

Spores Illustrated

Spring 2013

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2013 BRINGS CHANGES IN COMA'S LEADERSHIP

By Rena Wertzler Photos By Gary Lincoff



Rena Wertzler Today, 9:08 AM

Last fall at COMA's annual banquet, we bade farewell to our president, Dianna Smith, who is moving out of the area. We gave her a grand sendoff, and many expressed their appreciation for the tremendous job she has done. Gary and Irene Lincoff came from New York, and Roz Lowen came from New Hampshire to join in the party. Don Shernoff acted as Master of Ceremonies, and Joe Brandt presented Dianna with our gift of a beautiful gold mushroom pendant.

Dianna has been involved in every aspect of COMA's activities-from scientific presentations to community outreach. We are thankful to her, for, above all, her tireless commitment to mycological education. She conceived of, set up, and administered COMA's Mushroom University, a late winter mycology education class which now attracts over thirty students.

Last year Dianna won two awards from NAMA, the North American Mycological Association, the first time in NAMA's history for one person to win two awards in a year. She won the Harry and Elsie Knighton Service Award which recognizes those who distinguish themselves in service to a local club. She also received the President's Outstanding Service Award in recognition of her contribution to NAMA as editor of NAMA's newsletter, *The Mycophile*.

In addition to her contributions as a scientist and teacher, Dianna Smith exhibits an enormous generosity of spirit. She has helped to move COMA forward in many directions and has been responsible for involving many people in the pursuit of her passion, the study and appreciation of fungi. Knowing that she would be moving, Dianna has worked to insure that COMA's new leadership would have the skills to continue to grow and flourish.

COMA members are delighted to learn that Taro Ietake, long-time member and professional naturalist, has agreed to serve as president. Taro is currently Director of Conservation and Land Stewardship at Rye Nature Center and was previously curator of Cranberry Lake Preserve, a Westchester County Park. He is a skilled teacher and administrator with special interests in myxomycetes and lichens. As a professional naturalist his interests in the natural world are very broad, and we can expect him to share with us his observations of birds, wildflowers, mosses, and more as he joins us in our quest for fungi. What's more, he is a great chef. (See photos below.)

Stephanie Scavelli, our new vice president, will be taking a very active role in assisting Taro. Djerba Goldfinger has taken on the task of membership as well as secretary which she had been doing previously. We can count ourselves as very fortunate in having attracted young and vibrant new leadership to COMA. We are assured of continuing and expanding our common interests in the wonderful Kingdom of Fungi.



Taro, Ietake preparing udon suki at the Coma banquet



A still life of mushrooms and vegetables: the ingredients for udon suki

COMA SPRING MEETINGS

All meetings will be held at the **Friends' Meeting House** in Purchase, NY [see directions below]. Meetings are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Meetings are open, free of charge, to the public. Bring samples of your fungi finds to all of our evening programs and we will help you with identification.

Directions to Friends' Purchase Meeting House:

From I-684 - Take Exit 2 to stoplight at Route 120 (Purchase St.). Turn right and go 1 mile to a sharp left turn (following Route 120). The Friends' Meeting House is on the left at the corner.

From I-287 - Take Exit 8 (westbound) or Exit 8E (eastbound) and follow signs for Anderson Hill Road and SUNY Purchase. Turn left on Anderson Hill Road to Route 120, turn left and go about 2 miles to the intersection with Lake Street. The Friends' Meeting House is on the right just before the intersection.

**Tuesday,
April 23;
7:00pm**

Zaac Chavez and Stephanie Scavelli- A Practical Guide to Foraging :

This program will deal with choices for the forager which are healthy for both him and the environment .

“We believe it is crucial to make food choices that mitigate ecological chaos and mass extinction on our warming planet. This discussion about foraging will be informed by a subsistence ethic . By foraging for 'invasive' weeds and drying common mushrooms, we hope to empower attendees with less harmful means of sustenance. “

**Tuesday,
May 14;
7:30pm**

Gary Lincoff : “Edible Mushrooms: East vs. West- why some mushroom lovers ignore or reject what others desire.”

June Program

To Be Announced : We are hoping to have a showing of the movie, *Forager Now*, the date will be announced on our Facebook page and on COMA Weekly News.

Looking Down - Taro Ietaka

In a hilarious sketch comedy called “Smack the Pony,” one particularly memorable scene featured two hikers - the only people visible in the open, rolling hills of the British countryside. They travel the same trail, in opposite directions, get closer and closer, and finally collide and go down in a tangle of limbs. I’ve yet to see this happen while walking in the woods of Westchester or Connecticut, but it easily could. It is so easy to get wrapped up in one’s particular area of interest that a collision with an unnoticed person, while looking up at warblers or while looking down for morels, seems inevitable. In fact, it is my secret hope that a collision like this does occur, at least metaphorically.

