# Blue Ridge Mycelium

Edition 4; Spring 2026

# The Spore Drop

**A Letter from the President**

Dear Mush Family,

I'm so happy to be writing another *Spore Drop* for our freshly released edition of the *Blue Ridge Mycelium*!

We have had an action-packed winter, and we're only getting started with 2026. If you're wondering how we've managed this recent surge in events… you only have yourselves to thank! For years, this club ran on minimal resources, so programming was limited. But since organizing, forming a board, and collecting dues, we've been able to turn those resources into meaningful learning opportunities.

For example, one exciting new offering is our upcoming **Field 2 Lab 1.0** workshop. Denise Williams has graciously stepped up to lead our first-ever microscope class. This idea was inspired by our sister club in West Virginia, who pioneered the Field 2 Lab concept. This year, they're offering a more advanced "2.0" version, while we're starting with a more accessible introduction. Our hope is to provide complementary opportunities for people across all skill levels in our region.

If you're looking to expand your fungal observation skills but can't attend Field 2 Lab, consider participating in our **Virginia iNaturalist Challenge**. Alisha Millican from Fungal Diversity Survey (FUNDIS) has organized an iNaturalist competition focused on documenting species from the Southeast Rare Fungi List. She has put an incredible amount of effort into this project, so we wanted to contribute by offering some fun incentives.

The top two participants—those who document the most species from the list—will receive a one-year BRMS membership. In addition, the first-place winner will receive a physical copy of *The Claudius Project*, a highly sought-after publication on toxic mushrooms of Virginia. We hope this helps encourage participation in this important effort. Be sure to check out Alisha's detailed write-up below.

Now for something completely different, but equally exciting: we're launching a new t-shirt campaign! While our original logo will remain, we're introducing a new piece of artwork created by Chris Adams of Sporelust for what I'm calling the **"Hop on the BRMS Bus"** campaign.


*The new BRMS Bus artwork is now available on t-shirts. Artwork by Chris Adams.*

*Your BRMS Bus driver, President Pat Mitchell, posing on a log. We have been assured that that is a look of concentration, not concern. It is always safe to taste a mushroom, and it is always safe to hop on the BRMS bus. Photo credit: Pat Mitchell.*

This idea started years ago with our treasurer John Dent and was brought to life by Chris, who took the concept and ran with it. He even had me pose on a log to inspire the design. Seeing myself as an "old man of the woods" mushroom driving a "mush-bus" and gathering new members brings a tear of fungal exudate to my eye.

I'm deeply grateful to Chris, as well as Jenny Walker, the artist behind our original logo, for helping shape how our club presents itself. To showcase their work, and hopefully more from our community, we've launched a new section on the website called the **Artist's Corner**. It's still experimental, but the goal is to create a space where members can share and promote their art. If you would like your mushroom art to be featured, please follow this link.

Finally, I want to take a moment to thank the incredible team that keeps this club running: Harry, our Vice President; John, our Treasurer; Lina, our Secretary; and Mahi, our Volunteer Coordinator. Thank you also to Isaac for the time and care you put into creating this newsletter as a gift to our community. And to everyone who has volunteered, formally or informally: I see you, and I appreciate you.

As our mycological family has grown over the past two years, so has our programming. With this new season of growth, I'll be asking for more help in the form of volunteers and leadership. If you feel ready to step into a role or take on more responsibility with BRMS, please don't hesitate to reach out.

And as you read through this wonderful publication, consider how you might contribute to the next edition, especially if you have idea for content. You are what makes this a club, as opposed to some weird, red-bearded guy wandering around in the woods.

Let's go find some cool stuff together!
Pat Mitchell

# Looking Down

**A Fungal Survey of a Forest in Virginia**

by Isaac Hopkins

With the bare December trees of William & Mary's College Woods around him, something caught Alexander Raffetto's attention on the forest floor. He wasn't sure exactly what he was looking at.

"It's just a yellow stalk and then a black bulb on top, and that's pretty much it. It's a very unassuming looking fungus. It doesn't have gills. It doesn't have anything like that. It just peaks through the leaf litter, and it grows in December, so you probably won't find much else around."

He would try to identify it later; for now, he collected the sample and moved on. He was conducting a survey of macroscopic fruiting fungi in the area as part of his undergraduate studies at William & Mary, and the goal was to cover as much territory as possible in order to get a representative sample.

*Alexander Raffetto at Southeastern Population Ecology and Evolutionary Genetics Conference 2024. Photo credit: Alexander Raffetto.*

Raffetto wasn't a mycologist. He was studying biology with Joshua Puzey, a Plant ecologist, and mushrooms had not been on his radar.

"[Dr. Puzey] basically came to me with this idea. He said, 'well, what about doing a survey of fungi in The [College] Woods?'," he remembers. "The Woods had been surveyed for plants, but nothing had ever been done for fungi."

He decided the project would be a great idea, but he would need to work out the best way to do it. "I think that's the one thing that people don't really tell you about doing science: there's a lot of troubleshooting in the beginning and figuring out methods. We went through six iterations of developing the plan."

