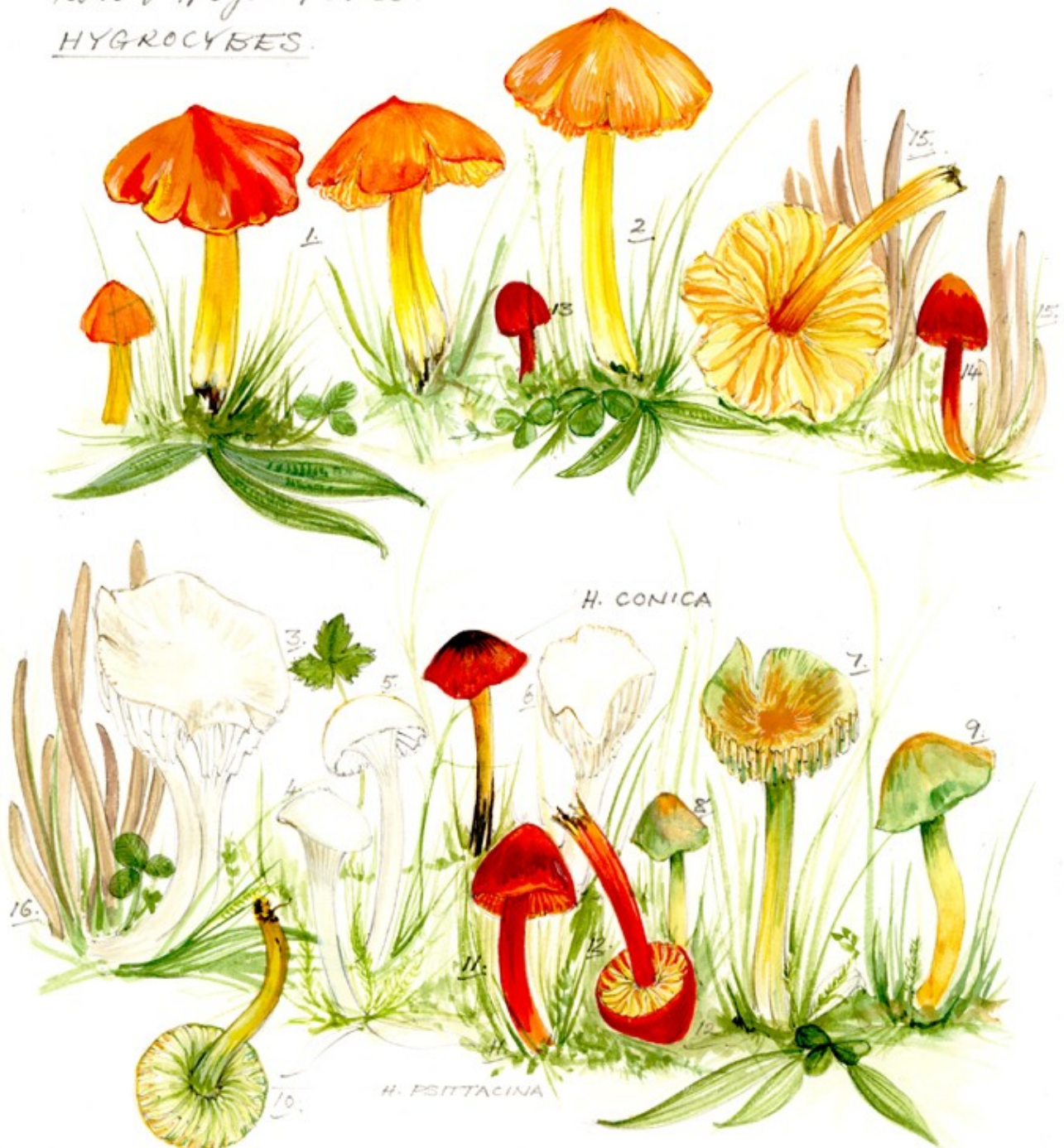


A VARIETY OF WAX CAPS, found on October 21st 1984, in pasturesland alongside the River Tees, between Low & High Force.

