

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WISCONSIN MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The fungi are coming. I can almost hear them growing as I write this letter. This area has had eight inches of rain in the past two weeks after a very long dry spell. I believe the rains came too late for the chanterelles to make an appearance around here, but I did see a few fresh ones up by Three Lakes yesterday August 22. We have our annual photo foray tomorrow and I expect we will capture many fine images and maybe a few items for the pot.

Going through this long period of dry weather, I had a chance to reflect on just how dependent everybody and everything is on everybody and everything. Whenever a key component in a relationship is absent or inadequate, the partner or partners suffer and may even die. In this case, with the water absent from the woods, the fungi have not been as abundant and many trees and plants have died or are stressed to the point that the winter will finish them off. Water, temperature and nutrition are some of the more obvious partners in these relationships, others may be not as obvious or just unknown. Next time you pick a mushroom you will be able to look at it and say this is a success story, this is a relationship that worked, all the needs of that particular specimen were met and now it becomes your partner and helps you with your needs.

I hope to see you all out in the woods this fall; we have a lot of nice spots lined up, so please join in.

by John Steinke, WMS President

WMS FALL EVENTS

- August 31 -- September 1 -- Labor Day Weekend Camping Foray near Phillips, WI.
- September 7 -- Bristol Woods Foray.
- September 8 -- Astico County Park (near Columbus, WI).
- September 14 -- Second Annual Sami Saad Memorial Foray at Mauthe Lake Recreation Area.
- September 21 -- Pike Lake State Park Foray.
- September 28 -- South Kettle Moraine State Forest Foray.
- September 28 -- Lichens and Mushrooms at Devil's Lake (jointly sponsored by Madison Audubon Society and Wisconsin Mycological Society-Madison Interest Group) --- For more information, contact Betsy True at btrue@wisc.edu
- September 29 -- Glacial Park Conservation Area in Illinois. (A joint foray with the Illinois Mycological Association.)
- October 5 -- Erskine-Hainer Memorial Foray at Point Beach State Forest.

Members should have received announcements with details and directions to each of the above events.

DUES REMINDER

This is a gentle reminder that your 2002 WMS dues are due on January 1. Early payments are appreciated by the secretary. Checks can be mailed to John Fetzer at 1309 S. 73rd St., West Allis, WI 53214. Note that WMS dues are \$15 and that NAMA (North American Mycological Association) dues are \$32.

A SUMMER FORAY  
by Peter Vachuska

Over a dozen optimistic mycophiles showed up on a hot July Saturday (the 20th) for the Summer Foray. In fact, they weren't optimistic at all, but mostly came for a walk in the woods with good friends. It had been dry. John Steinke, our foray leader, took us to the wettest location

he knew (above water), the Beulah Bog. Even the bog was low and while we did find one nondescript LBM in the bog, more attention was paid to the sundews, pitcher plants and blueberries. On our way back some of us scoured the edge of the bog and found a *Pluteus cervinus*, a *Russula* and a few wood-rotting polypores. Not a stellar day -- but we avoided being skunked. After the "foray" John took us on a tour of the 200 acre prairie that his family is recreating. We took a long walk in the hot sun oohing and aahing over each of the wild plants we saw. All in all, every one had a good time without the bother of having to clean and preserve ten pounds of chanterelles when we got home.

#### A NOTE ON THE ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Business Meeting and Picnic was held on Papa Steinke's Farm on June 22. This was a new venue for us after many years of having the annual meeting at Falk Park. The weather was wonderful, warm and sunny after a cold spring, and so were all of the potluck dishes that the members brought. It was too dry to even look for fungi, but Harold Korslin took us out to look at the newly-discovered Kittentails, a rare plant found on his property. (See Steve Nelsen's article.) We had a short membership meeting where we approved a revised set of by-laws. Secretary--Treasurer John Fetzer gave a report: Over the last year we've had \$6,890.88 worth of debits and \$6,777.00 worth of credits giving us an ending balance of \$3,215.14 as of 22 June 02. We also elected a new board member, Martin Sendera. This brings the number of board members up to eleven: Bill Blank, Kristine Ciombor, John Fetzer, Chuck Fonaas, Dave Menke, Alan Parker, Sunny Rupnow, Martin Sendera, Chuck Soden, John Steinke, Peter Vachuska. To contact them, see the contact information on our web page at <http://www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Trails/7331/introtofungiandwms/index.html#directors>

