FUNGI WALK at PULLINGSHILL WOOD, September 30th 2026

Penny Cullington

Our group, 15 strong, met up on yet another fine and dry morning and we started out as usual by checking the 'triangle' near our parking spot before continuing to the roadside bank and ditch. Both these areas now have a reputation for producing interesting and special things, our previous visit (last year almost to the day) being no exception when it had us almost gasping at times and produced a list of over 80 species. None of us were expecting a repeat performance this time and it was no surprise that the triangle was almost devoid of interest, as was the bank and ditch. 'Too dry - the mycorrhizals just haven't kicked off yet', we said, but we were in for a few surprises as we carried on!

Several collections of ***Russula cyanoxantha*** (Charcoal Burner) soon turned up but displayed such a range of cap colours that it was difficult to accept they were all the same species – this however proven by a crystal of iron salts producing a negative reaction when rubbed on the stem. The pure green-capped form we found (seen in the photo) is quite often encountered and named *var. peltereau* though this name is not generally accepted for recording purposes. More often the spilt petrol colours predominate (also seen here), making the FE crystal test invaluable in separating the species from two common lookalikes: *R. ionochlora* (Oilsick Brittlegill) and *R. grisea* (False Charcoal Burner), both of which react to FE with a clear orange rusty stain however.

Above: *Russula cyanoxantha* showing the typical colour range (LD)

Heading up into the woodland from the road we added a few more bits to the list though nothing of particular note until under Sweet Chestnut a couple of us wondered about the possibility of finding the tiny stemmed cup fungus ***Lanzia echinophila*** (Hairy Nuts Disco) which grows exclusively on the inner surface of old chestnut husks. Sarah did more than wonder about it and actually found it, new to the site! What's more, though on collection it was really desiccated but still recognisable, she managed to rehydrate it overnight at home making her excellent photo a possibility!

Left: *Lanzia echinophila* (SJE)

Continuing the *Russula* theme, we soon realised that the *cyanoxantha* encounter early on was not to be our only Brittlegill though there'd been extremely little evidence of this genus, usually up and active in September, in our area so far. We have eight species on the list, several of which turned up quite a few times, and one worth sharing here is another which can vary considerably in colour. ***Russula***

lepida (Rosy Brittlegill) gets its English name from its most commonly met red cap colour which sometimes but not always can be seen on the stem as well, as here. However, it can often lack red entirely with a cream to almost white cap – how confusing is that?! To make matters worse, there must be in excess of 10 other common red-capped, also several cream-capped, species. Thankfully *R. lepida* does have a couple of redeeming field characters which separate it from other contenders: it is remarkably firm to the touch - both cap and stem, furthermore it has an adnate cap cuticle (ie one that resists peeling from the margin towards the centre). Both these features are unusual in the genus and in combination are pretty well unique amongst the red or cream capped species.

Right: *Russula lepida*, showing both the rosy and cream forms. (TK)

Another of this genus, very different in appearance, was found by Claudi (who also found it here last year when new to the site and the county). ***Russula recondita*** (no English name) is a fairly nondescript pale brown, grows under Oak and has an unpleasant oily smell. As often in this genus there are several look-alikes but uniquely this species develops bright red markings at the stem base (just visible here on the central specimen).

Above: *Russula recondite,* a nice find today. (CVS)

However, the pièce de résistance and find of the day has to be the singleton *Russula* found by Jesper which had us all guessing in the field – not surprising because it turns out that it may well be new to the UK! Its intense rich red velvety cap was matched by an equally rich red stem and gills which promised to darken with age as the spores matured. The name *R. violeipes* (Velvet Brittlegill) was bandied about and favoured at the time though it was so atypical that I for one was not at all convinced. Mario, Claudi and Jesper all worked on the ID and, as we suspected, the sporeprint taken overnight proved too dark a colour for *R. violeipes* though the microscopic features placed it close to that species. Bearing the various morphological features in mind and having consulted with Geoffrey Kibby who then kindly amalgamated Mario's two photos together to show all features in one shot, the best match would appear to be ***R. stenocystidiata***, known from Central Europe but

Above: *Russula* cf. *stenocystidiata*, awaiting sequencing to confirm (MT/GK)

rare. Sequencing is clearly essential now, but this was an exciting find indeed. (We also have another rarity, *Russula roseicolor*, on the list though with doubts – another awaiting sequencing.)

