

# Nature's jottings

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Newsletter of the Natural History Society of Jamaica

Nov. 04

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## Upcoming Event

Fieldtrip to Bellevue (The UWI's House) & Environs

**Date:** Saturday, November 20, 2004 (*Reservations not later than November 18.*)

**Cost:** \$750.00 per person. Children - \$400.00

**Transport:** individual (pooling)

**Meeting at:** Scientific Research Council, Hope Gardens not later than 9:00 a.m.

**What to take along:** solid shoes, snacks and beverages for the walk. A light raincape just in case, cameras, binoculars.

**What can be seen:** There are several options for walks within the vicinity, like Mount Rosanna Trail, Flamstead and environs, Gallow Way, etc.

**Contact:** Herman Tobisch by Tel. 702-2888, Fax 970-4199, E-mail [catja@jamweb.net](mailto:catja@jamweb.net).

## MEMBERSHIP – Are you a paid up member?

If you wish to continue to receive our email notices then make sure your dues are paidup!

### MEMBERSHIP FEES:

Individual - \$500.00, Family - \$750.00, Student - \$300.00, Pensioner - \$300.00, Life Member (10 x annual individual fee)

### HOW TO PAY

Kindly make cheques payable to: Natural History Society of Jamaica

Mail to Natural History Society of Jamaica, c/o Department of Life Sciences, The University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston

OR

Deliver membership fees in a clearly marked envelope to the Department of Life Sciences. Membership fees can also be paid at any of the NHSJ activities. The Treasurer is Lisa Gordon. Please pay all fees as soon as possible and avoid discontinuation of emails. Thank you.

## PROPOSED NHSJ TRIP TO SANTO DOMINGO, THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Dr. George Proctor has suggested that the NHSJ visit the Natural History Society of the Dominican Republic, the capital of which, Santo Domingo is very interesting for a naturalist. He mentions that there is a renowned Natural History museum, a Zoo that is one of the largest in the West Indies, and a beautiful Botanical Gardens, with many exotic and native species.

In addition, the old town is a tourist treasure with the city's cathedral dating from the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Columbus' son palace, which now houses a museum, and many other Spanish colonial buildings of archaeological interest. Dr. Proctor is willing to act as a guide, since he knows the city and has had a cordial relationship with the Natural History Society there.

At the most recent executive committee meeting of the NHSJ, Feb, 2005 was suggested as an ideal time, which would allow for the sufficient planning for a smooth visit.

Members are being asked to contact Cecily Tobisch, who has agreed to coordinate the trip, at 702-2888, or members of the executive committee, with indications if they are interested in going on the trip, and how long should the visit be. For the best group rates, a good sized group and a unified travel plan would be ideal.

### *Your Gattings*

MUSHROOM NOTES, JUNE, 2004

BY TREVOR YEE

In the months before the rainy season in May, 2004, I received and observed a number of interesting mushrooms. Among these were a group of Stinkhorns, a species of the genus *Phallus*, (Phallaceae), on the University campus, and which prompted me to start a herbarium-type collection of mushrooms. Anthony Trout of CARDI pointed them out and mentioned that he saw others with a webbing under the cap, in the forests near Brown's Town, St. Ann. This would very likely be the netted stinkhorn *Dictyophora duplicata* (Phallaceae). On a subsequent visit to Brown's Town, he found an unusually large puffball. This was one of an inedible or poisonous group, and was nidentifiable as *Scleroderma polyrhizum* (Scleradermataceae)

Then, on one of his bird sighting trips, John Fletcher found a greyish brown Agaric growing on some coffee pulp. This I think was a species of the Straw mushrooms, *Pluteus sp.*, (Pluteaceae), which have been reported by other sources to be growing locally on other substrates such as banana pseudostems. As far as I know all of the species of the straw mushrooms are edible and are considered choice. One of members of this family is commercially propagated and sold as the Chinese straw mushroom, *Volvariella volvacea* (Pluteaceae) There is another species of *Volvariella*, the tree *Volvariella*, *V. bombycina*, that I have been trying to find and which is a striking yellow.

This group of mushrooms have an egg-like sac from which they emerge. The genus *Volvariella* has what is known as a universal veil that may leave a ring on the stem, *Pluteus* generally does not, and both have the distinctive spore prints of pink or salmon coloured spores. One has to be careful, in harvesting *Volvariella*, especially when young, since the deadly *Amanitas* (Amanitaceae), also have an egg-like sac and a ring on their stems, resulting from a universal veil.

Dr. Lloyd Gordon, a former NHSJ executive also brought a large fleshy white polypore that he found on a tree stump at Mafoota, near Montpelier, St. James. This turned to be a beautiful specimen of *Polyporus tenuiculus*, (Polyporaceae), also observed on the Society's trip to the Cambridge Backlands. It has an uncertain edibility.

On the Society's trip to Hayfield and Bowden Pen in early May, two large groups of the small, edible, white *Coprinus disseminatus* (Coprinaceae) were seen and Kai Meng Lui took beautiful photographs of them. These mushrooms occur in large numbers and start out with crystalline white, smooth caps which darken to a grayish brown and become ribbed with age. Also observed were two species of *Polyporus*, *P. tenuiculus* growing amongst the *C. disseminatus* and another species with a cap about 5cm. in diameter and brown on top. Both species of *Polyporus* had a diamond-pattern of pores similar to the appearance of expanded metal. The second species may have been, *P. floccipes*.