#### PICKING PLEUROTUS

by Gustav Shomos

During the early fifties, I remember how some Italian families would gather mushrooms for canning to last the winter. Around late September or early October, they would pile into one car and head out of the city to the rural areas. Armed with long, extendable bamboo fishing rods, with a sharp hooked blade at the tip, they would stop at farmhouses that had aged elm trees with obvious growths of *Pleurotus* (now *Hypsizygus*) *ulmarius*. They asked permission to pick the fungus to use as medicine for their horses. They didn't want them to know they were edible. After 10 or 15 stops, they would have at least a full bushel and thank the tree owners for helping them cure the animals. I personally went on several of those trips and had a wonderful time in the country and had my first experience with tree mushrooms and the technique of removing them from the branches. Now that elm trees have disappeared from farmyards, the box-elders are the source of the delectable fungus.

My present method of bringing them down from the high places in the tree is basically the same, except I use a looped coathanger (heavy gauge) with the inside edge flattened and sharpened to cut through the *ulmarius* stem, taped to a collapsible fiberglass fishing pole. It's important to have someone present to catch the mushroom before it hits the ground or you'll have scattered fragments. Pick while the gills are pure white, with no trace of brown, otherwise the taste will be affected. Also cut the fungus lengthwise to check for insect larvae. However, I've eaten those with mild infestation and did not notice any difference. It's a mind thing!

The Italians prepared them for canning by boiling them for 10 minutes, adding salt after draining. Cut-up celery stems and garlic were mixed in with pure olive oil and put in jars with the oil standing above the mix for preservation. Sometimes eggplant was added to the batch before boiling for a variation of the recipe. I personally prefer to parboil, then saute them in butter, then sprinkle with balsamic vinegar, olive oil, pepper and salt to taste.

If there are any questions, I can be contacted at 262-363-4125 or [Gshomos@aol.com](mailto:Gshomos@aol.com).

#### WISCONSIN MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY 20TH ANNIVERSARY

by Alan Parker

The present version of the Wisconsin Mycological Society dates back to 25 May 1982. It all started with a luncheon meeting hosted by Tom and Marilyn Fifiield. Additional attendees included Kris Ciombor, Martyn Dibben, Joseph Halser, Bernie Jendrzejczak, Alan Parker, and Sami Saad. Bernie seems to have disappeared, and Drs. Halser and Saad are deceased. Dr. Halser was a long-time physician in Milwaukee and was associated with St. Francis and St. Lukes Hospitals. His ancestors were foresters in Bavaria, and early in life he met persons interested in mushroom gathering. Halser was

active in the 1960's WMS, and was particularly interested in mushroom toxins. Dr. Saad received his Ph.D. in plant pathology at UW-Madison, and taught at UW-Washington County from 1972-1999. Sami greatly enjoyed teaching his students and the general public about edible and poisonous wild mushrooms. Dr. Saad died unexpectedly of a heart attack on 31 July 1999.

A name conspicuously absent from the luncheon group is Tula Erskine, who was unable to attend. She was a core WMS member and a president of the group during the 1960's, and made extensive contributions to the "new" WMS. Tula had amazing endurance and enthusiasm, and attended practically every WMS event from 1982 until her death in March 2000. Given her incredible attendance record, it's ironic that she had to miss the planning session on 25 May 1982! All long-time members of the current WMS will certainly remember both Sami and Tula for their exceptional dedication to teaching about wild mushrooms.

