

Small Wonders

Henningsomyces candidus

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Photographs by Joseph Warful

To inaugurate this new column, I've chosen a cyphelloid species called *Henningsomyces candidus*. "Cyphelloid" doesn't mean the unwary mycophile can get syphilis (pronounced almost exactly the same) from touching or eating a specimen, but rather that *H. candidus* is a cross dresser — it appears to be an ascomycete, but it's really abasidiomycete. Mycologist Ian Gibson calls such fungi "basidiomycete cup fungi," which is a good description of them. Other North American cyphelloid species include *Merismodes* (= *Cyphellopsis*) *anomalus*, *Rectipilus fasciculatus*, and *Flagelloscypha minutissima*.

Unless you're a devoted log roller, you're unlikely to encounter *H. candidus* because — like its cyphelloid colleagues — it tends to fruit under logs. Likewise, it's only 0.5-1mm long and 0.2-0.4 mm in diameter, so you

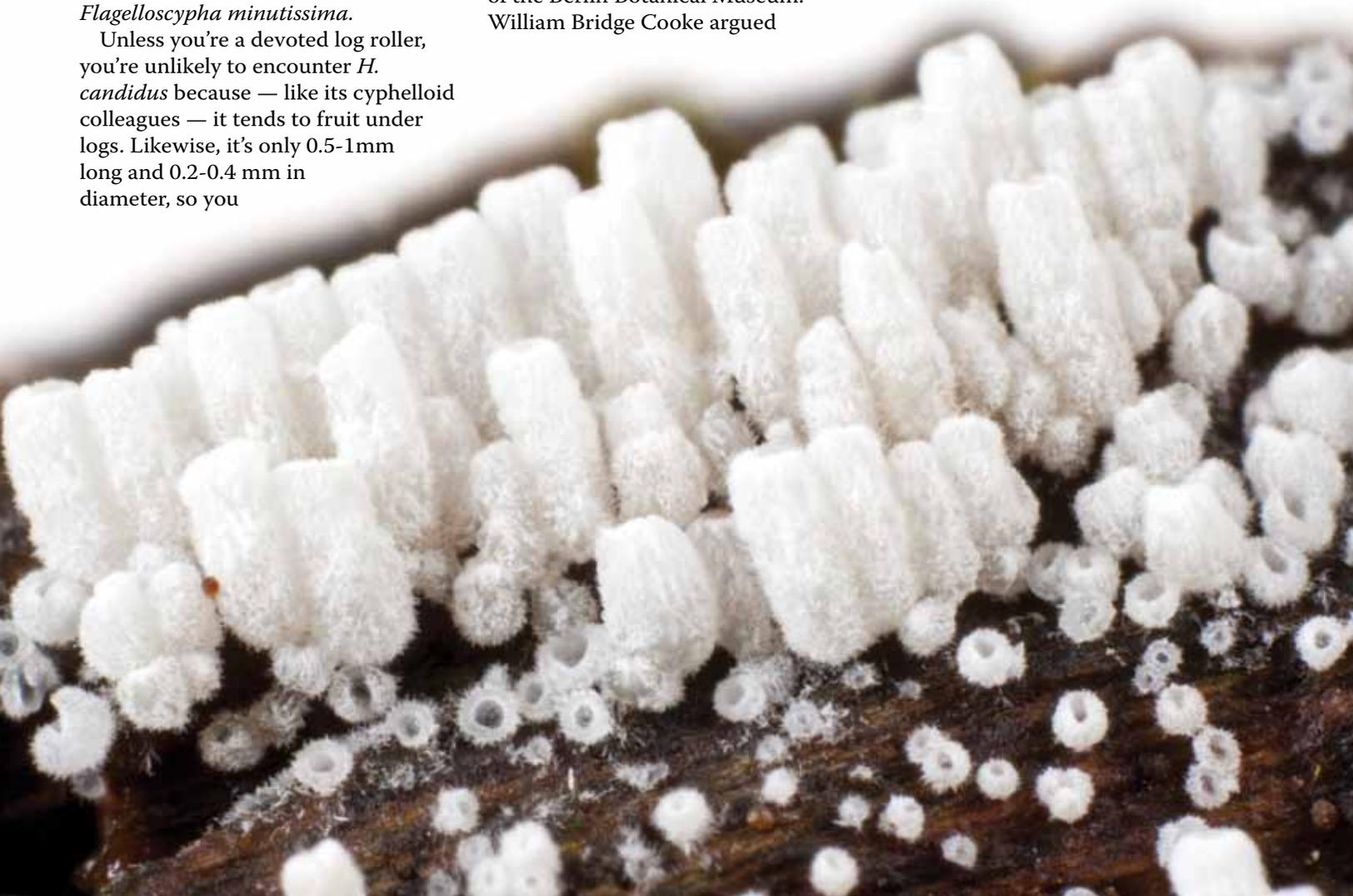
might confuse it with a generic white crust unless you happen to be gazing at it with a hand lens. But when you do find it, you'll doubtless be astonished, for its gregarious tubules suggest sea squirts gone terrestrial or perhaps a dish of miniature ziti. Since it's a basidiomycete, those tubules usually will be pointing downwards rather than, like ascos, upwards, the better to release their spores. Note: If there are lots of dichophytic hairs around the margin, you've probably got *H. puber*, a much less common species.

The genus *Henningsomyces* is not named for Paul Henning, creator of *The Beverly Hillbillies*, but for Paul Hennings (1841-1908), a prominent German mycologist and curator of the Berlin Botanical Museum. William Bridge Cooke argued

for another genus name, *Solenia*, but *Henningsomyces* has prevailed.

A mycophagically obsessed individual (or a Beverly Hillbilly?) might ask if *H. candidus*, despite its small size, is edible, but the answer is no, unless that individual is a thrip or a mite. Even so, the species is a close phylogenetic relative of *Fistulina hepatica*, the so-called beefsteak fungus, itself a reasonably good edible — if you think of the latter's tubes as tubules, you'll immediately be aware of the similarity between the two species.

In eastern North America, *H. candidus* grows under hardwood logs, and on the West Coast, it tends to grow under softwood logs. If you





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happen to be in New Zealand, you can find it on palm fronds. You might wonder about the time of year you can find it, and the answer is ... any time of year and especially in the spring. For cyphelloid species, like jelly fungi, revive and dry out, revive and dry out, depending on the humidity rather than the season. I've even found *Henningsomyces candidus* in New England in the dead of winter...

So what are you waiting for? Start turning over logs! †

