

# PVMA at the NEMF Foray

Jess Evans

I have a confession to make, folks. I took over 400 photos on my phone during the Samuel Ristich Foray on Cape Cod in October, and 350 of them look exactly like this:

Same white paper tablecloth underneath questionable lighting and artistic composition, different specimens in every picture. The reason for this? I spent the majority of my time on the Cape sitting in the corner of the identification and sorting room, logging specimens into Mushroom Observer as part of the Recording Team. While I hadn't expected to take on this role, it was one I stepped into willingly after seeing the backlog of specimens waiting to be logged by the incredible team of Nathan Wilson (Mushroom Observer) and Deanna Tempest Thomas (President of the Rhode Island Mycological Society).



This was the first time that the Northeast Mycological Federation had chosen to use Mushroom Observer to record specimens found at the annual foray. Mushroom Observer has been around longer than iNaturalist and caters specifically to fungi (along with lichens and myxomycetes/slime molds.) iNaturalist is perhaps more well known by amateurs and folks new to mushroom identification, since it has an app that uses AI to aid folks in identifying what they've found. Mushroom Observer relies more on the person inputting the observation, and others using MO, to identify fungi.

For the NEMF foray on the Cape, Nathan developed field ID slips that included a handy QR code that could be used to directly log and access observations. This was brand new to me but very exciting! What was less exciting, unfortunately, was the large number of fungi that came in to the identification tables but never received an official ID from any of the mycologists on the faculty given the sheer volume. While this is not a new phenomenon to large and regional forays, it invited some great conversations among the recording team about how to prevent this kind of heartbreak in future years. To see so many mushrooms removed from their habitats without being able to record them effectively (thus negating any scientific benefit to their removal) feels like the antithesis of our mission of responsible and sustainable study and collection methods.

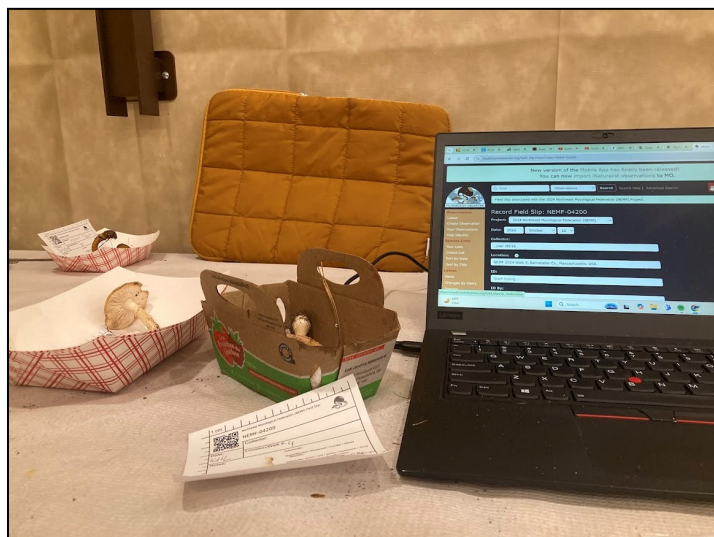
However, I am hopeful that this experience will lead to real change in how these large forays are organized, especially when it comes to instructing foray participants on collection methods. I am also certain that the majority of foray-goers are completely innocent of any deliberate overcollection! Instead, I think it's both the thrill of finding fungi and the collective behaviors of all who attend that lead to folks following the crowd and bringing back full baskets to the identification tables.

Beyond this, there were many joys to be found at the annual foray. While I did not manage to take any photos with fellow PVMA members, there were a number of us in attendance! In fact, member and former PVMA Vice President Mary Obrzut won our mushroom diorama contest. And, as you read earlier in this newsletter, Karen Hidalgo spent time with me in the ID room volunteering her time getting fungi out to the tables. When I wasn't

ensconced in my corner diligently recording mushroom and lichen finds, I met up with friends at mealtimes and one glorious walk off site.

Finally, one of my favorite moments of the foray was the Open Art workshop I hosted on Sunday morning. I brought materials for folks to make stuffed mushroom friends, and Julie O'Grady of COMA brought all of her supplies for hat-making (minus the hats.) A number of foray participants took advantage of a quiet art moment and made mushroom wreaths, stuffed animal mushroom friends, and dioramas to enter into the contest. I hope to offer more of these kinds of art opportunities for club members and beyond, because honestly it was my favorite time of the whole long weekend!

While our turn to co-host the NEMF foray will not occur for a number of years, I encourage all of you to think ahead to what you might like PVMA's role to be in these events. Personally, I'd like to continue advocating for the fungi in the coming years. How can we hold these events for amateurs and people brand new to mycology that are both educational *and* respectful of nature? Whether the science says removing fruiting bodies doesn't harm the mycelial networks below or not, forest ecosystems are more complex than we can fully understand. Whenever we can leave the fungi in the forest, we should.



Recording station: specimens, completed slips, and a laptop.



*Hydnum subolympicum*, spotted on the only NEMF walk I went on!



*Suillus spraguei*, with a lovely *Cladonia* lichen.



Hard at work recording specimens, with Nathan Wilson and Gary Gilbert's rubber chicken friend.



Left and right below: Scenes from Mary Obrzut's winning NEMF diorama! How many species do you see represented?



Left and right above: Jess offers an open art workshop at the NEMF foray. PVMA member Ramona completes a stuffed mushroom friend.

**NEMF 2025** will be held in Ithaca, NY from September 18-21 and is being hosted by a number of NY and PA-area clubs. Stay tuned for more information and visit [nemf.org](https://nemf.org) or follow NEMF on Instagram: @nemf\_fungi  
See page 14 of this newsletter for more Save-The-Dates!