FUNGI WALK at PULLINGSHILL WOOD, September 12th 2021

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This was another popular walk with 30 attendees, some no doubt attracted by the presence of guest leaders Geoffrey Kibby and Mario Tortelli whose valued contribution I was thankful for: it made the event not only much easier to manage but also meant many more species were quickly identified. As predicted, parking was a bit of an issue but appeared to cause no serious problems and the morning was fine and warm even if conditions were disappointingly dry and somewhat unproductive for fungi.

The lack of mycorrhizal species (those growing in symbiosis with trees) was somewhat tantalising for those of us familiar with this site which can be exceptional when such genera as *Amanita, Boletus* etc*, Russula, Lactarius, Cortinarius, Inocybe* etc are in full flow. It soon became evident that relatively little would be found fruiting in soil today, but focusing on the plentiful fallen wood kept everyone busy and we ended up with a list of around 60 species. (The surprisingly large proportion on the list which are new to the site – many of them very common things - is purely due to the fact that BFG has only visited here once previously, back in 2007.)

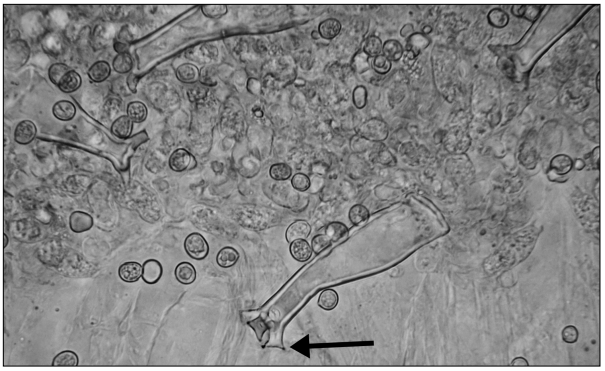
Quite a few people came up to us with specimens of ***Gymnopus fusipes*** (Spindle Toughshank) to be identified, this proving to be the commonest mushroom today and one which also featured on our two previous walks (see the photo in my Bernwood Forest report). It grows at or near the base of mature Oak or (as here) Beech usually forming tight clusters with their narrowing stem bases fused together. Today one confusing specimen was exceptionally large – this can happen when the mycelium beneath puts all its energies into just one fruiting body instead of the normal cluster.

The first of two rare species to be found was a tiny brown capped mushroom on rotten bare Beech. Initially looking like a typical LBJ (Little Brown Job) belonging to possibly *Conocybe* or *Galerina*, Geoffrey quickly spotted the fine upright warty scales covering both cap and stem which eliminated both those genera, and recognised it as ***Flammulaster muricatus*** (no common name), a species with under 50 national records and illustrated in very few handbooks (though included in the thick black Collins Fungi Guide). Later another even tinier specimen was found - both had caps less than 5mm across and a handlens was needed to appreciate the detail. So well done to Bob Simpson and Claire Williams for spotting them. Once I'd confirmed the id at home with a scope I discovered we had just one previous county record, from Mousells Wood – not far away as the Red Kite flies – in 2016 also in mid September, found by Claudi Soler and identified by me.

Left, *Flammulaster muricatus*, a rare LBJ found today. (BW)

The second rarity was a very pale capped - almost white - quite large species of *Pluteus* (Shield) noticed on a Beech trunk, recognised as unusual by Roger Wilding and then handed to Geoffrey whose voice instantly reflected his interest and excitement. (But who found it?! Please let me know!) Keying it out at home later Geoffrey identified it as ***Pluteus hongoi***, his words follow: '…. this is the new name for *P. nothopellitus* (which in turn is what most UK "*P. pellitus*" actually are). It has no clamps in the cap cuticle hyphae (*pellitus* does) and the points of a large number of the gill cystidia are each split into two, i.e. bifid. …… you should be aware that the cap can be brown also! Then it is best distinguished from *P. cervinus* [to which it is very similar (PC)] by microscopy (cystidia hardly ever bifid) and also the stem having very few fibrils.' This was a special

find, new to the county and with less than a handful of national records even under its previous name. Sadly we have no photo but Geoffrey's microphoto of the 'bifid cystidia' is worth including here.



Right, the spores and cystidia of the *Pluteus hongoi*, found today. The common *P. cervinus* also has these distinctive cystidia having 'cat's ears' on top but not with the 'ears' dividing into two as arrowed here, unique to this rare species. (GK)

Other finds of interest: some tiny white stalked caps on a rotting stump were found looking possibly like a white *Mycena* (Bonnet), but on close inspection the complete lack of gills on the underside pointed to its identity. This was the Ascomycete ***Cudoniella acicularis*** (Oak Pin) with caps less than 5mm across, a species which occurs on rotting damp wood, most commonly but not exclusively Oak despite its common name.

