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Omphalotus nidiformis — ghost fungus

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Omphalotus nidiformis, or the ghost fungus, is common throughout southern and subtropical eastern Australia. It generally fruits in autumn, in large clusters at the base of both living and dead trees. In Western Australia, it's common on living or dead bull banksia (*Banksia grandis*), peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*), sheoak (*Allocasuarina* spp.) and marri (*Corymbia calophylla*) as well as understory shrubs and plants in jarrah forest and coastal woodlands.

Caps are funnel- or fan-shaped, generally 8–15cm across, creamy white in colour with brownish or purple staining, especially near the depressed central region. Gills are creamy white, crowded and extend a short distance down the stem. Stems are often obscured by the dense cluster of caps but are attached strongly to the surface of the tree on which the ghost fungus is growing.

The ghost fungus gets its name from its habit of being luminescent. In the dark the ghost fungus glows an eerie green colour (*inset above*). The intensity of the luminescence varies and diminishes with age or if the caps get too wet. The reason for its luminescent is not known, but perhaps it is to attract night flying insects which feed or forage on it and then spread its spores.

The scientific name refers to the form and habit of the fruit bodies. *Omphal*:- naval (umbilicus), *-otus*: resembling or similar, *nid*:- nest, *-formis*: resembling in shape or form.