The first newsletter article I wrote after succeeding Dianna Smith as president of COMA was actually for Central Westchester Audubon. However, I assure readers that my priorities are in the right place. One of the things I’ve noticed on walks I’ve taken with birding and botanical clubs is how little is known about mushrooms. Birders probably think the same of mushroomers when it comes to thrushes and sparrows. Some people seem to tune out anything not related to their beloved taxa; I admire people with single-minded focus, and the world needs specialists. These are the people I turn to when I am stumped with an ID. However, I’d venture that many participants in birding clubs could easily catch fungus fever if they had exposure, time and the right teacher.

A walk in the woods is a much richer experience for a mushroomer than for a person with no knowledge of nature. Finding a *Russula* ties your little patch of forest into a much larger context of time and space. You may know to look in the same spot for Indian Pipe at different times of year – Indian Pipe, a plant without chlorophyll, can’t grow without intermingling with the mycelium of *Russulas*. Or perhaps your *Russula* brings back memories of pickled or salted ones that a Scandinavian friend or a

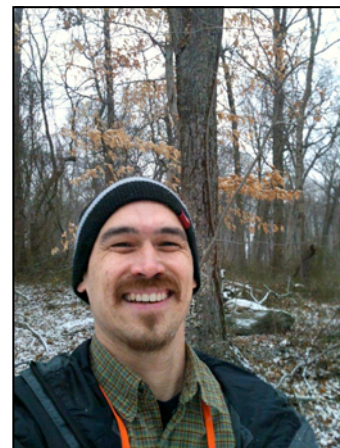
relative fed you. The untrained person just sees a mushroom. Now, imagine how much more rewarding a Saturday morning in the woods would be if your knowledge of bugs or rocks equaled your understanding of fungi – how you could see scat as an opportunity to find species of beetle or how you could hear a chatter overhead and know that a cat bird will be nearby.

There is no bad day outdoors for a person with a broad knowledge of wildlife: if the mushrooming is lousy as a result of drought, the trees may still be hopping with birds. There’s no season-long wait for mushrooms to re-emerge: mosses, lichens, and waterfowl will wait for you outdoors even in January. Or if conditions are right, one may be simultaneously looking down for wildflowers, listening for thrushes, smelling for stinkhorns (and steering away), and at the end of the day adding new species to her life lists and adding foraged gourmet ingredients to his cooking pot.

There’s a less lofty reason to start making connections to other nature clubs: membership. I don’t know of any local nature-themed club that complains of having too many members. It is just the opposite, and recruitment of new and, especially, young members is a common theme of club discussions. This is important work and should be continued. However, an overlooked area of recruiting is among those who already have a demonstrated interest in local wildlife, not only in mushrooms. So, one of my goals is to start inviting Audubon clubs, the Westchester Amateur Astronomers, the Torrey Botanical Society, the Fern Society, geocaching clubs, scout groups, and I’m sure I’ve left other candidates off the list, to COMA events. Even better, members who like to share their mushrooming passion can act as undercover agents, infiltrating other nature clubs, and evangelizing the gospel of *Gomphus*. Or they can just be friendly, social, point out a few mushrooms and interesting facts on another club’s walk, and share their enthusiasm while receiving the same in-kind. Plus they should shamelessly promote COMA and maybe sign-up to join Central Westchester Audubon as well.

So, the next time you see a stranger in the woods with a net and bug-jar, crash into her. Or at least introduce yourself and ask if she knows about COMA.

[This article is a revised version of what I wrote for Central Westchester Audubon www.centralwestchesteraudubon.org.]



A FIND IN COMA'S BACKYARD



Steve Rock took this beautiful photograph of a mushroom, which he identified as *Amanita phalloides*, in October, 2012. It was growing in a mix of conifers and hardwoods. Gary Lincoff and Rod Tulloss confirmed his identification. Let's see if we can find some more.

A tip from Steve:

I just wanted to pass along a little tip that I learned last year. You know those bags that contain the cereal in your boxes of cereal? They make great 'shrooming bags. They're especially helpful when bagging either a lot of small ones (e.g., chanterelles) or one large one (e.g., boletes, amanitas).

Save them for yourself or for other 'shroomers!

