

PVMA at the Clark Rogerson Foray: The Value in Volunteering

By Jess Benson Evans

Every September, the Connecticut-Westchester Mycological Association (COMA) hosts their annual Clark Rogerson Foray at Camp Hemlocks in Hebron, Connecticut. This “small” foray generally attracts attendees from across the Northeast, and registration is capped around 80 attendees. I was able to attend in 2019 but the pandemic and life as a single parent made it difficult for me to attend over the past few years.

All the stars aligned this year, and I was able to sign up for my second-ever Clark Rogerson foray. Our PVMA group included Vice President Mary Obrzut, club mycologist Dianna Smith, Treasurer/Membership Chair Mike Ostrowski, and members Karen Hidalgo, Brenda Clark, and Anna and Rudi Seitz. Beyond bringing dishes for the Saturday-night potluck, almost all of us also volunteered to help with various aspects of the foray.



PVMA members attend the 2022 COMA foray in Hebron, CT

As foray chair/registrar Joe Brandt noted before the foray began, “Veteran foray attendee or not, you all should know that (aside from the invited mycologists) the entire event is produced and run completely by volunteers; we have no paid staff. ‘Many hands make light work’ is a time-honored saying, which could not be truer than it is for the logistics involved for the Clark Rogerson Foray.” This means that every meal set out for attendees, every neatly arranged stack of bedding ready for the bunk, every hour of open swim time at the pool is planned and completed by volunteers. I saw this in action during several stints in the kitchen, washing dishes at the large sink as I watched the carefully choreographed dance of COMA members preparing our evening meals.

During the short hours I spent helping out, it was evident that the amazing folks of COMA were highly dedicated to creating what I believe is one of the best foray experiences out there. Volunteers were up late into the night serving hors d'oeuvres for the social hours or preparing collected mushrooms for Sunday's mycophagy and up early the next morning to ensure coffee was brewing for attendees. A number of attendees helped wash tables, collect dishes, tidy common spaces, and pack up everything at the conclusion of the foray. This volunteerism is a major part of what makes the Clark Rogerson Foray great – the sense that everyone is working together.

Beyond kitchen and dining-related tasks, other volunteer roles were also available. Late on Sunday evening, perhaps 10 p.m., I wandered into the room where all the collected mushrooms were identified, sorted, and registered. Foray mycologists were still working to finish up the last of the identifications, and the dedicated registrars were still recording each identified specimen for the foray's totals. As they registered each mushroom, I helped move the collected specimens to their correct places on the foray tables.



PVMA club mycologist Dianna Smith gives a “table talk” in the fungi sorting/ID room.

I have to admit that volunteering to help with this task also serves a purpose for my learning! The more exposure I have to new species, even through others' identifications, helps me to commit each new mushroom to memory. There were a few new species brought into the foray that I hadn't encountered before, so the extra time spent helping in this area really helped me to learn those species.

The first of these species was *Cortinarius lewisii*, which

seemed vaguely familiar. Perhaps I also found it in 2019, at the same location, during the same foray? Perhaps! This beautiful *Cortinarius* has rusty golden tones to the cap, a dry cream-colored stipe, and white basal mycelium. Another new-to-me species from the foray tables was *Stropharia kaufmanii*, collected by



Cortinarius lewisii

several different attendees. This beautiful golden-capped mushroom has a scaly white stem and a purple-brown spore print. Finally, Arleen Bessette identified a beautiful polypore I'd never seen before,



Stropharia kaufmanii

Bresadolia craterellus. At first glance, I was certain it was *Neofavolus alveolaris*. However, this specimen had a round, radially wrinkled cap with a depressed center and 1mm angular pores as opposed to *N. alveolaris*' kidney-shaped cap, lack of central depression, and 1-2 mm elongated or diamond-shaped pores.



Bresadolia craterellus

When I left the foray on Monday morning, the current collected total was 366 distinct mushroom species, with 38 of those being first-time finds at the foray! Camp Hemlocks' grounds were full of fungi, with more popping up as the foray went on through the weekend. On our second walk day, Sunday, the PVMA seven were thrilled to find the most fungi we'd seen all summer as we forayed at Gay City State Park. Throughout the woods you could hear us exclaiming, "YES!" and "OH MY GOSH" periodically. For a year in which the entire Northeast was in various stages of drought, this felt admirable. It was the foray we all needed!



The "artist's conk," *Ganoderma applanatum*, put to good use at the COMA foray.