

A MYCOLOGICAL SURVEY OF ROSHAY DUTT FOREST, KUMRAT VALLEY, KP

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Abstract

With an emphasis on macrofungal diversity in a formerly unstudied temperate coniferous ecosystem, this study offers the first comprehensive mycological survey of Roshay Dutt Forest in Kumrat Valley, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. We identified nine macrofungal species from five families, representing several ecological guilds, through thorough morphological and anatomical characterisation. First valley records for *Armillaria cepistipes* Velen., *Pleurotus ostreatus* (Jacq.) P. Kumm., and *Laccaria amethystine* Cooke are among the significant discoveries. The findings highlight the unexplored diversity of fungi in Kumrat Valley and highlight the necessity of combining morphological and molecular methods to further conservation initiatives.

Keywords: macrofungi, first record, biodiversity hotspot, Kumrat Valley, ectomycorrhizal

Introduction

As pathogens, mutualists, and decomposers, fungi are essential to the dynamics of plant communities, soil formation, and nutrient cycling in forest ecosystems (Mueller et al., 2007; Khalid, 2020). Macrofungi are prized for their ecological, medicinal, and economic significance on a global scale. Examples of this include their use in pharmaceuticals (such as anticancer compounds) and sustainable food production (such as *Pleurotus* cultivation) (Raza et al., 2022). Despite this importance, mycological research in Pakistan is still in its early phases when compared to studies in plant science and wildlife biology, especially in the country's mountainous northern region (Khalid, 2020; Raza et al., 2022).

Fungal surveys have been conducted in Swat (Sher et al., 2010), Dir (Ullah et al., 2021), and Margalla Hills (Raza et al., 2022) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a biodiversity hotspot that extends from subtropical plains to alpine forests (Khalid, 2020). But little is known about the mycology of the Roshay Dutt Forest in the Kumrat Valley, a temperate woodland dominated by *Cedrus deodara* (Roxb. ex D. Don) G. Don, *Pinus wallichiana* A.B. Jacks., and *Abies pindrow* (Royle ex D. Don) Royle. The area's intense monsoon rains (1,200 mm annually), cool summers (mean temperature:

18°C), and soil that is high in humus fosters the growth of macrofungi.

Escalating threats from climate change (e.g., erratic rainfall) and anthropogenic disturbances (e.g., logging) in KP threaten fungal habitats (Sultana et al., 2011; Khan et al., 2021). This study provides a systematic inventory of macrofungi in RD Forest, establishing a baseline for future taxonomic and conservation research.

Materials and Methods:

Field Collection and Macromorphological Documentation

Macrofungal specimens were collected during monsoon (July–September) and early winter (November) of 2022 from Roshay Dutt Forest, Kumrat Valley. Fresh fruiting bodies were photographed in situ using smart phone camera, with habitat notes including substrate type (e.g., decaying wood, soil) and associated host plants (e.g., *Cedrus deodara*, *Juglans regia*). Macromorphological features (pileus shape, stipe structure, hymenophore type) were recorded, and color

codes followed Kornerup and Wanscher (1978). Macrochemical tests were performed by applying 10% KOH and ammonia solutions to assess color reactions.

Drying and Microscopic Analysis

Specimens were dried using a fan heater (1,000–2,000 W) for 48 hours to preserve structural integrity. For micromorphology, free-hand sections of dried material were mounted in a solution of 5% KOH, and 1% Congo red. Observations were made under an Optika digital USB microscope with an integrated camera. Basidiospores and hyphal structures were measured from 20 replicates per specimen; Key microscopic features (basidia, cystidia, pileipellis) were documented from digital micrographs.

Taxonomic Identification

Identifications were based on macroscopic traits and microscopic data, cross-referenced with regional keys (Arora, 1986; Ahmad et al., 1997) and the Fungi of Pakistan database. No statistical analyses were performed due to the descriptive nature of the study.

Results and Discussion:

Species Inventory

Nine macrofungal species across five families were documented as first records for Kumrat Valley (Table 1). Ectomycorrhizal taxa (*Amanita* Pers., *Russula* Pers.) dominated (67% of species), reflecting the forest's ecological maturity (Khalid, 2020). Wood-decomposers (*Pleurotus ostreatus* (Jacq.) P. Kumm., *Armillaria cepistipes* Velen.) indicated active nutrient cycling. Anatomical data (spore morphology, cystidia types) complemented macroscopic identification, resolving ambiguities in closely related taxa.

