

Next Meeting March 10, 2003

SPORES Afield

The newsletter of the Colorado Mycological Society

March 2003

The President's Basket

Ten years ago I wrote an article for the March Spores Afield that was titled, "1992: The Year The Mushrooms Didn't Come Out." At that time, most members felt that the mountains had enough rain to bring out a large fruiting of mushrooms, but the mushrooms didn't fruit. Some members felt that the rains may have come at the wrong time, but most thought that the weather just didn't warm up enough in July and August.

I think there is unanimous agreement that the reason 2002 was the worst year for mushrooms that anyone can remember, was the simple lack of rain. As I wrote this in the middle of February, Colorado was still in the midst of a drought that caused Aurora to ban vegetable gardens and Denver to recommend flushing toilets once a day.

The big question for mushroom hunters in Colorado is what will the weather bring us in 2003. Will we have another summer with just a few mushrooms, or will we see an abundance of Boletus, Chanterelles and other prized edibles? It's too early to tell.

Larry Renshaw
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Speaker for the March meeting

Erika Mark McFarlane

The Montana Morel Experience

Erika stumbled across the topic of mushrooms in regard to forest management regimes while researching paper topics for a silviculture class during her first year in graduate school. She then went on to read and research various aspects of the wild mushroom harvest including its sociology, economics, and ecology.

When plans for conducting her Master's project in Sumatra, Indonesia—a study of medicinal plants and indigenous knowledge—fell through due to the political unrest in Indonesia during 1999, Erika opted to pursue mycology. She applied for and received funding from a private foundation affiliated with Yale, and collaborated with two professors at Oregon State University to develop a project.

After having graduated, Erika went on to contract with the Forest Service and Pacific Northwest Research Station to conduct a separate study on the commercial morel harvest in Montana. She currently has a second contract with the nonprofit Institute of Culture and Ecology (IFCAE) in Portland, Oregon, to publish the results of her first contract and to explore how individuals harvesting mushrooms in Montana splice together an income (Making It on the Margins: Morel Markets, Policy, and Livelihoods in Western Montana).

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Welcome to CMS!

This is the first issue for 2003 of *SporesAfield*, the newsletter of the Colorado Mycological Society. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide a forum for members to share experiences, information, and insight on mushrooms of Colorado and the Rocky Mountains.

The Colorado Mycological Society is a nonprofit corporation established in 1967 to advance the understanding of, and to stimulate interest in, the field of mycology. Our members collect specimens for identification, preservation and study. CMS is affiliated with the North American Mycological Association (NAMA). CMS provides consulting services to the Denver Botanic Gardens and the Rocky Mountain Poison Center.

Monthly Meetings

CMS meetings provide an informal opportunity to socialize and exchange information with others interested in mycology. Meetings are usually held the second Monday night of each month, from March through October, at 7:30 pm at the Denver Botanic Gardens, 1005 York Street, Denver, CO. The meetings are held in Mitchell Hall. There is no charge to get into the Botanic Gardens to attend the meetings. Members and visitors are welcome.

Spores Afield

Spores Afield is published from March through October by the Colorado Mycological Society. CMS dues are \$23 for the first year and \$20 thereafter. Send membership dues to CMS Membership Chair, Box 9621, Denver, CO 80209. All CMS members receive *Spores Afield* as part of their membership.

CMS is an associate member of the North American Mycological Association.

CMS website: <http://www.cmsweb.org>

Other Society Activities

Forays:

When the mushroom season gets going, mushroom forays are led by experienced members of CMS to different locations around the state. We usually hold forays on Saturday and Sunday. These forays are limited to members only. Forays are probably the best way to learn to recognize different kinds of mushrooms.

Classes:

Classes in beginning mushroom identification are offered periodically. CMS sometimes sponsors classes on growing edible mushrooms, mushroom photography and other subjects.

Classes are occasionally available through the Denver Botanic Gardens and Rocky Mountain Natural History Association.

Mushroom Fair:

A mushroom fair is held each year in August at the Denver Botanic Gardens. August is the height of the mushroom season in Colorado, and members from around the state bring in a large variety of mushrooms for identification and display. The fair is open to the general public on Sunday. It is a great time to learn about mushrooms!

