

# Social Media-Assisted Identifications: Gleaning Facebook for Clues

By Jess Evans

I know what you're thinking. Facebook? Not just an endless stream of advertisements and memes flashing by as you scroll? A hotbed of intellectual conversation on topics related to fungal identifications? Actually, sometimes, yes! It all depends on where you look.

There are myriad groups available to join for the mushroom enthusiast, with group names such as "Mushroom Identification," "I Love Wild Mushrooms!" and "Lichens, Mosses, Ferns, and Fungi." Each encourages folks to share their wild finds, often with the goal of helping members identify what they have found. Joining these groups does offer the danger of misidentifications and bandwagon theories, but also often helps narrow down identifications and connect like-minded mycophiles.

For accurate and interesting information, I really enjoy the daily postings from Rob Hallock's group entitled "Mycological Word of the Day." Dr. Hallock is the author of *A Mushroom Word Guide* (2015 and 2019 editions) and he shares content from his books as well as additional information based on the etymology and meanings of words pertaining to fungi. Each daily post includes photographs, definitions, and connections to articles or mushroom specimens collected by amateurs.

One such post from this past November caught my eye. Dr. Hallock posted a picture of what appeared to be a small, brown-grey mushroom with very distant, waxy gills. It looked very similar to a mystery mushroom I'd had on my mind since a foray in September. Dr. Hallock's mushroom was "possibly *Hodophilus*." *Hodophilus*? Further discussion revealed a recent Rhode Island find by amateur mycologist Joshua Hutchins, whose *Hodophilus hymenocephalus* (Fig. 1) was confirmed via DNA sequencing. I had never heard of that genus or species before. Did my mystery fungi belong to this new-to-me group?

I was inspired to do some research and found that the genus *Hodophilus* fits within the family Clavariaceae, and its place within this group was confirmed with DNA sequencing studies done in 2016 by Birkebak *et al.* Clavariaceae, within the Agaricales order, contains such familiar species as *Clavaria zollengeri* and *Clavulinopsis fusiformis*: coral fungi! Wait a second ... waxy, gilled fungi that are closely related to corals? The more I read on the topic, the



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Figure 1. *Hodophilus hymenocephalus*, collected by Joshua Hutchins of Rhode Island.

more intrigued I was. By morphology alone, I might never have considered that the widely varying fruiting bodies might belong within the same family.

Fungi within Clavariaceae have either a single club-shaped fruiting body, a multi-branched or coralloid shape, or an agaricoid fruiting body with stem and gills. Since 1986, several *Hodophilus* species were grouped within another new-to-me genus: *Camarophylloopsis*, which still exists within Clavariaceae as well. Looking farther back, these same species were previously placed in *Hygrocybe* (1969), *Armillariella* (1951), and *Hygrophorus* (1950). What's in a name? Before DNA studies, fungi were placed and re-placed into genera based on their morphology, or their forms and structures, both macro- and microscopically. The 2016 study simply confirmed the rightful place of *Hodophilus* species within Clavariaceae and separate from other genera in that family. Although *Hodophilus* and a few other genera within Clavariaceae have visible gills rather than coral-like shapes, their microscopic features and now DNA sequences place them firmly within that family.

My mystery mushroom was collected during the joint foray with the Boston Mycological Club in September, at the Harvard Forest in Petersham. I'd brought it back to the tables, and Chris Neefus and I discussed its possibilities. It was small, grey-brown, with distant waxy gills (Figure 2). I was fairly certain I'd seen it only once before, in 2018 on another club walk. This little gal was certainly intriguing, but that particular specimen was just one of many collected that day,



Figure 2. Specimens collected by Jess Evans in Petersham, MA, September 2019.

and I unfortunately did not keep it for further study. I wish I had done so – even if it meant waiting a few months with a dried specimen in storage to conclusively identify my mystery mushroom.

The single posting on “Mycological Word of the Day” was enough to spark connections in my mind with *Hodophilus*, and I shared my observation on Mushroom Observer. Within a few hours, CA-based mycologist Alan Rockefeller confirmed what I had suspected. His sequencing work had also confirmed Joshua Hutchins’ find. My mushroom, just based on visual characteristics and my description of its habitat and morphology, was very likely *Hodophilus hymenocephalus*. A mystery solved – thanks to Facebook!

**For more information:**

Link to 2016 study by Birkebak, et al.  
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2bd8/060c22047c0757b0c8de242152df0d12a620.pdf>

Link to my Mushroom Observer observation of *Hodophilus hymenocephalus*:  
<https://mushroomobserver.org/394649?q=14xoN>

Link to Joshua Hutchins’ Mushroom Observer observation of *Hodophilus hymenocephalus*:  
<https://mushroomobserver.org/393662>



Figure 3. First collection of the genus *Holophilus* by Jess Evans, September 2018.

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**Another beauty in the ice . . . *Tectella patellaris***

