

Notes & Records

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Many years ago (Henrici, 1988) I presented a plea entitled ‘What’s wrong with November?’ for the season of organised forays to extend beyond the end of October, as was then rarely the case. I presented a table of dates and average species counts based on 155 foray reports in the *BMS Bulletin* (predecessor of *The Mycologist*) over the years 1969–85. Grouping the dates into 10-day periods, I found that the most prolific recording period was late October. Early November came joint second with mid October. In 2007 I referred back to that article in my Notes and Records column in FMS(1) with a heading ‘What’s wrong with December?’, recording that the peak of the *Hygrocybe* season in south-east England in 2006 had fallen in the first week of December, with *H. calyptiformis* fruiting on Darwin’s lawn at Downe House in Kent in larger numbers than Joyce Pitt had seen there at any time in twenty years of monitoring. I won’t now ask ‘What’s wrong with January?’ as the answer this year was so obviously ‘Everything’. But as well as floods and storms, January 2014 generated some notable finds.

Some interesting January collections

The generally mild weather produced a lot of unseasonable records. For instance Ted Brown found five species of *Agaricus* in Kew Gardens during the month and I even found some St George’s Mushrooms (*Calocybe gambosa*) there on January 11th. They weren’t quite mature enough to sporulate, and a frost that evening probably put paid to them, but at least they tried! Much to my surprise Ted also collected *Amanita gemmata* at two Surrey locations towards the end of January. He already knew it can turn up in winter, and I have since found others who know, but the books don’t. To investigate further I did a quick scan of the collecting months of the 50 British *A. gemmata* already in Kew. There were 3 in January, 4 in December (including Christmas Day) and 16 in November, while the high season for foraging contributed only 4 in September and

13 in October. The picture is thus of a predominantly late autumn to early winter species, though only February, May and June missed out entirely. On hearing this news Ted promptly found another on Feb. 10th. I very much doubt whether any other British *Amanita* would show a similar pattern of occurrence. For further winter-friendly fungi found this January but not mentioned as such in the literature, see the notes in this issue by Graham Mattock on the cupulate form of *Cylindrobasidium laeve* and by Tony Boniface on *Pseudoclitopilus rhodoleucus*.

The unstoppable Ted Brown collected two further taxa in Kew Gardens in January that would be interesting at any time of year. Firstly some very opulent clumps of pure white *Clitocybe odora* on woodchips, going pale brown with age, with no hint of green (Fig.1). This appears to be no more than an albino form, but a rare one. There have been records from Oxfordshire in 1994, W. Sussex in 1997 and Herefordshire in 2001 but there is no previous British material held at Kew. Lange described his Danish type material as a distinct var. *alba*, though not noting any morphological differences. It is strange that it wasn’t reduced to a form by Kuyper (1995) when he treated *Clitocybe* in *Flora Agaricina Neerlandica*. Ecology would suggest that the montane conifer taxon No. 173 included under this name by Breitenbach & Kränzlin (1991) is something different. There are no mountains in Denmark. Later in January Ted found some earthstars under a cedar and I took one home to verify that it was *Geastrum striatum*, already known in winter in Kew in this habitat, but it wasn’t...

Geastrum campestre refound in Kew Gardens

Under a handlens Ted’s *Geastrum* (Fig. 2) showed an ornamented endoperidium (wall of the spore sac). Its spores were too large for *G. striatum*. In a dry, indoor atmosphere, the radiating arms of the largest specimen in Fig. 2 closed right up overnight as I hoped they would. All this made

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Fig. 1. *Clitocybe odora* var. *alba* collected by Ted Brown in a mulched bed in Kew Gardens, 9 Jan. 2014, smelling as sweetly as the type variety. Photograph © Geoffrey Kibby.

it *G. campestre*, a rare species first found in Britain a mere 300 m from Ted's site by Elsie Wakefield, then head of Mycology at Kew. Her record was in July 1926 from the Director's Garden, where there is also a large cedar. It has presumably persisted undetected at one or more sites in Kew from that day to this. Wakefield's find and one from the churchyard at Ickleford, Herts in 1956 were the only two in Britain before the year 2000. Since then material from five other sites has reached Kew, second ones in Surrey and Herts and one each in E. Kent, Wilts and Norfolk.

All but one of these records have been in various sorts of conifer litter. Readers may recall a similar affinity between *G. floriforme* and *Cupressus* commented on by Don McNeil in *Field Mycology* last year (McNeil, 2013). *Geastrum* isn't an ectomycorrhizal genus; this is a phenomenon needing an explanation. The exceptional habitat was that of the E. Kent collection. This was found by Joyce Pitt in 2005 a long way from any trees in sandy coastal soil near Dungeness. DNA sequencing has confirmed its identity.



Fig. 2. *Geastrum campestre*, collected by Ted Brown under a cedar in Kew Gardens, after a lapse of 88 years, 21 Jan. 2014. Photo © Geoffrey Kibby.

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