

Sneak Peek at MOTUM

by Mike Krebill

Teresa Marrone and Kathy Yerich. *Mushrooms of the Upper Midwest: A Simple Guide to Common Mushrooms*. Adventure Publications, Cambridge, MN, 2014.
www.adventurepublications.net \$16.95.

Having heard about the forthcoming *Mushrooms of the Upper Midwest* from coauthor Teresa Marrone, a friend of mine who lives in Minneapolis, I wrote the publisher and requested an examination copy in exchange for writing reviews. The examination copy arrived today. The book should be available for purchase in early April.

Teresa has been gathering and preparing wild edibles for 30 years and has written over a dozen outdoor-themed books. I served as technical editor on two of them.

Kathy is on the board of the Minnesota Mycological Society. She has been an avid mushroom hunter for 10 years, and is also a member of the North American Mycological Association.

Kathy and Teresa were assisted by consultant and reviewer Ron Spinosa. He's past president of the Minnesota Mycological Society, having served four years in that position. His special interest is mushroom cultivation, and he chairs NAMA's Cultivation Committee.

Kudos to these Minnesotans, to the skilled photographers, and to all those involved at Adventure Publications in producing this beautifully illustrated, thoughtfully organized, carefully written, pocket-sized paperback. I consider it a must own for anyone interested in mushrooms, whether you are a beginner or an expert, or somewhere in between.

Mushrooms can be overwhelming in terms of their diversity, with perhaps 3,000 to 5,000 different species in our region. The authors and their technical advisor have done a masterful job in selecting those that will be commonly encountered, reducing the selection to 400 species. A feature that I especially like is the way they have grouped the mushrooms into types to help with identification. These types are easy for beginners to distinguish in the field. For instance, mushrooms with a cap & stem & gills; mushrooms with a cap & stem & pores; mushrooms that have stems but do not have a typical cap with gills or pores; mushrooms with a shelf & gills; mushrooms with a shelf & pores; spherical mushrooms; cup-shaped mushrooms; coral & club-shaped fungi. Each type has its own icon and color band at the top of the page, so that all of the mushrooms of that particular type (which are covered in the book) are to be found in that section. This means that once you get to the right section for your type of mushroom, you can simply look at the pictures of every mushroom in that color-coded section. With luck, you may find a match to your mushroom. Then, for verification, you will want to make sure that all of the key identification features (in green print) on that page do indeed match your unknown. If even one or two of the characteristics don't match, then you still have an unknown mushroom. That's acceptable. No book yet written has them all. It is one reason why most serious mushroom hunters own a bevy of books.

The introductory material in the book covers important concepts for the beginner to understand. Photographic illustrations do a fairly good job of showing features of caps, stems, gills and pores that are useful in distinguishing mushrooms. Readers are encouraged to consider joining a local mycological society in their state, and by going to page 268, they can find the website for their state, as well as other helpful resources. (Minnesota Mycological Society, minnesotamushrooms.org is among those listed.)

One intriguing feature of this book is that the “Top Edibles” and “Top Toxics” mushrooms have their own sections right up front, before the color-coded sections based on cap with gills or cap with pores, etc. The Top Edibles are in a green-banded section. The Top Toxics are in a red-banded section with a prominent skull and crossbones symbol on each page.

The layout of facing pages for most of the mushrooms in the book is this: on the left page is the information; on the right is the photo or photos of the mushroom. The content on the left hand page begins with the color-coded band and icons at the top, followed by the common name and scientific name. The meat of the page is organized with bold-faced headings (Habitat, Description, Spore Print, Season, Other Names, Compare, and Notes). Edibility information and cautions are to be found in the Notes. The key characteristics of the mushroom are shown in green print to speed identification. Combining easily retrieved information on the left with the photo of the mushroom on the right is a winner. It is a great layout that is quickly referenced.

If you pick up a copy of the book and start flipping through the pages, I am sure you will be impressed by the attractive layout and the abundance of splendid photos. Out of curiosity, I counted the mushroom photos (including the cover) and came up with 440. Now that’s impressive in a 288-page book!

Believe I’ll get two books: one to keep in my car, one to keep in the reference library by my desk!