## HYGROCYNES.



These delightful, & colourful Toadstools - Hygrocybes, are as follows - 1,2; - HYGROCYNES SUBGLOBISPORAS. 3,4,5,6; - HYGROCYNES NIVEA. 7,8,9,10; - HYGROCYNES PSITTACINA. 11,12,13,14; - HYGROCYNES CONICA. 15,16; - CLAVULINOPSIS FUMOSA. There were also large numbers of CAMAROPHYLLUS PRATENSIS.



# North Eastern Fungus Study Group



Newsletter 25

July 2002



## What is It?

Some strange kind of Discomycete? Photographed on the Spring foray at Elementis Ecology park. See foray report on page 6.

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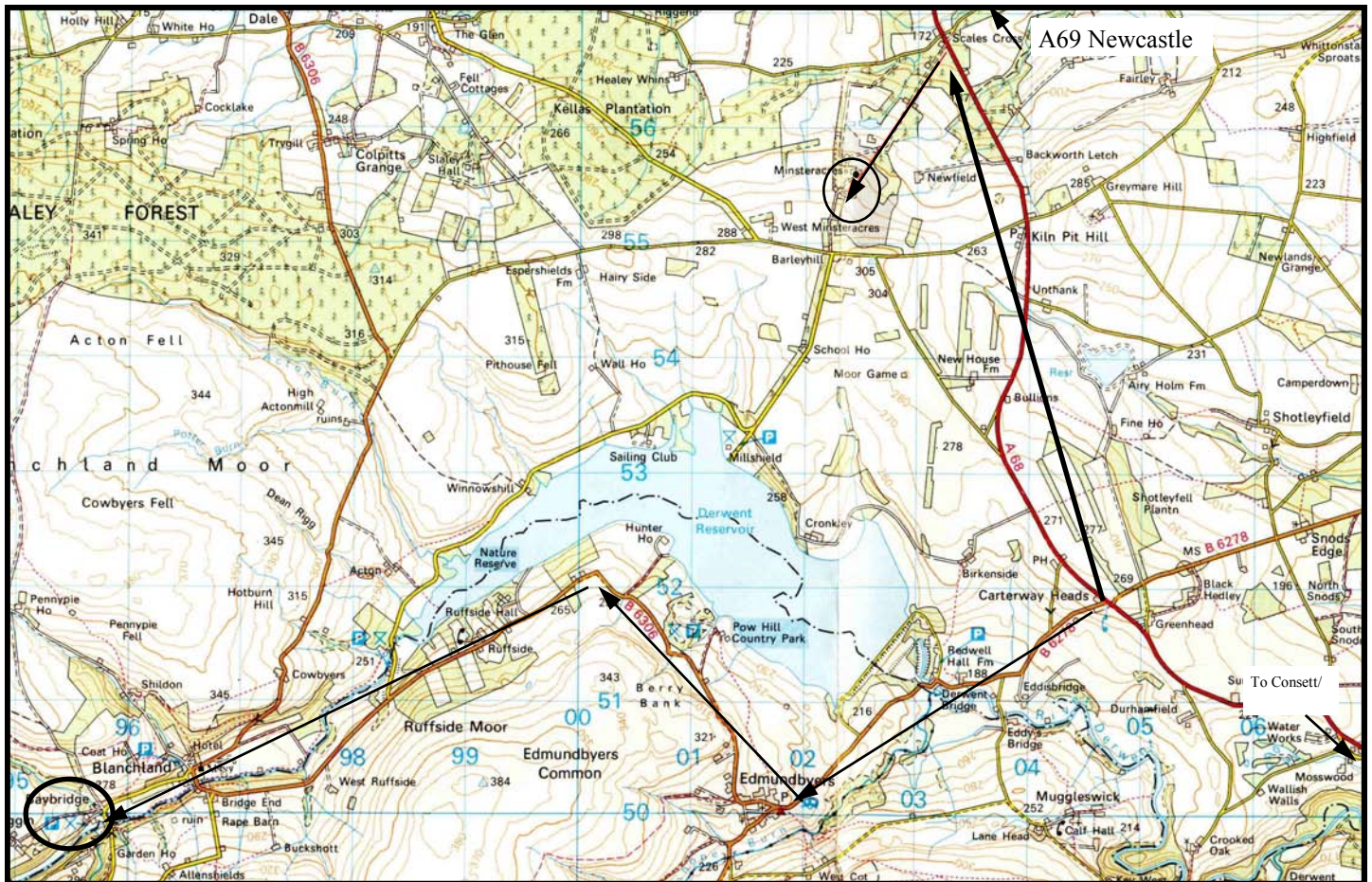
**Front cover :** *Wax Caps by Dorothy Wolfe. Another beautiful watercolour which shows many of the wax caps you may come across in unimproved pastureland.*

