

L.I. SPOREPRINT

VOLUME 13, NUMBER 2, SUMMER, 2005

FINDINGS AFIELD

by Joel Horman

Instead of a rare or unusual mushroom, which this column usually deals with, today we will focus on a common species, but one which our club members, including myself, have consistently misidentified. Not until Peggy questioned it did I look closer. Since it is not considered edible, and is usually classified as being of questionable or unknown edibility, no harm has been done in any way but taxonomically.

The species in question, which we have always identified as *Lactarius aquifluus*, is more accurately referred to as *Lactarius quietus v. incanus*. Why the confusion? Simply put, the two species are very similar in appearance, in odor, and even microscopically. Moreover, once a species has been misidentified, the error perpetuates itself, with one person transmitting it to another, in epidemiological fashion. This illustrates also the danger of accepting any identification at face value, no matter how trusted the informant, without making an effort to verify it on our own. In this case, as I said, no bodily harm was done, but it is a good lesson to take to heart.

Aquifluus means watery fluid (latex) and that is how we usually identify it, by the presence of clear latex in combination with

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The Tree Ear: *Auricularia auricula* & Anti-Semitism

by David Rose (from *Spores Illustrated*, Winter 2004, excerpted and reprinted, courtesy of the author)

One may wonder in disbelief that the subject of mushrooms and the phenomenon of anti-Semitism could be even remotely associated, and it is actually rather painful for me to tell you that they indeed are - I would far rather be writing about pleasant matters. As horrid as this pairing sounds, it is the unfortunate predicament of the human species that we are not only capable of evil, but we commit evil acts quite regularly. Therein lies the root cause of what will follow: a reflection on the history and taxonomy of a species of basidiomycete, the jelly fungus *Auricularia auricula*, and some observations on Nazi propaganda that has used mushrooms to depict Jewish people as thieves, murderers, and deserving extermination.

What's this? Mushrooms in Nazi hate literature? Yes - all too true and alarming all the more since propaganda picture books first produced in 1938 under the Third Reich have recently resurfaced in Westchester and Rockland Counties and in Bergen County, New Jersey, distributed by a hate group in October 2004.



We know that although some fungi are harmful to humans (the cancer-causing *Aspergillus flavus*, for example, springs to mind), fungi in general are, like most things, neither good nor bad in themselves. But the "harm" that the fungi (or any other life form) cause to humans (or to any other life form) is definable only in relation to human concerns, understandable only in terms of our own moral and intellectual capability. How humans have perceived the fungi through the course of history and through the distorted lens of their "harmful" effects is another matter entirely and a subject endlessly fascinating, for mushrooms have typically been viewed as grotesque, disgusting, sexually provocative, dangerous, magical, supernatural, and hauntingly am-

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Aside from the requisite few morels and the usual Oysters, this has been a poor spring season. Some other edibles were found but came from watered areas. The most exciting to me was the finding of three yellow morels, *Morchella esculenta*. They were found on three different occasions. Joel found one in Planting Fields on a foray and Dale found one there on his own. Roger found one in the Northport area. We usually find *M. elata*. Conditions must have been just right for them. Rumor has it that Michigan and Pennsylvania did not get their great abundance of morels this year either. Maybe

this means we'll have a good Bolete season!

Some of our traditional spots seem to be less productive in recent years, for a number of reasons, so if anyone knows any good gathering areas that we have overlooked and are accessible, please let us know; sharing is what this club is all about.

I want to remind everyone that my term as president comes to an end in October. If you think you might want to put your name in for the position, please feel free to run. Conversely, you can also nominate someone. Think about it.

Good hunting!

EDITOR'S NOTE

Among our members, the general impression is that this season has been lackluster. And in proof, we can point to our recollection of previous years, when our harvest, for example, of Oyster Mushrooms was much greater. But without detailed records, we probably cannot say exactly how many and which species were found in previous years. This is where the practice of record keeping proves its value. Looking at our club records, I can say with confidence that although we found an average of 18 species of fungi at Muttontown in previous years, this year we found only 10. This pattern holds true for most of this year's forays.

When I look at my personal data files, I can see

that many species that usually appear early in May, such as *Inocybe lacera*, did not make an appearance until almost June. Information such as this quantifies and verifies our impressionistic appraisal.

