

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LONG ISLAND MYCOLOGICAL CLUB

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In 1973 twenty members of the NY Mycological Society, residents of geographic Long Island (which includes the NYC boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens) split off from NYMS and formed a regional entity that would become known as the Long Island Mycological Club. It was felt that an island 120 miles long offered sufficient opportunity for foraging so as not to require the arduous trip off-island north and west of NYC. The emphasis here is on “club”. We are an informal group of like minded lovers of fungi and amateur mycologists (there is a difference), and make no claim to be a learned “society”; the casual nature of our board meetings would strike horror into the heart of devout parliamentarians.

Although we think of ourselves as a young club, it would be more accurate to say that LIMC is middle-aged, insofar as fortyish appears to be about the average age of NAMA affiliated clubs, which range in age from the venerable Boston Club, founded in 1897, to some clubs which first saw the light of day in the 2000’s. The original members were mostly from Brooklyn and Queens, and the rest from Nassau, the westernmost of the two Long Island counties. Over the years, with growing suburbanization the center of gravity of the club’s population has slid inexorably eastward away from NYC with more than 50% of current memberships now residing in Suffolk County. Our total membership has waxed and waned but in recent years hovers around 120 individuals, which seems about average for east coast clubs. In the early years, applicants were vetted to assure that they were serious naturalists.

Sadly, none of the founding members are with us any longer. Our first president and guiding light was Jean Paul Latil, a courtly, witty man whose Thurberesque cartoons continue to be reprinted in our newsletter. His wife Jacqueline was elected vice-president and Marge Morris secretary. Marge was an avid myco-educator who lectured at various schools and inspired many, including Rytas Vilgalys (pers.comm.) head of the Vilgalys Mycological Lab at Duke University. Since then, we have had only four more presidents; there is no club rule whereby a sitting president cannot be reelected. (Full disclosure: my wife Peggy has been president since 2002.) In fact, there were no established club by-laws until 2000 when our then president Dominick Laudato drew them up and they were approved by the membership.

Since inception our club has held a scheduled foray most every Saturday morning during the season, which is a long one on Long Island, stretching from the end of April to the end of November, sometimes into December. This late collecting has enabled us to add uncommon species, particularly of *Tricholoma* and *Hygrophorus*, to our ever-growing checklist, which has grown to about 950 species. This effort began in earnest in 2000 with 405 species and every passing year has added from 10 to 50 to the cumulative total. This checklist is publicly accessible on our website limyco.org as well as the Mycoportal site. Another public contact point are occasional lectures on fungi and their role in the environment presented at various venues such as garden clubs, Audubon chapters, etc.

Our membership fees have remained modest and unchanged for our entire history: \$10 for an individual and \$15 for a family. The membership includes people from all walks of life, from plumbers to physicists, and from many nationalities, with a strong European contingent, reflecting a shared family culture of mushrooming. Not all of our members are active and a significant percentage only rarely, or never, attend a foray but seem content to participate vicariously through the pages of our newsletter, the Long Island Sporeprint. Over the years the publication has grown from a couple of mimeographed pages of text to a quarterly eight paged newsletter available to members in full color on our website. As editor, the author attempts to merge local data, such as previously unrecorded taxa and newly available collection sites, with more general developments in mycology, by gleanings from the technical journals. Identification hints are also published to supplement the instruction supplied in the field to novices.

Like other clubs, we have had problems with access to collecting sites, but over the years have established relationships locally with various parks, arboretums, etc., which approve our activities. (We have learned that it

is best to deal with local managers rather than navigate the treacherous headwaters of the bureaucracy.) However, the largest areas of natural habitat, the Pine Barrens, are under the jurisdiction of the NYS DEC, which prohibited the harvesting of any natural product (other than game animals, which required a license). We did obtain a dispensation based on our research collecting of *Hebeloma* which also entailed the submission of specimens to the NYS Museum. By doing so we tread in the footsteps of Charles Horton Peck, the NYS botanist, who collected widely in Suffolk County, and it is a thrill to come across the very species (sixty-two in all) whose type specimens derive from here (e.g., *Boletus illudens*, *Cortinarius pulchrifolius*). It was not until 2012, when several natural history organizations prevailed upon the DEC, that they altered their regulations so as to permit the harvesting of forest products such as mushrooms and berries. Ironically, now that we have access, the Pine Barrens are under serious threat from the Southern Pine Beetle which has recently infested over 1,000 acres in Suffolk County. Measures including felling of infected trees have already begun this winter when the insects are dormant and cannot fly off to infect other trees.

We have had a web presence since 2001 (despite the initial misgivings of some older members) and group email notifications to members re foray conditions since that year as well. This has permitted us to cancel forays when adverse conditions prevail thus sparing members a fruitless trip. On the other hand, some may argue that the experience of failure makes success all the sweeter. Our website regularly produces new member applications and makes our presence known to a wider audience. Previously our annual public mushroom display at Planting Fields Arboretum, with whom we have a long standing relationship, was our only avenue to attract new members, other than word of mouth. We have also been fortunate in that over the years, Newsday, the leading newspaper on Long Island, has several times brought attention to the club by full page articles of our activities. Further attention was created by Dom Laudato's 2012 publication of his memoirs, "Mushrooming on Long Island: Selected Memoirs of an Obsessed Mycophile", which contains accounts of the club's activities over the years, as well as seasonal check lists, etc. Some members of the public become aware of us only after being referred by the Cornell Agricultural Extension to identify a suspect species consumed by their unfortunate canines (which seem to have a fatal attraction to *Amanita bisporigera*) or their grazing toddler.

Over the years, we have collected for various research projects, among them Benjamin Wolfe's doctoral thesis on the evolutionary development of symbiosis in *Amanita*; he is now Assistant Professor of Microbiology at Tufts University and our science advisor. We continue to supply collections of *Hebeloma* for Prof. Henry Beker, the Belgian researcher whose European guide is scheduled for publication this year; a North American guide is to follow. Collections from our own herbarium (back to 2001) continue to be accessioned at the NYS museum and the NY Botanical Garden for coordination with our published species checklist on the Mycoportal website, the public face of the Macrofungi Collections Consortium.

When founded our stated mission was "to improve the members' knowledge of mushrooms on Long Island"; it would now be more correct to add "also to contribute to the public awareness of fungal biodiversity and to the science of mycology".