

PHOTOGRAPHING FUNGI — 1

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Most mycologists 'have a go' at taking photographs of fungi from time to time with varying degrees of success. It is for those whose success is not what they think it ought to be that this short series of articles is written. Equipment and technique, fougstock and lighting, viewpoint and perspective, composition and the problems of low-light photography will receive their attention in turn.

But first it is essential to decide at the outset the **purpose** of the picture. I have already met the following reasons; there may be others:

- 1 To illustrate a scientific paper.
- 2 To form part of a series to use for teaching purposes, perhaps for identification. (This includes books on identification).
- 3 For purely aesthetic purposes.
- 4 As the start of a series to aid one's own recall or to show friends.
- 5 For publication in a 'popular' magazine.
- 6 To use up the last couple of shots on the film!

Given a little thought it is just as easy to take a good, pleasing picture as a poor one. For simplicity I shall initially consider photography of an agaric in the field using a 35mm camera, dealing with the problems as they arise when one is actually taking a photograph. ('Studio photography' will be discussed later).

AIMS

If at all possible the photograph should show:

- 1 The environment
- 2 The cap surface
- 3 The gills
- 4 The flesh
- 5 The stem
- 6 The ring (if present)
- 7 The volva (if present)

In detail the cap surface and stem should clearly show:

- 1 The colour
- 2 The shape
- 3 The texture and surface ornamentation

Expressed like this the list looks formidable if not downright impossible without resort to carving the specimen up. There is absolutely no reason why one should not cut up a specimen to show certain points but if so it should be taken back to the laboratory where the lighting can be controlled and reproduced exactly, time after time, and a very much better job made of the dissection. In many cases the above requirements can be met 'in the field' without uprooting the specimen and in addition the picture can be aesthetically pleasing.

SUITABILITY

Choice of specimen is important; most photographers know that there is a Law which states that as soon as the photograph is complete a better specimen will turn up a couple of yards away! It pays to spend a little time in selecting the best specimen for the purpose. A cap-fungus has an upper and a lower surface and it is not often

possible to see both at the same time. However, searching will often turn up either a specimen with a wavy edge, showing cap surface in one part and underside in another or two adjacent specimens can be found. In this context it is perhaps unnecessary to point out that a second specimen should not be 'planted' by the first one in the case of species of solitary habit! I can see no reason against doing a careful 'transplant' to replace an unsuitable specimen. It **must** be skilfully done if it is to be done at all. The flesh can often be shown by selecting a specimen which has been attacked by a slug or split radially as so many agarics with fibrous cuticles often do when rain follows a dry spell.

VIEWPOINT

Having found your specimen it is helpful to remove anything in the background which will be distracting and to choose a position which will show what you want to show of the specimen(s) and also to show the environment as well as possible. There is a limited number of agarics and larger fungi which can be reliably identified in the field so the final act will be to collect the specimen for laboratory examination. Meanwhile a tentative diagnosis must be made and a conscious effort made to show the key features of the specimen(s): scales on the cap or ornamentation at the apex of the stem, colour ranges on bruising, colour of the inside of the volva are just a few which are worth a little extra effort.

The light can be manipulated to show all these features and will be discussed in the next issue.