Back to the origins. The initial impetus to reactive the WMS in 1982 was provided by the Fifiields. Dr. Martyn Dibben served as catalyst in bringing together a diverse group of people with common interests in higher fungi. All attending the 25 May luncheon enthusiastically endorsed the plan to form a new version of WMS. The first official function of the "new" WMS was an organizational meeting and foray on 28 August 1982; this event was held at the Milwaukee County Zoo. According to Volume 1 Number 1 of our Newsletter, 12 paid-up members were there. The foray was led by Carl Garczynski, and the species list contains about 21 fungi - not spectacular, but a fair start. The next meeting, a free public lecture and membership drive, was held at the Milwaukee Public Museum on 1 September 1982. Approximately 65 people attended and were entertained by a lecture by Dr. Dibben on Wisconsin's wild mushrooms. Three additional forays were held that fall on 11 and 25 September and 16 October; these were hosted by Sami Saad, Alan Parker, and Hal Burdsall. Over the past 20 years, the WMS has held over 80 winter meetings and dinners, over 100 forays, and various other activities to promote appreciation of higher fungi. Throughout its history, the primary emphasis of the Society has been on education relating to fungi identification. Photography and mycophagy have also been given just recognition -- many people find it important to document their finds with nice pictures and to safely eat their prized collections. To our knowledge, we have lost no member to poisonous mushrooms. There have been, however, a few mistaken identities leading to numerous extra visits to the bathroom.

The Society continues to have a loyal following of "mushroomers" and fungi fanatics from many walks of life. Our membership has remained strong the past 20 years, and we have a number of people from outside the metro-Milwaukee area. The sustained success of the current WMS is most likely the result of a combination of very active and supportive members and good leadership through the Board and our officers. May we have many more years as successful as the first 20!

KITTENTAIL  
by Steve Nelsen

Harold Korslin hauled a couple camping trailer-loads of attendees of the Wisconsin Mycological Society Picnic on June 22nd with his ATV up over the hill behind John Steinke's farm to see the kittentails that Pam Watson had found on Harold's property north of highway NN this spring, soon after John and she had found them at another place about a mile east of there. Kittentail is in the snapdragon family (Scrophulariaceae), and blooms in May with tiny yellow-green flowers in a tight inflorescence on an unbranched stem, has little leaves up the stem and a rosette of big leaves at the base. As John pointed out, it looks rather like a plantain, but is bigger. The flower head elongates after blooming, leaving larger separation between the green seed-pods, which is the way that we found it.

The Latin designation was originally *Gymnandra bullii* Eaton (1840), named after George Bull, who was a botanical assistant to Douglas Houghton, the leader of the First Michigan Survey in 1838 and 1839. According to Edward Voss, the author of the three volume Flora of Michigan, no First Survey types are known to exist. The same plant was independently named *Synthyris houghtonia* Benth (1846), after the same Houghton, who collected it in southern Minnesota on the Schoolcraft expedition to find the source of the Mississippi in 1832. It was transferred to *Wulfenia houghtonia* (Benth.) Greene (1894); *Wulfenia* is a rather similar European genus, and separately to *Synthyris bullii* (Eaton) Heller (1900). Voss and other newer books that I have call it *Besseyia bullii* (Eaton) Rydberg (Rydberg transferred a more western species, *S. rubri*, to *Besseyia* in 1903, but apparently not *bullii* at that time; the date is no longer part of the citation that modern books give, and I lack it for *B. bullii*). I include this tedious litany of names to show that it is not only mycologists who appear to like to change the names of plants as often as possible;

vascular plant people appear to show the same behavior.