Steve Rock

WATCH WHERE YOU STEP**Rena Wertzer**

As I write this, it is almost spring, and I am itching to be out in the woods, hearing birdsong and searching for mushrooms underfoot. We are very fortunate in having many parks where we can walk. In most of them we are welcome to pick fungi. However, there are some which prohibit picking, and we must be scrupulous in respecting this. We do want to be welcome back.

When we leave an established trail, we are treading on lands which have been preserved for the conservation of all animal and plant life. With each step that we take, we disturb some tiny creature, and with each leaf we turn over, we are exposing someone's home. It is our responsibility to be aware of this and to take each step with care.

All of our woodlands are home to precious wildflowers, many of which are increasingly endangered due to deer, habitat loss, and invasive plants. In our excitement to be out in the woods again after a long winter, let us not overlook the sensitive ferns and spring ephemerals underfoot.

We must not pick or remove plant material. I am talking about the neighboring biota of wildflowers and ferns that may be destroyed in the process of foraging. Let us have consideration for what is growing around us. It is important to realize that, on the one hand, mushroom organisms can survive having their fruiting bodies plucked, because the main body of the fungus is growing hidden away in a substrate and has the ability to put out more fruiting bodies. The fungi are surrounded by sources of food which they can break down and absorb. On the other hand, flowering plants and ferns can take just so much plucking and being trampled upon until they will fold up and die. They need the unbroken exposure to sunlight so that they can make their own food. Once the leaves and stems are crushed, the ability to photosynthesize, i.e. turn the sun's energy into the chemical energy found in food, has been destroyed.

So let's get outdoors and enjoy our woods, and please, let's leave them as beautiful and as healthy as we find them.



The Coprinoid Mushrooms

By Dianna Smith

When I first started learning the deliquescing mushrooms about eleven years ago, I was pleased that I could recognize several of them as belonging within the dark-spored genus *Coprinus* in the now defunct family, *Coprinaceae*. Since they had gills which dissolved from the outer edge upward into an inky liquid to release their spores, it was natural to think of them as related. In fact, the genus was rather large with well over a hundred saprobic members. Little did I know that it had already shrunk in size to just a few mushrooms that all resemble *Coprinus comatus* morphologically. All the other blackening mushrooms were split up into two overarching families, the *Agaricaceae* and the newly created *Psathyrellaceae*. Within these two groups, they were assigned to at least four recognized genera, *Coprinus*, *Coprinopsis*, *Coprinellus*, and *Parasola*. Auto-digestion seems to have evolved several times independently. Let's see if we can sort through some of the more common ones and place them into their respective genera based on characteristics visible to the eye.

We'll begin by looking at the species type, *Coprinus comatus*. Its common names include the Shaggy Mane, the Lawyers Wig and the Inky Cap. Almost every amateur mycologist has encountered a gregarious fruiting of this Inky Cap in lawns, though my first experience with it involved a single mushroom breaking through the edge of my asphalt driveway before dissolving onto it some hours later! Its scaly whitish cap is initially cone or bullet-shaped and covers most of its stipe, which bears a loose ring. As it matures, the cap curls up to expose its maturing spores to air currents. Its fragile, close gills are free and change color from white, to pink, and ultimately to black. Unique among mushrooms, its stipe encloses a white 'string.' You can eat *Coprinus comatus*, if you cook it, battered and fried, almost immediately after picking.

Another edible coprinoid mushroom frequently seen is *Coprinopsis* ("like *Coprinus*") *atramentaria*, the mushroom that causes an unpleasant reaction when accompanied by alcohol. Like other mushrooms in this genus, it emerges from a universal veil and exhibits a ring. The largest number of coprinoid mushroom are now in *Coprinopsis* with roughly a hundred species assigned to this new genus.

A characteristic of the mushrooms in the genus *Coprinellus* ("little *Coprinus*") is the mica-like granular scales seen on the caps of familiar mushrooms like the Mica Cap. These are remnants of their universal veils. The coprinoid mushrooms that exhibit the orange mycelia mat called an *ozonium* at their base are also in the genus. These are just a few examples of the over forty species in this genus that additionally includes the familiar *Coprinellus disseminatus* and *Coprinellus radians*.

Mushrooms in the genus *Parasola* on the other hand lack a universal veil and consequently don't have veil remnants or rings on them. They also don't deliquesce. They tend to be tiny and exhibit umbrella-shaped caps. One beautiful example we frequently find is the species type for this genus, *Parasola plicatilis*. There are just over twenty or so mushrooms worldwide in this genus.

