. Sydenham Hill Wood and Cox's Walk (owned by Southwark Council and managed by London Wildlife Trust) is conjoined to the east, and Grange Wood Allotments, College Road and the residential properties of Woodhall Drive form the western boundary. Dulwich Wood and Low Cross Wood are divided by the Low Cross Wood Lane which runs steeply between College Road and Crescent Wood Road.

Between 2016-23 Sydenham Hill Wood saw significant investment in paths, interpretation and conservation fencing through projects funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Defra.

Both sites comprise ancient and semi-natural woodlands, with dominating canopy of *Carpinus betula*, Hornbeam, *Quercus robur*, English Oak, *Quercus petrae*, Sessile Oak (in part), *Acer pseudoplatanus*, *Betula pendula*, Birch, *Fraxinus excelsior* Ash.

The survey comprised of four visits during October and November 2023. This report will address both Dulwich and Sydenham Hill Woods separately within, giving a brief history in relation to their ecological composition and management which has and will have a direct bearing on the larger fungi now present or absent from these sites.

1.1 The Fungal Modes & The Habitat

To obtain nutrients, larger fungi are mycorrhizal, saprobic or parasitic in nature; the latter two modes are combined with some species.

Mushrooms and toadstools can either be called fruit bodies or sporocarps; the main part of the fungus is within the given substrate and is called the mycelium. The mycelium, consisting of cottony, thread-like elements known as hyphae, absorbs nutrients, utilising enzymes, to enable it to produce mushrooms and toadstools. There are three main ways in which fungi obtain nutrients.

Mycorrhizal fungi form a mutual symbiosis via the roots of various trees and shrubs with which they exchange nutrients. These are very important fungi that help maintain healthy trees and woodland. Most of our native trees have this association with fungi; naturalised trees such as Horse Chestnut and Sycamore do not.

Saprobic fungi feed on dead and dying matter, helping to break down matter and release nutrients back into the soil.

Parasitic fungi take and give nothing in return. Some of these fungi can be very destructive, such as *Armillaria mellea* - Honey Fungus or *Meripilus giganteus* the Giant Polypore, the former is parasitic and then saprobic on its host.

Physicality and Habitat

Ancient Woodland, Semi Natural Woodland, Grassland & Water features

Both woods are underlain by weathered London Clay, which grades upwards into Claygate Beds. The railway track bed is composed mainly of limestone ballast with alkaline and free-draining soils. Areas of woodland east of the railway track have slightly leached, slightly acidic or neutral brown earth soils. Soils on the Claygate Beds are silty, with local deposits of fine sand, and more acidic. However, much of the soil on the upper part of the hillside has been disturbed and has relatively high fertility.

Over the years, due to heavy footfall, soils have become compacted and desire lines have been created. To combat these, fencing has been erected and paths have been upgraded. In degraded areas where fencing has not been erected, dead hedging has taken place. The work is ongoing.

The tree canopy of both woods is largely the same and composed of abundant but mostly similar aged hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* with occasional beech *Fagus sylvatica*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, wild cherry *Prunus avium* and sessile oak *Quercus petraea* and yew *Taxus baccata*. There is also a scattering of younger sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*. *Quercus petraea* sessile oak dominates in ancient areas of SHW.

The understory consists of younger trees of abundant hornbeam with occasional beech, ash, wild cherry, yew and horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*. sycamore, holm oak *Quercus ilex* and rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*. These trees are supplemented by shrubs dominated by holly *Ilex aquifolium* and occasional elder *Sambucus nigra*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* and scattered amounts of hazel *Corylus avellana*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, spotted laurel *Aucuba japonica* and rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum*.

The mixed woodland canopy of Sydenham Hill Woods is mainly that of sycamore, *Acer Pseudoplatanus*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, silver birch *Betula pendula*, goat willow *Salix caprea* and sometimes yew. There are also frequent mature and regenerating oaks *Q. patraea*, *Q. robur* and hybrids *Q. robur x petraea*, hornbeam, yew, wild cherry *Prunus avium*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and holly. There are a number of ornamental trees, which would have been planted in Victorian gardens, particularly a cedar of Lebanon *Cedrus libani*, black mulberry *Morus nigra*, Chilean pine *Araucaria aracana* and ash-leaved or box maple (*Acer negundo*). Much of the yew may also originate from planting in Victorian gardens.

All these trees, apart from ash, wild cherry and sycamore, form a mutual symbiosis with a diverse number of mycorrhizal fungi genera. Ash, cherry & sycamore will be and are very important for diverse genera of saprobic fungi, either directly on the tree, living or dead parts, or on the debris dropped by the tree.

The ground flora is largely similar throughout and is dominated by ivy *Hedera helix*

with abundant bramble aggregate species *Rubus fruticosus* agg. Patches of bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* are frequent throughout except where the soils are heavily eroded or compacted. In places, these are interspersed with hybrid types *H x massartiana*. Small patches of wood-anemone *Anemone nemerosa*, lesser celandine *Ficaria verna* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* can also be found along with a scattering of wood dock *Rumex sanguineus*. Several other species are also present in very small numbers, including species such as male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, lords-and-ladies *Arum maculatum*, cleavers *Galium aparine*, hedge dead-nettle *Stachys sylvatica* and common nettle *Urtica dioica*. Various rust fungi can be found on a number of these plants.

