

NEW RECORD
EARTHSTARS FOUND IN CAIRNGORMS AREA

A remarkable species of earthstar fungus, *Geastrum striatum*, has been discovered growing near Nethy Bridge in Strathspey. This is understood to be the first record of the species for the Cairngorms area, and about its most northerly occurrence in the UK. Only eight previous records for Scotland are known, though they are commoner further south.

Earthstars initially grow underground at first as a sphere composed of an inner and an outer layer. Eventually ~~IF IT IS GOING TO HAPPEN IT WILL 'EVENTUALLY' DO SO - THEREFORE SUPERFLUOUS WORD - REMOVE!~~
The outer layer splits into lobes that bend outwards and downwards to form a star-like pedestal. This lifts the inner layer a few centimetres above the ground. The spores are then released from the inner layer via a "beak" at its top.

The earthstars were found ~~grew [THEY MAY HAVE GROWN THERE BEFORE BUT HAD NOT BEEN FOUND]~~ in autumn 2004, ~~which was~~ an exceptionally good year for fungi ~~generally~~. Six ~~individuals~~ specimens were found together under old pine trees at the edge of meadows owned by a director of the Cairngorms Campaign. He said "I am sure that none have appeared there for the previous thirty years, since my bee-hives are nearby, so I go there frequently and would have noticed them. It is interesting to speculate whether the earthstar mycelium have been in the soil for decades and have only just started to fruit, or whether they are starting to colonise this area, possibly as a result of climate change. A somewhat similar sudden appearance occurred in 2003, when a greater butterfly orchid - the only one known for miles around - flowered in the meadow just in front of my house. Again, I am sure that none has appeared there for the previous thirty years. The meadows have been managed to encourage wild flowers under the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme, and it seems to be working."

Since ~~this~~ earthstar ~~discovery~~ find was publicised, another reported find ~~[TWO 'FINDS' IN ONE SENTENCE - HENCE 'DISCOVERY']~~ was ~~has been~~ received from a little further north at Tomatin. The Campaign would be interested to receive any further reports, so please keep your eyes open, particularly in the winter when they are easy to find.

~~DRENNAN IT MIGHT BE WORTH GETTING A QUOTE FROM SNH ON THIS AND TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THE SPECIES IS SUBJECT TO PROTECTION.~~