Raffetto's efforts bore a fruiting body: their findings were recently published in Northeastern Naturalist (Raffetto and Puzey 2025[1]), an impressive achievement for a brand new student of mycology doing undergraduate research.

[1] Raffetto, Alexander & Puzey, Joshua. (2025). A Study of Macrofungal Diversity in Williamsburg, Virginia. Northeastern Naturalist. 32. 10.1656/045.032.0309.

*Alexander Raffetto poses with a pair of gorgeous Amanita jacksonii, a Caesar-like Amanita mushroom known as a choice edible. Photo credit: Alexander Raffetto.*

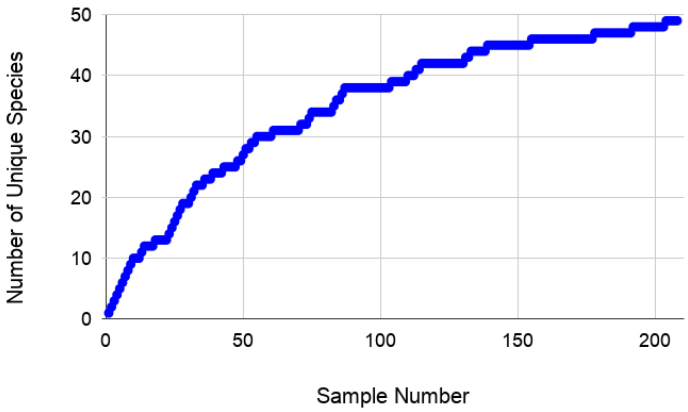
Their methods included a series of surveys of the 900-acre College Woods, which took place over an entire year, with sample collection and identification of species. The College Woods is a frequent subject of ecology research, and it turned out to be an excellent candidate for mycology.

"The understory is completely clear, which makes it super easy to find fungi. And there's just tons of them because the conditions are right: it's a tidal flood plain, so that whole area gets a lot of water and it creates so much fungal growth!"

Raffetto has the numbers to back up that claim: they identified 212 distinct species from 124 genera. This was in spite of unusually dry conditions during the typical peak fruiting window in the summer of 2024.

In addition to the basic collection of species information, their procedure allowed them to create a species accumulation curve. As specimens are found, they were classified as either a new species or one that the team had already found. Plotting the specimen number against the total number of species identified produces a curve that can give an indication of the biodiversity of an area: the steeper the curve, and the later it tapers off, the more diverse an ecosystem is. In addition, this curve can allow researchers to guess whether they've found the majority of the species present in an area, and even to provide a cautious estimate of the total number of species.

The species accumulation curve in this study suggests that they found most, but not all, of the fruiting species that were present in the College Woods. Tools like this are relatively simple and easy to understand, but can reveal a lot of hidden information, making them excellent for basic biodiversity surveys.




*An example of a species accumulation curve, created from simulated data. There were 71 species present in this simulation. The fact that the curve had not plateaued reflects the fact that not all species had yet been found. Image credit: Isaac Hopkins*

Raffetto is open about the limitations of this survey study. For example, this was only a count of macroscopic fruiting fungi, and there may have been bias based on

how easy a mushroom is to spot, when and where it fruits, and under what conditions. The true number of fungal species is much higher. "If we were to look at all fungi, the number would skyrocket. We were just looking at a tiny little subset."

However, the goal of the study was to establish a baseline: a point of comparison for more comprehensive surveys of fungal biodiversity, both in the College Woods and elsewhere. And in that respect, this research was an inspirational success.

"The important thing is that you're doing good science," Raffetto mentions. "The way to do that is reproducibility and transparency. You can make really any decision. As long as you are clear about what you did, then people can come along and say, 'oh, you didn't do a good job.' And that's fine, because you were transparent about it."

*Mycena sp. Photo credit: Alexander Raffetto*

Mycology is at an interesting stage as a scientific discipline. Because of its breadth and diversity and its relative obscurity, it is far more accessible to amateur researchers, citizen scientists, and new students than most fields. Mushroom clubs are positioned to be drivers of scientific progress, with the added benefit of being immediately positioned to communicate findings with the public. We *are* the public, after all.

Raffetto wants people to learn from the methodological trial and error that they went through. He encourages others to do similar surveys and recommends taking lots of good-quality field photos (with a ruler for scale), collecting specimens when you find them, and repeating the surveys across seasons and even years. If he had more resources, he would have compared on-trail against off-trail biodiversity, used deer exclosure to measure the impact of deer pressure on mushroom fruiting patterns, and performed extensive DNA sequencing as verification and a tool to capture more diversity than the surveys alone can detect.

The Schuyler Quarry Gardens would be an unusually well-suited candidate for a survey of this kind, with this paper as an inspiration and methodological starting point. The Blue Ridge Mycological Society has access to an area with many microhabitats that have demonstrated great fungal productivity; lots of humanpower to perform surveys; the resources, connections, and experience to identify finds; and potentially the access to deer exclosure or DNA sequencing.