Later in May, after returning with Dr. Proctor and Keith Wong from a visit to a woodland in Stony Hill, a large group of the Shaggy Manes or Inky Cap, *Coprinus comatus* (Coprinaceae), was observed on one of the lawns in Keith's apartment complex. This mushroom is considered choice edible and lived up to its designation, having a texture similar to that of the straw mushrooms. Although choice, this mushroom has

to be eaten when young as the gills becomes an unsightly black inky mass soon after emerging from the soil and the taking of a spore print can be difficult as a result. This is a feature of the *Coprinus* genus. An exception to this dissolving into an inky mass is *C. disseminatus*.

In a previous mushroom notes, I had reported that considerable research has been conducted on various mushrooms, some of which are choice edible ones, validating various medicinal claims. The common button mushroom, *Agaricus campestris* (Agaricaceae) has been demonstrated to be anti-diabetic, the wood ears, *Auricularia polythrica* (Auriculariaceae), to be effective against cholesterolaemia, the Shitake mushroom, *Lentinus edoides* (Thicolomataceae) against tumors and the Chinese have been using species of the bracket mushroom, *Ganoderma lucidum* (Ganodermataceae), which has the common names of Ling Chih and Reishi, in the treatment of various forms of cancer.

I have recently been reading several articles on additional research that has or is being done on the above and a number of other mushrooms..

One of the mushrooms being investigated is the inedible bracket mushroom *Trametes versicolor*, syn. *Coriolus versicolor* (Polyporaceae), with the common name, the Turkey tail. This mushroom has been reported to have anti-cancerous properties.

In the April and June issues of the magazines Nutraceutical World, and Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals, respectively, there are several articles on research into validating the claims of several mushrooms. The Nutraceuticals World issue has as its lead article, "Medicinal Mushrooms". This article mentions in addition to the mushrooms mentioned above, claims for two other edible mushrooms, the Hen of the Woods or maitake, *Grifolia frondosa* (Polyporaceae), and the oyster mushroom, *Pleurotus ostreatus* (Tricholomataceae)

In the article it is also claimed that some polysaccharides contained in most mushrooms have "immune modulating" properties that fortify the body's immune system against a range of pathogens, such as bacteria and viruses, and are helpful against such diseases as cancer, liver diseases, diabetes, and hepatitis. The oyster mushroom is reported to contain a natural isomer of Lovastatin, which is an FDA approved drug for the lowering of cholesterol.

The *Agaricus* genus is also reported to contain aromatase inhibitors, which are reported to cause a reduction in the growth of tumors, and breast cancer in particular.

In the Functional Foods and Nutraceutical issue, it is reported that a mushroom extract containing the Hen of the Woods, marketed in North America by the Tradeworks Group, under the trade name MaitakeGold 404, has been given FDA approval for testing in human clinical trials for its effect against breast cancer, in Vermont. The article has a good photo of the mushroom. *Grifolia frondosa* has such a distinctive appearance that it should not be confused with any other mushroom..

Except for intermittent rains, the weather has been fairly dry in Kingston and surrounding areas. Hopefully, the hurricane season and the October rainy season will bring more rain.

## NATURAL HISTORY NEWS

### *HONORARY DOCTORATE*

*Dr. George Proctor will receive one of the honorary Doctorates (D. Sc) in the next UWI graduation exercises.*

*Congratulations and so well deserved! May he continue to add to the knowledge of Jamaica's Botany for many years to come.*



### NHSJ/IOJ BENEFIT FROM EFJ FUNDS

1. The NHSJ and the IOJ (Institute of Jamaica) received funding for two joint proposals for the EFJ (Environmental Foundation of Jamaica): Jamaica Popular Folklore and Natural History Video Series \$2,776,177.00 which will run for 8 months and Endemic Trees of Jamaica \$3,638,253.74 which will run for 24 months. The NHSJ will have a Project Administrator who will ensure that all objectives are met for

the life of each project. The administrator will also engage in other administrative activities, which will benefit the society. The society will also acquire a computer as part of the projects.

2. A proposal titled Identification and Photographic Documentation of Dragonflies and damselflies of Jamaica has been submitted to the EFJ for funding.

### *NEW DIRECTOR FOR NEST*

Effective June 7, 2004 Mr. Devon Blake became the new Executive Director of the National Environmental Societies Trust. Mr. Blake comes with years of experience in the environment/development sector. His combination of skills and training should serve all Jamaica's environmental societies well and so we look forward to a productive experience with Mr. Blake in the position as ED.

### **BOOK LAUNCH**

The launching of the book "Flowers of Jamaica" by Monica Warner will take place at the Institute of Jamaica, Discovery Room, Wednesday, November 24, 2004 at 12:30 pm. The books will be on sale and light refreshments will be served. For details please contact Tracey Commock at [nhd@instituteofjamaica.org.jm](mailto:nhd@instituteofjamaica.org.jm)

*Prepared by Jill Byles & Audette J. A. Bailey*