For further information or if you would like to submit an article or questions for the next newsletter, please contact the Chairman of the NEFSG, Alan Legg at 36, Carleton Drive, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 9QP. Tel : 01325 - 350834. Treasurer / Membership Sec, Babs Walton, Stodhoe Farm, Middleton-St-George, Darlington, Co Durham, DL2 1DS. Tel: 01325 332789. The Secretary, Keith Cunningham can be contacted at 1 Grove Cottage, Baybridge, Blanchland, Consett, Co Durham DH8 9UB email [keith.cunningham@ntlworld.com](mailto:keith.cunningham@ntlworld.com) Tel: 01434 675339

### **Minsteracres Foray Saturday July 20th 11am NZ024554**

Minsteracres Monastery is a Passionist Monastery and retreat. Originally a stately home built by the Silvertop family. The grounds contain many exotic trees as you will soon see when you enter from the A68. With luck we might find some interesting Fungi.

Enter the Monastery from the A68 at Scales Cross driving through the gate and up the long drive of enormous Conifers. After you pass the Church turn left towards the main buildings and park at the front. See Map for directions



### **September Foray at Baybridge, Blanchland, Saturday 14th 11am NY957499**

This site is a joint foray with the Northern Naturalists Union (NNU). Alan Legg is President this Year. Turn off the A68 at Carterway Heads and follow the road until you reach Edmundbyers, turn immediately right on the B6306 to Blanchland. On reaching Blanchland turn left at the archway. Baybridge is about a quarter of a mile further on. Park in the Durham County Council car park just before you reach the bridge. We will walk through the woods on the south side of the River Derwent to Blanchland, at fungi pace this may take a while!. At Blanchland there are refreshments available at the Tea rooms, there is also The Lord Crewe Arms which serves more expensive beverages. After this you may need the Public Conveniences. After lunch we will walk back to Baybridge along the North side of the river.

## EARLY SPRING TOADSTOOLS IN DARLINGTON 2002

Alan Legg

Writing on April 1st - and with no intention of fooling anyone - I can't help reflecting on the fact that I've already seen several toadstools locally, which I tend to associate with April at the earliest.

On Monday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, I was on my way towards the exit from Darlington West Cemetery after very meagre pickings, when the sight of a group of fairly large toadstools brought me to a sudden halt. Their fairly bright colour and one or two other characters made them readily identifiable as *Melanoleuca cognata*, which can be found at other times of year but is usually associated with conifers in April. My earliest record hitherto was made in Hamsterley Forest on April 7<sup>th</sup> 1991.

A more commonly found, frequently early toadstool is *Coprinus domesticus*, associated with deciduous stumps and logs, often in or near human habitation as the name suggests. The most commonly noted month among my records is May but I found the species on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1999 in Thorsgill near Barnard Castle. This year a routine exercise stroll in Hummersknot, Darlington, revealed three mature fruitbodies with a sycamore log on March 25<sup>th</sup>.