"You don't really need a ton of experience to actually do the collecting," Raffetto noted. "This is the point: to get people excited about mushrooms. To get more [mushrooms] in the future."

And how about that weird winter mushroom that Raffetto collected? It turned out to be his favorite specimen from the project. "The Drumstick Truffleclub. It's a truffle parasite: it basically eats truffles, which are, of course, another fungus that relies on trees. When you find the Drumstick Truffleclub, you know that there are truffles underneath."


A *specimen of the Drumstick Truffleclub*, Cordyceps capitata, *is a parasite of deer truffles. Photo credit: Alexander Raffetto.*

Sometimes important things aren't truly hidden; they just escape our notice. When asked about the ongoing rivalry between birders and mycologists, Raffetto was diplomatic: "I appreciate their passion for birds, [but] bird people never look down. Why would they? But then they miss out on a lot of cool stuff."

As you head out into the woods, don't forget the value of looking down.

# The Claudius Project

by Pat Mitchell

I first began my obsession with mycology in 2012. I went through the typical stages one goes through: morel crazed, is it "eatable," can it heal me, etc. One stop along my journey has stayed with me through the years, and that is toxicology. While I am no expert, I have enjoyed perusing the incredible collection of toxicology reports put together by Dr. Michael Beugh. The knowledge in these reports, and some of the other documents that are tied to them on the North American Mycological Association (NAMA) website, have been helpful for me in recent years as I started my own NAMA-affiliated club here in Virginia: the Blue Ridge Mycological Society. This is why I was both intrigued and intimidated when Alfred Goossens reached out to me in September of 2023, requesting my help with a publication on toxic mushrooms of Virginia that he called *The Claudius Project*.

Alfred represented the Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN), and they had worked with the Division of Medical Toxicology at the University of Virginia School of Medicine to produce two previous works. You can find both of those publications for free on the VMN website: The Socrates Project - Poisonous Plants in Virginia and The Cleopatra Project - Poisonous and Venomous Animals in Virginia. The decision was then made to seek support from Virginia-based mycophiles for the next installment of the series: The Claudius Project - Poisonous Mushrooms in Virginia.


In my first meeting with Alfred, the project director of all three publications, he explained that this was to be written for "the man on the street," and therefore more digestible for laypeople. Physical copies of *Claudius* would be distributed to emergency rooms, nursing schools, school nurses, and Virginia-based naturalist groups, while digital copies would remain free and accessible on the VMN website. The main purposes of the publication were to protect public health, encourage mycological education, and motivate readers to access the outdoors.

