

***Clathrus archeri* Devils Fingers in Worcestershire**

Rosemary Winnall

Clathrus archeri is a most splendid fungus which may be found fruiting between June and October. It is related to the Stinkhorn *Phallus impudicus*, and like that species, the fruiting body arises from a gelatinous ‘egg’. This soon ruptures, and from it emerges between four and eight long slender red arms. On these the gleba develops – a black mucilaginous layer containing the spores. The mature fungus smells of rotting flesh which attracts flies to feed, and through these the spores are dispersed. The mature fungus measures about 20cms wide and 10cms high.

Devil’s Fingers is indigenous to Australia and Tasmania but has been introduced into America (where it is known as the Octopus Stinkhorn), Europe and Asia. It was first seen in Europe in about 1914, when it was introduced with war supplies, and was found for the first time in the UK at Penzance in Cornwall in 1946. From there it has been slowly extending its range across the south of England and in recent years has been recorded in Wales and the Midlands.

In 2009 John Bingham in his article ‘*Fungal Changes in Worcestershire*’ suggested we look out for it, as it was a species that was spreading.

On 9th August 2011 it was found by James Clay in Herefordshire at the National Trust Brockhampton Estate near Bromyard, the first record for that county.

Ian Wright found the first Worcestershire specimen on 30th June 2014 in grassland in Andy and Helen Griffée’s back garden near Stanford Bridge at (SO7365). A single fruiting body was present, and two more were seen in September 2014. More fruiting bodies were found in August, September and October 2015 in two different parts of the lawn (01, 02).



01. Devil’s Fingers, *Clathrus archeri*, 7th September 2015 Stanford Bridge. Rosemary Winnall.

Tony Groves obtained the first Shropshire record on Clebury Mortimer Golf Course growing near the 8th hole in an area called Badger’s Loop (SO6976) on 16th July 2014 (identified by the late Roy Mantle).

Wood chip mulch was the substrate for the first Warwickshire record. It appeared in the children’s play area at Newbold Comyn Arms in Leamington Spa and was discovered by Ken Stephenson on the 22nd September 2014 (03).

Then Sue Chandler found Devil’s Fingers in an open meadow at Worcestershire Wildlife Trust’s Knapp and Papermill Reserve whilst with a conservation work party on 28th October 2014. It apparently did not reappear there again in 2015.



02. Devil’s Fingers, *Clathrus archeri*, 9th August 2015, Stanford Bridge. Andy Griffée.



03. Devil’s Fingers, *Clathrus archeri*, 24th September 2014, Leamington Spa. John Roberts

Clathrus archeri is still a rare fungus in the UK and a special find! Its unusual shape, bright red colour and foetid smell make it easy to identify. More county records are to be expected, so do look out for it, take a photograph, record the date, and location, and send your records to the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre. Who will find the next county record I wonder?

Many thanks are due to Ian Wright who alerted me to the presence of this fungus at Stanford Bridge on private land. The owners, Andy and Helen Griffée, kindly allowed me access to their back garden so that I could see it for myself and Andy gave permission to use his photograph showing the ‘egg’ as well as the mature fungus. Thanks too to David Antrobus who sent me details of the fungus at Leamington Spa, and to John Roberts for use of his photograph of the fungus at that site.

Reference

Bingham, J. 2009. Fungal Changes in Worcestershire’ *Worcestershire Record* 26:15-17

Images

01. Devil’s Fingers, *Clathrus archeri*, 7th September 2015 Stanford Bridge. Rosemary Winnall.

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