# Nycena News

# The Mycological Society of San Francisco September 2009, vol. 60:06

## September 15<sup>th</sup> MSSF Meeting Speaker



Ashley Hawkins

Forest pathogen dynamics in oldgrowth mixed coniferous forests of the Coast Range, Northern California

In 2006 Ashley received his B.S. degree in Botany with an emphasis in mycology at Humboldt State University. He is presently finishing his graduate work in Humboldt's Department of Biological Sciences, working with Dr. Terry Henkel, Associate Professor of Mycology.

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## MycoDigest: Recruiting a new generation of mycologists: how to engage youth in mycology

Nicole Hynson

If I were to take a trip back in time to, say, 20 years ago and ask myself what I would be doing in the year 2009, I don't think the answer would have been studying fungi. As a young person, never in a million years would I have thought that the job Mycologist was real or just as legitimate as say Astronaut, Doctor, or Ballerina. Yet here we are! Now, as a graduate student and teacher of mycology, I often wonder what is it about fungi that has held my interest? The answer to this question is perhaps the solution to getting young people interested in mycology.

The first bit of fungal bait that comes to mind is wild edible mushrooms. As a teenager living in Oregon collecting wild edibles was what first got me hooked on fungi. However, compared to many places in Europe and Asia, wild crafting in general is not a common American pastime. Most American children are not

encouraged by their families or teachers to learn about wild edibles. For the average American child it is actually quite the opposite: they are taught that mushrooms are dangerous and should be avoided. The one exception is the benign button mushroom that may show up in the marinara on spaghetti night. This lack of exposure to fungi already presents a hurdle for educators who are interested in getting kids engaged in the fungal world.



#### Photo courtesy of Nicole Hynson

Furthermore, as the child grows up fungi stop being associated just with "gross toadstools" and move further into the realm of taboo where if one is interested in fungi they are automatically aligned with the psychedelic movement of the '60's or the occult.

An additional challenge is that, unlike less morphologically and seasonally variable organisms such as birds, bugs, or even plants, the ability to correctly identify mushrooms cannot be gleaned from a book, video, or lecture; it must be handed down from person to person. Thus, learning to identify mushrooms is one of the last remaining oral traditions we have, which makes it all the more valuable and at risk.

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MycoDigest is a section of *Mycena News* dedicated to the scientific review of mycological information.

# PRESIDENT'S POST

Welcome to the new season!

My name is Dan Long. I've been on the Council for a number of years and now I find myself sitting at the head of the table. I'm a 35 year, self-employed cabinetmaker by trade. The MSSF has enhanced my life to such an extent, that I feel a need to give something back. Let the good times roll!

I think my first order of business is to thank J.R. Blair for being our President for the last couple of years. He truly rose to the occasion. He's been overseeing the Fungus Fair for the last couple of years, and with the Oakland Museum under a major remodel, found another venue to have this years Fungus Fair. It's going to be at the Lawrence Hall of Science, in Berkeley, I'll address that more on a later post. He has also been giving twotiered identification classes that are very popular and always booked up. He is a giver and we all should be grateful that he is in our group.

I think there is a misconception that the MSSF is run by a few individuals and you have to be part of the "in crowd" in order to be on the council. I want to assure you, that is not the case. We need people to come forward. There are people who have been volunteering for years and could use some much needed help. It is very gratifying to be able to contribute to an organization that will affect many. I encourage you to come forward and participate with other like minded people. I want to extend special thanks on behalf of the entire club to Monique Carment and Denise Gregory who have contributed immensely to help make our club what it is today. They are stepping down from their posts as librarians, and have been a part of everything since I have been around.

I would like to touch on one more thing. This summer, David Bartolotta was tragically killed in a car accident on the East Coast. A car ran a red light and hit the car he was a passenger in. It was horrible news to bear. David had been a member of the MSSF for 19 years and was a friend to many. If you didn't know him, you are probably reaping the benefits of his involvement in our group and don't know it. He was my friend and I like to think that he helped me one last time. We truly don't know when our time is up and that we should assert ourselves in our everyday lives. Do the things you think about today, and shed that comfort that you'll do it tomorrow. ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Cultivation Classes at Peralta Community College

The Peralta Community College District is offering a number of classes that may be of interest to MSSF members. At Merritt College, up in the Oakland Hills, Ken Litchfield continues his cultivation classes, Sundays, 11 am - 3 pm.