CMS Library

The Colorado Mycological Society has an extensive library available to all members. Please contact: Chris Hardwick 303-237-0356 to check out a book or find out more about our collection.

Books For Sale

We also offer a variety of books for sale at each meeting. The books are usually available to members at a discount.

CMS Website

CMS is on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.cmsweb.org>. The website is full of information on the society's events, forays, and links to other sites in an easy to use format.

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President (Board)	Larry Renshaw 303-648-0048 lmr@hotpop.com
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In Memory of Jeanette Taylor

Long time members of CMS will be saddened to learn of the death last November 2nd of Jeanette Taylor at the age of 95. For many years Jeanette Taylor was an active presence in CMS, NAMA, the Colorado Mountain Club, and many other organizations, but in recent years had been unable to take part in any activities. Her sense of humor was legendary, and her peppy personality brightened our lives. During her working years she was involved in the women's wear industry, a fact that was revealed in her flare for fashion. She is survived by her son, Bayard Victor Taylor, of Steamboat Springs, a grandson, Scott Victor, and a sister, Virginia Brailsford.

Offered by Marilyn Shaw

In Memory of Pete McKenzie

Pete McKenzie, a long time member from Fort Collins, died on January 10, 2003. Pete was an avid fisherman, hunter, camper, and an excellent cook. You may remember Pete from some of our forays where he was always enthusiastic and usually followed closely by one of his Brittany Spaniels. Pete collected wild mushrooms and many other wild foods both in Colorado and at his cabin in Washington state. He was my good friend and I miss him so much.

Offered by Ellen Jacobson

Mushroom of the Month

By Ellen Jacobson

Last week I decided to ignore this terrible drought we are immersed in and assume that we will have moisture soon plus gentle spring rains. Therefore, for the month of March, I have picked our dear old friend, *Pleurotus ostreatus*, one of the first and finest mushrooms to appear.

Pleurotus or Oyster mushrooms can show up in the city at almost any time from late December until May if there is a minimum amount of moisture and some warm weather. They grow on dead tree trunks or from the roots of usually dead trees and will fruit profusely in the same spot for several years. The tree of choice seems to be the Cottonwood, but I have found them on Alders and Siberian Elms. The secret is to find your own personal stump and watch it carefully, as the best mushrooms are about the size of a drink coaster or smaller. Older mushrooms are usually very large and white, while the younger ones can range from off-white to medium brown. If the moisture holds, several crops may appear one after another for 4 to 6 weeks on the same or nearby stumps. Dr. Alexander Smith, who wrote the first popular guide for amateurs once found a clump weighing over 50 pounds in Denver.

Identification is relatively easy. The mushroom has an off-center stem, decurrent gills, and always grows on wood or buried tree roots. The stems tend to be long and joined at the base. Oyster are common in the city, where it can grow to great size; the mountain species, which appear on Aspen are much more fragile. Check any mushroom guidebook for pictures and specifics. One way to make absolutely sure that you have a Pleurotus is to look for the black beetle with a red head that lives only in this mushroom. Where this creature goes the rest of the year I have no idea.

Just a few more hints. Be careful where you pick Pleurotus as it often grows along city streets and the pollution from car exhausts could be concentrated in the fruiting body. The stalk is tough and should be cut off very close to the cap and discarded. I love this mushroom in Oriental soups or breaded and fried; it is a wonderful fungal treat when little else is available.

The "Off Season"?

By Marilyn Shaw, CMS Toxicology Chair

We don't expect to get many mushroom poisoning calls during winter, but there are always a few. Many of those off season cases involve bad trips with hallucinogenics. However, this call had a twist.

A woman who had worked at Denver Botanic Gardens called the Gardens wanting to find someone who knew about mushrooms. After being out for several hours the previous day she had come home to find her Twinkles, a five year old fifteen pound Pomeranian, obviously very ill with severe gastrointestinal symptoms. The dog was wobbly and its hind legs just wouldn't work very well. She had taken her pet to her veterinarian who was as puzzled as she was. Then she wondered, could those little mushrooms she had noticed in some of her flower pots left from last summer be the culprits?

The person she first talked to at the Gardens referred her to Vera Evenson, CMS member and curator of the DBG Herbarium of Fungi. Vera listened to the description, then called me to see if I would talk to the owner, too.

