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## *Podoserpula pusio* — pagoda fungus

Richard Robinson, Science Division, Manjimup, [richard.robinson@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:richard.robinson@dec.wa.gov.au)



The first encounter with *Podoserpula pusio* is always an exciting find. Its unusual but attractive shape inspired the common name of pagoda fungus and in many ways it resembles a flower rather than a fungus. The pagoda fungus forms colonies on well-rotted wood or in litter at the base of stumps or alongside rotting logs in jarrah forest. It has also been found in pine plantations.

A number of tiered, soft chamois-like lobes arise from a central soft pink stem. The lobes at the base of the stem are generally larger and they tend to diminish in size towards the top of the fruit body, which develops into a pagoda-like structure up to 10cm tall. The underside of the lobes are a soft pink colour and have a ribbed or folded pattern that extends a short way down the stem (*lower left*).

The genus *Podoserpula* has its origins dating back to when the ancient southern continent, Gondwana, existed. Species of *Podoserpula* now have a Pacific distribution and can be found in Australia, New Zealand, Madagascar, New Caladonia, Chile and Venezuela. *Podoserpula pusio* was thought to occur only in Australasia, but recently it was recorded from Madagascar and the Falkland Islands.

Unfortunately the scientific name bears little significance to the habit or appearance of this species, as it was originally described from a small, undeveloped specimen. *Pod-*, *pod-*: foot or base (stalk), *serp-*: snake, *ula-*: pertaining to or diminutive, *pus-*: foot, base or stalk or *pusil-*: very small, little or weak.