Kittentail grows in dry prairies and thin oak woods, from southwestern Ohio to Southeastern Minnesota and south to eastern Iowa, so it has a relatively restricted range. Voss notes that it "ranges rather locally", meaning that it does not occur in most suitable places in its range, so it is a rather unusual find. Fassett lists its range in Wisconsin as the southern tier of counties and Pierce to Polk county, but the UW Herbarium site ([wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/herbarium](http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/herbarium)) produces the distribution map shown (paper version only). Curtis's Vegetation of Wisconsin lists kittentail as reaching a maximum prevalence (that is, it occurs in the largest fraction of sites studied) in oak openings, which he uses as the technical designation of a plant community that is dominated by grasses (often mesic, but also drier and wetter), but has a scattering of large trees, usually bur oak. He estimates that there were 5-1/2 million acres of oak opening in Wisconsin in the early 1800s but that it made the best farm land, and beyond question, oak opening with an intact space groundlayer is the rarest plant community in Wisconsin today. Only 19 sites were considered undisturbed enough to be included in Curtis's book. Sites in Kettle Moraine State Forest and Scuppernong Scientific Area in Waukesha Co. were listed as typical examples. Kittentail was found on only 3 of these 19 sites, but oak openings were still the community in which kittentail was most prevalent. Kittentail also occurs on the John Muir Trail in Walworth Co. and at Murault Prairie in Green Co. Another plant community that Curtis distinguishes is cedar glade, open grassland with scattered red cedars dominating the tree community, on steep hillsides of thin loess over limestone or quartzite bedrock (in the driftless area), or gravelly glacial moraine. The "lake district" of the Kettle Moraine in Waukesha Co. is listed as a typical place where this tiny community (estimated at only a few thousand acres total) occurs, and a 61% overlap of groundlayer species with oak openings is noted. There certainly were red cedars near the kittentails on Harold's hillside, and I'm not sure whether Curtis would have called it an oak opening or a cedar glade.

AND THESE CANNED MUSHROOMS CAME FROM WHERE?

by Alan Parker

My fascination with geographic origins and reading "labels" seems to have started with my childhood stamp collection. It was really fun to figure out the countries where certain stamps came from and then check the world atlas. In the process of stamp collecting, I seemed to have accidentally learned a bunch of geography. Next came antique collecting with my older sister, in particular English ironstone china. More "labels" to study and an introduction to another sort of classification through inanimate objects. There were many makers of 1800's ironstone, and a very diverse array of patterns to learn.

The habit of reading labels on all sorts of objects has followed me through life, and provides cheap entertainment while shopping. The grocery store can be particularly challenging, because there are categories of labels. The first thing that usually comes to mind is ingredient labels -- the bizarre list of ingredients found in processed foods is mind boggling. With reference to geographic origins, there seems to be a rather straightforward dichotomy. Imported foods such as certain chocolates, cheeses, spices, ethnic specialties, etc. are usually clearly marked and even promoted as imports. The usual assumption with fresh foods is that they originate in the U.S. unless otherwise noted. Finally I have arrived at the primary subject of this note, canned goods, or more specifically canned mushrooms.

I normally buy fresh mushrooms, but occasionally get lazy and rely on a can opener. For many years I assumed that canned mushrooms most likely came from Pennsylvania or some other mushroom growing area in the U.S. Had I been the victim of some sort of very subtle mushroom "brainwashing?" I recently discovered that there has evidently been a major shift in where mushrooms for canning are grown. I started a detailed survey after discovering that 4 oz cans of Liberty Gold brand of "Mushrooms -- pieces and stems" come from China or France or Holland, depending on the particular lot. Curious. How does the Statue of Liberty illustration on the Liberty Gold label relate to anything inside? All 4 oz cans of other brands also say "Mushrooms -- pieces and stems" except Pennsylvania Dutchman brand, which says "Mushrooms -- stems and pieces." Assuming that stem flesh is less desirable than cap tissue, is there a message here? In many foods, ingredients are listed in descending order of quantity. In the category of where things come from, I have always assumed that Pennsylvania Dutchman mushrooms were grown and processed in Pennsylvania. The front of the label has a small map of the United States, and the label says "America's favorite mushroom." As you can see further on, reality is thousands of miles from PA.

My findings about a number of the most popular brands of canned mushrooms (all the common white Agaricus) are summarized in the following table. I couldn't find a single brand of processed mushrooms that originates in the United States. Two brands not included in the table came from the Republic of China (Taiwan). In this day and age, my survey results aren't too surprising and the explanation is probably quite simple. It must be cheaper to grow and process the common Agaricus mushroom outside the U.S. Is there some dark, hidden concern about all these imported mushrooms? Not that I'm aware of. As far as quality control, that's the responsibility of the folks associated with the name on the label. There's no violation of "truth in advertising" that I see, but I am troubled by some labels attempt to visually or verbally imply an "American" association. A final footnote -- if you're interested in trying some locally produced pickled mushrooms, I found an interesting offering among some speciality canned goods. Forest Floor Foods of Eden, WI offers three varieties of pickled Agaricus - dark Bergamo, classic sweet, and traditional.

