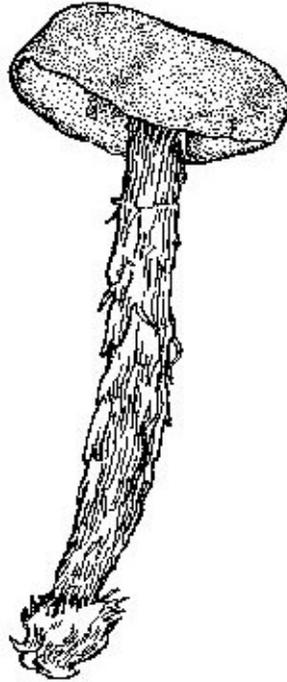


## Sandy Stilt Puffball (*Battarraea phalloides*)

*The Sandy Stilt Puffball fungus makes appearances in most years in Suffolk, but these remain the most predictable occurrences of the species in the country. Very little is known about its ecology apart from a liking for sandy soils. Hollow trees and perhaps stumps may also be important.*



### 1 Definition

The Sandy Stilt Puffball (*Battarraea phalloides*) was first described from Britain and has a scattered distribution in western Europe. Although it was formerly known from much further north, its main areas of distribution became confined to sites in southern and eastern Europe.

### 2 Current status

#### 2.1 National

The Sandy Stilt Puffball is one of only four fungi listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, it is also a Red Data Book species. This species has been recorded from a number of counties in southern England, but is only reliably known from Suffolk and Norfolk. *Battarraea phalloides* only appears to be known from about 30 UK sites, of which there are 7 in Suffolk. A number of specimens are held in the National Collection at Kew, mostly from Kent and Surrey, the latest being found in 1981. Those collected in Buckinghamshire and Gloucestershire are very old, though recent specimens come from Jersey and Norfolk (both 1996) and Oxfordshire (1997). Records exist for Somerset and possibly other southern counties.

Although rare in Europe, it has been recorded from most countries except those in the north, and it is also known from North America.

## 2.2 Local

There are seven known sites in Suffolk, (one of which remains confidential). Sandy Stilt Puffball has been noted in the parishes of Blyford, Melton, Campsea Ashe, Marlesford and Reydon. This rare fungus appears to have been seen first in England in 1782 in the area of Earsham and Kirby Cane, in south Norfolk, just north of the town of Bungay (Suffolk) and was formally described in 1785.

The first definite Suffolk record was made by a Mr. Davies of Yoxford, and his specimen was illustrated by Sowerby in 1803 and is included in the National Collection at Kew.

It has appeared at three sites since the last war, principally at Blyford near Halesworth, where over 80 were seen in the mid 1970s. It has appeared in much smaller numbers in most years since then, sometimes in spring as well as summer and autumn. In the period 1984-86 a few fruiting bodies occurred on a hedge bank at Campsea Ashe some 20 miles further south, but none have been recorded at this site since then.

A new location was discovered by D. & C. Orme at Melton, East Suffolk in August 1997, when two large fruiting bodies were noted on a small heap of sand excavated by rabbits under an old oak tree. This verge bank is dry and has little vegetation and faces east.

The Blyford bank faces east and has elm scrub and annual weeds over its 70 metre length. It is backed by a good hedge of Small leaved elm (*Ulmus minor*) for most of its length. The Campsea Ashe bank is less scrubby, but has the same elm at various stages from scrubby bushes to quite tall trees. It faces north and supports mainly weed species in its sandy soil.

At neither site has the fungus been seen inside hollow trees, a habitat mentioned in the National Biodiversity Action Plan, although at Blyford in late August 1997 two fruiting bodies appeared close to the base of a large elm which was felled some years earlier.

## 2.3 Natural Areas

Suffolk Coast & Heaths.

### 3 **Current factors causing the loss or decline of the species in Suffolk**

- Very little is known about this fungus. Of the 7 sites in Suffolk, only the dry sandy soil and possibly the fact they face north or east appear to be common factors.
- As it appears rather randomly, it is possible it has always been rare and therefore may not be significantly more threatened now than it was when discovered two centuries ago.

## 4 **Current Action**

### 4.1 **Legal Status**

Sandy Stilt Puffball is protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(as amended).

### 4.2 **Management, research and guidance**

- All sites are monitored fairly regularly to check for fruiting bodies. The Reydon site has recently been involved in a planning enquiry, resulting in houses being built just behind the site. The site owner has volunteered to look after the site as a private nature reserve. The fungus is still present here (2003).
- The Blyford site will remain uncut until the winter (2003), when it is hoped local volunteers will remove dead vegetation and prune elm suckers. The fungus has not been seen here for the last couple of years.
- The confusion between *B. phalloides* and *B. stevenii* is currently being researched at the University of Kent. This research is funded by English Nature, Kew Gardens and Kent University). It is hoped the research will investigate the genetic diversity of *Battarraea phalloides* and *B. stevenii* at and between distinct sites across their natural range by comparison of specific DNA sequences to clear up uncertainties about their likely taxonomy. Molecular diversity measures should also be used to suggest the relative roles of mycelial growth and spore dispersal in population maintenance and spread.

## 5. **Action Plan Objectives and Targets**

1. *Maintain seven known Suffolk sites in favourable condition and ensure adequate protection.*
2. *Monitor all sites for appearance of fruiting bodies.*
3. *Encourage local wildlife recorders to search for the fungus at other suitable sites.*

## 6. Sandy Stilt Puffball proposed action with Lead Agencies

Action	Date	Partners
<b>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</b>		
Ensure Sandy Stilt Puffball remains on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) and that relevant district councils are aware of its presence.	On-going	EN
<b>SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT</b>		
Maintain road verge sites as Roadside Nature Reserves and extend marker posts if the fungus appears again outside the posts.	On-going 2004	SCC
Notify all sites as CWS where not already protected as Roadside Verge Reserves.	2006	SCC, SWT
<b>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</b>		
Co-ordinate monitoring of all sites on an annual basis	On-going	SCC
Disseminate findings of national research into the needs of the fungus and its management to relevant people.	On-going	EN (Carl Borges), Kent University.
<b>ADVISORY</b>		
Protect from potential damage by roadworks, soil disturbance and trampling. By advising landowners and SCC Highways staff of its presence.	On-going	SCC
<b>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</b>		
Publicise the importance of the sites in local press and county naturalists' journals to increase local awareness and encourage sightings of the fungus.	On-going	SBRC, SWT, SCC,