



Wombat Forestcare Newsletter

Welcome to our winter edition. The array of fungi in the Wombat this year is amazing, possibly one of our better seasons. So many different colours, shapes and sizes. Winter is also time for some Greenhood orchid species. Stand still and look down carefully, there is much that is easy to miss. See you out there!
Gayle Osborne (editor) and **Angela Halpin** (design)

Where Beauty Meets Bizarre - A Fungal Foray in the Wombat

Words and images by Alison Pouliot

It's winter and the Wombat's fungi welcome the rain and cooling soils. A wander through the forest finds them emerging through leaf litter, crevices of logs, mossy depressions and even springing forth from wallaby scats.

The fungal kingdom epitomises the merging of the beautiful and the bizarre, capturing the imaginations of those who stumble upon them on the forest floor. Some adopt familiar cap-and-stalk style configuration while others appear in more curious forms shaped like brains, antlers, goblets, phalluses or lattice balls. How did such eccentric forms come to be? All are driven by the one imperative – to produce and disperse spores. And nature, it seems, has a quirky sense of humour. Fungi have been around since the Devonian (380-420mya) and have evidently become very proficient at evolving ingenious forms and strategies to maximise spore distribution and enable their continued existence.

Despite their ubiquity and diversity, fungi challenge our notions of the categorising of life. Not only is their taxonomy in a state of flux, but they also occupy a place deeply embedded in myth and uncertainty. Their indeterminacy – being neither plant nor animal – upsets this Linnean dichotomising of organisms that still persists today despite new understanding and the assignment of fungi to a separate kingdom. In Australia concepts of nature, biodiversity, or conservation rarely extend to include fungi. Yet almost all of the plants and many of the animals that are the focus of these ideals would perish without their fungal counterparts. Even when their fruitbodies aren't apparent, vast mycorrhizal networks beneath the soil form beneficial relationships with the roots of most plants and underpin terrestrial



The common prettymouth, *Calostoma fuscum*, grows in bare soil and leaf litter in the Wombat.

ecosystems. Dozens of mammals and countless invertebrates also rely on fungi for food and shelter. It is perhaps time for a more plural and inclusive approach to the connective fungal matrix.

In May a dozen or so of us headed into the Wombat to seek these autumn treasures. We'd only taken three steps before keen eyes spied the first fungi and cameras started madly clicking. Once at ground level, ones focus

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shifts to a micro-world, adjusting to the more unusual fungal forms that colonise every crack and crevice. The emperor cortinar, dressed in a coat of mucilaginous purple poked through the layers of bark wrapped around the base of a messmate. *Collybia eucalyptorum* formed shelves of fruitbodies in a scar on the trunk. Our attention was then diverted to an overturned branch, its underside scalloped by the rainbow fungus (*Trametes versicolor*).



The rainbow fungus, *Trametes versicolor*, is an important recycler in the Wombat and is also known for its medicinal qualities.

A few steps further the tiny ruby mycena (*Mycena viscidocruenta*) glistened like its namesake, its stipe wrapped in a gloopy sheath, perhaps to retain moisture, but also pronouncing its stunning hue. The blue staining of a rotting fallen branch gave away its proprietor, the green elf cup (*Chlorociboria aeruginascens*). Further down the track the stalked puffball, *Calostoma fuscum* was just one of several finds among the litter that included colourful specimens of the coral genus *Ramaria*, an especially large specimen of the rhubarb bolete (*Boletellus obscurecoccineus*),



Collybia eucalyptorum spring from the crevice of a tree trunk.

the sulphur-yellow spines of the golden splash tooth (*Mycocacia subceracea*) and the soft-textured shelves of *Grifola colensoi*.

Fungal discoveries seem never-ending. Be sure to find at least an afternoon this winter to meet the Wombat's magical fungal inhabitants. ■

Through a child's eyes

By Ari Scheltema

“This looks like little roofs growing out of a tree.”

Image taken on holiday in the Otways.
Photography © Ari Scheltema