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ETHNOMYCOLOGICAL STUDIES ON WILD MUSHROOMS IN CAMEROON, CENTRAL AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Mushrooms play important social, economic, and ecological roles in Cameroon. Several species, belonging to the genera *Agaricus*, *Volvariella*, *Ganoderma*, *Flammulina*, *Auricularia*, *Pleurotus*, and *Termitomyces*, were found to be used as food or in traditional medicine by the indigenous people.

Key words: Mushrooms, ethnomycology, Cameroon.

Wild edible mushrooms are an important food source for rural communities during the rainy season in many regions of the world. They can also provide additional incomes to households, if mushrooms are sold in regional markets^{1,2,3,4}. We carried out an ethnomycological study in Cameroon during the period 2000-2003, in order to develop a database on mushroom diversity and traditional uses. In this country, about 70% of the people live in rural areas, and most of them live on poor diets, resulting in malnutrition. A total of 22 mushroom species were identified by conventional taxonomy (**Table 1**). Mushroom biodiversity in Cameroon is rich and

remains poorly explored. *Termitomyces* spp. are widely distributed across the country, and provide an additional source of incomes for the rural people from Ndop plains and Baligham in the Northwest province of Cameroon, as well as in Mbounda region in the western part. Mushrooms are gathered in raffia baskets, and taken to regional markets to be sold. Baskets containing about 3-5 kg of fresh mushrooms, depending on bargaining, can reach a market price of USD \$ 35.00, which is equivalent to 21,000 Cameroon francs.

In Kom Village, Northwest province, *Flammulina velutipes* is called “fetuitui”, an

Table 1. Mushroom species identified during ethnomycological studies in Cameroon.

Species	Indigenous names	Village/Language	Traditional uses
<i>Agaricus campestris</i> Link : Fr. ^a	Kikul cocombiyako, Aghog	Lamnso, Pidgin, English Kom, Kom	Food, traditional delicacy for most tribes
<i>Agaricus bitorquis</i> (Quél.)Sacc. ^a	Cocombiyako	Pidgin, English	Food
<i>Volvariella volvacea</i> (Bull. : Fr.)Singer	Cocombiyako	Pidgin, English	Food
<i>V. gloiocephala</i> (DC.)Wasser	Aghog (ughog)	Kom/Kom	Food
<i>V. caesiointacta</i> P. D. Orton	-	-	-
<i>Clathrus</i> spp.	-	-	-
<i>Amanita</i> spp.	-	-	-
<i>Ganoderma lucidum</i> (Leysser)Karsten	Kep	Baligham	Traditional medicine to treat skin infections, boils, abscesses, and tumors. It is also used as a component in other medicinal preparations.
<i>Dictyophora</i> spp.	Not known	-	-
<i>Omphalotus olearius</i> (DeCandolle : Fr.)Singer	Not known	-	-
<i>Chlorophyllum molybdites</i> (G. Mey.)Massee	Not known	-	-
<i>Macrolepiota</i> spp.	Not known	-	-
<i>Flammulina velutipes</i> (Curtis : Fr.)Singer	Aghog (ughog), Cocombiyako	Kom/Kom, Pidgin, English, Kom Land	Food, delicacy
<i>Auricularia auricula</i> (Hooker)Underwood	Aghog (ughog), Cocombiyako	Kom/Kom, Pidgin	Food in most tribes
<i>Pleurotus tuberregium</i> (Fr.)Singer	Aghog (ughog), Cocombiyako	Kom, Pidgin	Food, delicacy for important members of the community
<i>Termitomyces titanicus</i> Pegler & Pearce ^b	Pohwett, Lemukwali	Baligham, Marova, Hausa	Food, traditional medicine
<i>T. robustus</i> (Beeli)R. Heim ^c	Kep, Pohwett	Baligham	Food
<i>T. clypeatus</i> R. Heim	No specific name	Baligham	Food
<i>T. mammiformis</i> R. Heim	No specific name	Baligham	Food
<i>Pleurotus ostreatus</i> (Jacq. : Fr.)Kumm. ^d	Aghog Uboh	Kom/Batibo	Food
<i>P. pulmonarius</i> (Fr.)Quélet ^d	Aghog Uboh	Kom/Batibo	Food
<i>Pleurotus sajor-caju</i> (Fr.)Singer ^d	Aghog Uboh	Kom/Batibo	Food

^a Species commonly harvested around palm trees (*Elais guineensis*) across the country, which are considered a delicacy for most cultures in Cameroon. Traditional food based on these species is "Achu".

^b Abundant species in northwest and western provinces where it is considered as a delicacy for children, or as a tonic for patients recovering from illness and diabetic patients.

^c Species growing predominantly in the southwestern provinces where it is considered as a delicacy.

^d Species cultivated commercially on palm and maize wastes by non-governmental organizations, which use spawn bought commercially.

indigenous name that likens it to chicken, and it is treated as a delicacy. Rural women and children normally gather this species in moist shady soils, dry or smoke their harvests, and then keep them for several months. In Bai-Bikom-kumba, Southwest province, children go out early in the morning to gather *Termitomyces robustus* and *Agaricus* spp. Mushrooms and plants are used to make traditional medicinal preparations. In Baligham, *Ganoderma lucidium* is dried and mixed with palm oil to be used as ointment for the treatment of skin diseases. *Termitomyces titanicus* is dried, ground, and mixed with a pastry for the consumption of children that are underweight.

Mushrooms play important social, economic, and ecological roles in Cameroon. However, further studies need to be done in order to assess the fungal diversity of this country.

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Figs. 1-2. *Pleurotus tuberregium*. 1: Mushroom gatherers (children from a primary school in Bai-Bikom Kumba, Southwest province of Cameroon) holding sclerotia for sale, which were harvested around a palm tree. 2: Sclerotium giving rise to fresh fruit bodies ready for sale in the regional market.