Topics covered: Study of mushrooms in the landscape and kitchen garden for food, medicine, aesthetics, soil building, composting, and bioremediation; relationships with plants, taxonomy, and lore. The laboratory covers capture and ramping-up methods and translation of lab methods to field use.

Click on "Enroll Now!" at www.peralta.edu

Mushroom Cultivation	Course Number	Code
Beginning	LANHT 45A-M1L	42114
Intermediate	LANHT 45B-M1L	42116
Advanced	LAHNT 45C-M1L	42118

## GRADUATE MYCOLOGY CLASS AT SFSU

Mushroom Taxonomy, Biol. 800

Instructor: Dr. Dennis E. Desjardin

Meetings: Mondays, 1:00-5:00 at San Francisco State University, Hensill Hall room 401, from August 31<sup>st</sup> to December 18<sup>th</sup>.

Open to the public for those interested in mushrooms. Fees paid through the College of Extended Learning. 3 credit, graduate-level course but we start at the beginning...all you need is an avid love of mushrooms. Three weekend fieldtrips are planned, two jointly held with professors and students from UC Berkeley, UC Davis, and Humboldt State Univ. There are still a few spots available. If interested, let Prof. Desjardin (ded@sfsu.edu) know ASAP.

#### **MSSF Scholarship**

Each year the Mycological Society of San Francisco offers scholarships of \$700 to \$1,500 to graduate students majoring in mycology at colleges and universities in northern California. On completion of their work, scholarship winners present the results at a general meeting of the MSSF. Past winners include MSSF science advisor Prof. Dennis Desjardin (SFSU), Prof. Andrew Methven (Uof TN) and Prof. Brian Perry (Uof HI).

All proposals are welcomed, but special consideration is given to taxonomic studies of the higher fungi of the Pacific States. Applicants should send a brief statement describing the research project and include two letters of recommendation, one from a professional mycologist, to:

> Robert Mackler 736 Oak Crest Circle Placerville, CA 95667

Deadline for applications is December 31, 2009. Students reapplying, or modifying previous proposals, need not resubmit letters of recommendation.

See ya, Dan



The prime mushroom season will be soon upon us. It's time to check your book library and see if you are adequately equipped for the task ahead. I have been searching the book publishers over the summer and I have located three new fungus-related books which I will present in future *What's Booking?* articles. I will have all the books and posters available for purchase in the basement of the Randall Museum for one hour prior to the next general meeting. Members receive a 10% discount on books. I am also looking for someone who can assist with the sales of books at the Fungus Fair in December and

eventually take over the book sales chair position. Call me if you may be interested; one perk of the job is that you get to read all the books for FREE! -Curt Haney, MSSF Book Chairperson

## Land's End and Beyond

## Advocacy report by Eric Multhaup

The MSSF is ushering in a new era of cooperation and collaboration with the GGNRA with the joint project of monitoring the Land's End area of GGNRA in San Francisco regarding the effects of mushroom picking. In July, 2008, the GGNRA suspended mushroom picking at Land's End in response to a national park service directive that public harvesting of national park resources (animal, mineral, vegetable, and fungal) was permissible only after a scientific study showed that the harvesting would not adversely effect the harvested resource, or any native species that used the harvested resource, or any native species that were used by the harvested resource, i.e., predator and prey relationships.

There was some initial grumbling that the Land's End closure was a bureaucratic boondoggle, but the far-sighted leadership of the MSSF viewed this as an opportunity to promote science-based regulation of public lands, rather than arbitrary administrative regulation, of which there is far too much going around at the federal, state and local levels. The MSSF made an overture to the GGNRA to formulate and conduct the monitoring study necessary to a re-opening of Land's End, and the GGNRA responded that it would "welcome a proposal to conduct a study in the park by qualified individuals with a well thought out study design."

The MSSF has put its best foot forward with a proposal headed up by a more than merely "well-qualified" individual in the persona of the <u>eminently</u> well-qualified J.R. Blair as Principal Investigator.

We are currently working out the details of the study, but what has become abundantly clear is that this will require a labor-intensive effort on the part of MSSF volunteers at Land's End following the first major rains in November through March. The basic structure of the study is to assemble a baseline roster of Land's End mushrooms from historical sources, and then observe whether what comes up this rainy season largely duplicates the historic list, falls short of the list, or exceeds the list with new varieties. If the observations duplicate or exceed the historic list, then we can argue that the past decades of public mushroom picking have not depleted the resource, and that Land's End can safely be re-opened to picking.