Now, there is a species of mushroom that is very common in potted plants. I get at least one call a year concerning them, but these have never involved symptoms. Vera and I both thought the mushrooms in this case were the common *Lepiota lutea*, which has the distinction of probably having more names than any other mushroom - and it's so small. Vera and I agree that our favorite name for the fungus is *Leucocoprinus birnbaumii*. Just say it and see how luxuriously it
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rolls off the tongue. It is usually pretty easy to identify even on the telephone because of its habitat (flower pots and greenhouses) and the fact that it is essentially quite a bright yellow. The genus name holds some clues: *Leuco* means white and *coprinus* refers to the familiar inky caps. However, you say, *Coprinus* has black spores, but you would get a white spore print from this one, hence the *Leuco* prefix. The *coprinus* part of the name indicates that these mushrooms have the stature (appearance) of a *Coprinus*.

The description we were able to get was pretty close to the mushroom we suspected, but as they say, close only counts in horseshoes. For one thing, where were the striations? Fortunately, the owner had some specimens. Since she lives in Thornton it was not very far for her to meet Vera in Boulder with samples. Vera proceeded to do her usual thorough identification macroscopically and microscopically.

Meanwhile, I was pondering how I could square my opinion that these mushrooms were probably harmless if we had a small dog that was quite sick. The literature is nebulous at best with occasional statements that there may have been cases of illness from them. Seems to me that since they are so common we should know for sure if they were poisonous.

Vera called later in the day with the news that the specimens were not *Lepiota lutea*, but rather *Gymnopilus purpuratus*. She related that real progress in the quest to identify the mushrooms came when she checked an old edition of Rolf Singer's "The Agaricales". In it he alluded to their suspected hallucinogenic effect. She further confirmed their identity using one of the volumes of "The Mushrooms of Switzerland". The owner subsequently mentioned that her pet of five years had stared at her as if she didn't know who she was, a good clue to what was going on. The dog had apparently eaten a fairly large cluster, but quickly made a complete recovery.

Another interesting factor. Many years ago I had

purchased a plant at Safeway. They were not watering it and I decided I had to save it. Within a month or two it began presenting me with fruitings of this same tiny mushroom. It produced three flushes at about two week intervals over that summer. I still have the plant, but it has never produced another mushroom. I had photographed my little gems and show one of those slides every time I give a beginners' talk to illustrate the answer to the question, "Where can you find mushrooms?" The answer is, "Mushrooms are where you find them." The date on my slides is 1977, and these are the first of the species I have seen since then.

Mushrooming, Motorcycling and Monarch Pass

By William Windsor, CMS Vice President

I love it when I can combine favorite activities and favorite places with my work. I am a housing developer with the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and last fall I had the privilege to conduct a series of workshops on Affordable Housing Development at a Rural Initiative retreat near Monarch Pass. Since Monarch Pass is one of my favorite motorcycling roads, on Thursday morning I rode out to the retreat on my Triumph 955i. It turned out to be a cold ride with fresh snow at 8,500 ft. and above. Still, I was lucky as all the roads I traveled were free from snow and ice and the combination of snow, golden aspen leaves and bright red ground cover was spectacular.

Heading southwest over Kenosha Pass I spotted an interesting forest road sign on the south side of the highway labeled "Mushroom Gulch". That name sure grabbed my attention! The ground in this area had about 6 inches of snow, so I reluctantly rode passed, but I did make a mental note to return sometime next summer. I mean, with a name like that, I HAVE to check it out.

I arrived at the retreat, unpacked my little motorcycle 'tail-pack' (it mounts on top of the passenger seat) and prepared myself for my first workshop.

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It was a pleasure to meet so many dedicated individuals from throughout Colorado who work with the homeless and address the need for affordable housing, health care and educational services. Following my workshop, there were still a few hours of light remaining and I decided to make a 'sporting' run over Monarch Pass on my motorcycle.

The ride was great, with the pavement in very good condition and just a very small amount of sand in a few corners. On my initial run I was focused only on the road as I enjoyed setting up for each curve then leaning the bike over deeply as I clipped apex after apex. On the second run, I was able to pay a bit more attention to the environment and I noted that there was a decent stand of Lodgepole Pine near the top of the pass. "Hmmm, might be good for Matsutake", I thought to myself.