For these reasons, I recommend that everyone keep detailed records of their own excursions. Looking back at previous year's records not only shows us nature's larger patterns, but can also impart local knowledge of the seasonal timing of the appearance of different species. You will be surprised how the mention of a particular species at a specific site can evoke memories of forays past. And it helps to know that, e.g., we found *Boletus edulis* in September but not October



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Lichens: An Ancient Partnership

from *"The Life of Plants"* by David Attenborough. Princeton Univ. Press, 1995)

The most intimate relationship between plant and fungus developed very, very much earlier. The first single-celled plants floated in the sea, as many kinds of algae do today. About four hundred million years ago, some managed to spread to the moist earth around the margins of fresh-water lakes and survived as a thin green dusting on the soil. There they encountered thread-like fungi which were also, around that time, beginning to colonize the land.* Where plants lived, plants died and the fungi were there to consume the remains. Doubtless at that early period they were living within the soil. Lacking chlorophyll, they could not manufacture complex organic substances for themselves. But, then as now, they were able to obtain some nutriment by secreting an acid and dissolving the minerals in rocks and the soil. So each organism had valuable commodities needed by the other. The fungi could absorb starches and sugars from the plants. The plants could extract minerals dissolved in the water that they took from the fungi. A partnership was established and the fungi enclosed the algae within their tissues in a most intimate embrace. The partnership survives to this day in twenty thousand different forms. It is so close that each pairing looks like a single entity and naturalists give each of them a single name as though that were indeed the case. They are lichens. It was not until the 19th century that scientists, peering at them through microscopes, recognized that two very different organisms were involved.

Some form thin skins on rocks and are often brilliantly coloured- red, blue, yellow, green, even black. Others develop minuscule branches and grow into dense curling thickets a few inches high. Their outer skin is formed by the compacted threads of the fungi and is sufficiently impermeable to prevent the loss of water from the partnership; beneath are the algal cells, kept moist and protected from harmful ultra-violet radiation by the fungal skin; and below them, in the centre of the structure, there is looser tissue, also provided by the fungus, where food and water is stored. The partnership has been extremely successful. Lichens can survive in the most extreme and severe of environments where neither plants nor fungi can exist alone. In the Himalayan mountains, they grow at altitudes of up to 18,000 feet. On the Antarctic ice-cap, they have been found on rocks within 300 miles of the South Pole, where it is so

cold that growth is only possible for a few days in the year.

At the other end of the earth, in the Arctic tundra, lichens grow with particular luxuriance. A bushy kind forms ankle-deep carpets that covers great areas and grows in such quantities that it provides the main food for reindeer in winter. This is the so-called reindeer "moss". The long beards - bluish-green, grey or even yellow - that hang from the branches of trees in many northern forests are also, in fact, lichens. They obtain their moisture from mists and find all the minerals they need dissolved in the rain. Lichens can also tolerate heat which would desiccate and kill most plants. They shrivel but remain alive and, when the opportunity comes, they take up moisture at extraordinary speed and in great quantities, absorbing as much as half their dried body weight in a mere ten minutes.

The fungal member of the lichen partnership reproduces by spores that develop inside special small cups and spikes. A single spore among the many millions blown from these structures is capable of founding a new colony but to do so it has to find a new algal partner. Exactly how it does this is even now not known. But the complexities of coordinating two separate sexual cycles appears to have defeated many lichens. Instead they produce small knobs containing representatives from both partners. These are blown away or transported inadvertently by insects. Travelling as a pair, they are ready to continue the alliance as soon as they arrive on a suitable new site. The algal partner is able to exist by itself and what is more will grow more swiftly when it does so. The fungus, however, cannot.

To that extent, the fungus can be regarded as the ruler, clinging to life by holding the alga captive. In really harsh circumstances, the fungus will even kill and digest some of the algal cells, so confirming its dominance. In partnership, the two play an invaluable role in the living world. They are the intrepid pioneers. They establish themselves in some of the most hostile environments on the planet where nothing else can find food and when at last they die, the dust to which they are reduced may provide just enough nourishment to enable an independent plant to establish itself.

(*Editor's note: Recent theoretical speculations tend to the view that the symbiosis may have preceded the colonization of the land by plants. Viz., *The full-length phylogenetic tree...of chitinous fungi*, Tehler, Little and Farris, *Mycological Research*, 2003, 107: 901-16, (Review article).



