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Fungus of the Month - February 2012



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Omphalotus nidiformis - the ghost fungus

The ghost fungus, *Omphalotus nidiformis*, is common throughout southern and subtropical eastern Australia. It fruits, generally in large clusters, at the base of both living and dead trees.

In Western Australia, it is 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. The funnel- or fan-shaped caps are generally 8-15 cm across and creamy white in colour with brownish or purple staining, especially near the depressed central region. The gills are creamy white, crowded and extend a short distance down the stem. The stem is often obscured by the dense cluster of caps but is 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 (*see inset*). The intensity of the luminescence varies and diminishes with age or if the caps get too wet. The reason for its luminescence is not known, but perhaps it is to attract night flying insects which possibly feed on it and 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.

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