Also in 1999 I found mature St George's Mushrooms, *Calocybe gambosa*, on April 5<sup>th</sup> in the West Cemetery. At the time, these represented easily my earliest collection of this edible toadstool, supposed to be in evidence around April 23<sup>rd</sup>, Saint George's Day. When I first started collecting in 1970, I soon learned not to expect this fungus in northern parts before early May. This year Ros and I were making our way back along our road from the local shops when I spotted a small clump of toadstools just peeping through the edge of an unknown lawn. Imagine my surprise when I picked one and found it to be *Calocybe gambosa*. The date was March 26<sup>th</sup>!

I had another walk in the Cemetery on Easter

Day, March 31<sup>st</sup>, and very soon encountered a few specimens of the small ringed spring species, *Conocybe aporos*, common enough and frequently found on spring forays. I thought this was my earliest collection but I see that I found it in the Cemetery in 1999 as early as March 15<sup>th</sup>! Definitely an earliest record for the Cemetery, also found on March 31<sup>st</sup> this year, was *Strobilurus tenacellus*, growing from a half-buried pine cone. Again, however, not an earliest collection for me as I see that I have a record from the Hudeshope Valley, Middleton-in-Teesdale, made on March 17<sup>th</sup> 1990.

Who says there are no spring toadstools? Here are five species all fruiting in Darlington in March 2002! Have any of you had any other such records in spring this year? If so, do write about them in the Newsletter. Fungi are obviously responding to climate change and one way we can usefully contribute to knowledge is by looking for ever earlier specimens as the years go by.

### The March Meeting 2002

Our last year's March fixture fell victim to the early moves to close everything down in the wake of the initial Foot and Mouth outbreaks. We had to wait a whole year for Hewett Ellis' illustrated talk on fungi. Those members who managed to attend this event at Rainton Meadows on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2002 will agree that it was well worth waiting for.

It was obvious from the outset that Hewett had put a tremendous amount of work into the preparation of his talk. It was a model of organized lucidity, contained an enormous amount of information, and was accompanied by slides which not only showed the key features of the fungi illustrated but were also often breathtakingly beautiful. Fungi were dealt with in systematic order beginning with a pin-mould. We were taken rapidly but never hastily through most areas of the fungal Kingdom. Emphasis was placed on showing them in their natural habitat but

we also had some photomicrographs helpfully illustrating such key structures as asci containing ripe ascospores.

Even the anomalous slime moulds were not forgotten and we were treated to a surprise expert identification of the tree-climbing myxomycete found in Hawthorn Dene last October. Not a peculiar form of *Mucilago crustacea* (seen nearby) as first thought, it turned out to be an immature specimen of the very large *Brefeldia maxima* which has been known to cover several square metres. It has been seen twice in VC65, at Richmond and Egglestone Abbey, but the Hawthorn Dene specimen is the first in County Durham. There is, as yet, no record for VC67 but, having now seen it in the field, we are confident that Hewett will soon plug this gap in Bruce Ing's national record!

Our thanks to Hewett for his vastly informative and entertaining lecture.

### **GRINKLE PARK APRIL 20<sup>TH</sup> 2002**

Our social event, at Grinkle Park Hotel near Loftus, North Yorks took place on one of those unfailingly warm, sunny days with which the spring of 2002 was liberally blessed. A group of about 20 members and some partners were provided with a large table in a private room and the company was much enjoyed. Sadly the hotel seemed to be going through one of those periods to which all such establishments are subject when it was resting on its laurels. The meal left something to be desired in terms of both quality and quantity! Apologies to all those who made the wrong choices. People were determined to enjoy themselves however, and a visit to Grinkle Park is perhaps more about setting than eating.

The good weather had meant a long dry period so we were not expecting to find many fungi and not really disappointed when we didn't. To make up for this lack, we were thankful for the presence of Gordon Simpson, full as he always is, of fascinating information

about trees, other plants and all aspects of Natural History. People looked hard - even finding a few toadstools mainly in the damper parts of the valley bottom but the list was inevitably short, just managing to scrape past a total of 30. The only mystery was a thick covering of little black discomycetes on lopped hazel wands. These have been sent to Kew but it will probably be some time before we have a name for them.