I made a third run up the pass to look for mushrooms. Norm Birchler, our esteemed editor, taught me to hunt for Matsutake in stands of Lodgepole pine that include flat areas and where the trees are not too mature. Under his tutelage, I had learned to reliably recognize the proper environment and to find this wonderfully aromatic mushroom. Even though the summer had been very dry, I was hoping that the recent rains and snow might trigger a fruiting of Matsutake. Unfortunately, snow covered the ground at the most promising looking areas along the pass. Still, I was set on finding mushrooms, so I slowly rode my motorcycle to lower elevations searching the forest until I came to a zone that had very little snow, but still has some patches of Lodgepole Pine among Spruce and Fir trees. Dismounting my motorcycle and hiking into the forest, I scanned the ground for signs of Matsutake. I could not find any telltale cracks in the earth nor little mounds of pushed up pine needles that might reveal the location of a mushroom hiding beneath the duff.

I did note that fallen spruce trees were nice and

wet, so I changed my mental filter from identifying ground eruptions to spotting color anomalies on the fallen logs. In a short while my scan picked up a small patch of brown against the gray colored bark of the tree and I found some nice fresh Wood Ear mushrooms. The downed Spruce trees here did not contain large numbers of Wood Ear mushrooms, but a fairly high percentage of fallen trees did have a few mushrooms on them and in a short while, I gathered enough to make a fine breakfast meal of sauteed wood ears, scallions and eggs.

Returning to the retreat, I marveled at what a wonderful and awesome place we live. In a single day, I had motorcycled across two mountain passes, traveled through picturesque valleys, enjoyed the changing fall foliage and crisp air, met with good and dedicated people, delighted in a first snowfall and picked enough mushrooms for a delicious meal.

There are many days where my attention is focused on the challenges of work and daily life. But I want to share with you my fellow fungiphiles, the joy and enhancement to life that is the result of the study and pursuit of fungal fruiting bodies. On those days that I can get outdoors to wander about the earth's tectonic plates, I not only stop to smell the roses, but I also pause to pluck a schroom, and that has made all the difference.

HOW MUCH DO YOU LIKE TRUFFLES?

The Rocky Mountain News on November 13, 2002, under a Rome dateline, reported that a giant white truffle collected in northern Italy had been sold at auction for \$34,000 to Donato Poto, director of the Los Angeles restaurant Bastide. The fungus weighed over 2 pounds. Lunch in LA, anyone?

Membership Dues are Due

If you have not paid you CMS dues for 2003, please pay as soon as possible. If you are not sure if you have already paid, check your membership expiration date in the upper right corner of the mailing label of this issue. To renew your membership, send a check for \$20 and a note to:

CMS Membership Chair
P.O. Box 9621
Denver, CO 80209

(Note: New membership is \$23)

If you have any questions as to the accuracy of the expiration date on the label or change of address, please contact:

Linda deLeon
14310 W. Fifth
Golden, CO 80401-5226
ldeleon@attbi.com
303-278-9582

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Erika earned her Bachelor's Degree (B.S.) from the University of Vermont in Burlington, VT in 1995 with a major in Studio Art and minors in both Wildlife Ecology and English. Then she went on to earn a Master's of Forest Science (M.F.S.) in 2000 at Yale's Forestry and Environmental Studies program in New Haven, CT. Her focus was on tropical and temperate non-timber forest products and agroforestry systems.

Erika has traveled and researched all across the United States as well as Australia, South and Central America, and has taught sculpture, 3-D design and ceramics at several Art museums and schools. She also enjoys camping, gardening, permaculture, ethnobotany, ceramics, nutrition, running, skiing, cooking, film and video documentary.

In the future, she would like to explore the role that mushrooms play in tropical agroforestry systems. She is interested in doing a photo-essay on mushroom harvesters and their lives. She would also like to explore other non-timber forest products such as medicinal plants, honey, berries etc.

Colorado Mycological Society New Member Roster — September 2002

Name	Address	Home Phone
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Dyer, Robert, Eva & Alexandra	685 Humboldt St, Denver, CO 80218	303-861-5248
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