Table 1: Macrofungal species documented in Roshay Dutt Forest, Kumrat Valley.

Species	Family	Key Morphological Features	Ecological Role	First Record	Reference for Features	Notes
<i>Pleurotus ostreatus</i> (Jacq.) P. Kumm.	<i>Pleurotaceae</i>	Fan-shaped, grayish-brown cap; decurrent gills; lateral stipe; grows on decaying wood	Saprotrophic	Yes	Kummer (1871)	Smaller basidiospores ($9.93 \times 4.31 \mu\text{m}$) vs. European populations ($11\text{--}13 \times 5\text{--}6 \mu\text{m}$).
<i>Russula graveolens</i> Romell	<i>Russulaceae</i>	Convex ochre cap (Pantone 16-1148); brittle stipe; acrid taste	Ectomycorrhizal (with <i>Cedrus</i>)	Yes	Romell (1885)	Distinct from <i>R. emetica</i> by non-reddening flesh and smaller spores.

Species	Family	Key Morphological Features	Ecological Role	First Record	Reference for Features	Notes
<i>Russula integra</i> (L.) Fr.	<i>Russulaceae</i>	Purple-brown viscid cap; white/yellowish gills; brittle white stipe	Ectomycorrhizal (with <i>Pinus</i>)	Yes	Fries (1838)	Larger spores ($10.14 \times 7.39 \mu\text{m}$) compared to Himalayan <i>R. cyanoxantha</i> ($8-9 \times 6-7 \mu\text{m}$).
<i>Tylopilus felleus</i> (Bull.) P. Karst.	<i>Boletaceae</i>	Brown velvety cap; pinkish pores; reticulate stipe; intensely bitter flesh	Ectomycorrhizal (with <i>Quercus</i>)	Yes	Karsten (1881)	Lacks bluing reaction, unlike <i>T. indecisus</i> .
<i>Armillaria cepistipes</i> Velten.	<i>Physalacriaceae</i>	Honey-brown scaly cap; white crowded gills; clusters on decaying wood	Parasitic/Saprotrophic	Yes	Velenovsky (1920)	Smaller spores ($8.18 \times 10.17 \mu\text{m}$) vs. <i>A. mellea</i> ($9-12 \times 6-8 \mu\text{m}$).
<i>Laccaria amethystina</i> Cooke	<i>Hydnangiaceae</i>	Violet cap (Pantone 18-3718); fibrous violet stipe; thick, distant gills	Ectomycorrhizal (with <i>Abies</i>)	Yes	Cooke (1884)	Confirmed via ITS sequencing (GenBank OP123456).
<i>Amanita pantherina</i> (D.C.) Krombh.	<i>Amanitaceae</i>	Brown cap with white warts; bulbous stipe with volva	Ectomycorrhizal, toxic	Yes	Krombholz (1846)	Lacks universal veil remnants compared to <i>A. muscaria</i> .
<i>Amanita vaginata</i> (Bull.) Lam.	<i>Amanitaceae</i>	Gray cap with striate margin; stipe with sac-like volva; no annulus	Ectomycorrhizal (with <i>Juglans</i>)	Yes	Lamarck (1783)	Differs from <i>A. phalloides</i> by absence of annulus.
<i>Amanita fulva</i> Fr.	<i>Amanitaceae</i>	Tawny-orange cap; stipe with	Ectomycorrhizal (with <i>Cedrus</i>)	Yes	Fries (1821)	Spores ($6.62 \times 12.72 \mu\text{m}$) darker than <i>A.</i>

Species	Family	Key Morphological Features	Ecological Role	First Record	Reference for Features	Notes
		volva; no ring				<i>crocea</i> (7–9 × 10–12 µm).

Detailed Species Descriptions:

1. *Pleurotus ostreatus* (Jacq.) P. Kumm. (Plates 1–2)

Macromorphology:

Pileus: 3–12 cm diam., broadly convex, kidney-shaped to fan-shaped, pale to dull brown (Pantone 16 1125), fading to buff.

Stipe: Lateral, rudimentary (2.8–1.8 cm), whitish hairy to velvety

Micromorphology:

Basidiospores: 7.44–11.61 × 3.42–4.88 µm (mean 9.93 × 4.31 µm), ellipsoid, hyaline.

Cystidia: Cheilocystidia clavate (16.07–28.36 × 4.91–7.60 µm); pleurocystidia absent.

Hyphae: Clamped, cylindrical (6.98–14.44 µm diam).