Despite the drawbacks, people seemed happy with their day out and we are very grateful to Tom Kirby for making the arrangements particularly as he is out of the country most of the time.

### **Spring Foray Elementis Ecology Park - May 11th 2002**

Like our March meeting, this visit was also held over from 2001 because of Foot and Mouth. We had yet another fine, sunny day in which to explore an unusual site described more fully elsewhere in this issue.

After a slow start, for which (through no fault of his own) the organiser failed to turn up, a pleasant day was had by all. With so much dry weather beforehand at a site never very damp, no one really expected to find many fungi, so we were neither daunted nor disappointed when these expectations were proved justified. The harder one has to look, the greater the sense of achievement when something is found - even something as predictable as the St. George's Mushroom. I also predicted *Entoloma clypeatum* under one of the many hawthorn bushes. We didn't find this but I had the satisfaction of seeing my prediction fulfilled three days later when, on a further visit with Darlington and Teesdale Naturalists, Babs did find large specimens of this spring toadstool.

The foray itself produced five other species of agaric including a little brown *Omphalina* growing in an attractive group in one of the few damp areas. There were also the remains of two of last year's grassland puffballs still identifiable as *Bovista nigrescens* and

*Calvatia excipuliformis* We saw four rusts and one early powdery mildew. People were intrigued by the tiny crimson *Nectria episphaeria*, a fungicolous fungus often to be found on old stromata of the common *Diatrype stigma* in spring-time. There were no great surprises and no exciting rarities in our total of 33 species. It is almost impossible to name *Omphalina* species as there is so little to distinguish one from another, meaning that names have proliferated. A puzzled half-hour led to the tentative identification of ours as *Omphalina cf. obscurata*, a name not previously assigned to any of the few species found in VC66.

Other things of interest were seen, not least a number of green shield bugs on gorse bushes and two rows of beautiful insect eggs, also on gorse. On our way to the site, Cliff Evans spotted a bright yellow butterfly as we rounded the bend leaving the Yarm road. I was able to pull up and we both had a good view of a Brimstone butterfly. This alone would have made our trip worthwhile!

## ELEMENTIS AS A COUNTY WILDLIFE SITE

CHRISTOPHER J. LOWE

Not surprisingly after so much dry weather, the Elementis site near Urray Nook, visited by the group on 11<sup>th</sup> May, provided few fungi, especially agaric-types. It was nonetheless an interesting venue, because of its unusual mixture of habitats. Elementis Ecology Site is in fact a 'county Wildlife Site' ratified in December 1996 by the local Wildlife Trust on behalf of the then Cleveland County Council.

What does this 'CWS' label imply? The term has an essentially local connotation; most Local Government areas now have lists of places that are endowed with above-average natural history interest, but have not achieved the statutory designation of 'Site of Special Scientific Importance'. County Wildlife Sites thus seek to embody the conservation ethics of maintenance and enhancement

of habitats, but at a level below the nationally significant SSSIs.

For all this emphasis on 'local', and in some senses lesser, conservation value, candidate sites for the CWS register must satisfy quite demanding guide-lines. These include such obvious, tried-and-tested qualities as Diversity (of habitats and communities, as well as species), and either SCARCITY or 'TYPICALITY' within the area in question.

How does the Elementis Site match these criteria? Certainly it has few claims to 'NATURALNESS' compared to, say, a truly ancient woodland, being based on man-made creations—concrete runways and other artifacts associated with military use. The plantations of Corsican Pine (*Pinus nigra*) are also, in themselves, of only moderate conservation priority, though they do provide resources for deer, grey squirrels, goldcrests and chaffinches.

