

Spatulate Oysterling *Arrhenia spathulata*: a present from the birds

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There can be few occasions when a bird can be credited with aiding the recording of a fungus. My house roof has a very good covering of mosses which Blackbirds *Turdus merula* and Jackdaws *Coloeus monedula* readily search through and in so doing send lumps of moss to the ground. On November 17th 2024 I was clearing up one of these lumps and noticed something beige amongst the green. I picked it up and realised the beige shapes were a group of small fungi. I had no idea what they were and have usually fought shy of tackling the identification of these smaller species, but it was easy to put the moss lump aside intact and return to it later. It presented a challenge!

The fungus that I saw was not well matched by any illustrations in my usual reference books, so I turned to the internet. After a fair bit of searching, I found a good visual match on the MycoDB website. The ecology and general description were right too. The species that I landed on, Spatulate Oysterling *Arrhenia spathulata*, is associated with mosses and may be regarded as a specialist on *Syntrichia ruralis*, variously known as Star Moss, Sand-hill Screw-moss and Great Hairy Screw-moss depending upon variants. Photographs of the clump showing moss and fungus (01) were sent across to John Bingham for the fungus identification and to Tessa Carrick to identify the moss. They came back with positive, but cautious responses. Tessa said that she would only be certain if she had both a fresh and then a dried-out specimen of the moss, but she was "confident" that it was *Syntrichia ruralis*, possibly subsp. *ruraliformis* or Sandhill Screw-moss. Tessa also remarked that she had seen it fallen from her own roof in Bromsgrove. John was happy to confirm the fungus as Spatulate Oysterling.

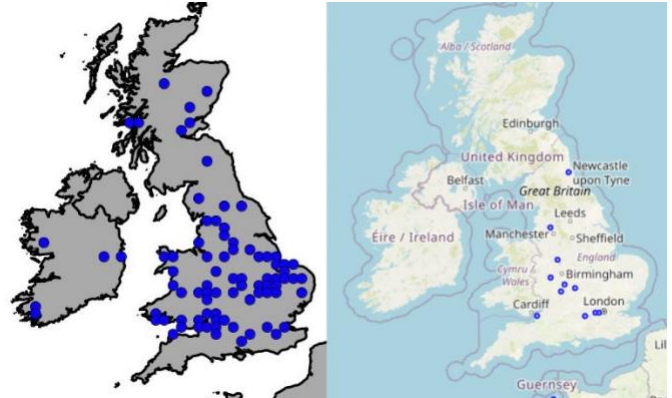


01. Spatulate Oysterling fungus, a present from the birds. Aston Somerville 17.11.24. Graham Martin.

I then began a search of previous records from Worcestershire of both species. Spatulate Oysterling has only 14 records in the iRecord UK database; 11 from this century including just one from Worcestershire (02 right). That record is from John Bingham in

2022 in a churchyard at Far Forest on the far Northwestern edge of the county. My record from Aston Somerville is 48 km away on the far Southeastern edge of the county. There is a lot of Worcestershire in between those two sites where presumably Spatulate Oysterling could also occur.

The NBN Atlas records for Spatulate Oysterling reach back a lot further and show 148 records (02 left): the first is from 1864 but half of the records are dated in this century. However, there is not one record from Worcestershire.



02. NBN records (left) and iRecord records (right) for Spatulate Oysterling distribution.

Records for the moss suggest that it is not scarce in Worcestershire. The NBN atlas records the species as *Syntrichia ruralis* and gives it the common name Great Hairy Screw-moss. There are over 10,000 records for the UK from the past century and a half, with about 50 records from Worcestershire. It is found worldwide and grows on many types of soil surfaces and can withstand desiccation for many years. These features are reflected in the record from my own roof where the weathering of the roof tiles produces gritty surfaces which are constantly eroding and frequently dry out.

It seems reasonable to assume that there are plenty of places in Worcestershire where the moss grows and all can potentially host Spatulate Oysterlings. My house roof is less than 35 years old so both moss and fungus can establish rapidly.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to John Bingham and Tessa Carrick for confirming my identifications.

01. Spatulate Oysterling fungus, a present from the birds. Aston Somerville 17.11.24. Graham Martin.
02. Distribution of records of Spatulate Oysterling *Arrhenia spathulata* from NBN Atlas occurrence download at <https://nbnatlas.org> accessed on 19 November 2024 and distribution of records of Spatulate Oysterling *Arrhenia spathulata* from iRecord accessed on 19 November 2024.