

Nature springs into action after the flood The Clarence Valley, Northern NSW, April 2017

For nature lovers, this past summer has been one of disappointment. Prolonged drought and heatwave conditions had resulted in stressed forests, dried up wetlands, and minimal growth of annual flowering plants.

However, with heavy rain followed by high humidity and warm temperatures, nature instantly bounces back through a proliferation of growth, not just the annuals and new leaves on shrubs and trees, but with a sparkling array of fungi.



They come in every form, size, colour and shape imaginable. They grow on trees, rocks, the forest floor and on rotting logs, even on grasses.

The more common groups include mushrooms, those with simple gills on the under surface that distribute their spores, while others have pores. There are coral fungi, puffballs, earth stars, underground truffle like fungi, slime moulds; shelf, jelly and birds nest fungi and, of course, stinkhorns.

These latter, while beautifully intricate of form, live up to their names giving off an unpleasant odour to attract flies to help spread their spores.



Phallus indusiatus



Aseroe rubra, stinkhorn. Courtesy Mazza Verdante



Phallus rubicunda



Some fungi are barely visible, with heads only 2 - 3mm across supported on long stalks no thicker than a thread of cotton, while others are immensely powerful, able to force their way through the rock hard surface of termite nests that even a wielded mattock would have difficulty breaking.



The variety is endless.



Coral and club mosses come in many colours, red, yellow, white, and even black



Some are dainty and fragile

while others are woody, hard and tough



while others are just plain weird.



The North Coast of NSW is already acknowledged as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, with a staggering proliferation of flora and fauna, both on land and in the adjoining ocean. It's clear that fungi diversity is no less outstanding.

**By John Edwards
for Clarence Environment Centre**

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