Auricularia*(Continued from page 1)*

biguous. When the "evil mushrooms" are subject to cultural taboos and human misrepresentation, and are even used for the depraved purpose of racist propaganda, well, the plot naturally thickens, especially when what some perceive as evil (the mushrooms) are used deliberately with maleficent intention, or when, less malicious but still troublesome enough, they are called by names like "Jew's Ear." Which brings us to the peculiar case of *Auricularia auricula*.

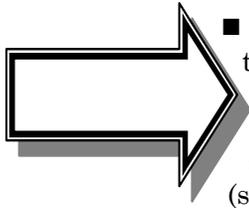
Auricularia auricula is a common jelly fungus widely distributed throughout North America and Europe. We find it regularly on our mushroom walks. At first glance it may seem similar to cup fungi, leading one to conclude it is an ascomycete. Not so: it is a basidiomycete, with basidia and spores on its upper surface. It is brown, irregular, wavy, rubbery, and gelatinous; it grows on wood; it is edible, but with no distinctive taste; and it often looks like, as one mushroom expert phrased it, "the missing part of a Van Gogh self-portrait," i.e. an ear. This resemblance has given rise to various common names like "Tree Ear," "Wood Ear," and "Jelly Ear." To enter the thicket of scientific (and common) nomenclature associated with this fungus is to become ensnared in a mycological maze within a mist of mystification. The salient fact is this: *Auricularia auricula* (Hooker) Underwood, known in the nineteenth century as *Hirneola auricula-judae* (Fries), is also known as "Judas's Ear" and "Jew's Ear". In fact, its former Latin species epithet "auricula-judae" literally means "ear of Judas." It became known as "Judas's Ear" by virtue of the fact that it grew on elder (*Sambucus*), though it also grows on other deciduous and coniferous species. Christian legend maintains that the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified was made from the elder tree and - a more important point, this - that Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver, hanged himself from an elder. Judas hanging in death from an elder tree - this folk legend has been mentioned in 14th century literature like William Langland's *Piers Plowman* in 1362 ("Judas he japed / with Jewen silver / and sithen on an eller / hanged hymselfe") and the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1366) and even in Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost* ("Judas was hang'd on an elder;" V. ii.606) in 1595. *A.auricula* has been widely recognized as a distinctive fungus at least since the Elizabethan age, and the mycological historian G. C. Ainsworth has observed that it was one of the

earliest depicted in a painted illustration, by the Flemish botanist Matthias de L'Obel in 1581.

The appearance of *A. auricula* as a fungal growth on the elder led naturally to a magical association with the myth of Judas's awful demise: Judas hanged himself on an elder, therefore the ear-like fungus that grows on elder trees symbolizes his very own ears. Why, then, is this fungus also known as "Jew's Ear"? How and when did "Judas's Ear" become "Jew's Ear"? Or did these variant names exist together all along simply because Judas was associated with the Jews? We will probably never know the precise answers to these questions, but a little etymological research may provide some clues. For example, Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable tells us that the name Jew's Ear "is due to a mistranslation of its Latin name, Auricula Judae, i. e. Judas's ear," and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) offers a similar reading: "erroneous rendering of medieval Latin auricular Judae, Judas's ear." However, these suppositions gloss over the undercurrent of prejudice inherent in the name. I believe there was no mistranslation, nor was there error, for the OED gives ample evidence that "Jew's Ear" was circulating in English at least by the 16th century *but gives no entry whatsoever for "Judas's Ear." The most likely explanation for the origin of the name lies in the hysterical anti-Semitism that burgeoned in the middle ages, fostered by doctrines of the Catholic Church and by widespread popular beliefs that the Jews were unclean (like animals), had magical powers through a pact with Satan, and were responsible for betraying and killing Jesus Christ. Notice the transposition here: not Judas, but the Jews, were responsible for the crucifixion. In the context of widespread religious persecution of the Jewish people, the slippage between "Judas's Ear" and "Jew's Ear" probably became very fluid, especially when these names represented objects of fear and disgust: Jews, Christ killers, and fungus.

