

Coral Tooth *Hericium coralloides*; a first record for Worcestershire?

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Following John Bingham's plea for more news of Worcestershire's Funga (Bingham 2024), I am pleased to report a record of Coral Tooth *Hericium coralloides* from October 24th 2024, which may be the first record for the county.

Coral Tooth is a large and striking white fungus (01 & 02) so the lack of records probably does not suggest that its occurrence has been overlooked in recent years. This is a nationally rare fungus with only 92 records shown on the NBN Atlas (03) (NBN Trust, 2024).

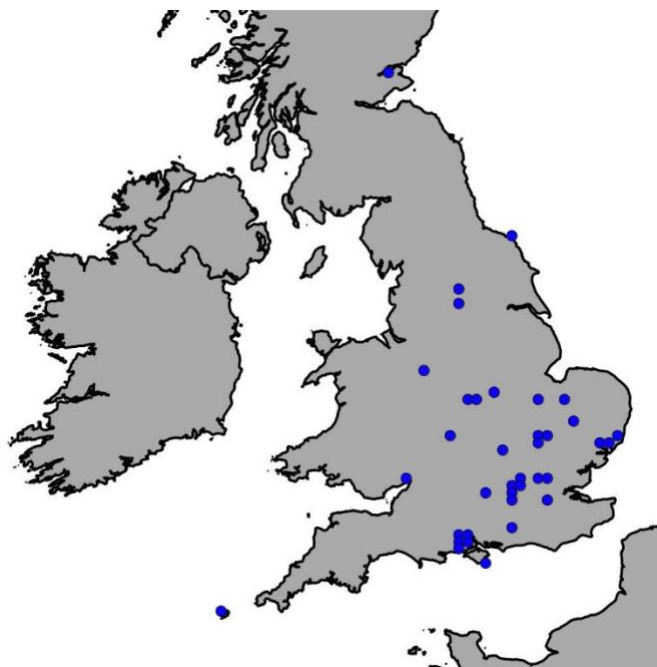


01. Coral Tooth is a large and striking fungus, so it is unlikely that it has been overlooked in the county. Fish Hill 24.10.24. Graham Martin.

There is a single NBN record that might be from Worcestershire, dated from October 1813, and its latitude and longitude co-ordinates are in Weethley, Warwickshire. However, there is a caution in the record that the co-ordinates have been generalised to within 0.1 degrees, so it is probably best to conclude that it refers to a find in the region of the boundary between Warwickshire and Worcestershire, southwest of Alcester. The most recent record of Coral Tooth from the NBN Atlas database is from October 2021 in the Rutland/Leicestershire region. Clearly this is an elusive species of fungus. However, I had few doubts about what I had found as it was such a striking specimen, and the identification was soon confirmed by John Bingham from my photographs.



02. Coral Tooth at Fish Hill. Its yellowish colouration suggested that it was past its best for eating. Graham Martin.



03. Distribution of Coral Tooth as shown on NBN Atlas.

Finding the fungus, as always, involved a little serendipity and shows the value of poking about wherever and whenever it is possible. The fungus was on a large living Ash Tree *Fraxinus excelsior* close to the A44 road on Fish Hill, above Broadway. The road was closed for a three-week period for repairs, and I was able to walk along its verges, something that I would not usually consider because of the density of traffic and because the footpath is very close to the roadway. Although the fungus was relatively high up on

the tree's trunk the land fell away steeply and so the fungus was just about level with my camera and less than two metres away.

Coral Tooth is reported to be associated with living or dead wood of broad-leaved trees usually in old broad-leaved woodland. This specimen was on a more-or-less isolated tree, one of a few following the line of a wall beside the road, and below the tree was sheep grazed pasture. There is Beech *Fagus sylvatica* woodland within a couple of hundred metres, but it is not particularly old woodland.

Coral Tooth is regarded as edible and good when young, but I did not try a sample of this specimen as its yellow colour (02) suggested it was already past its best; young growths are brilliant white. A congeneric species, Bearded Tooth *H. erinaceus*, is commercially available as a food (also sold as lion's mane mushroom, yamabushitake, or bearded hedgehog) and a search of the internet shows that it is possible to buy fungus-growing kits for Bearded Tooth; plugs impregnated with the mycelium that can be inserted into holes in cut logs. However, I have not come across any commercially available kits for growing Coral Tooth in the UK, so any specimen of Coral Tooth is presumably truly wild and has not been encouraged by humans. Furthermore, the location of this specimen on a relatively isolated healthy tree, beside a main road, makes it very unlikely that humans have been an agent in its arrival.

Bearded Tooth is one of the few fungi protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and it is a Biodiversity Action Plan species. However, Coral Tooth is not awarded the same level of protection.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to John Bingham for confirming my identification.

References

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Images

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