



# Wombat Forestcare Newsletter

**Welcome to our spring edition.** Birds are busy building nests, wattles are flowering, and the plentiful rains bring the promise of an abundance of wildflowers. Enjoy your walks.

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The Ink Cap, *Coprinus comatus*, in its many guises that mushroom into fizz.

## Fungal Fizz

**Words & Images by Alison Pouliot**

Diverse and delightful fungi enrich the Wombat Forest yet many of them don't have names. However, even with nameless fungi, we can often recognise a familiar species, not necessarily by specifics, but from an overall generalised impression. Birdwatchers call this *jizz*, in reference to birds. *Jizz* combines learned and intuitive knowledge, focussing on the bigger picture of form, movement and habit, more so than particular details. No equivalent term exists for fungi.

Poor appreciation of fungi relative to animals and plants is reflected in the lack of language to describe them. As one might expect, the weaker the cultural connections to fungi, the fewer the fungal words in that culture's language. Historically, Australians are not typically mycophiles and consequently fungal

words in the English vernacular are scant. There are no collective nouns, for example, for fungi. Even the names for a mushroom's parts are less well known than those of a flower. Given the growing interest in fungi, it's time to expand our fungal vocabulary.

In this article, I propose a new addition to the fungal lexicon – FIZZ – as a contraction of *fungal jizz*. Like *jizz* for birds, the *fizz* of a fungus could include gestalt plus elements such as form, growth pattern, texture, smell, habitat, 'behaviour,' along with all the things that tell us it's not something else. *Fizz* is a distillation of what we cognitively understand and intuitively feel about a species. *Fizz* develops from lived experience, from daily wandering and intimate

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liaison with fungi over extended periods. Every fungal moment fosters fizz. Familiarity allows us to interpret limited information in a meaningful way – through looking, sensing, absorbing, repeating, recognising patterns, trends and relations and laying down memory. Very slowly, one's brain becomes fungally infected with fizz.

Learning to recognise fungi requires awareness of fizz, tuning to the senses and instinct, along with scientific understanding. It requires a shift from looking to seeing and then sensing and feeling more broadly. It is about conscious tuning to affordances, subtleties and nuances, presences and absences, tracks and traces. Many of us know the experience of recognising a familiar fungus, even if we can't name it. Although it might not look like the idealised illustration in the field guide or has been distorted by age and lost its characteristic colour or smell, it is fizz that reveals it.

Fizz comes from jizz, but where did jizz come from? The etymology of jizz is uncertain, particularly whether it should be called giss or jizz. Some birdos suggest that giss was originally a military acronym for General Impression of Size and Shape in reference to aircraft and has been borrowed by the birding community. However, others claim the term is older dating back to 1922 when it was first used by Thomas Coward in his book *Bird Haunts and Nature Memories*. Others still posit that it is a corruption of the similarly

meaning words, *guise*, *gist* or *gestalt*, or a contraction of 'just is', as in the assured answer to, 'why is that bird X?' Jizz also has rather an unfortunate homonym. The unscrupulous organisation known as Google delivers its highly censored take on the world via its search engine, yet still spits out over a hundred million hits on another more pornographic interpretation of the word jizz. But let's not linger on jizz and focus on fizz.

Jizz and fizz are very helpful terms. These short and punchy words carry incredibly useful and evocative meanings. The catchall German word, *Gestalt*, for which there is no real equivalent in English, partly captures fizz. But fizz goes further than just gestalt or form or habitat and is often an amalgam of ill-defined or incomplete aspects of a fungus that capture its essence, allowing us to recognise it is as perhaps regal or elegant or enchanting. Fizz grows from time and patience and keen observation. You can't recognise a fungus from its fizz unless its traits and patterns, its *vibe*, are infused in your being. The best way for fizz to flourish is to first familiarise oneself with more frequently encountered fungi. It is fizz that allows one to spot a clump of Ink Caps, *Coprinus comatus*, at a distance and instantly recognise them. However, for many fungi, fizz is useful for getting to the level of genus rather than species. And unfortunately, even fizz is unlikely to help with the notorious little brown mushrooms. But oh look, it's that time again. I think I'll fix myself a gin fizz . . . ■

## The Red and White Mystery Mushroom

Words and images by John Walter

When I first came across this little red mushroom it was known as *Mycena viscidocruenta*, sometimes called the Ruby Bonnet. Then, in 2008, DNA analysis determined that it was more closely related to *Panellus* than to *Mycena* and the new genus *Cruentomycena* was established to accommodate it. This little red beauty now goes by the rather difficult name of *Cruentomycena viscidocruenta*.

Viscid is of course a reference to the sticky, glutinous secretion often found on the stem and cap of this



The viscid cap and stem are clearly seen in these two images of normal fruit-bodies.

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