Not all coprinoid mushrooms can be so easily identified macroscopically as belonging to one of these groups. Microscopic, chemical (KOH) and ultimately DNA sequencing is the only way many can be correctly assigned to one of the four genera.

Now for another mind bender...*Coprinus comatus* has been put in the *Agaricaeae* rather than the *Psathyrellaceae*, which led mycologist, Lorelei Norvel*, to argue that it should be bumped and replaced by *Coprinopsis atramentaria*. Although she had some support for the proposal, in 2005 the International Botanical Congress (IBC) voted to accept

the conserved name. But who knows what changes the future may bring? In the meantime, don't forget to consult www.indexfungorum.org/names/Names.asp to verify the most recently accepted name of your coprinoid mushroom finds. The current name will appear in green.

You can read more on the coprinoid mushrooms at Tom Volk's Mushroom of the Month pages: http://botit.botany.wisc.edu/toms_fungi/may2004.html, Michael Kuo's Mushroom Expert site http://www.mushroomexpert.com/coprinus_comatus.html and by reading the studies of Scott Redhead(2001) "Bully for Coprinus - a story of manure, minutiae, and molecules" *McIlvainea* 14(2): 5 -14. "Coprinus: Persoon and the disposition of *Coprinus* species *sensu lato*" (2001) by Scott A. Redhead, Rytas Vilgalys, Jean-Marc Moncalvo, Jacqui Johnson & John S. Hoppie, Jr. *Taxon* 50:203-241. Both of these articles can be found online as well. See also the Cornell Blog by Kathy Hodge at <http://blog.mycology.cornell.edu/2008/07/01/the-dish-on-deliquescence-in-coprinus-species/>

*See *Inoculum* 52(5) 2001, p. 5 at <http://www.science.ulst.ac.uk/rtm/Coprinus.html>.



Coprinopsis atramentaria Dianna Smith

NAMING CREATION by Susan Goldhor, Boston Mycological Club

Last week a friend, who's been a volunteer at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology for about a decade, gave me a tour of his department: Ichthyology. Since I spent a couple of decades working in fisheries, he thought that this would be familiar territory to me, but in fact the collections of the MCZ were completely different from my working life, although they were a surprisingly powerful reminder of my days as a grad student. My time with fish was in the context of commercial fisheries; either cod and haddock on this coast or Pacific cod, halibut and sablefish in the North Pacific. Except for Atlantic cod, whose Latin name has somehow gotten inscribed in my admittedly really awful memory, I couldn't even tell you the binomials of the other fish I worked with. I was working with processors and fishermen and common names were all we used. When I had to write a paper, I looked up the Latin names each time and then promptly forgot them.

But the MCZ collection is all about Latin names. There are thousands and thousands of specimens there, pickled in alcohol, and each one is labelled with the full Latin name, the date and place of capture, and the name of the person who captured it, or at least who labelled it and donated it to the Museum. The loss of the labels would be a catastrophe equalled only by the loss of the specimens. And the most valuable of all are the "type specimens," those specimens which (according to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History) are "the objective standard of reference for the identification and naming of species." In case of fire, these are the specimens that workers are instructed to save first.

What my friend has been doing in his years of work there is checking the nomenclature of certain specimens -- at the time of my visit he was plodding through the shad family -- which might be incorrectly labelled, or whose names have changed since their acquisition. Exciting? No. Important? Yes.

It's clear why accurate naming is important to scientists. If I wanted to talk about my work to someone in Norway or Saudi Arabia or Botswana, I'd use the Latin binomials and they would know exactly what organism I was talking about. But is the ability to name organisms important to everyone else in the world? The answer turns out to be a resounding yes. That ability is important to us and -- unexpectedly -- important to the world's organisms. For if we cannot name something, it

becomes part of an unrecognized and devalued mass and -- in the same way that it's easier to accept the obliteration of millions of people who live far away and speak a language we can't understand, than it is to accept the death of one person we know -- it becomes easier for us to allow that unnamed creature to slide into extinction.

This was brought home to me by a review by Paul Greenberg of a book entitled, *On Extinction: How We Became Estranged from Nature* by Melanie Challenger (N.Y. Times, Jan. 27, 2013, Book Review, p. 13, "Ends of the Earth"). As Challenger crosses a moor in West Cornwall, she realizes that she cannot name the birds whose songs she hears, and she writes, "I was bereft of speech for this landscape, suffering from a kind of amnesia shared with others of my generation." Whereupon the reviewer points out that although Challenger is a poet who is possessed of enormous richness of language, "as an inhabitant of nature, she, along with most of modern humanity, is losing or has already lost the vocabulary necessary to interact with her environment." And, if we cannot interact with our environment other than by dominating or "utilizing" it, we are being impoverished and threatened along with all the other species that we are sending to extinction.