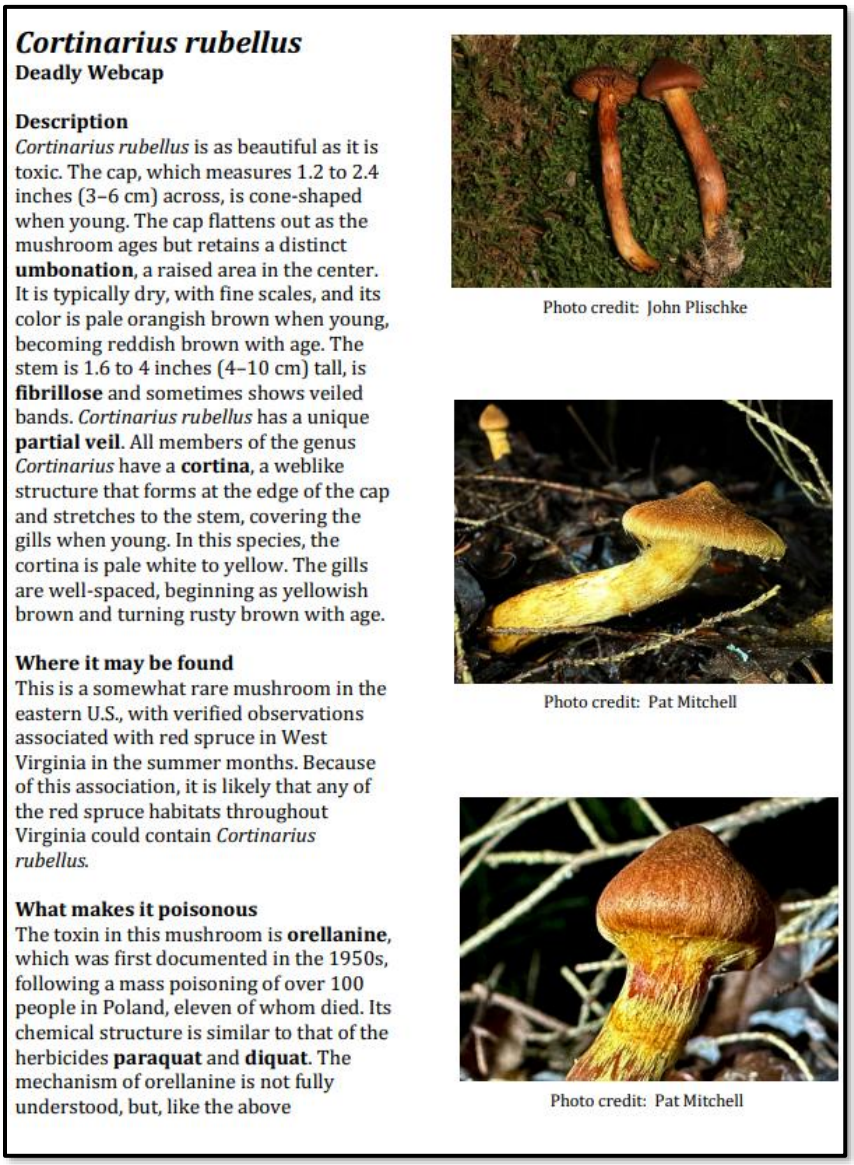
*Watercolor art by Trish Crowe.*

The first big task was to decide which mushrooms to include. For this, we started with an extensive list of known toxic mushrooms within our region. Mushroom Observer and iNaturalist significantly helped with this endeavor. We decided that a credible observation from within Virginia or a bordering state would warrant inclusion. For example, *Cortinarius rubellus* was considered and eventually included, even though it has not been formally documented in our state. Because it has been found in West Virginia and other Appalachian states growing among red spruce, it's a safe bet that it may one day be found in our own red spruce habitats. This mushroom contains orellanine, making it the only known species in our region to contain that toxin, so it was worth a mention. Some mushrooms were excluded because they were unlikely to be ingested, often due to their size or rarity.

Eventually, we worked our way down to 33 individual species, 3 species groups, 3 genera, and 1 family. One of the immediate concerns was taxonomy. Our project spanned 2 years, so it was likely that we would encounter several taxonomic changes during our process. *Amanita chrysoblema*, *Conocybula smithii*, and the *Clitocybe* reorder were the biggest hurdles. We aimed to stay as taxonomically accurate as possible while also being aware that some new changes may produce confusion. It was certainly a challenge.

*The Claudius Project* included seven main toxins or toxin groups: amatoxins, coprine, gyromitrins, ibotanic acid and muscimol, muscarine, orellanine, psilocybin and psilocin; and an additional catch-all group for other, less common, toxins. For this part of the publication we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Chris Holstege, MD, and his team at UVA, who were responsible for the toxin profiles for each mushroom.

The contents of *Claudius* were collectively written by me and 12 other authors: Lee Borg, Adam Boring, Bill Bynum, John Dent, Don Hearl, Kevin Howe, Harry Puffenberger, Rebecca Rader, David Saylor, and Janet Walker. We split up the sections and mushrooms of the publication. Each of us followed a standardized format and submitted our work to our editor, Margaret Clifton, who shaped it into one cohesive piece. A strong team of peer reviewers (Michael Beug, PhD; Britt Bunyard, PhD; Penelope L. Firth, PhD; Heather Hallen-Adams, PhD; Christopher P. Holstege, MD; and Michelle P. Prysby, MS) were then put to the task of reviewing the work.



***Cortinarius rubellus***
**Deadly Webcap**

**Description**
*Cortinarius rubellus* is as beautiful as it is toxic. The cap, which measures 1.2 to 2.4 inches (3–6 cm) across, is cone-shaped when young. The cap flattens out as the mushroom ages but retains a distinct **umbonation**, a raised area in the center. It is typically dry, with fine scales, and its color is pale orangish brown when young, becoming reddish brown with age. The stem is 1.6 to 4 inches (4–10 cm) tall, is **fibrillose** and sometimes shows veiled bands. *Cortinarius rubellus* has a unique **partial veil**. All members of the genus *Cortinarius* have a **cortina**, a weblike structure that forms at the edge of the cap and stretches to the stem, covering the gills when young. In this species, the cortina is pale white to yellow. The gills are well-spaced, beginning as yellowish brown and turning rusty brown with age.

**Where it may be found**
This is a somewhat rare mushroom in the eastern U.S., with verified observations associated with red spruce in West Virginia in the summer months. Because of this association, it is likely that any of the red spruce habitats throughout Virginia could contain *Cortinarius rubellus*.

**What makes it poisonous**
The toxin in this mushroom is **orellanine**, which was first documented in the 1950s, following a mass poisoning of over 100 people in Poland, eleven of whom died. Its chemical structure is similar to that of the herbicides **paraquat** and **diquat**. The mechanism of orellanine is not fully understood, but, like the above

Photo credit: John Plischke

Photo credit: Pat Mitchell

Photo credit: Pat Mitchell

*An example of a profile of a poisonous mushroom in* The Claudius Project: Cortinarius rubellus. *Image courtesy of Virginia Master Naturalists.*

Having never been a part of a publication like this, I entered into the process feeling very intimidated. However, once we started, it was fun to see how many people were working toward a common goal. I am very proud of our team.