Our most difficult task in this study is to beat the general picking public to the mushrooms as they fruit so we can photograph them and take voucher specimens before they disappear. While Land's End is officially closed to public picking, we have to assume that the general picking public does not spend a lot of time scrutinizing arcane federal rule publications, and will be out as usual come November. Therefore, we are going to need volunteers to make early morning sweeps of assigned sectors of the Land's End area between 7:00 and 8:30 a.m.

Contact Eric Multhaup (<u>mullew@comcast.net</u>) for details and to volunteer.



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## **Contributors:**

Pat George, Lisa Gorman, Curt Haney, Ashley Hawkins, Nicole Hynson, Dan Long, Eric Multhaup and Adam Wright.

## Editing and Layout:

Dave Lubertozzi

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To subscribe, renew, or make address changes, please contact Alvaro Carvajal: alvaro.carvajal@ sbcglobal.net or (415) 695-0466.

Past issues of *Mycena News* can be read on-line at www.mssf.org.

## MSSF Officers 2009-2010

President: Dan Long (925) 945-6477 danlong@astound.net

Vice-President: Lou Prestia (510) 597-0214 lou@prestia.com

Secretary: Phil Brown (510) 526-4325 towltek2000@msn.com

Treasurer: Henry Shaw (925) 943-3237 shaw4@llnl.gov

## Mushroom Report from Yunnan, China

## Adam Wright

As it is the off season in California and the list seems a little inactive right now, I thought I'd spice things up a bit with a fungi-related account from my recent travels through southwest China. I just returned to the US from a year-long stay in Kunming, China, the capital of the southwestern-most province of Yunnan, which also happens to the wild mushroom capitol of China. Its summer and mushrooms of all varieties were popping up in the produce markets, so I decided to try my hand at a little local foraging. My girlfriend and I did a bit of research and located a small forested village just outside of Kunming that was one of the main centers for local production. We asked the locals where should one go to find wild mushrooms, and we were pointed along a steep trail leading up a pine covered mountain. The soil was bright red, very clay-like and hard...no soft pine duff like I'm used to seeing in the Bay Area, so I was a little wary of whether or not there would actually be mushrooms or not.

As soon as we entered the forest however, there was fungal activity galore! *Russula*, *Suillus*, LBMs, and everything else was present with a gusto, though very little looked edible (my girlfriend served as my guide to what was and was not edible because she, like everyone else in Yunnan, knows a lot about local mushrooms). With this amount of fungal activity, where were the edibles? Soon I found out, as I passed about 30 people within the next hour, families, couples, old, young, all with brimming baskets of boletes and other edibles. With this amount of picking all on this one hill, there was no way I was going to get much of anything, though I did stumble upon a few good boletes and edible *Russulas (Russula virescens* as I later identified).

Discouraged, I decided, rather than try to pick myself, why not see the fruits of everyone else's labor all in one place? That place was the Kunming Wild Mushroom Wholesale Market. It was an unbelievable experience, especially for those passionate about mushrooms. Walking thru the market gates at 7 am, the first thing I was met with was the unmistakable earthy aroma of wild mushroom, a bit like the last day at the fungus fair but much stronger. Next I saw a never ending sea of basket upon basket piled high and overflowing with...potatoes? As I got closer, and the smell told me as well, I realized that these were not potatoes but instead boletes of every conceivable type, color, size and shape. Boletes of colors that I did not think imaginable for an edible mushroom.

Once I got over the initial shock of seeing so many boletes in one place, I began to take in the sounds and other sights of the market. Besides boletes, there were endless amounts of other mushrooms, most that I had never seen, but some that were familiar like chanterelle, porcini, and matsutake. I walked around talking with the vendors, and using the chinese name of the mushroom I managed to come up with a list of only a small portion of the available selection there: *Boletus magnificus, Russula virescens, Boletus luridus, Termitornyces albuminosus, Thelephora ganbajun*.

The last one on that list, *Thelephora ganbajun*, deserves special mention. Called "ganbajun" in Chinese, which means "thick cut roast beef mushroom", it is by far the most fragrant and flavorful mushroom I have ever tasted, with an aroma on par with truffles and a texture that of porcini. My girlfriend and I bought some that day and brought it home and she made the most divine fried rice that I have ever eaten. Setting the mushrooms in the kitchen for five minutes gave the entire apartment an intense mushroom aroma.

