

PODOSCYPHA MULTIZONATA

- Zoned Rosette

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The first encounter that one of us (A. O.) had with *Podoscypha multizonata* was during a seasonal visit to the New Forest, some time during the 1990s, the New Forest apparently being a stronghold for this species in the UK. It was a species that he had not then recorded at any of the other, mainly London area sites he visited regularly during his autumn forays. It was therefore a big surprise when, during a routine ramble around Golders Hill Park, close to Hampstead Heath, he came across two fruitbodies in early October 2002. It did not fruit in 2003 but reappeared in 2004 with five fruitbodies and then again in 2005.

Initially placed in the Polyporaceae, then Thelephoraceae, *P. multizonata* has now been placed in its own family, Podoscyphaceae. It is, as the vernacular name suggests, rosette-like, with a number of thin, tough, erect, individual lobes, reddish to pinkish brown in colour. It usually measures between 50 and 250 mm across, which in an open, short grass situation makes it fairly obvious, whereas in a woodland setting it easily blends in with the autumnal leaves.

P. multizonata is associated with the roots of *Quercus* or more rarely *Fagus*. Whether this association is parasitic, merely saprobic or both, needs further investigation. When modern field guides include this fungus it is generally categorised as a rare species.

The rather ambiguous status of this curious looking organism is reflected in the experience of the two people who first found it in Highgate Wood, north London, in 1996. They took some fresh material to Fungus 100, the exhibition celebrating the centenary of the BMS, hoping to have it identified. The unnamed person who did the identification

was surprised to hear of its provenance, initially assuming that these people had come hotfoot from the New Forest. He mentioned that *P. multizonata* was on the increase, but was otherwise not over-excited. This admirably level-headed approach was by no means universal however, as the finders remember it generating plenty of interest from other attendees of the exhibition, one of them going as far as to call it the star attraction of the day (Sylvia Starshine pers.comm.).

Certainly this fungus is neither very rare in Britain - there were 172 records in BMSFRD as of December 2005 - nor very limited in its distribution. 67 of these come from South Hants, most likely the New Forest and environs, the remaining 105 are scattered among the southern counties of Surrey, Sussex, Essex, Kent and Middlesex, as well as a few records from Herts, Berks, Worcestershire, South Devon, South Yorks., East Suffolk, Oxon, Wilts, and Warwickshire [see also the note on p. 85 by J. Bingham of a recent collection from Herefordshire - Editor]. The records date back to the 1800s but most are post-1960.

The distribution map associated with the BMSFRD data supports the comment in the new Checklist, "widespread in southern England" (Legon & Henrici, 2005). But this fungus has a high 'wow' factor when pointed out on public forays. For not only is it a singular and peculiarly distinctive thing, impressively sizeable, but a high percentage of its known sites worldwide are in England (Spooner & Roberts, 2005 quote 80%). This percentage strongly suggests an association with old or veteran trees of oak and beech, as found in historic English deer parks and

Royal Forests. These are important habitats which in most other European countries have become scarce.

This near-endemic status in particular resonates with people, especially when they can see it in their local park or wood. And in north London they can do just that, since *P. multizonata* has been known from Highgate Wood and Alexandra Palace Park since the mid-1990s, fruiting every year. Slightly further out of town, it is has also been an annual sight at Horsenden Hill and Hainault Country Park for many years. Since 2000, apart from the collections at Golders Hill Park, there are records for Barn Hoppitt (2004) and High Beech (2005) in Epping Forest; Kenwood with *Fagus*, Queen's Wood, Haringey, in 2005; and Trent Park in Enfield in 2005 on both *Quercus* and *Fagus*, including a very large (40cm+) fruiting body first spotted on July 30. South of the Thames, there was a fine specimen in Beckenham Place Park in the autumn of 2004.

Of the 33 London boroughs, *P. multizonata* has been recorded in 9 of them – Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Havering, Hillingdon,

Lewisham, Redbridge, Richmond and Waltham Forest (GLA 2004). Eight of these are north of the Thames. We would be very surprised if it were not flourishing on veteran trees in the family *Fagaceae* – there is a single record in the BMSFRD on *Castanea* – in other boroughs, Barnet for example, though possibly not on the heaviest of London clays.

P. multizonata was proposed, along with 32 other species, for Appendix 1 of the Bern Convention (Dahlberg & Croneborg, 2003). It is known to be present, post 1980, in eight of the 37 European countries included and in only five of the countries constituting the European Union in 2003. One hundred and sixteen of the localities are post 1980 and 29% of these are in protected areas. The Bern document states that it is red listed in only two out of those eight countries - France and Spain. It was not included in the proposed British red data list by Bruce Ing in 1992.

Thankfully the European status of this species and its occurrence within North London and the Greater London area has not been ignored. It is included in the Greater London Biodiversity Action Plan –



Podoscypha multizonata at Croft Castle, Herefordshire - Main rosette in foreground with smaller rosette behind. Photograph © John Bingham.

Species of Conservation Concern (GLA 2004) and in the Haringey Biodiversity Action Plan (Bevan 2004). It is likely to be a species of national concern before too long as it has been included as a flagship species alongside such rarities as *Piptoporus quercinus* in a Stage 1 review of proposed UK BAP species. It would be difficult to argue for the inclusion of this species on the British Red Data List. Yet we in Britain do have an international responsibility for conservation of *P. multizonata*. We have a very high percentage of the known world population, so it must be accorded some degree of national or international status and protection, especially given its seeming intimate association with another UK speciality, veteran trees. We would support wholeheartedly its inclusion in the current review of proposed UK BAP species. Maybe then there would be sufficient resources and interest to mount a nationwide search for the attention-grabbing Zoned Rosette, just like the Pink Waxcap survey of a few years ago. And maybe we would find that north London isn't such a hotspot after all, or that it is widespread over more than just southern England.

References

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A RECORD OF *PODOSCYPHA MULTIZONATA*

from Herefordshire

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The rare root associate, *Podoscypha multizonata* was recorded at the Croft Castle Estate, north Herefordshire by John and Denise Bingham on 4th November 2005. It was growing in parkland, under an ancient stag-headed common oak (*Quercus robur*).

There was one large robust rosette some 10cm high and 40cm in diameter with several smaller rosettes (20cm across) adjoining nearby (see photo previous page). It was about three metres from the base of the oak near a recently fallen large branch. The ground vegetation was herba-

ceous and grassy with some bare soil. Previous records from Herefordshire were 1872 "Hereford", 1873 Moccas Park and 1966 Garnons by Fred Fincher. (Ted Blackwell pers. comm). There are no records from Shropshire and one (?) record from Worcestershire from Pipershill Common in October 1971 by S. C. Porter (Worcs BRC data).

This record is some distance from the main centre of distribution for the species in England and considered to be a significant addition to the mycota of Croft Castle.