One surprise happened shortly before we were ready to go to print. *Cortinarius rubellus* was one of the mushrooms that I personally wrote about, so the orellanine-containing group of *Cortinarius* was especially fresh in my mind. While we were on a club mushroom foray, BRMS and NAMA member Michelle Kisliuk brought a peculiar mushroom to my attention. At first glance I thought, "Well, it's a cort –" but then I noticed that it looked similar to the *Cortinarius* from my writeup, but it was growing with the wrong trees. I took a picture for iNaturalist and later that day the mushroom was discarded.

*Mystery mushrooms found by Michelle Kisliuk at a* BRMS *club foray, later identified as* Cortinarius orellanosus. *Photo credit: Pat Mitchell.*

Shortly after it was uploaded to iNat, someone identified it as *Cortinarius* section *orellanii*, and most likely *Cortinarius orellanosus*. I was right! But now I was also aware that I had committed one of the great myco sins: throwing away a rare specimen that should have been vouchered. I spent the next two days in sorrow.

Then, while out picking some chanterelles near my house, I came upon two beautiful, fresh, and deadly specimens! I documented, preserved, and sent them to Stephen Russel with Mycota Lab for sequencing. I asked him to expedite the results, because if this was *Cortinarius orellanosus* it would be a first for our region and could be added to the publication. I had now committed another great myco sin: the sin of "Rushing the Sequencer." Stephen pulled through, which verified this species' presence in our state. The specimen has been vouchered and is being sent to the Chicago Field Museum. At that point,


*Photos taken by Pat Mitchell near his house, later confirmed to be of* Cortinarius orellanosus.

*The Claudius Project* had already been written, edited, and peer reviewed. The progress was placed on hold while we awaited Stephen's results. After that, I got to write the very last entry for the project, and it was my favorite.

Participating in this project was challenging and humbling, but most of all rewarding. I got a sneak peak into the world of publishing, picked up some extremely useful toxicology information, and gained a new micro myco community. True to Alfred's original timeline, we had published and printed by December of 2025, the very month that he had planned. The timing was bittersweet because he passed away just one month later. Alfred was 86. He had told me that he was determined to finish the project and that *Claudius* would be his final work. I am deeply honored to be associated with a legacy like that.

Moving forward, we have launched a "Speakers Bureau," which consists of a portion of the *Claudius* authors and one of the peer reviewers. Over the course of the next year, we plan to engage the public by delivering presentations related to our publication. This is the fun part: taking it into the wild! With the recent amatoxin poisonings in the news, now is the perfect time to offer free and easily digestible information that could one day save a life.

# Southeast Rare Fungi Challenge

**Virginia Winner to Receive Free BRMS Membership**

Got your eyes peeled for rare fungi? Here's some excellent news: BRMS is giving away a free one-year membership to the mycophile who documents the most target fungi in Virginia, as part of the Southeast Rare Fungi Challenge.

The Fungal Diversity Survey (FUNDIS) has put together a list of rarely observed and under-recorded fungal species across the Southeast, and they need YOUR help tracking them down. Every photo you submit through iNaturalist helps scientists better understand where these elusive species are hiding, how they're distributed, and what conservation efforts might be needed to protect them. It's a scavenger hunt with actual scientific value.

The person in each participating state who documents the most observations from the target list wins a free membership to a local mushroom club. For Virginia, that lucky fungus fanatic gets to join us right here at BRMS! It's FUNDIS's way of saying "thanks for being awesome" and connecting dedicated mushroom hunters with their local mycological community.

Ready to get out there? Check out the FUNDIS website for the target species list and submission guidelines, or reach out to Alisha Millican, Project Coordinator for the Southeast Rare Fungi Challenge, if you have questions.

**Competition Rules**

**How Observations Are Counted:** Each qualifying observation counts as one entry. Multiple fruiting bodies found on the same log or in the same immediate area will be considered duplicates and count as a single observation. What constitutes a duplicate can be a bit subjective (different species have different fruiting patterns), so duplicate determination will be done by the challenge coordinator.

**Where to Submit:** All observations must be submitted through iNaturalist.org to qualify for the challenge.

**Tiebreaker:** In the event of a tie, the winner will be selected at random from among the top observers.

# Club Highlights

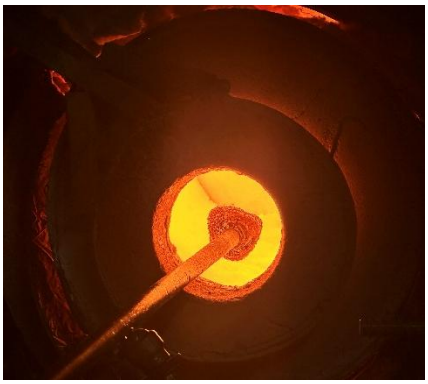
**January Work Day**

We had a great day helping to cut down a tree and remove trash from the quarry. It was a smaller group, but that was probably in large part due to the fact that we accidentally advertised a $40 fee to attend. Oops! This was a consequence of having two events on the same day and using the copy/paste feature. For future reference, there will never be a charge for our BRMS work days. It is a way for us to give back to the quarry, and we are extremely grateful for everybody who showed up this year and in years past.


