Sclerencoelia fraxinicola a recently recognised cup fungus on Ash

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Mycologists visiting deciduous woods in spring are likely to come across Spring Hazelcup, *Encoelia furfuracea*. Its distinctive appearance as a cluster of somewhat irregular brown 'cups' pushing through the bark of dead, standing *Corylus* (and occasionally *Alnus*) stems renders it safely identifiable in the field. A further 11 species of *Encoelia* are listed on the Fungal Record Database for Britain and Ireland (FRDBI) but only *E. fascicularis* has more than a handful of records. This is a similar dark brown species, mostly recorded from *Populus*.

Recent molecular studies have established that not all of these species are closely related to each other and in a partial revision by Pärtel *et al*. (2017), *E. fascicularis* was moved to a new genus *Sclerencoelia*, together with *E. pruinosa*. In the same paper they established that the black 'form' on *Fraxinus* was a distinct species and named it *Sclerencoelia fraxinicola*.

Jenny Kelly, of the Norfolk Fungus Study Group, has been organising monthly forays at Sculthorpe Moor, a Hawk & Owl Trust reserve just west of Fakenham in Norfolk, for the past three years and has recorded 379 species there. On 20 February 2020, Keith Fox drew the group's attention to a black discomycete fruiting along the trunk of a recently fallen ash tree (Fig. 1) in a wet wood. The lowest group of fruiting bodies occurred where the trunk was about 20 cm in diameter, just over two metres from the base of the tree; the highest group was about eight metres from the base. The bark was intact but the thin outer layer could readily be peeled away. The dead tree had snapped off at its base in recent storms. It is not clear whether *S. fraxinicola* is parasitic or saprobic on Ash; in other words, has it contributed to the demise of the tree, or not?

The apothecia were up to 3 mm in diameter in the material collected, with a matt black, slightly textured, hymenium. When fresh they formed open, slightly irregular, cups, mostly single but some clustered in small groups (Fig. 2). These were attached to the wood below the bark without a stalk. On partial drying, the edges of the apothecia folded over to reveal the dark underside covered with white granules (Fig. 3). Spores were mostly curved (allantoid) 14–17 x 3.5–4 µm (Fig. 4). The paraphyses were narrowly club-shaped and dark towards their tip. The line drawings for *E. fascicularis* in Breitenbach & Kränzlin (1984) illustrate *S. fraxinicola* well.

This record will not be the first for Britain as it is likely that any former records for *E. fascicularis* on Ash will have been of this species. On FRDBI there are three such records: Stocksmoor, West Yorkshire (1996); Aversley Wood, Huntingdonshire (2002) and Trench Wood, Worcestershire (2010).

We are grateful to Nigel Middleton for encouraging us to record fungi at this site.

References

Breitenbach, J. & Kränzlin, F. (1984). *Fungi of Switzerland*: Vol. 1. Verlag Mycologia, Switzerland.

Pärtel, K., Baral, H-O, Tamm, H. & Põldmaa, K. (2017). Evidence for the polyphyly of *Encoelia* and *Encoelioidea* with reconsideration of respective families in *Leotiomycetes*. *Fungal Diversity* 82: 183–219.

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Fig. 1. *S. fraxinicola* in situ at Sculthorpe Moor, Norfolk. Photograph © Jenny Johnson.

Fig. 2. Fresh apothecia of *S. fraxinicola* at Sculthorpe Moor, Norfolk. Photograph © Tony Leech.

Fig. 3. Partially dry *S. fraxinicola* at Sculthorpe Moor, Norfolk. Photograph © Tony Leech.

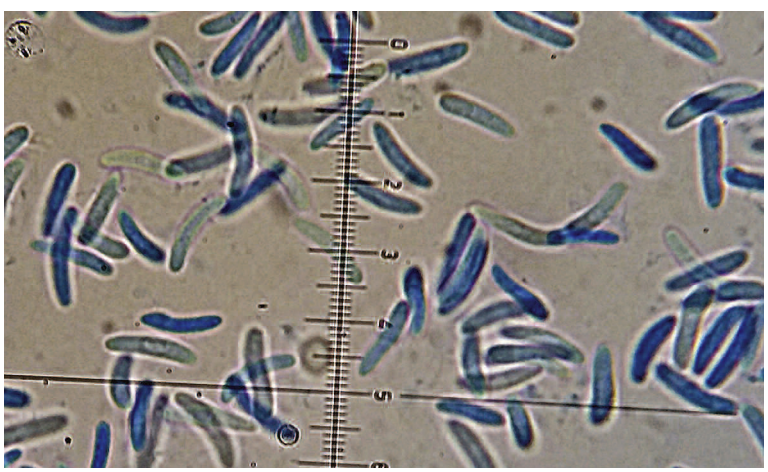

Fig. 4. Spores of *S. fraxinicola*. Photograph © Keith Fox. Scale is in microns.