

NEW LICHENS OF TASMANIA

A lichen isn't a single organism, but a symbiotic relationship between a fungus and an alga or cyanobacterium. In fact it is more like a mini-ecosystem, and more than one of each of the fungal or algal partners can be involved within the one lichen species! With the support of TMAG botanists, a Bush Blitz at Stony Head in northern Tasmania turned up more than 200 species of lichens. Not surprisingly, these included at least four that are likely to be new to science. One is this species from the genus *Coenogonium* (pictured right).

Although the genus was recently revised for Tasmania, and found to consist of seven species (including two endemic to Tasmania), this species had been overlooked. It was found in a remnant patch of *Melaleuca ericifolia*-dominated swampy woodland, a vegetation type that has been extensively cleared and is largely ignored by conservationists and ecologists, but one that supports many remarkable lichens, several of which are either extremely rare or are new to science. So this new species of *Coenogonium* is but one of several exciting discoveries made in this tiny patch of woodland.

Coenogonium is a largely tropical genus, with about 90 species worldwide, growing on bark, wood, bryophytes, rocks and living leaves. Although many look superficially similar, they are readily distinguished by microscopic characteristics. This one has the unique feature of dense, yellowish oil droplets in the fruiting body, seen in thin sections at high power magnification (pictured left).