*Devin Floyd poses with a completely normal and definitely not haunted find during the January Work Day at the Quarry Gardens.* Photo credit: Rachel Floyd.

**Mushroom Glass Blowing**

This was our first experience doing a glass blowing workshop with the club, but it will certainly not be our last! We had full attendance and everybody had an absolute blast! Huge thanks to Luke Brooks, the glass studio at the McGuffey Art Center, and the other extremely kind glass blowers who helped us through the process.



*[left] Glass is heated on the end of a blowpipe to make it malleable. [middle] Luke Brooks demonstrates techniques for shaping glass mushrooms during the BRMS glass blowing workshop. [right] A finished glass mushroom.* Photo credits: Pat Mitchell.

**Macro Photography Club Meeting**

Many mushroom clubs take a break during the colder months when there are few mushrooms to find, but we've always tried to offer fun and interesting content all year long. Thankfully, our loyal club mascot, the zombie fungus (*Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*), proudly

displays her beauty regardless of the season. February was the perfect month: there was nothing to distract us and we had all the time in the world to find the most interesting and unique displays of this fungus. We were able to spend a lot of time learning about macro photography techniques and capturing great photos on our phones from this event.

*Basket Weaving Workshop participants pose with their creations. Photo Credit: Pat Mitchell.*

*Pat Mitchell helps Olivia Oldenburg and Mo Fadden get a microscope set up for photography. Photo credit: Lina Schneider.*

**Basket Weaving Workshop**

Not every mushroom club gets to have a professional basket weaver in their ranks, and none of them are as cool as Karen Milnes. As is becoming an annual tradition, she led a group through the process of making baskets again this year. If you attend our forays this year, chances are good that you'll spy some brand-new handcrafted mushroom baskets.

**Bruch Reed Morel Presentations**

We were extremely fortunate to have Bruch Reed visit our club and deliver an informative, funny, and insightful presentation on morels. President Pat has known Bruch for 10 years, so it was a treat to finally get him to come see our neck of the woods! The next step will be getting him to return during a fruiting season. Thank you to everybody who came out to see him talk.

Bruch's talk at our club meeting was so popular that his second talk filled the space in Lynchburg to capacity almost as soon as the RSVP form went out to members. We're planning more programming at that venue in Lynchburg, so look out for more announcements on that later in the year.

*Bruch Reed (left) and Pat Mitchell pose with the new "Hop on the BRMS Bus" logo. Photo credit: Pat Mitchell.*

*Harry Puffenberger discusses shiitake log inoculation. Photo credit: Pat Mitchell.*

**Shiitake Log Workshop with Charlie and Harry**

Harry Puffenberger and Charlie Aller changed things up this year and gave an incredible shiitake log workshop, providing participants with hands-on experience inoculating logs with shiitake spawn. It was so successful that we may to do several next year.

**Cultivation workshop with Brandon from Hill City Mushrooms**

Brandon Sharp has been doing these workshops with us for the last three years. I am extremely grateful for the knowledge he offers. Attendees received all the information needed to start a mushroom farm of their own, whether it be tiny or large. They also got to bring home a mushroom fruiting bag of their choice, allowing them to begin their mushroom growing journey. Thank you, Brandon, for such a great class!

*Brandon Sharp holds up a mushroom fruiting bag. Photo credit: Pat Mitchell.*

# Upcoming Events

**April Club Meeting**

*Sunday, April 12*
*2 – 5 pm*
The Quarry Gardens at Schuyler

Spring is definitely springing! Come enjoy the first real mushroom foray of the year, as springtime mushrooms are starting to make their appearance. Let's greet them together! This meeting will begin indoors with a brief welcome and club news, followed by a foray and table talk afterwards.

As always, all levels of knowledge, age and abilities are welcome! Please bring whatever you need to be comfortable and safe in the woods: water, snacks, bug spray, sunblock, rain gear, etc.

**Mushroom Melodies**

*Saturday, April 18*
*6 pm (overnight optional)*
*Nealand Farm, 8232 Scottsville Rd, Scottsville, VA*

"If you're into singing mushroom songs with happy, nerdy types,
Go to BRMS Club dot org and join us if you like.
But if you don't, we'll show up at your door,
And when you least expect it we'll infect you with a spore!"

*Singing mushroom songs around a fire pit. Photo credit: Lina Schneider.*

Hey! If you've ever wondered about those goofy songs we keep singing while out on our forays, this is your chance to see where they come from!

Every year, Nealand Farm in Scottsville hosts the members of BRMS for an evening of mycology-themed musical shenanigans. We gather around a campfire with whatever musical instruments we feel like bringing (voices included) and make music together. Our songs include club-written parodies, original compositions, and folk songs. We also try to write a new song or parody as a group at each Mushroom Melodies event.

