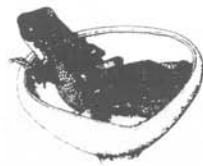


FUNGI IN SCHOOLS

for
CHILDREN
TEACHERS
PARENTS

and other
interested parties



JELLY FUNGI

Jelly fungi wobble when they are wet. They are gelatinous and can absorb water and swell very quickly after rain. In dry weather they become hard and horny, darker in colour and quite difficult to see as they often dry to a thin crust. Start your search for jelly fungi in wet, or at least damp, weather when they are most conspicuous. One of the easiest to find is the Jew's or Judas Ear fungus (*Hirneola auricula-judae*) on the elder (*Sambucus nigra*) where it is a weak parasite and can often be found on the branches especially those that are dying back. It also grows on fallen branches of many other trees including Beech, Ash and Willow. The fruitbodies are shown in Fig B, they are ear-shaped, usually somewhat veined and pink to greyish brown. When wet they are very flabby. If you find hard, dry ones you can easily soak them in water and see what they look like when wet. They can be found throughout the year and each fruitbody lasts for at least a year and perhaps longer. If you find any fruitbodies near your home you can watch them and record how long they last. They seem to escape the attacks of small animals except perhaps millipedes and the occasional slug or snail which may graze on the fruitbody and strip the flesh from the upper surface. In Holland it has been shown that the fungus is not found in areas where the average temperature from December to February is below 1°C which means, very roughly that it is found in the west of the country and not in the east. The fruitbodies are edible but not greatly liked in Britain. In China, however, this species, and others closely related, are a favourite food. They are called Wood Ears and are cultivated on logs of trees to be used later in soups and many other dishes. The name 'Jew's Ear' refers both to the shape of the fruitbody and also the medieval belief that Judas hanged himself from an elder tree.

Tremella mesenterica (Fig E), known as 'Fairy Butter', is a bright golden-yellow and found on fallen branches of many broad-leaved trees in the winter months. It is soft and very folded or contorted and may be 4-7cm across. Another old name for this fungus is 'Star Jelly' as it was thought to be the remains of a meteor shot from the stars. Unfortunately not true. Fig F shows *Tremella foliacea* which grows on stumps and fallen branches of conifers. It has leaf-like lobes brown-cinnamon-pink in colour and can be 6-10cm in size.

If you find a black, disk-shaped or somewhat flattened fungus about 4-7cm across on dead branches often of oak, which instantly reminds you of 'Witches' Butter' you have found *Exidia glandulosa* (Fig C). It is soft to touch but the surface away from the wood is roughened with small warts. There are many stories of an association of this fungus with witches and some of these are given in BMS *Bulletin* 19 (1): 63 (1985). If you have any reason to suspect that you have been witched then a pin thrust into the butter forces the witch to appear and undo her mischief. The fruitbody is not edible — at least for non-witches. *Exidia thuretiana* (Fig D) is very common on fallen branches of broad-leaved trees. It is whitish or opalescent and has no known connection with witches.

The Jelly-hedgehog, *Pseudohydnum gelatinosum* (Fig A) is found on pine stumps or amongst pine debris in autumn. The fruitbody is fan-shaped, 3-5cm across with a small stem-like base at one side, the top is bluish grey speckled with tiny white granules while underneath there are sturdy, pointed gelatinous spines. A very nice fungus to find.

Sheila M. Francis



Fig A. Jelly-hedgehog, *Pseudohydnum gelatinosum*;

(Photo: A Outen)

Fig C. Witches' Butter *Exidia glandulosa*.

(I Munro)

Fig E. Fairy Butter, *Tremella mesenterica*;

(F Boardman)

Fig B. Jew's Ear, *Hirneola auricula-judae*;

(BMS Slide colln.)

Fig D. *Exidia thuretiana*

(J & I Palmer)

Fig F. *Tremella foliacea*

(I Munro)