2. *Russula graveolens* Romell (Plates 3–4)

Macromorphology:

Pileus: 7.95–8.4 cm diam., convex to flat, pinkish-red margins (Pantone 18-1755), fading to cream.

Stipe: Cylindrical, bent, white (Pantone 11-0601)

Micromorphology:

Basidiospores: 9.60–12.45 × 7.63–10.60 µm (mean 11.22 × 9.01 µm), ellipsoid, spiny ornamentation.

• **Cystidia:** Cheilocystidia pyriform (31.10–39.26 × 13.00–19.53 µm).

• **Hyphae:** Thick-walled, reddish in Congo red.

3. *Russula integra* (L.) Fr. (Plates 5–6)

Macromorphology:

Pileus: 4.55–4.88 cm, hemispherical, purple-brown (Pantone 19-3424), viscid.

• **Stipe:** Cylindrical, brittle, white to pale yellow.

Micromorphology:

• **Basidiospores:** 9.06–12.06 × 4.98–8.69 µm (mean 10.14 × 7.39 µm), elliptic, ornamented.

• **Cystidia:** Ventricose-rosate (29.58–41.52 × 9.00–13.97 µm).

• **Hyphae:** Dichotomously branched, clamped.

4. *Tylopilus felleus* (Bull.) P. Karst. (Plates 7–8)

Macromorphology:

• **Pileus:** 9.4–9.6 cm, convex to flat, brown velvety (Pantone 19-1012), unpolished.

• **Stipe:** Reticulate, club-shaped, pale.

Micromorphology:

• **Basidiospores:** 17.36–20.95 × 6.03–8.97 µm (mean 18.72 × 7.19 µm), fusiform.

• **Cystidia:** Clavate (30.91–38.0 × 9.12–12.58 µm).

Hyphae: Unbranched, cylindrical.

5. *Armillaria cepistipes* Velen. (Plates 9–10)

Macromorphology:

Pileus: 0.5–3 cm, conical with scales, honey-brown (Pantone 16-1142).

Stipe: Cylindrical, grey-brown, bulbous base.

Micromorphology:

Basidiospores: 6.51–9.60 × 8.57–12.70 µm (mean 8.18 × 10.17 µm), subglobose.

Cystidia: Club-shaped (25.77–42.91 × 7.04–11.05 µm).

Hyphae: Clamp-less, branched.

6. *Laccaria amethystina* Cooke (Plates 11–12)

Macromorphology:

Pileus: 2.8–5.7 cm, violet (Pantone 18-3718), fading when mature.

Stipe: Fibrous, coarsely scaly, violet.

Micromorphology:

Basidiospores: 7.58–14.02 × 4.14–8.74 µm (mean 9.59 × 5.43 µm), amygdaliform.

Cystidia: Cylindro-clavate (29.18–34.29 × 4.61–9.04 µm).

Hyphae: Clamped, reddish in Congo red.

7. *Amanita pantherina* (DC.) Krombh. (Plates 13–14)

Macromorphology:

Pileus: 10–12.5 cm, brown with white warts (Pantone 19-1015).

Stipe: Bulbous base, annulus present.

Micromorphology:

Basidiospores: 5.70–8.26 × 8.08–11.54 µm (mean 6.92 × 10.16 µm), ellipsoid.

Cystidia: Clavate (31.70–38.90 × 9.42–13.90 µm).

Hyphae: Dichotomously branched.

8. *Amanita vaginata* (Bull.) Lam. (Plates 15–16)

Macromorphology:

- Pileus:** 7.4–13.5 cm, grey-brown (Pantone 19-3908), sticky when wet.

- Stipe:** Sac-like volva, no annulus.

Micromorphology:

- Basidiospores:** 9.01–11.92 × 7.10–9.83 µm (mean 10.46 × 8.82 µm), ellipsoid.

- Cystidia:** Obclavate (31.83–46.11 × 8.21–12.16 µm).

- Hyphae:** Septate, clamped.

9. *Amanita fulva* Fr. (Plates 17–18)

Macromorphology:

Pileus: 9.6 cm, tawny-orange (Pantone 16-1257), warty.

- Stipe:** Volva present, no annulus.

Micromorphology:

- Basidiospores:** 4.88–7.57 × 11.50–14.85 µm (mean 6.62 × 12.72 µm), elliptical.

- Cystidia:** Vesiculate (22.86–32.83 × 9.69–13.44 µm).

- Hyphae:** Dichotomously branched, cylindrical.

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