

Time: 12:45 - 7:30 pm

Weather: Pc 0 mm; RH 63%; BP 101.9 kPa; cld/sun; calm; T 17° C

Activity: The Great 2012 Fungus Walk

Some eight people showed up for the First Annual Newport Forest Fungus Walk. This is nearly an ideal number as eight pairs of eyes will find a lot more than one. But more people would take longer to assemble for impromptu mini-talks on the differences between Ascomycetes and Basidiomycetes, fruiting bodies, and so on.



The walk started at the beginning of the Thames River Trail by the vernal ponds (now dried up of course). In the image above, Erin Carroll (walk organizer) looks on as (from left to right) Sherry Van Dixhoom, Margaret Hull, Bruce Parker, Andrea Arsenault, Jessica Van Zwol and Carol Parafenko admire some bracket fungi on a log. The more we looked, the more fungi we found, collecting some five specimens from this little area alone. We then continued on toward the river,

arrested at the Elbow (where the vernal ponds cross the main trail) by the faint scent of anise. Soon we located the source, a fragrant white bracket called *Oligoporus caesius*.

We found ourselves stopping so frequently along Edgar's Trail (first leg of the 1640 m long Thames River Trail) that I had to point out that we wouldn't finish the walk before sunset. Consequently, we decided to skip certain parts of the trail in favour of more fungi-rich areas. Thus on our next stop, at the River Bluffs, we indulged in the luxury of examining virtually everything. Along the way, Andrea Arsenault and Jessica Van Zwol were distinguishing themselves by finding specimen after specimen. On the bluffs, for example, Jessica found a large mushroom with a freckled cap and a hollow, splitting stem that defied my best efforts to ID it a day later. Andrea, meanwhile, spotted a cute little mushroom, still growing, with a grossly swollen base ("clavate", as the mycologists say). It resembled an old fashioned potbellied stove. Just as challenging as Jessica's mushroom.

One by one, the finds kept coming in. I kept my impromptu talks, such as how to smell and taste mushrooms, brief and to the point. "Come on. Let's keep moving. Never mind that little brown mushroom!" Before we crossed the rather sharp ecotone between the riverine forest and the Beech-maple section, Jessica had to leave. I shudder to think how many specimens we would have found otherwise.

But others certainly did their share. Besides the fungi that Erin, Bruce and I found, Sherry discovered a black ascomycete called *Xylaria* on a log in the Beech-maple section. Later, in the Blind Creek Forest, Marg found a new, creamy gilled mushroom/bracket growing on a stump. In the Avian Department, artist-birder Carol Parafenko saw a yellow-rumped Warbler, our only notable bird of the day.

While ascending the Hogsback and later at the top, we encountered many old logs simply *coated* with Pear-shaped Puffballs (*Lycoperdon pyriforme*). The logs were remnants of the massive drought-induced dieback of mature Bitternuts (over 100, all told) of 2006-07. The weakened trees were brought down by Hickory Borer Beetles, an endemic species.

We got back to the camp by 5:30 and immediately laid out our specimens in the Nook, each fungus with its own accession number. How many could we identify on the spot? Certainly a few. The rest were assigned to Erin, Bruce and me to take home to work on. We planned to take the remaining mysteries to Greg Thorn, our consulting mycologist, in a few days. Later that evening, we all turned in, only to be haunted by ghostly mushrooms and brackets behind our eyelids.

New species: (Some of these may change later on after consultation process.)

Mesh weaver	[<i>Dictyna</i>] sp.	ET KD Sp27/12
Powdery Mildew	[<i>Erysiphe cichoracearum</i>]	ET/VP KD Sp27/12
Mica-cap	<i>Coprinus micaceus</i>	BCF aA/KD Sp29/12
Comb-tooth Fungus	<i>Hericium coralloides</i>	BMF BP Sp29/12
“Violet Wood Cup”	[<i>Ascocoryne</i> sp.]	RB EC Sp29/12

Note: There are some 39 species of “Powdery Mildew” in seven genera. Our best guess (enclosed in square brackets) is the most common infective agent of many composite-flowered species, including Wingstem. While a few other species may attack composites (often regionally), the great majority of the remainder attack specific fruit crops or woody species exclusively. We will attempt to examine a fresh specimen to get a look at the asci or conidia, whichever present themselves. (*Westcott’s Plant Disease Handbook*, Van Nostrand Reinholdt, New York 1990.)

Erin’s Website: A potpourri of fungi and amazing videos await the interested reader at Erin’s website: <http://erintown.blogspot.ca/> Want to join next year’s Fungus Walk? Erin’s email address is right there.

Summary of finds:

15 identified specimens, 2 new species, counted
3 tentatively identified to genus, all new, not counted yet
22 unidentified specimens

READERS WRITE:

Dave Martin, a well-known Ontario bird expert, offers an opinion on Mora Gregg’s mystery raptor of the last Bulletin:

“Mora's hawk is definitely an accipiter given the long narrow tail. It looks like a Sharp-shinned rather than a Cooper's Hawk to me. The most telling mark is the small rounded head on a slender body as compared to the more angular head of the Cooper's Hawk on a rather more chunky body.”

IMAGES:



Going over the finds (spread out on the cedar table in the Nook) Bruce, Andrea, Erin and Marg check field marks against descriptions in manuals. We sorted the specimens into three groups: definite IDs, tentative IDs and “mysteries”. The latter were divided among Erin, Bruce and me. Bruce, like me, is an amateur at fungi with some experience already under his belt. Marg and Andrea are both members of the West Elgin Nature Club.



Erin Carroll

This cup fungus, found on rotted wood, illustrates a pitfall in any identification process, namely lookalikes. Most cup fungi fruit on soil, so we initially thought it was a slam dunk on the basis of habitat alone. Not so! Three lookalikes vie for the ID: *Ascocoryne cylichnium*; *Peziza praetervis*; and *Chlorencoelia versiformis*.



Pear-shaped Puffballs (*Lycoperdon pyriforme*) were especially abundant today, coating old logs of Bitternut. Still fleshy, they were not quite ready to “puff” clouds of spores -- like brown smoke.