
MYSTERY PHOTO



This insect masquerading as a miniature propeller, was photographed near Ketchen, SK in June 1999 by Shirley Johnston. What is it?

Answer for JUNE 2000 MYSTERY PHOTO



The tiny parasols on slender threads belong to a MOSS called Yellow Collar Moss or Fairy Parasols (*Splachnum luteum*). The parasol structure is the sporophyte. Because this moss grows only on animal droppings - usually moose - getting spores to new sites for growth poses a bit of a problem. The moss enlists the help of insects. Lured by odours produced by the moss, insects land on the parasols, pick up spores and transfer them to new piles of droppings which they visit to lay eggs.

Several readers sent in correct responses : Reed Barclay, Ruth Griffiths and Michael Goodyear, who, in July, had the remarkable coincidence of seeing a second species of Collar Moss in northern Saskatchewan. Thank you all for writing in. I would also like to thank those who identified the photo as a mushroom - for that is what I also assumed it to be when I took the photograph.

This atypical moss is well illustrated in several field guides : Plants of the Western Boreal Forest and Aspen Parkland by Johnson, Kershaw, MacKinnon and Pojar, and Mosses, Lichens and Ferns of Northwest North America by Vitt, Marsh and Bovey.

The editors would like to thank René Belland, University of Alberta, for confirming the identity of the mystery photo.