BRAND	TYPE	MUSHROOMS	ORIGINS
Green Giant	4.5 oz	Jar Whole	Indonesia
	4.5 oz	Jar Sliced	India
	6.0 oz	Jar Sliced	Indonesia
	4.0 oz	Can Pieces & stems	India, Indonesia
Liberty Gold	4.0 oz	Can Pieces & stems	China, France, Holland
Old Time	4.0 oz	Can Pieces & stems	China
Pennsylvania	4.5 oz	Jar Whole	India
Dutchman	4.5 oz	Jar Sliced	Oman
	6.0 oz	Jar Sliced	India
	4.0 oz	Can Stems & pieces	no data
	8.0 oz	Can Stems & pieces	no data
Roundy's	4.0 oz	Can Pieces & stems	China
	8.0 oz	Can Pieces & stems	no data

#### THE WILD ONE

by John S. Komosa

As I sit here quietly under a big oak,  
 reflecting on my short and peaceful life,  
 keeping an eye for some crazed myco bloke  
 who's looking for me, my kids, and my wife.

In the not so distant ages past,  
 our existence was less stressful,  
 life expectancy was at its best,  
 but now it's measured by basketful.

Then, all one had to do was wait for rain,  
 and for the sun rays to heat up the ground,  
 and the race was on, all over again,  
 with no obstacle or enemies around.

Oh yes, there would always be some  
 who would stop by and nibble a bit,  
 like the deer, and maggots would come,  
 but those we knew how to deal with.

But now it's all a different story -  
 acid rain, heat waves in February,  
 arid summers, El Nino in his glory,  
 growing seasons short and temporary.

And if all that is not enough  
 to make our survival look bleak,  
 when I think of all the human stuff,  
 it makes my knee (stem) weak.

Why? Just look at some of my brothers,  
 like the whales, the herring and buffaloes,  
 the passenger pigeons, turtles, and others...  
 very sadly... but that's how the trend goes.

So I live here under an old oak,  
 dreading the day and the moment when,  
 an old shroomer cuts me and I croak,  
 in dishonor, with a name like a 'hen'!

#### RECIPE: CRAB STUFFED PORTOBELLO MUSHROOM

from the Northwestern Mutual Cafeteria contributed by Cheryl Rausch

4 Portobello mushrooms  
 3/4 cup Artificial crab meat chunks

1/3 cup Onions, diced fine  
1/4 cup Celery, chopped fine  
2 tsp. Garlic, Chopped  
6 Tbsp. Mayonnaise (Hellmans)  
1/3 cup Cheddar cheese, finely shredded  
Salt and Pepper to taste

Wash portobello mushrooms, pat dry, and cut out stems. Place stems, onions, celery and garlic in a food processor and chop fine. Add artificial crab meat and chop to medium texture. Add the salt, pepper, cheese and mayonnaise. Mix together. Divide mixture evenly into the mushroom caps and bake in 350 degree oven for 20 minutes or until hot. Serve on a bed of rice pilaf and top with a seafood bechamel.

#### SEAFOOD BECHAMEL

2 Tbsp. Oil  
2 Tbsp. Flour  
2 cups Skim milk  
1 Tbsp. Seafood Base  
Parmesan cheese, optional  
Salt and white pepper to taste

Heat oil in sauce pan until moderate temperature. Stir in flour well. Do not brown! Gradually add milk, using a wire whip to blend together. Bring sauce to a simmer. Add seafood base, salt and pepper and adjust thickness with additional milk, if needed. For added flavor or to thicken sauce a little, you can add grated parmesan cheese. Serve over baked or broiled seafood, portobello mushrooms, etc.

Enjoy.

END