A few years ago, Carol Kaesuk Yoon wrote a book called *Naming Nature: The Clash Between Instinct and Science*. She pointed out in it that naming and ordering species (and for our purposes, any group of organisms that is recognizably different from all the others will be called a species here) is common to all folk and tribes, all of whom recognize certain basic categories such as fish, birds, snakes, trees, herbs, etc. and can name hundreds -- sometimes thousands -- of their member species. How else could they make sense of their environments? How else could they have conversations about things that are as central to their lives as electronic gadgets or movies or newspapers are to ours? How else could they know what was good to eat and what was poisonous? We might think that we don't know the names of organisms because our memory bank is full of other information which is

actually more useful to us, given the life we lead. But there is evidence that the part of our brain that recognizes living organisms may be separate from the part that recognizes computers or subway trains or cereal packages. There may be a part of the brain dedicated to taxonomy. There are a group of patients who have received brain injuries that deprive them of the ability to recognize living things -- and only living things. Yoon writes of people with such injuries, "These are people completely at sea. Without the power to order and name life, a person simply does not know how to live in the world, how to understand it. How to tell the carrot from the cat — which to grate and which to pet? They are utterly lost, anchorless in a strange and confusing world. Because to order and name life is to have a sense of the world around, and, as a result, what one's place is in it."

And here is the key problem for Yoon and Challenger and others: we are becoming like those people except that we are doing it voluntarily. We are injuring ourselves by depriving ourselves not only of the experience of nature, but the comfort that comes from naming nature. If we can't name it, we probably can't see it. We see a mass of green, a lot of bugs, a bunch of flowers. But if all we see are these lumped categories, we won't notice when a species goes extinct. We are living through one of the greatest periods of extinctions that the planet has known, and we don't see it. If our only experience of humanity was a mob, would we notice the deaths of individuals?

Yoon has written "that sorting and naming the natural world is a universal, deep-seated and fundamental human activity, one we cannot afford to lose because it is essential to understanding the living world, and our place in it." This is what my friend over at the Museum of Comparative Zoology is doing, and why he's spent so many hours without pay, sorting over bottles of dead fish. It's not an accident that in Genesis, God creates the animals and then gives Adam "dominion" over them, commanding him to name them. If anything demonstrates the power of naming, at least in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, it must be this passage. There are some of us who think that giving humans "dominion" over nature, and thus creating a separation between one species and all the rest, was a bad step, but we must keep in mind which species got to write the Bible. However, the Bible was not originally written in English, and we can reinterpret the meaning of this passage to

say that naming gives you power -- not the power to trample and destroy nature -- but the power to see it with greater clarity, to understand it and your place in it more accurately, and to better appreciate the beauty and the variety and the singularity of it all.

Realistically, none of us is going to master the Linnean names for all of creation. Even Adam only named the animals, and my guess is that it was limited to the kind of charismatic megafauna that we see ascending the gangplank in Noah's ark toys. But, even making a start at learning to name and order some part of nature will enrich your life in ways that you cannot even imagine. And, since you were interested enough to join a mycological club, why not start with mushrooms?

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KEEP IN MIND2013 NEMF SAMUEL RISTICH FORAY

August 7th-10th

Rimsky, Quebec, Canada

<http://www.mycomontreal.qc.ca/actualit.htm>

for information and reservation form.

COMA'S CLARK ROGERSON FORAY

August 30-September 2nd (labor day weekend)

Hebron, Connecticut

registration form and description enclosed .

There are benefits to joining NAMA, the North American Mycological Association, the non-profit organization of professional and amateur mycologists. Dues have been reduced to \$24 for members of affiliated clubs . Be sure to receive NAMA's newsletter, *The Mycophile*, edited by our own Dianna Smith and filled to the gills with interesting articles.

VOLUNTEER and enjoy being a part of your club.

There are many places where we can use your talents.

We need help with walks, events, newsletter articles, parties.

Get in touch with Taro to discuss what you would enjoy doing the most.

Spores Illustrated : I would like to have a column for each issue which would be "Mushroom of the Season."

For this issue, Dianna has done an article about the coprinoid mushrooms which are a typical spring group. It would be nice to have this for the other seasons for either a group, a family, or a particular genus or species. Please contact me if you would like be involved with this project. Rena Wertzer, editor.

COMA

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