This opprobrious epithet "Jew's Ear" for *A. auricula* became general in England in the 16th century. John Gerard used it in his *Herbal* in 1597 ("a certaine excrescence called *Auricula ludae* or lewes eare") as did Thomas Phaer, English translator of Virgil, in 1544, and Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome in *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), a work dealing with England's best-known witch trial in 1612. If the fungus was an object of superstition, so too was the tree on which it grew, for the elder became so associated with the devil in certain areas that many would not burn elder logs

(Continued on page 7)



■ **TINY GOURMET:** Springtails, small soil dwelling insects (named for a forked structure on their undersides they use to flip over) are sometimes found by mushroomers, much to their dismay. A study published online has shown that these invertebrates are quite discriminating in their food habits. DNA analysis demonstrated that the diversity of fungi found in the soil was 33 times greater than that in the guts of a collembolan (springtail) species. We can only be thankful that they are not large enough to carry collecting baskets. (*Biology Letters*, June, 2005-<http://www.journals.royalsoc.ac.uk/app/home/main>)

■ **CRANES HUNT FUNGI:** For the past 20 years, forest canopy research, whether by climbing, balloons, or walkways, has been mostly confined to the tropics, where insects, birds, and plants were studied. Not to be outdone, scientists in Leipzig, Germany utilized a crane to gain access to the forest canopy there in order to assess the diversity and ecology of wood decaying fungi. 118 different taxa were discovered, with corticioid fungi dominating with 37 species; also present were 18 species of pyrenocmycetes. Gilled mushrooms were scarce, limited mostly to those with minute basidiomes (fruiting bodies). Most species were quite host specific, even those usually thought to be non-specific. (*Myco. Prog.* 4(2): 117-132, 2005)

■ **EYELESS BUT SEEING:** The presence of light sensing proteins has been known in ascomycetes such as *Neurospora crassa* (red bread mold) and has now been demonstrated in a basidiomycete, the human pathogen *Cryptococcus deformans*. The protein, called White Collar 1, senses blue light and interacts with other molecules to regulate growth, mating and virulence. It is also thought to play a role in ultraviolet light resistance. UV/blue light also regulates development of other fungi, such as the higher basidiomycete, *Coprinus cinereus*. Its presence in both lineages indicates it is ancient in the fungal kingdom, and the authors speculate that it is “of major significance for terrestrial life”, its UV protecting ability remaining a selective force into the present day. (*PLOS Biology*, Vol.3, Issue 4, April, 2005)

(Compiled by editor from indicated sources.)

FORAY NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR 2005

Killdevil Lodge, Gros Morne National Park, Sept 2-5; Labrador, coast of the last frontier, Sept 6-9.

Exotic boreal mushrooms, excellent guest and local faculty, full scientific program, friendly people, stunning natural settings, determinations backed by photo and voucher specimen.

Information, Agreement & Registration Forms, Reports of 2003 & 2004 Forays, species lists and other information available/downloadable at Humber Natural History Society web site: <http://www.swgc.mun.ca/hnhs>.

FACULTY: Michael Burzynski *Gros Morne National Park*,
Dave Malloch *New Brunswick Museum*
Faye Murrin *Memorial University*
Machiel Noordeloos *Netherlands National Herbarium*
Stan Pieda *College of the North Atlantic*
Roger Smith *University of New Brunswick*
Vello Soots *Mycological Society of Toronto*
Greg Thorn *University of Western Ontario*
Rod Tulloss *The New York Botanical Gardens*
Andrus Voitk *Humber Natural History Society*
Tom Volk *University of Wisconsin*
Gary Warren *Canadian Forest Service*

A wonderful chance for the amateur naturalist to learn about mushrooms beside professionals and seasoned mycophiles, as well as a chance for the advanced mycophile to share experiences with the like-minded.

25th Anniversary of the Telluride Mushroom Festival:

Telluride, Colorado, August 18-21, 2005

The 25th annual Telluride Mushroom Festival—designed for people interested in edible, psychoactive, and poisonous mushrooms—will be held in Telluride, Colorado, Aug. 18-21.

The festival includes mushroom lectures, forays, hands-on identification and cultivation workshops, mushroom poetry, and a mushroom parade—which runs down the main street of Telluride and features festival participants dressed as mushrooms, spores, and other elements of the mycological world.

Experienced guides will lead daily fungus forays

in the forests surrounding Telluride, generally productive of a wide variety of wild mushrooms, particularly edible species, like chanterelles and porcini.

Nationally recognized authorities: **Gary Lincoff**, **Paul Stamets**, **Manuel Torres**, **Kathleen Harrison**, and **Dr. Emanuel Salzman**.

