

Study of Mushrooms and Other Fungi in Mihintale

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Knowledge of the Sri Lankan fungal flora is incomplete and the published data available at present are scanty and scattered. Hence, there is an urgent need for a national collection of fungi, development of a data base and a focal point for mycological activities in the country. Training and expertise in mushroom identification is very essential. The total fungal flora in the world is estimated to be about 1.6 million of which only a small fraction (7%) around 75,000 is known today. The total native fungal flora in Sri Lanka could be around 25,000 species and apart from this many species have been introduced with food, plantation and ornamental plants. However, just over 2000 species are known at present.

In this study, the fungi were collected mostly around the Rajarata University specifically in the Mihintale area. The collection sites were selected randomly, and include several types of ecosystems such as those close to a freshwater pond, a grassland and a forest. Collections were made during the rainy season from November to February 2006 and 2007. The collected fungi (about 55 specimens) have been counted and classified into several categories according to their morphological features. The mushrooms and other fungi collected in this study include those with a prominent stipe and a cap, stink horns, earth stars, bird nests, bracket fungi, coral fungi, puff balls, cup fungi, cramp balls, ear like fungi, and finger-like fungi. The fungi collected have many advantages such as utilization for medicinal purposes, for cosmetics and for some industries such as the paint industry, edible fungi, and for use as decomposers.