It was so good I just had to let others take part, so when the time came to fly back to the US, I risked smuggling some in my checked luggage (wrapped it up really well so the dogs wouldn't sniff it). I made it thru and made an amazing mushroom soup and risotto when I got home. If I had gotten caught, I think I would have taken it to the supreme court, as the agricultural control notice said "no plants, plant products, fresh fruit, meat, meat products, dairy products, insects, or snails". When the inspector asked me if I had any of these, I answered truthfully "no".

Wondering how they manage to sell all of those fresh boletes before they spoil? There is an enormous dried mushroom business going on in China, and I'm sure that is exactly the fate of many of the mushrooms at that market. That market goes on EVERY DAY during the summer mushroom season, and ALL the mushrooms in the pictures will be sold by the end of the day, which is why we got there at 7 am. Buyers are there from all over China and the rest of the world, I saw Japanese guys buying up a lot of Matsutake, some dudes from Beijing buying up a bunch of boletes for a hotpot restaurant out there, and many more from around Kunming which has multitudes of restaurants serving vast varieties of mushrooms.

Photos opposite courtesy of Adam Wright. For a brief video, go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz5yTNSTSkE



# Every Mushroom Has Its Moment

## Lisa Gorman

For a lot of us, the thrill of the hunt never dies. It still stops my heart just a little even when I spot just one rare, edible and/or beautiful mushroom. But, it seems there are favorable moments for spotting mushrooms in the most unusual or ideal of circumstances. But, alas, these cannot be predicted. We just stumble into one of nature's mycological moments.

This type of experience was quite frequent for me in France, where I lived from 1997-2002 and where I first really discovered mushrooms. Although I commuted most days into the Paris, I was fortunate enough to live and even find work just outside Paris proper, and just a five minute walk to the edge of the forest.

When I discovered a trail that led into the forest near my work, I would take every chance I got to explore the trail without being late. But, one morning I accidentally caught the extra early bus to the edge of town and started down the path to the trail head that just entered a forest of chestnut, pine and birch. It was 6:30 a.m. on a freezing winter dawn, before the sky turned a noticeable blue. Stars were still out. But, when I stepped into the trail beneath the dense forest, it was so dark I could only make out the tree trunks and the trail three feet ahead of me. I started my descent from the top of a gentle slope, thinking how useless it is to hunt for mushrooms since it was impossible to see anything. But I kept my eyes peeled to the ground out of habit.

## The Culinary Group Invites You to Join Us!

Among the diverse and well-informed members of the MSSF are many who want to learn more about the gastronomic aspects of fungi, like to prepare great food and share it with friends, old and new. They join the Culinary Group. Its members plan and execute fine dinners most first Mondays of the month from September through May.

Culinary Group members share in the preparation of our dinners either as part of the team making the dinner courses or by bringing an appetizer. During the meeting part of the evening, members contribute suggestions for upcoming dinners and volunteer to do the cooking. The cooks are reimbursed for the costs of their ingredients.

Traditionally, these dinners have been designed to take advantage of the wild mushrooms available at the time, may have an ethnic food focus, or may center on an unusual main ingredient or a holiday near the time of the dinner.

Notice of the upcoming dinners in the calendar section of the Mycena News, on the website, or on the Yahoo groups site. Members receive notice of the upcoming dinner with the menu via e-mail or US mail well before the dinner dates. Reservations must be made in a timely manner so that the cooks know how much to buy. The deadline for reservations is the Friday

Only after a few yards, deeper into the woods, when my eyes scanned out of habit both sides of the trail, I suddenly froze—as far as my eye could see, pure white mushrooms against the pitch black earth, surrounded by blackness and silence. Because it was so dark their shapes were so distinct puff balls, large and small perched on the ground; *Amanita phalloides* young and old, white *Russulas* and agarics, with tall stipes and large caps. The contrast of these white shapes on black ground with almost no light gave them an incandescent, magical quality, like they were floating on an invisible sea of blackness. For a few minutes I just stood there and forgot my freezing fingers in spite of my gloves, and in awe of the glowing contrast of a surreal quality.

But, then, the sky turned blue black and brought in more light through the forest trees and onto the forest ground. These glowing bodies faded and the black sea mutated into a dark brown muddy trail and damp forest leaves came into closer view with the morning light.