Diversity, though, is a strong point. In addition to the habitats mentioned above are areas of self-generated gorse- and hawthorn-scrub, occasional deciduous tree-cover (birch and poplar, for example), plenty of established grassland, low-growing but species-rich plant-communities invading the hard substrates, and the many fire-ponds, now the home of great crested newts. Diversity is represented, too, by a wealth of invertebrate life, some of which (in the absence of fungi but the presence of 'all-rounders' such as Gordon Simpson and Malcolm Birtle) became alternative foci of observation and interest on the 11th May visit.

SCALE is also an important parameter: larger tracts of semi-natural habitat generally confer better advantages than smaller, other things being equal. The Elementis Site covers about 30 hectares, and is thus an extensive portion of land for a relatively small district such as Stockton-on-Tees. Other features are of a secondary nature, and would not In themselves justify selection as a County Wildlife Site, but are valid supporting arguments. Site-management is one of these

assets. Thanks in part to the Elementis Ecology Group formed among the factory's work-force, scrub has been cleared to extend sheltered grassland habitat for the benefit of butterflies, and the excavation of more natural-looking water-bodies has helped the translocation of endangered newt-populations.

Educational use, especially by schoolchildren, is another recognized virtue. The Ecology Site's classroom is well patronised, and, as we saw, still undergoing enthusiastic development. Not least among the site's demonstrable interests are the large boulders, dredged from a nearby excavation and now on show as geological exhibits of rock-type and glacial transport.

It is therefore not too difficult to justify the Elementis Site as of CWS calibre. Where, though, do fungi fit in the scheme? To my knowledge, no County Wildlife Site has been designated with fungi as its most prominent feature, though a good variety, or the occurrence of rarities, should be as much part of the documentation as any other taxa. However, an innovation that should please NEFSG members has recently come to my notice: some 'Environmental impact Assessments' now require a proper statement about mycological interest, as a real element of biodiversity. Progress at last, perhaps, for those of us who would wish to see fungi incorporated in mainstream conservation action!

## ***Helvella leucomelaena* in Northumberland: A new record**

**Hewett Ellis and Christine Ellis**

On 12<sup>th</sup> May 2002, whilst walking through Winnows Hill Plantation which forms part of Slaley Forest, we found a group of the cup fungus *Helvella leucomelaena* (Pers.:Fr.) Nannfeldt growing amongst damp moss in the middle of a stony forest track. The plantation is situated in the most southern part of

South Northumberland, Watsonian VC67 (Grid Ref. NY 977541), and comprises mainly conifers grown for commercial purposes. This is the first time we have encountered the species, which must be uncommon in Northumberland. It appears that this is the first record for the county. Alan Legg has informed us that he has not seen *H.leucomelaena* in the North-east and Bramley, in his 1985 Fungus Flora of Yorkshire, lists only two records, both in Dalby Forest, Thornton Dale, in 1962 and 1964. The fruiting bodies characteristically appear in the spring and early summer, and according to Marcel Bon, favour conifer plantations.

We found six to seven cups in one cluster and a solitary cup nearby. The tan coloured shallow cups measured up to 40mm in diameter. On the undersurface the tan colour continued at the outer margin but the central area extending down on to the short 'stem' was white. The 'stem' was about 10mm in diameter and 11mm long. The ridges on the 'stem' did not extend far up on to the undersurface of the cup (as occurs in the closely related species *Helvella acetabulum* (L.:Fr.)Quelet ). There is a good life-like illustration of the fungus in Courtecuisse & Duhem, Fig.24 page133.

Microscopic examination enabled us to confirm the identity of the fungus. The asci with 8 spores measured on average 260 X 15.6 µm. The spores were broad ellipsoids with a large conspicuous central oil droplet and measured 18.5 to 21.1 X 14.6 to 15.6 µm. (mean 20.4 X 15.4µm. Sections revealed septate non-branching paraphyses with slightly expanded ends and the tips of the asci did not stain blue with Melzer's Iodine.

We sent samples to Alan Legg and he agrees with our determination. In view of the rarity of the species Alan is sending some of our material to Dr Brian Spooner at Kew.