Tree and shrub regeneration at the ground layer comprises of mostly hornbeam, holly, ash, wild cherry, hawthorn, yew, and sycamore with smaller amounts of beech, horse-chestnut, holm oak, rowan, elder, cherry laurel, hazel, blackthorn, and rhododendron.

Dead wood as cut and fallen branches and general brash is abundant throughout; it is also present within the canopy and the understorey. Several standing dead tree monoliths are also present, as are a few old tree stumps and recently cut stumps of the invasive cherry laurel, rhododendron, and spotted laurel. Some of the dead cut wood has been used to create dead hedges as a management tool to close former desire-line paths so to reduce trampling and widespread erosion. Small grassland areas and ponds can also be found in SHW. The dead wood left in situ throughout the woods is excellent and provides very important habitat for a diverse range of wood inhabiting fungi.

2.1 Method

The survey was carried out during October and November; therefore, providing only a snapshot, partially covering the changing, environmental conditions.

When possible, species were named in the field; if not possible, collections were made for identification by microscope and where needed, were sent for DNA sequencing. Status and nomenclature criteria used in the accompanying spreadsheet of species recorded, were based upon recent literature listed in the bibliography at the end of the report, in particular the Checklist of British and Irish Basidiomycota by Legon and Henrici (2005, published by Kew Gardens). Frequency was given as in the pre-mentioned publication, as frequent, infrequent, occasional, widespread, rarely reported, rare or red data listed. In some instances, these entries were modified with qualifiers such as locally common. GPS readings were taken for each rare or endangered species for their exact location. Specimens of the rare and unusual species were collected, dried, written up and deposited as voucher specimens at the Fungal Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens, at Kew.



Fig.1 Map of survey route around Sydenham Hill Wood

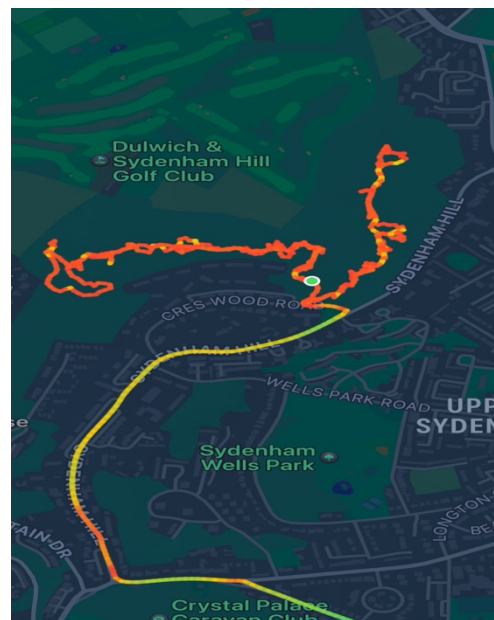


Fig. 2 Map of survey route around Dulwich Wood

2.3 Results and species of note.

During the survey, Sydenham Hill Woods recorded 82 species from 146 records, whilst Dulwich Wood had 54 species from 97 records. A total of 131 species from 243 records. These were identified from both the grassland areas and the woodlands during October 24/26, November 15/30 2023. Most of the genera, spread across a number of families, were what you would expect from these woodland types, and the complex of habitats therein. However, a few species from SHW are rare or only occasionally recorded in the Greater London Area, such as, *Amanita pantherina*, *Pluteus luctosus*, *Flammulaster grannulosus*, and *Sanagarella tylicolor* one *Cortinarius* species from Dulwich Wood will be sent for DNA analysis. Notable species from previous visits, *Buchwaldoboletus lignitilis* and *Nectria cinnabarina* were not observed.

Genera and species from *Boletaceae* were not recorded during the visits, which, to some extent, is rather unusual. Species of *Paxillus*, Roll Rim's, and *Scleroderma*, Earthball's and late occurring small Boletes, such as *Xerocomellus*, should be expected in such habitat, during the autumn months. Most of these have been picked up on previous records so this could just be down to timing. Some of the larger Boletes are thermophilic and are most likely to be seen during the warmer summer, late summer months.

Important mycorrhizal families such as the *Amanitaceae*, *Cortinariaceae*, *Inocybaceae*, *Hymenogastraceae* and *Russulaceae* were all represented by a small number of species, from various genera such as, *Amanita*, *Cortinarius*, *Inocybe*, *Hebeloma*, *Laccaria* and *Russula*. The prolific dead wood across both woods provided many important saprobic genera such as, *Mycena*, *Crepidotus*, *Gymnopus*, *Gymnopilus*, *Hypholoma* and *Armillaria* among others. On the woodland floor saprobic genera, *Agaricus*, *Clitocybe*, *Mycena*, *Pholiotina* and *Psathyrella* were evident. Saprobiic/Parasitic species such as *Fistulina hepatica* on *Quercus* and *Grifola frondose* at the base of *Quercus* were also recorded, as well as *Armillaria mellea*, Honey Fungus and the less virulent *Armillaria gallica*, Bulbous Honey.

