

The non-native scarlet berry truffle *Paurocotylis pila* in King's Park, Glasgow, Scotland

M. O'Reilly¹ & E. Taylor²

¹Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Angus Smith Building, 6 Parklands Avenue, Eurocentral, Holytown, North Lanarkshire ML1 4WQ

²3 Arnprior Quadrant, Glasgow G45 9HA

¹E-mail: myles.oreilly@sepa.org.uk

The scarlet berry truffle (*Paurocotylis pila*), is a non-native fungus that originates from New Zealand. It first appeared in the U.K. near Nottingham, England, in 1973 and is assumed to have been introduced with exotic plants from the antipodes (Dennis, 1975). Since then, it has spread slowly across the U.K., with scattered records in the midlands of England, its first appearance in Scotland being in 1994, and then Northern Ireland in 2010 (Hobart, 2019). In Scotland it has been found around Edinburgh, Inverness, Orkney, and Islay (NBN, 2022) and more recently it has been recorded from Victoria Park, Glasgow (September 2017) and from Spottiswoode, Berwickshire (December 2021) (FRDBI, 2022). According to Pegler *et al.* (1993) it attains a size up to 2.8 cm but Eggerling (2004) found specimens up to 6 cm diameter in Orkney, where it occurred at 53 sites, with usually two or three fruiting bodies, but sometimes 10 to 20, and occasionally up to 40. However, it is still relatively scarce over the U.K. as a whole, with a total of only around 30 records on the Fungal Records Database of Britain and Ireland (FRDBI, 2022).

On 23rd October 2022 four fruiting bodies of scarlet berry truffle were found by ET on the southern boundary of King's Park, Glasgow (NS59636010) on bare soil/mulch under a mature yew tree (*Taxus baccata*) (Fig.1). Two of the truffles were found half-embedded in the soil within a couple of metres of the yew trunk (Fig. 2A,B), and another found loose nearby was broken open and somewhat decayed. The fourth truffle was sitting loose on top of the soil compost about 4 m from the yew tree trunk (Fig. 2C).

The truffles were irregularly ovoid and ranged in size from 2.0 to 3.2 cm (max. diameter). They were a distinct orange colour, rather than scarlet, with the largest specimen being quite wrinkled, presenting the appearance of discarded chewing gum, the latter not unexpected in a busy public park! When sliced open, the inside of the truffles (the gleba) consisted of a white spongy mass (Fig. 2D). The embedded truffles



Fig.1. The yew tree site for the scarlet berry truffle (*Paurocotylis pila*) in King's Park, Glasgow, Scotland, October 2022. (Photo: M. O'Reilly)



Fig. 2. Specimens of scarlet berry truffle (*Paurocotylis pila*) under yew tree in King's Park, Glasgow, Scotland, October 2022. (A) Embedded in soil mulch; max. diameter 2 cm. (B) Embedded in soil mulch; max. diameter 2.8 cm. (C) Lying loose on soil mulch; max. diameter 3.2 cm. (D) Specimen shown in C, sliced open to reveal internal white gleba inside both halves. (Photos: M. O'Reilly)

were easily extricated from the soil and it seems that the loose specimens could well have been dislodged by dogs, squirrels, or birds.

In its native New Zealand, the scarlet berry truffle is frequently found under fruiting *Podocarpus* trees and it is believed that it has evolved to resemble fallen fruit and thus, in the absence of native ground-feeding mammals, to be eaten and spread by ground-feeding birds (Læssøe & Hansen, 2007). It has been speculated that migrating thrush species, such as redwings (*Turdus iliacus*) or blackbirds (*T. merula*), that often feed on fallen berries, may perform a similar role in its dispersal in the U.K. (Hobart, 2005, 2019).

The only previous record in the Glasgow area is of a single small scarlet berry truffle found on a Clyde & Argyll Fungus Group (CAFG) foray in Victoria Park in September 2017. The new find in King's Park, Glasgow, suggests that it may be becoming established in the Glasgow area. Although the fungi of Glasgow's parks have been investigated previously (Marshall, 1979), more recent forays by CAFG have revealed many species new for the area. Notes on some of the interesting fungal finds around Glasgow have been

published in this journal (e.g. McInerny, 2019; O'Reilly, 2020, 2022).

The scarlet berry truffle is a distinctive, brightly coloured species and is unlikely to be overlooked. While its presence in the U.K. has been highlighted among mycologists (Barker & Watling, 1993), it is not yet shown in popular U.K. field guides (e.g. Buczacki *et al.*, 2012) and thus may go unrecognised by amateur fungi enthusiasts. It is hoped this note will bring it to the attention of ramblers and perhaps elicit further finds.

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