Come join us as we explore mycology through art and music, eat campfire-cooked food, and spend a lot of time laughing. Guests are welcome to camp out on the farm that night. This event is free.

**Morel Walk**

*Sunday, April 19*
*10 am – 1 pm*
The Quarry Gardens at Schuyler

It's time for another Morel Walk! These walks are always a blast, especially if you've never found a morel before! We'll begin with a brief talk on Morel etiquette, ecology, and safety, and then explore the Quarry Gardens.

At this event, don't expect to fill your basket to the brim with morels and take them home. We will certainly find and pick morels, but we will harvest carefully and share our finds with the group, starting with folks who have never tried morels before. The biggest morel find of the day will win a prize as well!

As always, all levels of knowledge, age, and abilities are welcome!

*A morel (Morchella sp.). Photo credit: Alexander Raffetto*

**Mushroom Madness**

*Saturday, April 25*
Stone Brewing – Richmond, 4300 Williamsburg Ave, Richmond, VA

This is not a BRMS event, but several of us will be there. Kori Langli will be running our booth and Harry Puffenberger will be giving a talk on the Claudius Project. Charlie Aller and Nina O'Malley might also be present with a booth and a talk on tuckahoes! If you're in the Richmond area, you won't want to miss this one. Details can be found here.

**Britt Bunyard Walk & Talk**

*Sunday, April 26*
*1 – 5 pm*
The Quarry Gardens at Schuyler

We are excited to have Britt Bunyard back for yet another fascinating presentation. This time, we'll be diving into the dark side of fungi, exploring parasites, predators, and corpse finders! In addition, he is visiting us during mushroom season! This means we'll be able to show Britt our beautiful quarry home and get to have an exciting table talk with our guest! Space will be limited, so sign up soon! To learn more and register, you can visit the Britt Bunyard Walk & Talk page on our website.

We have a unique opportunity this year to offer several of Britt's books at a discounted rate. We will have a limited supply of them available, so reserve your copy(s) if you want them for him to sign!

**May Club Meeting**

*Sunday, May 10*
*2 – 5 pm*
The Quarry Gardens at Schuyler

Come join us for another walk. We should see more diversity this month than the previous month. We will start inside for some club news and best practices for documenting fungi. Our walk will be followed up by a short table talk to showcase any of our interesting finds.

**Field 2 Lab 1.0: Fungal Microscopy Boot Camp**

*Friday, June 12 – Sunday, June 14*
Thunder BRidge, 1425 Arnolds Valley Rd, Natural Bridge Station, VA

A full-immersion, hands-on weekend workshop designed to take beginners and intermediate microscope users from "I'm not sure how to start" to confidently preparing slides, using oil immersion, and capturing publication-quality micrographs. See more details below.

**Thunder BRidge Foray Club Meeting**

*Sunday, June 14*
*2 – 5 pm*
Thunder BRidge, 1425 Arnolds Valley Rd, Natural Bridge Station, VA

This is going to be an exciting meeting! Not only will we be at a totally new spot, but several of us will be just finishing our very first BRMS Field 2 Lab 1.0 weekend workshop, so we'll be eager to practice our new skills! Thunder BRidge is an arts community located in the Thomas Jefferson National Forest near Natural Bridge. You can expect more forays in new locations as we grow.

# Field 2 Lab 1.0:
# Fungal Microscopy Boot Camp

*Denise Williams has taught biology at Caldwell Community College for over 20 years and has a passion for helping others connect with the natural world. She'll be leading our Field 2 Lab 1.0 program. Photo credit: Denise Williams.*

BRMS will be hosting a multi-day, hands-on workshop for mushroom enthusiasts with little or no microscope experience, as well as those who want to build confidence and skill. The goal is to remove the intimidation factor from microscopy by teaching practical skills for preparing slides, staining tissues, handling oil immersion, making accurate micro-measurements, and digital imaging.

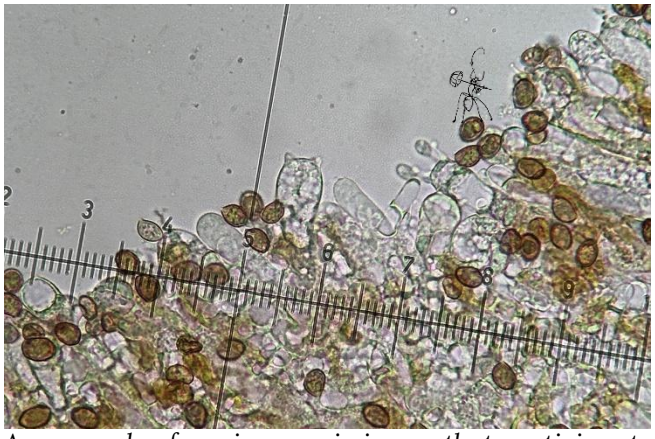
As the weekend progresses, we will also move beyond the basics into advanced contrast-enhancement techniques, such as Kohler, darkfield, oblique, Rheinberg, and related methods, to help participants produce striking and informative images that reveal more than standard brightfield microscopy alone.