Some of these are depicted and covered below.

Dead wood across the woodland site is excellent and some good records were made from some of the fallen dead wood, standing and fallen dead trees.

Most of the species recorded during the survey are frequent, common and widespread across England and what you would expect from these old grassland areas and woodland on clay over chalk. However, I suspect that given the age of the woodland and grassland, there is a much more to be revealed from these habitats and this site. Some very rare, new to the county of Surrey and nationally important species were recorded from here during the survey. Some of these are covered below. There were no species identified that are listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981.

2.4 *Sagaranelia tylicolor* – TQ 34410 72406 – Woodland

An occasional to rare species, once of the Genus *Lyophyllum*. 146 records are currently held on the FRDBI, 12 of which are from Middlesex, making this the 13th record.



Fig. 4 *Sagaranelia tylicolor* - ©Andy Overall

2.5 *Gymnopus foetidus* – TQ 34390 72500 – open woodland on dead wood

An occasional yet widespread, wood rotting species with 428 records currently held for the UK on the FRDBI. 71 of these are for Surrey.



Fig. 5 *Gymnopus foetidus*—©Andy Overall

2.6 *Cortinarius* sp. – TQ 34224 72463 – On soil beneath *Carpinus betulus*.

This collection belongs to the complex surrounding *Cortinarius hinnuleus* widely spaced gills are characteristic as are the heavily verrucose spores. It awaits DNA confirmation.



Fig.6 & 7 *Cortinarius* sp. (*C. hinnuleus* complex) Fig. 6 shows violet/black reaction to KOH at base of stem, typical of this section © Andy Overall

2.7 *Mycena corynephora* – TQ 34345 72371-On mossy bark of live Ash tree

A fairly common and widespread species with 238 UK records currently held on the FRDBI. Only 9 of these are from Surrey, 4 from East Kent and there are surprisingly none from Middlesex. Most likely overlooked. Microscopic details are needed to help separate it from other small, white *Mycena*'s on mossy tree bark.



Fig.6. *Mycena corynephora* © Andy Overall

2.8 *Tricholoma album* - TQ 34450 72588

This is a fairly common and widespread species of oak mixed deciduous woodland. There are 751 records for the UK currently held on the FRDBI with 51 for Surrey 12 for East Kent. Many of the records cite various hosts such as *Betula* and *Fraxinus*. However, this species is believed to be host specific with *Quercus*, therefore such records with other hosts may belong to other species such as *Tricholoma stiparophyllum*, itself believed to be host specific with *Betula*.



Fig.6. *Tricholoma album* © Andy Overall

3.0 Recommendations

Where non-native, invasive species, such as Laurel, Rhododendron and any Bamboo occurs, these need to be continually tackled and removed as they affect the soil in such a way that it inhibits fungi and viable, native plants from growing.

Too continue fencing around worn and degraded areas.

As the survey took place over only four visits, I suspect that there is a lot more to be revealed, given the age of some parts of these woods. I would most certainly recommend further visits to the site, spread out over a longer period, to account for vernal and summer species.

4.0 Biodiversity Action Plans

Where certain species from the site have been identified as vulnerable or endangered with reference to data from the current UK Fungi Draft Red Data List. A local or where appropriate, national Biodiversity Action Plans should be applied, if this has not already been done. This will afford further protection for the species.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, during October 24/25th and November 15/30th 2023 both Sydenham Hill Wood and Dulwich Wood appeared to be well represented by many genera of the major groups of fungi to be expected from ancient and secondary, mixed woodland and the complex habitats therein. Collectively a total of 131 species from 243 records were recorded from the woods. Sydenham Hill Woods recorded 82 species from 146 records, whilst Dulwich Wood had 54 species from 97 records. Some of which are rare or only occasionally recorded from the Greater London area (see results).

One collection of *Cortinarius* sp. From Dulwich Woods will be sent for DNA sequencing. Notable records from past visits, *Buchwaldoboletus lignicola* and *Crepidotus cinnabarinus* were not recorded during the survey visits.

Mycorrhizal families such as the *Cortinariaceae*, *Inocybaceae*, *Russulaceae* and *Hymenogastraceae* were all represented by several species, from various genera such as, *Cortinarius*, *Inocybe*, *Hebeloma*, *Laccaria* and *Russula*.

Genera and species from *Boletaceae* were not recorded during the visits (see results).

Standing and fallen dead-wood is excellent throughout both woods, providing habitat to a diverse range of fungi genera.

Both Dulwich and Sydenham Hill Woods represent a very important, vital habitat for fungi, which is becoming scarcer in the Greater London Area. The status, support and progressive management of the woods is very encouraging for the future.

This survey will stand as a baseline survey for any future fungi surveys. A more comprehensive survey is recommended, running from spring to late autumn/winter. This will give a much clearer picture of fungi occurring in the woods.

Most of the species recorded during the survey are frequent, common & widespread across England and what you would expect from ancient and secondary woodland and the complex of habitats therein. The survey also picked up rare and occasionally recorded species, as mentioned above. There were no species identified that are listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981.

APPENDIX 1

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