

Many of you probably expected me to cover my own Web site, MykoWeb, in this second installment of Webwatch. Instead, I will cover a less well known but excellent new site, Mushroom Observer (www.mushroomobserver.org). MO may well be the best World Wide Web mycology site that you have never heard of.

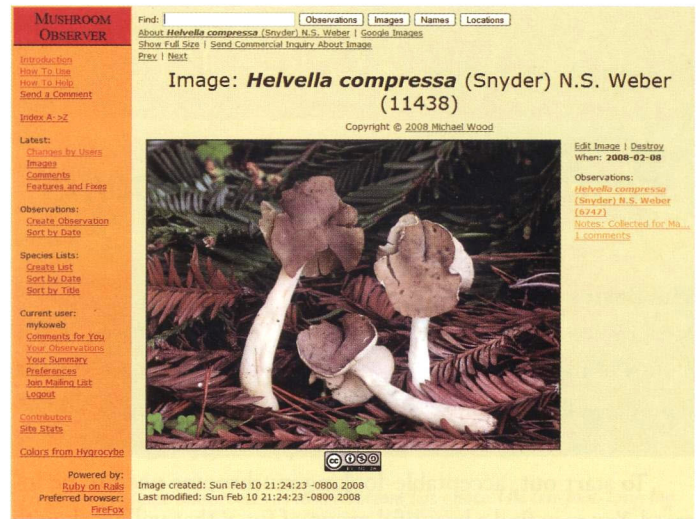
Mushroom Observer was started in 2006 by Nathan Wilson as a way to bring together two of his passionate interests: mycology and technology. Nathan says the purpose of MO is “to record observations about mushrooms, help people identify mushrooms they aren’t familiar with, and expand the community around the scientific exploration of mushrooms. . . . I like to think of it as a living field guide for mushrooms or a collaborative mushroom field journal.”

When you visit Mushroom Observer, you will see a menu on the left side of the page, with most of the page occupied by a group of images and names, called the “Activity Log.” Click on any of the mushroom images or names to get more information or to view larger photographs. Before you get too involved in clicking on the images, I suggest you read the “Introduction,” which will give you an idea of the purpose and philosophy of the site. Next read the very important “How to Use” page. This will explain essential concepts and navigation of the MO Web site and make your journey through the site more enjoyable and productive.

Now let’s use Mushroom Observer. On most any page you will find a box at the top labeled “Find.” Type in a mushroom name of interest, say *Boletus edulis*, and hit Enter, or click on “observations.” This will bring up a page or pages of “observations.” Each observation will have the collector, collection date, collection location, optional notes, and usually one or more photographs of the collection. At the time I did it, I got 31 observations on *Boletus edulis*, illustrated with 52 photos. The photographs are all available in three sizes: the thumbnail version on the observation page, the middle size (± 640 x 480 pixels) on the image page, and the original size (which can be quite large—it is dependent on the size the contributor uploads).

The “Find:” box is your gateway to most of the goodies at MO. If you want to get directly to the photographs, type in your species name and click on “Images,” which will take you to a page of thumbnail images of the species. Clicking on one of the thumbnails will present you with a larger image. Typing in a genus name and clicking on “Names” will bring up the name list. When I tried “*Mycena*,” I got a list of 120 *Mycenas*, some of which have associated observations and some that are waiting for user contributions. If you type in a place name and hit “Locations” you will get a listing of the observations from your requested place. “California” gave me more observations than I care to count!

So, where do all the information and photographs come from? It is all contributed by the users of Mushroom Observer—the MO community. To be able to create observations, make comments, and contribute photographs, you must create an account and login. After logging in, click on “Create Observation” and you will be taken to a page where you give the information about the observation: date,



location, species name, notes, etc. Then you can upload your photographs or other images (some contributors illustrate their observations with drawings).

The resulting observations and images vary greatly in information provided, quality of photographs, etc. One common use of Mushroom Observer is the posting of photographs of species unknown to the contributor. The species name will initially be listed as “Fungi,” and the MO community then gets to suggest names for the observation. This is a good way to get your unknowns identified! A good, sharp photograph with sound information on habit and habitat will increase your chances for a good ID. And if you don’t like the species name given to an observation, you can suggest another name and the MO user community can vote on the names! If there is enough information given in the photos and description, a consensus of the “right” name is usually reached.

I must admit that when Nathan first outlined his plans for Mushroom Observer to me, I was skeptical that his concept would work. I was wrong. MO is a very useful site for the amateur and professional mycologist. And it will continue to improve as it is still being developed, with new features and refinements made on a regular basis and user contributions on a daily basis. One initial goal of Mushroom Observer was to document as much of the world’s fungal diversity as possible. That is a massive project, but an impressive start has been made.

As of the time this was written, Mushroom Observer has 7249 observations, 5552 names, and 12,796 photographs. It includes mushrooms from many states and countries, although currently it is heavy on the California fungi. You can help Mushroom Observer become more universal by becoming a part of the MO user community and making contributions from your part of the world.

