

# Wyre Forest Study Group

## A New Tooth Fungus for the Wyre Forest

BOB KEMP



*Phellodon confluens*, Withybed Wood

Bob Kemp

Fungus enthusiasts familiar with the Wyre Forest in autumn will often encounter the relatively common Wood Hedghog Fungus *Hydnum repandum*. Occasionally they may also see Jelly Tongue *Psuedohydnum gelatinosum* on fallen wood or the inconspicuous Ear Pick Fungus *Auriscalpium vulgare* growing out of a pine cone. All of these fungi possess spore bearing teeth on the underside of their caps, a feature that sets these unrelated species apart from the masses of gill and pore bearing species.

Generalising though, it can be said that all other tooth bearing species (varying Genera) that bear a stipe (stalk) are scarce to rare and worthy of note. In the UK we have 18 species with possibly 10-13 in England, all of which have held a place on the UK Fungus Red List.

On 7th September 2017, on an unplanned fungus foray to Wyre (Withybed Wood, SO759769), Keith Fowler (Joy

of Wildlife Group) presented to me a fragment of what looked like a bracket fungus, but on closer inspection bore grey teeth instead of pores. Knowing that we may have an interesting species the sample was retained, but sadly, despite a good search, we unsuccessfully found the source of the fragment.

Such a potentially interesting find prompted a return visit to the site a few days later (12.9.17) and I was duly rewarded. A small clump was found growing amongst Bilberry and mosses close to the footpath. Photographs were taken and a further sample collected for determination. Local experts were consulted but a positive ID was not forthcoming. Les Hughes, Fungus Recorder for Shropshire, finally sent the refrigerated, second sample to Kew Gardens (Martyn Ainsworth) for an expert opinion. The Wyre 'stipitate hydroid' proved to be *Phellodon confluens*.



Withybed Wood showing the habitat for *Phellodon confluens*

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*Phellodon confluens*

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In 2000 Peter Marren in his excellent Research Report for English Nature on the 'Stipitate Hydroid Fungi in England', wrote about this species:

"Status: Native. Apparently rare in broadleaved woodland, mainly in SE England. Records of *Phellodon confluens* are rather few, but this rather critical species can easily be missed and it is probably under-recorded. It is certainly one of the rarest species in the New Forest, but seems to be more frequent in east Berkshire and the south-east. From its European distribution, one would expect it to be confined to broadleaved, especially oak, woodland, and in warmer areas. However records of *Phellodon confluens* from the Scottish pinewoods, if correct, indicate a second, wholly different habitat. English records are mainly from oak or sweet chestnut, with a few from beech, silver birch and pine. Habitats include sandy heathland and tracksides, woodbanks and edges of marl-pits. On the continent it is associated with oak or beech on the



Jelly Tongue

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southern coasts of Norway and Sweden, and formerly in shrubby oak forests on acid soils in the Netherlands."

*Phellodon confluens* had only been found in Shropshire on one other occasion in 2015 (The Hurst, Soudley Wood) by Jo Weightman. I am not aware it has ever been recorded in Worcestershire. It may well be overlooked and often dismissed as a common bracket on wood from a distance. Phellodons though are mycorrhizal and emerge from the soil. They are often reported from sparsely vegetated banks in old forest amongst mosses. The Withybed site agrees well with this. Fruit bodies appear to be fairly persistent, often described as corky and liberate white spores. Individual caps will fuse and they can grow around and engulf vegetation. On banks the fungus caps can form tiers.

*Phellodon confluens* has recently been removed from the Red List but is considered to be Nationally Rare.

This species, as well as the other similar Phellodons, are worth being aware of when foraging in Wyre. September appears to be the most favoured month.

## References

- Peter Marren, 2000. Stipitate Hydroid Fungi of England. No 420 English Nature Research Reports. Available online as PDF from Natural England.
- Geoffrey Kibby, 2017. Mushrooms and Toadstools of Britain and Northern Europe Vol. 1. privately published by the author.



Wood Hedgehog Fungus

Bob Kemp



Tooth Pick Fungus

John Bingham