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Macrofungal ecology, diversity and ethnomycology in Ethiopia

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Our knowledge of macrofungal diversity in Ethiopia is very limited. The type of vegetation, ecological and habitat variation in an area determines species richness and composition of macrofungi. Our recent mycological study undertaken in three ecologically and geographically different sites, Welmera, Menge and Kaffa in Ethiopia has shown interesting variations in macrofungal flora. Mushroom diversity on the central highlands is dominated by species of *Agaricus*, diverse and common on highland fields, pastures and forested areas. Mushrooms associated with termites, *Termitomyces* spp, are diverse in the low altitude savanna woodland where macrotermitinae termites are common and diverse. Other examples of macrofungal diversity and specificity on the highland and lowland ecosystems have been documented. A high diversity of *Lentinus spp* is found on *Cordia Africana* wood and *Pyrofomes demidoffi* as a specific pathogen of *Juniperus procera* are worth mentioning. Ectomycorrhizal mushrooms found in exotic plantations (Eucalyptus, Pinus and Cupressus) such as species of *Laccaria* and *Suillus* are absent in indigenous forests. Mushrooms are, in general, known to have food and medicine value to local people in many cultures including in Ethiopia. Unlike the central highlands, however, ethnic groups in southwest Ethiopia have a well developed traditional knowledge and habit of using mushrooms for food and medicine. In this region, wild mushrooms are a free source of food during the rainy season, a period of grain scarcity. Deforestation and habitat destruction are the main factors for decreasing variety and abundance of macrofungi in Ethiopia. The need to study macrofungal flora of Ethiopia and conserve the genetic resources is highly recommended.

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