Left, *Cudoniella acicularis*, a tiny species of ascomycete masquerading as a mushroom, but lacking gills – this visible in the lowest fruitbody here. (MT)

On a Beech stick a small flattish patch with a pinkish beige poroid 'honeycomb' upper surface was noticed, this familiar to both me and Geoffrey though neither of us could recall the name! Claudi Soler remembered it, however: ***Junghuhnia nitida*** (a Corticioid species with no common name) to which we both responded 'Ah yes, that's it!'

Right, the distinctive corticioid *Junghuhnia nitida* on bare fallen Beech. (CW)

Two brackets now, both common species and distinctive enough to recognise in the field. Firstly ***Hymenochaete rubiginosa*** (Oak Curtain Crust), a species restricted to Oak (or occasionally Sweet Chestnut) and rather like a dark brown *Stereum* (Curtain Crust), i.e. having thin texture and forming tiers or rows. It is fuscous brown both above and below and was found today still immature and yet to form its proper raised brackets. Next ***Daedaleopsis confragosa*** (Blushing Bracket), a species often on Willow or Birch and usually forming evenly shaped semicircles. The upper surface is zoned and rough, often becoming reddish in the centre (sometimes entirely red), the pale beige mazelike pores beneath (when fresh) bruise pink when pressed but when dry or old bruise not at all!

Above left, immature *Hymenochaete rubiginosa*, the patches only about 3 cm across and yet to join up to form brackets. (JW) Above centre and right, the semicircular brackets of *Daedaleopsis confragosa*, with pores fresh enough today to bruise pink, proven by Justin's thumbprint! (JW)

This site is one of the best in the area to find ***Amanita phalloides*** (Deathcap) and despite today's unfavourable conditions I was hoping that a specimen would turn up to enable us to show the species to those not as yet familiar with it. We found several somewhat damaged and tatty examples of ***Amanita citrina*** (False Deathcap) – not worthy of a photo hence the image included below for comparison, but luckily a singleton Deathcap was found (by Claire again) and though somewhat small was in good condition as well. Comparing the two images here, they look very different and not easy to confuse, but the cap colour of Deathcap is very variable and often considerably paler, with hardly a hint of olive green. There are, however, more reliable features which separate the two species. Firstly the shape of the volva (sac at the stem base): in *A. citrina* it is like a round bulb and quite hard having a regular rim more or less adjoining the stem, but in *A. phalloides* it is baglike, open at the top with a large gutter and often irregularly torn. Secondly the smell (needing a specimen to be picked but note that the deadly toxins come into effect when consumed – touching is not dangerous). *A. citrina* has a distinct sharp smell of potato peelings; *A. phalloides* has a sickly sweet smell a bit like honey. One further tip: *A. citrina* normally retains at least some white (removable) flecks of veil on the cap into maturity, *A. phalloides* often loses any veil flecks early on, thus appearing completely smooth capped.

Above left, today's *Amanita phalloides* in situ (CW), the insert showing the typical guttered volva of the species. Above right, *Amanita citrina* (from Hodgemoor Woods last year), the insert showing the typical bulblike volva of the species. (PC)

A strangely deformed example of another common mushroom turned up, testing anyone's ability to identify it. A species normally with a brown wrinkled / furrowed cap, widely spaced white gills and a longish thin stem which extends well into the soil as a root, this was ***Xerula radicata*** (Rooting Toughshank). The only recognisable feature was its wrinkled cap and Geoffrey suggested it must have been 'hit' by some other organism to cause this distortion.

Left, our somewhat distorted example of *Xerula radicata* found under Beech today. (JW)

Some small white blobs on rotting wood were noticed Barry, as usual on the hunt for slime moulds. These, however, were a species of Ascomycete – one belonging to the Pyrenomycetes i,e hard, crusty and usually black. ***Lasiosphaeria ovina*** (Woolly Woodwart) is quite common and differs from others in the genus by having this furry white coating covering its hard black interior, making it nameable in the field. It also has a distinctive beak /opening in the centre which protrudes through the 'fur'. Each fruiting body is less than 5mm across.

Left, *Lasiosphaeria ovina*, a tiny Ascomycete. (BW)

Two slime moulds to finish with, both miniscule and beautiful and found on rotting damp wood today.

Left, *Ceratiomyxa fruticulosa* (Coral Slime) like a swarm of tiny icicles. (GF)

Left below, *Stemonitopsis typhina* (no common name) before having matured when the white 'lollipops' turn gradually pink then brown as they dry off. Recognised in the field by its translucent white coating around the stalk reminding one of old fashioned seamed stockings. (BW)

Thank you all for coming and for finding so much in challenging conditions today. A big thank you also to Geoffrey and Mario who made the event so special. A final thank you to all the photographers. For more detail of what we found (which includes all the common names we couldn't recall in the field) see the complete list.

Photographers:
BW = Barry Webb, CW = Claire Williams, GF = Gill Ferguson, GK = Geoffrey Kibby,
JW = Justin Warhurst, MT = Mario Tortelli, PC = Penny Cullington