

Wet Winter is Perfect for Mushrooms

Who ordered an Indian Summer day for the first week of January? Whoever it was, thanks! Wasn't last Friday just one of the most wonderful days you've ever spent in mid-winter!

And wonders of wonders, someone found the water spigot and turned the tap back on again. We've had almost 5 inches of rain at the Biology Station since December 20th and the ground is sopping wet in places. Many of the depressions, even those in the sand, have standing water in them—bodes well for spring wildflowers, doesn't it?

A quick walkabout—ok, so it turned into a 2 hour hike—turned up 11 species of butterflies, including one late Lyside Sulphur (not bad for the 5th of January!), and 4 species of Odes by the pond, including many Plateau Spreadwing damsels, *Lestes alacer*. I also found large numbers of the teeny tiny basal rosettes of the carnivorous Annual Sundews, making it a lot different from last year.

But the most obvious beneficiary of the unseasonably warm weather and the rain are mosses, lichens and mushrooms. A week ago Monday I was actually stopped dead in my tracks by the bright green moss and lichens on the hackberry trunk beside the drive while on my way to the mailbox. They're always there but in a sub-



*Small Red Waxy Cap mushrooms, *Hygrophorus miniata*, are considered edible but are quite small so they often escape notice despite their bright orange-red color.*

dued, background kind of way. A hike through the woods at this time of year will offer up a num-

ber of mushrooms, lichens and other normally non-descript parts of our landscape brought out front and center. Lichens are common right now and their shades of green, gray, white and orange make them obvious and quite attractive. Mosses are at their peak, too—bright green, bushy and worth stopping to take a gander at.

The resurrection ferns are fully expanded, and together with the mosses are making the oaks look uncharacteristically green for mid-winter. Just about any fallen log or old snag is as colorful as they can be, even if the only color on the polypores (shelf fungus) is the green of algae.

Look under some of the larger pines and you may find some diminutive, bright orange-red, mushrooms—the small red Waxy Cap mushroom, *Hygrophorus miniata*, a late winter/early spring specialty. They're certainly photogenic.

Needless to say, anytime it's not too cold or too hot, and there's abundant moisture, is just about perfect for mushroom hunting. If you're so inclined I suggest you get copies of "Texas Mushrooms" by Susan & Van Metzler or "Edible Wild Mushrooms of North America" by David Fisher and Alan Bessette (both from UT Press).

I'm not partial to mushrooms so you can have mine, ok? Happy hunting—and be careful out there!