

Fungal Portrait: 91

Three bleeding *Mycena* species

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Fig. 1. *Mycena crocata* on a mossy fallen branch, Mousells Wood, Bucks, October, 2019, showing its bright orange juice. Inset: cheilocystidium. Photograph © Geoffrey Kibby.

The genus *Mycena* is well represented in Britain with over 60 species present (even more if you include the more recently separated genera such as *Atheniella*, *Phloeomana*, *Roridomyces*, etc). Many of the species are small and often require detailed microscopy to identify the species or even molecular sequencing to be sure of what you have. So it is nice when you have some species which are so striking in the field as to be easy to identify.

Three such species are shown here, all of which bleed a coloured juice when scratched or broken. All are common and likely to be found in the appropriate habitat during the course of the fungal season.

Mycena crocata (Schrad.) P. Kumm.

This is one of our larger and most distinct species and is characterised by the bright, almost fluorescent orange juice with which it is filled.

When young the 1–3 cm conical cap is a pale cream-ochre to greyish ochre, aging to darker brown. The stem is a pale to dark orange or red-brown and if broken will bleed bright orange juice which will readily stain your fingers. The photo above shows some of the orange liquid on the pale, almost white gills.

M. crocata often grows in large troops on fallen twigs, branches and woody debris in deciduous forests and is particularly common where the soil is calcareous. Microscopically it is worth looking at the cheilocystidia which look like swollen clubs with numerous small protrusions or spikes.

Mycena haematopus (Pers.) P. Kumm.

Unlike the previous species *M. haematopus* grows in fasciculate clusters, usually on fallen logs or wet, often mossy trunks of deciduous trees. Its bluntly conical caps are 2–4 cm across, and a dark to pale reddish or vinaceous brown,



Fig. 2. *Mycena haematopus*. The specimen at left shows the dark blood-red juice where scratched. Photograph © Geoffrey Kibby.

often with a whitish ‘bloom’. The cap margins usually have distinctive small triangular ‘teeth’. The stems are of a darker vinaceous hue and if broken bleed a deep burgundy-red juice which stains the fingers dark reddish brown.

The species is very common in mid to late autumn throughout Britain and is one that any beginning mycologist can easily learn to identify.

Mycena sanguinolenta (Alb. & Schwein.) P.



Fig. 3. *Mycena sanguinolenta* with distinctive reddish gill edges. Epping Forest, Essex, Oct. 2021. Photo © Geoffrey Kibby.

Kumm.

Somewhat smaller than the preceding species with caps reaching about 1–2 cm across, its most distinctive character, apart from the red juice that bleeds from the stem when broken, is the red edges to the pale cream gills. You may require a hand lens to see these clearly although they are often easily visible even to the naked eye.

The caps are pale to dark vinaceous or reddish brown and often have darker radial streaks. The stems are reddish to vinaceous brown. They do not bleed quite as freely as *M. haematopus* but in young specimens is usually visible.

The species grows in small troops, often on fallen needle litter in coniferous forests but also on fallen coniferous wood, and is quite widespread, especially as you go further north in the country. Both this species and *M. haematopus* have distinctive, sharply pointed, fusiform cheilocystidia.

This is one of a number of species with coloured gill edges but the others will not bleed when broken.



cheilocystidia shape in *M. haematopus* and *M. sanguinolenta*