I felt I witnessed something awesome that nature had given me—its very own slide show with the lights off. I never again saw puff balls in the same way. Nor did I ever try to find that "just right" timing between night and day when all the white mushrooms were glowing in profusion all at once on a damp black earth, and being at the right place while all this is happening. It's this and other mycological experiences that bring home the message for me that "timing is everything.

before the Monday dinner date. The cooks are notified of the number of people attending the dinner on Saturday morning.

The Culinary Group is a <u>participatory</u> cooking group. Members take part at least once a year in the preparation of part of the main dinner- the entree, sides or dessert. Others bring appetizers to share. We often work together preparing the menu items and we have a battery of pans, etc., to use for large groups. We in the Culinary Group also volunteer to help with special MSSF events such as the Holiday Dinner, the annual Fungus Fair and the forays. To join the Culinary Group you must be a member in good standing of the MSSF. Dinner costs to participants are very reasonable, covering rental fees and the cost of dinner ingredients.

Here is a sample Culinary Group menu: Appetizers, including many with wild mushrooms; Salad; Roasted Salmon with Black Trumpet Beurre Blanc Sauce; Scalloped Potatoes with Candy Caps, Morels and Gruyere Cheese; Roasted Asparagus; Key Lime Dessert; Coffee...

Come join us you lovers of mushrooms, cooking, good food and conviviality! And check out the Culinary Group link on the MSSF website: mssf.org. For more information, contact Pat George at (510) 204-9130 or plgeorge33@yahoo.com

#### MycoDigest continued

Because I was fortunate enough to have friends who were into mushroom hunting and to live in the Pacific Northwest where the houses have more kinds of mold than inhabitants, when I began college my curiosity in fungi was already piqued. However, had it not been for the enthusiasm and knowledge of mushrooms held by my professor Dr. Michael Beug, I don't think my interests would have gone any further than wanting to know the difference between chanterelles and hedgehogs. A quick survey of young Mycologists reveals a similar story of a mentor who brought them into the field and in some way shaped their current career trajectories. At this point you may be saying to yourself, "sure, we all have had teachers that have impacted our lives in a similar way, so shouldn't the creation of new Mycologists just continue to be reciprocal? Where good teachers will encourage new students to take up the field and become teachers and so on?" Sadly, it is my opinion that this is not the case. The strength of our ability to teach about fungi and get students engaged in the field of mycology lies in exposing them, even if just in their own backyards, to wild mushrooms. This is confounded by the fact that in the U.S., not only is the study of fungi something that fundamentally has cultural taboos associated with it, but with the rise of molecular techniques, we are losing our experts in mushroom identification. The rise of molecular techniques for the study of fungi has provided a wealth of scientific discovery, especially when it comes to our knowledge of the sheer diversity of fungi in natural systems. However, what has been and can be accomplished through techniques such as DNA sequencing of environmental samples in no way negates the need for field biology. We are at a crossroads in the mycological world where the two paths of molecules and morphology, often diverge in the proverbial wood.

So where do we go from here? First off, the power to maintain and share fungal knowledge lies in you. Until we reach the day of tricorder-esc handheld DNA sequencers we continue to rely on mushroom experts to impart their knowledge to others. Because of this, outreach to the next generation is critical. Perhaps visiting your niece's fourth grade class to talk about mushrooms isn't your idea of a well-spent afternoon, but outreach doesn't have to happen in such orchestrated ways. What about that Panaeolus species that you found in your yard? Sure it's not the most charismatic of fungi, but to your friends, neighbors and family members it might be the first wild mushroom they've seen. That little LBM has gills, spores, a cap and a stalk (or stem) , just like many other mushrooms, and therefore lends its self nicely to explaining the basics of mushroom identification. Furthermore, it's found in a particular yet common habitat (the lawn) and is known for having a saprotrophic lifestyle- some tidbits that could be easily shared and could possibly pique someone's interest in the ecology of fungi. Fungi don't have to be something that is studied far a field or in the lab, around your home are fungi in unexpected places (not just the bathroom), think of cheese, beer and penicillin! Helping those in your daily life to see that fungi are not something to fear, but an integral (and delicious) part of both human and natural systems is key.

