FRIENDS of Sax-ZimBog

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY

—from Head Naturalist Clinton

Shelf Fungi

POST #56—January 12, 2023

Deep into the winter, you might not expect to find much mushroom diversity. Most of the time, the best mushroom weather is warm, damp, and typically above freezing. However, there are still plenty of fungi to be found! One group of fungi that is easiest to find during the winter are the hardy shelf fungi. Today, let's take a closer look at this diverse group of fungi.

Shelf fungi is a general name for a group of mushrooms called polypores. These mushrooms usually don't have gills, but rather teeth or pores. Most of the time, these species look very much like an extension of their host tree or shrub and not like a typical mushroom. Shelf fungi are most often found on dead and decaying wood, though can be indicators of heart rot on live trees. This group of fungi is dependent on trees and in some cases very old trees.

Mushrooms are a popular foraging food, but this is not a recent phenomenon! Fungi of all kinds have been used for food and medicine for thousands of years across the world, especially by

Indigenous communities. There is also an artistic use for fungi, as many species can be used to make natural dyes (like Dyer's Polypore!).

If we think about greater biodiversity, fungi are an important part of biological communities. Fungi are important decomposers, helping to break down dead wood into more biologically useful components. There are a number of species who rely on fungi as part of their life cycle! Forked Fungus Beetles, Handsome Fungus Beetles, and other species of beetle spend their lives on/in fungi. Woodpeckers frequently place their nests below or near shelf fungi as the wood is softer than surrounding sections of a tree trunk. When we think about leaving dead trees for woodpeckers, we also should be considering shelf fungi!

Below are just a few examples of shelf fungi that have been found in the Sax-Zim Bog. The fungi list in our area is ever growing and as of today we have documented 165 species! We are currently working on planning a mushroom workshop for this coming fall, so stay tuned if you are interested in learning more about the wonderful world of mushrooms!

More information about these selected shelf fungi included in the photos below!

(Photos by Head Naturalist Clinton)

Aspen Bracket doesn't look much like a mushroom at all! This species is fairly common on aspens and have several similar species of fungi. This is species does not have gills, but lots of tiny pores on the underside of the mushroom.

Northern Red-Belt is a super cool mushroom that grows on spruces. This is a mushroom that in our area especially likes to grow on Black Spruce. Tree ID can be important when trying to ID some species of shelf fungi.

A beautiful, velvety species, Resinous Polypore looks similar to Northern Red-Belt, but likes to grow on deciduous trees. Though most shelf fungi aren't terribly palatable, Resinous Polypore is a desired edible at the right time of year.

While all of the shelf fungi so far have had pores, the next two species have teeth! Now, mushroom teeth are just oddly shaped pores (not like our teeth!). This is Birch Polypore. It's fruiting bodies can sometimes emerge during the winter, as these were found freshly emerged in January.

Not all shelf fungi look the same! This is Milk-white Toothed Polypore growing on Speckled Alder. This species looks almost like damage to the shrub and not like a mushroom, but has very distinct teeth.