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Fungus of the Month - October 2011



Hygrocybe polychroma

Hygrocybe polychroma is widespread throughout the wetter areas of the jarrah forest and woodlands, and coastal heath regions of the south-west. It is very variable in colour and ranges from yellow to orange to red. Generally fruit bodies are orange with red and yellow or white highlights and become yellow with age, but in the southern coastal areas they may normally be more yellow. Caps are 10-35 mm in diameter, smooth, shiny, broadly dome-shaped at first then expand to become flat, orange red or orange yellow with a yellow margin. The gills are thick, variable in length with a waxy texture, generally pale orange yellow becoming lighter in colour towards the edge. Stems are up to 70 mm tall, smooth, orange red in the upper region then orange yellow and finally white at the base.

Other *Hygrocybes* may be red, orange or yellow, but *Hygrocybe polychroma* is characterised by its colour variations and large groups may have a mix of specimens of different colours with either red, orange, yellow or even white being the dominant colour of individuals.

The scientific name refers to the texture and colour of the fruit body. *Hygr-*: moisture, humidity, *cyb-* or *cybe*: head, *poly-*: prefix meaning several or many, *chrom-*: bright colour, e.g., chrome-yellow.