The Piggyback Pinkgill

Volvariella surrecta

A parasitic mushroom, riding “Piggyback” on distorted Clitocybe species! There are only a handful of known collections of this mushroom from western North America — we need more collections of this species so scientists can determine whether it is different from the European populations with the same name.

Have you ever seen a parasitic mushroom?

The first thing to do is record your observation. We prefer to use the iNaturalist app for that (visit www.iNaturalist.org to learn more), but you could also upload your observation to Mushroom Observer (visit www.MushroomObserver.org). The QR code to the right will take you to the Fungal Diversity Survey (FunDiS for short) website on how to “Contribute Observations” to the project.

The best thing you can do is take lots of photographs and notes. Typically, smartphones will automatically georeference any photos taken, but it is good practice to note your exact location, preferably with GPS coordinates, and be sure to note what trees are nearby, and any other salient features (like smell and texture). In this particular case, you should also document the host just as thoroughly as the parasite.

Collect a specimen

If you are in an area where it is allowed and have any necessary permits, we strongly urge you to create a vouched collection of both the parasite and the host, if you are able. This means a dried specimen for deposit in a herbarium, where researchers can access it for things like DNA sequencing. If you don’t know how to do this, please see:

fundis.org/sequence/sequence/dry-your-specimens

In California, collecting mushrooms is usually allowed in National Forests with a permit. Permits can be obtained at the headquarters of the National Forest you’re visiting, and are usually inexpensive or free. However, restrictions vary among the individual National Forests, so make sure to find out the specifics when picking up your permit. In Oregon and Washington, you are typically allowed to collect one gallon without a permit on most public lands.

Don’t forget to look for other mushrooms and fungi while you’re at it! Keep your eyes open for mushrooms growing on other mushrooms: they’re all rare, so even if you haven’t found this one, you’ve got something neat! Since you’ve already got iNaturalist open, why not record your other finds?

If you think you’ve found this mushroom, and you’re not sure about any of the above, such as how to report the find, whether you can collect it, or what to do with it once you have collected it, please contact us!

conservation@fundis.org

Who to contact

conservation@fundis.org
**Description**

This remarkable fungus is a parasite on *Clitocybe* species, hence its common name: “Piggyback”. It is also pinky-white the way “white” pigs are white. **Like all Volvariella, it has a sac** (or in technical terms, a “volva”) at the base of the stem. The cap is 0.75–2 inches across and the stem is 1–3 inches long. The gills are usually whitish to pale pink.

**What else could it be?**

Nothing else like it grows on top of *Clitocybe* species, which are *often deformed by this parasite*. If you did not notice that it was on top of another mushroom, then it could be confused with *Volvariella smithii*, which grows on humus and has smaller spores. There are other mushroom parasites, for instance on old blackened *Russula*, but nothing as big, white, and pink as the Piggyback Pinkgill.

**Potential Range**

Based on habitat for the host, *Clitocybe nebularis*, using EPA North American Ecoregions 5 (Northern Forests), 6 (Northwestern Forested Mountains), 7 (Marine West Coast Forest), & 11 (Mediterranean California). Data from EPA; map layer from Stamen Design.

**CAUTION:** Never eat wild mushrooms without a confident identification! Contact Poison Control if you think you have eaten a poisonous mushroom: 1-800-222-1222