Moving on now to two more important mycorrhizal genera we were somewhat surprised to find well represented today. This is often a good site for the deadly ***Amanita phalloides*** (Deathcap) but I really doubted it would show up today as this genus has hardly made an appearance yet this autumn. Wrong! We found three or four specimens which demonstrated the species well to those amongst us unfamiliar with it. Not only that but of our five Amanitas seen today we also had two examples of ***A. pantherina*** (Panthercap), another regular here and also extremely poisonous.

Left: *Amanita pantherina*, and below *Amanita phalloides*, a pair of very dangerous mushrooms which all fungi lovers should learn to recognise for obvious reasons! (CVS)

Next, some interesting boletes, starting with a piece of instruction: Early on we debated the identity of a xerocomoid species which was handed in – there are several often easily confused. One trick is to slice it open lengthwise and watch for any colour change in the stem and cap flesh / the speed of that colour change / any other indications of colour which might help. A good example of this is ***Hortiboletus engelii*** (Orangefoot Bolete) which does what it says on the tin. Though extremely similar to some other members of the xerocomoid generas, when sliced open it often has tiny orange dots right at the stem base. (This feature is not entirely unique but others which might show it have other features which help to separate them.) *H. engelii* is otherwise pretty nondescript and easily mistaken (in my opinion) for the trio of confusing species which are *Xerocomellus cisalpinus, chrysenteron* and *pruinatus,* but for its orange dots which are clearly visible here.

Right: the stem base plus orange dots of *Hortiboletus engelii* (LD)

A few more boletes to report on, one rarity and a couple of common things but always a pleasure to find. It was good to see several specimens of ***Boletus edulis*** (Penny Bun) beginning to appear – conspicuous by its absence thus far. Another favourite to find but for a different reason, ***Neoboletus luridiformis*** (Scarletina Bolete) always brings a smile to ones face when sliced open to reveal the magic colour change in flesh colour from yellow to blue inside. Get used to a mouthful of a new name: this species may well become now known as *N. praestigiator* – thank heavens for unchanging English names!

Above left: *Boletus edulis* (JL), and right: *Neoboletus luridiformis* (CVS)

The rare bolete we found was ***Butyriboletus appendiculatus*** (Oak Bolete), notable for its cap cuticle which slightly extends (appendiculate) over the margin, only slight blueing of the pores and flesh when cut, also its yellow mesh / network on the stem, the base of which tends to taper. The surprise was that last year we found the very similar *B. subappendiculatus* under Beech here, confirmed with sequencing and usually described as a conifer associate. It blues much more strongly but otherwise the two are remarkably similar but for their different tree association. However, Sarah tells me that the latest tome on Boletes mentions the occasional find of this species reported under deciduous trees.

Left with stem detail insert: *Butyriboletus appendiculatus* (SJE)

Time to sum up. Though our total of 68 is down considerably on last year's, this was in no way a disappointing morning with 20 species new to the site found and potentially one very exciting addition to the UK list (watch this space which I hope to update with confirmation once our *Russula* has been sequenced). A few more photos are added for your enjoyment below. The usual thanks go to our leaders for their expertise and experience, to the photographers for providing the icing on the cake for these reports, and to all attendees whether expert or novice for their enthusiasm and sharp eyesight. For more details of what we found see the separate species list.

Photographers

CVS = Claudi V. Soler; GK = Geoffrey Kibby; LD = Lynn Day;
JL = Jesper Launder; MT = Mari Tortelli; PC = Penny Cullington; SJE = Sarah-Jayne Ebdon; TK = Tony Knight.

Left: *Elaphomyces granulatus* (False Truffle) and I suspect the first truffle to be recorded here. (JL)

Below left: *Echinoderma asperum* (Freckled Dapperling) previously in genus *Lepiota* – a genus apparently reluctant to get going so far this autumn. (MT)
Below right: the large clump of *Armillaria mellia* (Honey Fungus) in the middle of our path though no doubt growing on the roots of nearby Beech. (PC)

Below left: the beautiful poroid tiers of *Antrodia* cf. *xantha*, to be confirmed with sequencing. (SJE)
Below right: our final find of the day and another which always brings a smile, *Sparassis crispa* (Wood Cauliflower) at the base of a Pine with the group wandering off to the cars behind it. (SJE)