By the end, attendees will leave with the confidence to continue exploring fungal microanatomy on their own, using clear and reproducible methods that support both personal learning and community science.

Throughout the workshop there will be lots of guided practice with one-on-one help.

**Microscopes will be provided!**

Participants without their own microscopes will have access to quality, fully serviced instruments throughout the workshop. These microscopes will also be available for purchase at the end of the event at very reasonable prices, ideal for anyone who wants to continue practicing microscopy at home.



*An example of a microscopic image that participants in the Field 2 Lab boot camp will learn to capture. Photo credit: Denise Williams.*

**Rough Schedule**

**The Basics: Setting Up Your Scope (and How Not to Break Stuff)**
*Friday Evening*
*6:30 – 9:00 pm*

A practical and hands-on walk-through of microscope components, illumination, focusing, handling objectives, and basic troubleshooting, followed by slide preparation and lots of guided practice.

**Field Trip: Collecting Fungal Specimens**
*Saturday Morning*
*9:00 am – 12:00 pm*

A guided walk to gather fresh material to bring back to the lab. We'll cover sampling technique, how to keep specimens intact for microscopy, and what macroscopic features matter for the microscope later.

**Oil Immersion, Measuring, and Digital Imaging**
*Saturday Afternoon*
*1:00 – 4:00 pm*

Master the techniques that unlock fungal structures under the microscope at high magnification: contrast stains, oil-immersion work, micrometry, and micrography, followed by practice observing and imaging the morning's finds.

**Advanced Contrast Enhancement Techniques**
*Saturday Evening*
*7:00 – 8:00 pm*

Explore Kohler, oblique, darkfield, Rheinberg, polarization, and many other illumination tricks, followed by an open workshop where participants can make their own filters.

# Mushroom Melodies

## "Charlie"

A parody of "Dooley"
Original song by The Dillards (1963)
New lyrics by BRMS members at Mushroom Melodies 2025

Charlie was a good old man
with puffballs in his lawn.
Charlie had some wood chips
and a 40-gallon spawn.
One week was for waiting.
The next week was the rush.
With buckets overflowing,
Ole Charlie cut the flush.

Charlie, living in a cloister.
Charlie, checking on the moisture.
Charlie, give me an oyster
And I'll pay you back someday.

Hunting for some tuckahoe
While slipping through the woods,
Charlie with his poking stick
Always finds the goods.
Charlie was a grower.
Into the lab he'd come,
Dissect a piece of tuckahoe
And grow it by the ton.

Charlie, living in a cloister.
Charlie, checking on the moisture.
Charlie, give me an oyster
And I'll pay you back someday.

I remember very well
When Charlie went to Greece
Hand in hand with Nina
In her matching mushroom fleece.
Singing by the seaside
The mushroom songs of old,
Thinkin' 'bout the old home,
Hoping that it's free of mold.

Charlie, living in a cloister.
Charlie, checking on the moisture.
Charlie, give me an oyster
And I'll pay you back someday.
And I'll pay you back someday.

*Charlie Aller finding the goods: a tuckahoe (arguably Pachyma cocos). Photo credit: Charlie Aller.*

# Little Spores

Happy spring! We'd like to welcome back our local shell-ebrity, **Myrtle the box turtle**!

Now that it's April, Myrtle is waking up from her winter brumation. You may see her or her box turtle friends exploring their home territory at any time of day since it's not too hot yet. Myrtle's home range is about ten acres (or 7.5 football fields), where she likes to forage for food, including mushrooms, and keep an eye out for a mate.

**Myrtle has a few jokes for you (answers below):**

1. What does Myrtle wear in the winter?
2. What do you call a turtle chef?
3. What do mushrooms enjoy eating around a fire?
4. Why wouldn't the mushroom buy a couch?

**Answers to Myrtle's jokes:**

1. A turtleneck
2. A slow cooker
3. S'pores
4. He prefers toadstools

Thanks for checking out Little Spores. Keep an eye out for Myrtle and her friends!

**Can you help us find Chestnut the Ant?**

This is Chestnut. She's a carpenter ant. She likes mushrooms, so she tends to hang out in this newsletter. In fact, I bet you'll find her somewhere in every edition of Blue Ridge Mycelium. If you find her in this edition and let us know where she is, you'll earn a sticker at the next mushroom walk! You can email brmsclubsecretary@gmail.com when you find her!

**The Blue Ridge Mycological Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit.**

Our goal is to learn about fungus and share that knowledge as a way of sparking interest in others.

## Society Officers

President - Pat Mitchell
Vice President - Harry Puffenberger
Treasurer - John Dent
Secretary - Lina Schneider

Editor - Isaac Hopkins

## Membership

An annual membership in the Blue Ridge Mycological Society is available to anyone for $20 per individual (or $30 per family).

Sign up for BRMS membership here.