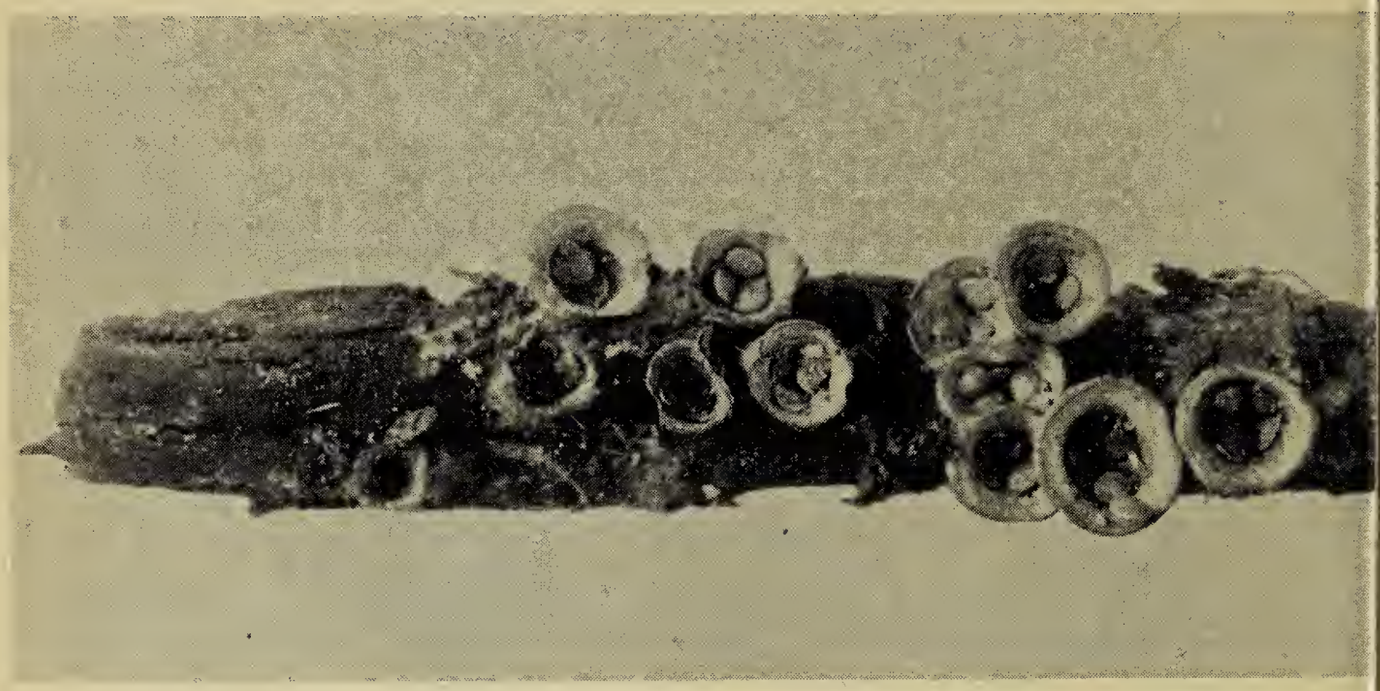
Bird-Nest Fungus

by **A. J. Hruska, Gerald**



National Museum of Canada Photo
Bird-nest Fungus showing peridiola in cups.

You will have to get down on your knees to see this small inconspicuous fungus. The Black Egg Bird-Nest Fungus *Cyathus olla* (Batsch) Pers. is one of the most astonishing creations to be found in the woods as far as its intricate method of reproduction is concerned.

The specimens in my collection are about ½ inch high with the cups or openings about ¼ inch in width, attached to organic matter and forming close set colonies. Inside the cups are a number of black egg-like spore cases called **peridiola** fastened to the wall and bottom of these nests.

These "eggs" are smaller than mustard seed and contain thousands of spores. For many years it has been a riddle as to how the spores got out of the hard cases containing them and further how the cases got out of the little nest-like cups. Each peridiolum is firmly attached with a strong fibrous cord to the wall of the cup.

National Museum of Canada Photo
General appearance of Bird-nest Fungus.

As always in Nature, there is a reason. The cup is just right sized for a rain drop. During a rainstorm one pelting raindrop hitting the cup makes a splash and the peridiola are knocked out. As the peridiola are ejected the fibrous threads holding them follow like a comet's tail. As they land the threads wrap themselves around a twig, stem, etc., bola fashion.

With the tiny bird-nest peridiola hung up by threads on a stem, twig or leaf they become available to grazing or browsing animals. In order to grow and reproduce again the spores of this fungus must be eaten by an animal, pass through the digestive system, and be voided, before the spores will germinate and reproduce. The intricate process by which this fungus is reproduced has resulted in these small, choice treasures of Nature which are sometimes called Splash Cups.