Complete information about the Festival program, registration, lodging, and travel is available on the Festival's web site: www.shroomfestival.com. Or write, Fungophile, Attn. Mushroom Festival, Box 480503, Denver, CO, 80248-0503. Call 303-296-9359.

Contact: Emanuel Salzman, MD 303-296-9359 or 303-292-1524

Muttontown

by Peggy Horman

For many, many years the club has explored Muttontown on forays and found it a very interesting 550 acres.

I'm sure most of us have seen the ruins of Knollwood there and wondered about its history. It was originally built in 1907 by a venture capitalist. Made of granite, it combined Greek revival, Italian Renaissance etc. It had 60 rooms and must have been quite a sight. It was sold in 1951 to Ahmed Bey Zogu also known as King Zog. (Zog became president of Albania in 1925 and a few years later declared himself King. To consolidate power, he appointed family members to important posts. He was almost assassinated in 1931 and fled to England when Italy defeated Albania's army in 1939. He was sure to take a share of his country's bullion with him.)

In 1951, on a visit to the US, he saw Knollwood and bought it. Although Zog reportedly never occupied the mansion, rumor had it that booty was hidden inside. Treasure hunters vandalized the estate beyond repair. In 1955 it was sold to Lansdell

Christie who had the mansion torn down. Very little remains today.

More recently a skeleton was discovered there in 2001. (I'm glad our club didn't find it!) It was under a light covering of leaves in a fetal position. The police determined that it was a female murder victim and the case remains open.

All very interesting don't you think? I got this information from a fairly new hiking book called "60 Hikes within 60 Miles (of) New York City." It was published in 2004 and written by Christopher and Catherine Brooks. All of the hikes are described in detail, including expected flora and fauna and all have good driving directions and trail maps. In addition, length, difficulty, time, etc. is noted in an easy to read format. On top of that, some areas even have a history, such as the one about Muttontown. It sells for \$15.95 and is well worth it.

Those wishing to access trails further east should consult, "Hiking Long Island" (by Lee McAllister, 2001, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, 356 pages, \$19.95), previously reviewed in these pages (Spring, 2003, available on our website).

FINDINGS AFIELD (Continued from page 1)

sweet odor and brownish color. But if we refer to Besette's key to *Lactarius* in his "Mushrooms of Northeastern North America" we see that there are four species that are in this category: *L. aquifluus*, *L. mutabilis*, *L. quietus var. incanus*, and *L. hibbardae var. hibbardae*. Again, none but *L. mutabilis* is universally considered edible, and neither is *L. hibbardae var. glaucesans*, which Besette does not include in this section of the key, but which nevertheless embodies these same characteristics. However, both varieties of *L. hibbardae* can be identified by their acrid flesh and latex, and the latex of *L. hibbardae var. glaucesans* stains the gills green. *L. mutabilis* has not yet been found on L.I., but there is no reason not to expect it to occur.

So our main task is to distinguish between *L. aquifluus* and *L. quietus var. incanus*. Of these, the latter is much more common on L.I. and should therefore be the default species. *L. aquifluus* is described by Besette as occurring among sphagnum mosses in bogs or in conifer or mixed woods. Roody (Mushrooms of W. Virginia and the central Appalachians) also adds that they are more readily found at higher elevations. **They are orange-brown in color, varying to pale cinnamon-brown and the latex is always transparent and mild, not staining the gills. The spore print is white to cream,**

and the flesh likewise.

In contrast, *L. quietus var. incanus* is **purplish-brown to purple-gray, the latex white in young specimens, then becoming watery, and the gills developing orange-cinnamon stains, and becoming cinnamon overall.** The spore print is pinkish buff as is the flesh, and its taste as well as that of the latex can vary from mild to slowly and slightly acrid. This species is associated with oaks, although our mixed woods, especially the pine barrens, make it difficult to say with certainty which is the linked tree.

