

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Red Tree Brain fungus

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The ground is beginning to thaw which means fungi are soon to appear. The Sax-Zim Bog has a wide range of fungi, including highly specialized fungi, common generalized fungi, and even fungi that looks less like fungi and more like goop! One of the more common (and bizarre) species of fungi that you might see along most trails in the Sax-Zim Bog is our featured species of the day: Red Tree Brain fungus!

Red Tree Brain fungus, as noted above, is quite common in the Sax-Zim Bog. This species utilizes aspen and poplar and can be found nearly all year round, given the right conditions. Red Tree Brain fungus is well named, as it is often reddish and definitely looks like patches of dozens of tiny brains. As a saprophytic species, this fungus survives by decomposing dead wood. Though this fungus looks squishy, it is rather hard.

Fungi play an incredibly important role in an ecosystem, even those fungi that appear to be goopy or brain-like. Much of the individual fungus is never seen as it exists as mycelium. Mycelium

are the often whitish, root like structures that are found on or within the chosen substrate. The "fungus" that folks see are the reproductive structures of the fungi that exist to release spores and make more fungi! In the case of Red Tree Brain, the brain-like structure is what releases spores. As the fungus ages, it gets darker, almost purple in color and then is ready to release spores.

As noted above, Red Tree Brain fungus can be found almost year round. This fungus has been reported in 7 of 12 months on iNaturalist in our area, including all the "cold" months. Often, fungi need specific growth conditions, whether it is a particular moisture levels, warm temperatures, or sunlight levels. For many winter appearing fungi, temperature is important. Jelly fungus (like Witches Butter) fruiting bodies will often appear during warm spans during January or February, as will Red Tree Brain fungus.

If you are interested in digging in to the depths of fungi ID, including odd species like Red Tree Brain, we are excited to be offering a Fungi Workshop this fall! There are only a few spots remaining on this workshop so register soon if you are interested. You can find more information, including registration information, here: <https://saxzim.org/events/>.

More information about Red Tree Brain fungus can be found in the photos below!

(Photos by Head Naturalist Clinton)



A close up view of Red Tree Brain! This is a variable species, with colors ranging from orangish to reddish to purplish!



If you are surprised to find newly emerged fungi during the winter... don't be! It is not uncommon to find Red Tree Brain fungus during the winter months, as long as it is warm.



As it matures, Red Train Brain fungus turns purplish often getting a white cast to it. At this stage, the fungus is ready to release spores.