As research in Universities, colleges and non-academic organizations such as the USDA Forest Service and The Nature

Conservancy continue to rely heavily on molecular methods for the study of fungi, the role of the amateur mycological societies in engaging and training young Mycologists will become all the more critical. Opportunities for outreach and education within these groups are innumerable. Additionally, more mycological societies could form collaborations with researchers that could complement their work in the lab. One such existing example is the collaboration between the Bruns lab at UC Berkeley, the Mycological Society of San Francisco and the Sonoma Mycological Association on the Pt. Reyes (http://www.mykoweb.com/PtReyes/) Myco-blitz where multiple mushroom forays in Pt. Reyes National Seashore have lead to the creation of a publicly accessible database of the fungi found in the park. This type of collaboration helps not only to build understanding between molecular versus morphological identification of fungi, but also helps academic researchers meet important social responsibility criteria set by funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation. Above all, these forays are fun and get people from various backgrounds outdoors and looking at fungi. A natural extension of this type of collaboration could be organizing specific events for children and young adults. It is my fervent hope that a younger generation will find the same delight in mushrooms that I did and still do today. Coming back to my initial question of what is it about fungi that is so compelling? I'd have to answer that it is not only the intrigue of wild mushroom hunting, but more so the people who study them, their enthusiasm for the natural world and the knowledge they have to impart on others.

Acknowledgements: the author would like to thank A.S.A. and A.R.A. for valuable feedback on this article.



Nicole Hynson is a Ph.D. student in the Bruns lab at UC Berkeley. She was introduced to the study of fungi by Michael Beug at Evergreen State College. Her research interests include the functional role of mycorrhizal fungi in forest ecosystems and their association with myco-heterotrophic plants. She remains involved with education and outreach by teaching mycology to undergraduates at UC Berkeley and volunteering for the MSSF Fungus Fair.

#### Speaker continued

Growing up along the far northern coast of California, Ashley developed a strong interest in collecting and learning about the abundant fungal species at an early age. This interest in fungi, which continued throughout his university studies, inspired him to take extra mycology classes as well as concentrate his senior project and graduate work on the subject.

Ashley's talk will focus on his work with native fungal and some non-fungal pathogens of old-growth Douglas-fir/white fir forests of the Northwest California Coast ranges. He will speak about the general ecology of fungal pathogens in the forest environment and give an overview of some important and interesting examples in northern Californian forests. Following this he will talk about his masters project, discussing some of his findings relative to the role of fungal pathogens and their effects on old-growth Douglas-fir/white fir forests. Mycological Society of San Francisco c/o The Randall Museum 199 Museum Way San Francisco, CA 94114





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# MSSF Calendar - September 2009

Monday, September 14, 2009, 7 pm (note the date, please) Culinary Group Annual Potluck Dinner

As usual, we start off our mushroom year with the best potluck you can imagine. We meet at the SF County Fair Building (Hall of Flowers), 9th and Lincoln, San Francisco. Unlike our other dinners, no reservation is necessary this time. The cost will be \$5.00 per person to cover rental expenses. Be sure to bring your own tableware as the venue doesn't provide it. Also, bring a favorite dish to share and a beverage. We will continue to have our fabulous raffle at the dinner. Bring something interesting to be raffled off and you will receive 5 free tickets for the raffle. Visit the MSSF website (mssf.org) for a link to the Culinary Group site for more information or contact Pat George at (510) 204-9130 or plgeorge33@yahoo.com. Our next dinner meeting will be October 5th.

**Tuesday, September 15, 2009, 7 pm MSSF General Meeting** Randall Museum. 7pm, mushroom identification and refreshments provided by the Hospitality Committee. 8pm, Ashely Hawkins will discuss *Forest Pathogen Dynamics in Old-Growth Mixed-Coniferous Forests of the Northern California Coast Range* 

#### Ongoing - November-March: Land's End study collections

We need volunteers to make early morning sweeps of assigned sectors of the Land's End area between 7:00 and 8:30 am, following the first major rains in November through March. (Sunrise on November 1 is 6:35 am, 7:06 am on November 30, and approximately 7:15 am at the Winter Solstice.)

We hope that our members will respond enthusiastically to this opportunity to perform a public service as part of the MSSF, and perhaps in the longer run contribute to the opening of more public lands to public picking.

ALL VOLUNTEERS PLEASE E-MAIL YOUR CONTACT INFO TO ERIC MULTHAUP, <u>mullew@comcast.net</u>, chairman of the Committee on Public Land Regulation.

> Deadline for the October 2009 issue of *Mycena News* is September 18th. Please send your articles, calendar items, and other information to: mycenanews@mssf.org