Since most of us do not use microscopes or chemical tests, this article deemphasizes their use, but there are definite differences, which cognoscenti can ferret out in the appropriate reference works. Both Bes-



Lactarius quietus var. incanus

ette and Roody have excellent illustrations of these two species. The illustration above is from Roody and may be seen in color on the web 

Auricularia*(Continued from page 4)*

for fear of bringing Satan into their homes. Sir Thomas Browne, one of the finest prose stylists in the English language, offers a more balanced appreciation of the fungus in his marvelous *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646): "In Jew's-ears something is conceived extraordinary from the Name, which is in propriety but *Fungus sambucinus*, or an excrescence about the Roots of Elder, and concerneth not the Nation of Jews, but Judas Iscariot, upon a conceit, he hanged on this Tree; and is become a famous Medicine in Quinsies, sore Throats, and strangulations ever since." Browne's corrective understanding that the name "concerneth not the Nation of Jews" did nothing to deflect the continuing use of the name into the 19th century, even though his pre-Linnaean binomial, *Fungus sambucinus*, seems oddly more fitting than the Friesian name, *Hirneola auricula-judae*, which recapitulates the Judas/Jew perplexity in scientific nomenclature. His observation that the fungus grows "about the Roots of Elder" is also an indication that the name "Jew's Ear" would soon be applied to terrestrial cup fungi like *Peziza* by common observers who discerned little difference between the basidiomycete and other ascomycetous fungi. At the end of the 18th century, just as the incipient science of mycology took its first taxonomic steps, Pierre Bulliard established *Peziza auricula-judae* (1786) and Lin-

naeus established *Tremella auricula-judae* (1788) as names for this fungus, thus incorporating the Judas myth into the scientific nomenclature. Elias Magnus Fries established *Hirneola auricula-judae* in 1874, which held until Lucien Underwood published the name as *Auricularia auricula* (dropping "-judae") in 1902. Though this summary glosses over several complexities of taxonomy and nomenclature, it is also important to recognize that the common names "Judas's Ear" and "Jew's Ear" have slowly fallen into disfavor, due especially to the anti-Semitic connotation of the latter.

(* Editor's note: Apparently the pejorative, "Jew's Ear", remains in use, at least among mushroomers in Great Britain and on the continent, judging from its continued use in mushroom guides published there as late as 1999 (e.g., *The Pocket Guide to Mushrooms*, Jean-Marie Polese, 1999, original edition in French; *Mushrooms and Toadstools of Great Britain, etc.*, Marcel Bon, 1987; *Mushrooms & Other Fungi of Great Britain*, Roger Phillips, 1981.)) It is telling that Phillips' North American mushroom guide, 1991, avoids this odious epithet. In contrast to the old world, no North American field guide, since the early years of the 20th century, has found it necessary to revive this prejudicial usage, and all use the revised Latin name, *Auricularia auricula*.)

FORAY RESULTS

Wellwyn, April 23 & 30: Our first morel foray produced only 2 caps, the second about 15, and a species previously not on our list: *Phlebia radiata*.

Planting Fields, May 14: Only 8 species, but one surprising lone *Morchella esculenta*. A fair quantity of wine-caps.

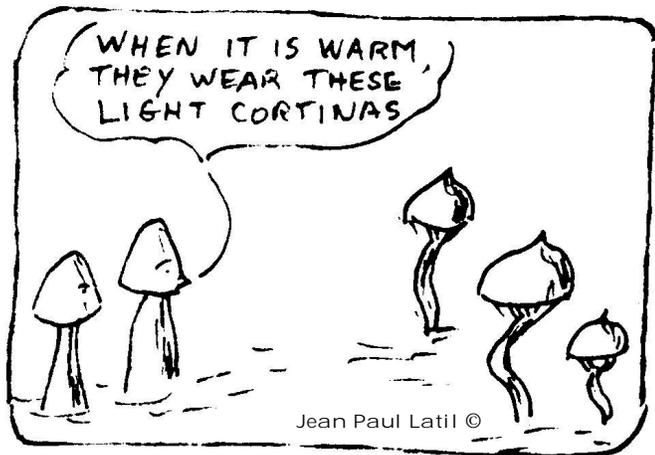
Bethpage S.P., May 21: The Spring Oyster, *Pleurotus populinus*, was not as plentiful as usual, but provided everyone with a meal.

Muttontown, May 28: 10 species, less than the norm, but Tony Mish (joined by Sue Gaeta) saved the day with his acrobatics (see photos, rt.) and with wine-caps he had gathered elsewhere.

Massapequa Park, June 4: Only 4 species, but one new one, *Russula primaverna*.

Christie, June 11: 10 species, including many *Megacollybia platyphylla*





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"If you have remarked errors in me, your superior wisdom must pardon them. Who errs not while perambulating the domain of nature? Who can observe everything with accuracy? Correct me as a friend, and I as a friend will requite with kindness."

LINNAEUS



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