



Wentiomycetes sp. from plant litter on poor fen in northeastern Poland

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Abstract

During research carried on peatlands in northeastern Poland, small leaf-litter ascomycete identified as *Wentiomycetes* sp. was found on decaying litter of *Sphagnum* sp. and *Vaccinium oxycoccos*. The taxonomy of this genus remains obscure, and there are still few and incidental published records in the mycological literature. This taxon is therefore described in the present paper in more detail and a short overview on the current knowledge regarding ecology and systematics of *Wentiomycetes* spp. is provided.

Keywords: leaf-litter ascomycetes; peatlands; Pseudoperisporiaceae; *Sphagnum*; *Vaccinium oxycoccos*; *Oxycoccus palustris*

Introduction

The results of the extensive literature survey published by Thormann and Rice [1] have shown that more than 600 species of fungi were already recorded from various types of peatland habitats. Peatlands are one of the major carbon-sequestering ecosystems (e.g. [2]), and the apparent negative influence of various anthropogenic disturbances, e.g. global warming and water-level drawdown on decomposition processes, has stimulated research on many interconnected ecological aspects, including interactions with microbial decomposers, and especially fungi (e.g. [3]).

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Fungi are described to be the most important group of decomposers in these ecosystems [4,5], and growing interest regarding different aspects of fungal diversity and role on peatlands can be observed (e.g. [6,7]). However, still surprisingly few of those studies concern the diversity and potential role of the leaf-litter microfungal communities (e.g. [8]). Our knowledge and understanding of the factors involved in the decomposition processes on peatlands and the possible interactions of these with climate change and anthropogenic disturbances are therefore incomplete without more research on peatland mycobiota.

During our research on leaf-litter microfungi from peatlands, interesting specimens were found, which were identified as *Wentomyces* sp. The concept of this genus is still little understood, therefore the aim of this paper was to provide some details concerning our findings and review the current knowledge regarding the taxonomy and biology of the genus *Wentomyces*.

Material and methods

Findings described in this paper originate from a research project carried in 2010–2014 on peatlands in the Szeroki Bór mire complex, near town of Pisz, the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, northeastern Poland. The study site, where the presented fungal specimens were found, was located on open poor fen, being in fact a small lake completely overgrown by dense cover of *Sphagnum* spp. with *Carex limosa* L., *Eriophorum vaginatum* L., *Vaccinium oxycoccos* L. and *Drosera rotundifolia* L.; dead pine trees occur on the banks. The material collected in October 2010 for preliminary screening, comprised of mixed litter of moribund and healthy *Sphagnum* spp. fragments with addition of dead leaves and stems of *Vaccinium oxycoccos*.

The method of incubation of plant litter samples in damp chambers was employed for the study [9]. Material was observed under dissecting microscope SMZ800, and semi-permanent prep-slides were made in lactophenol-blue or glycerin, and observed under Nikon Eclipse E200 light microscope. All prep-slides and photographs are housed in the mycological laboratory of the Department of Plant Systematics and Geography, Faculty of Biology, The University of Warsaw. Taxonomic system and nomenclature for fungi follow MycoBank [10], and for plants follow Integrated Taxonomic Information System [11] except for the table, where they are given as in original publications.

Descriptions of specimens

Wentomyces Koorders, Pseudoperisporiaceae, Dothideomycetidae, Dothideomycetes.

Wentomyces sp., specimen A (Fig. 1a). Superficial spherical pseudothecium, ca. 42 µm in diameter, brown; peridium composed of polyhedral cells, often 4–6 µm in diameter; around conspicuous ostiole few characteristic, rigid, dark brown and thick walled setae, ca. 10–11 µm long, 3–4 µm wide, mostly twice dichotomously branched and blunt at the apices. Setae have one septum, and are paler to hyaline towards the tips. Pseudothecium grows on sparse, superficial, melanized mycelium; on the bottom part of ascomata melanized, thread-like hyphae emerge, ca. 2–5 µm in diameter. No asci or ascospores observed.

HABITAT. On moribund *Sphagnum* spp. leaves collected in October 2010; poor fen in Szeroki Bór peatland complex, 53°36'20.77"N, 21°37'56.79"E. First record from this host.

Wentomyces sp., specimen B (Fig. 1b). Pseudothecium superficial, spherical, ca. 50 μm in diameter, brown, peridium composed of polyhedral cells. Ostiole conspicuous, surrounded by eight characteristic, rigid, dark brown and thick walled setae, ca. 11–14 μm long, 4–5 μm wide, with one septum, at the apex mostly twice dichotomously branched, paler to hyaline towards the tips. On the bottom part of the ascomata, melanized thread-like hyphae emerge, ca. 2–5 μm in diameter. No asci or ascospores observed.

HABITAT. On dead leaf of *Vaccinium oxycoccus* collected in October 2010; Szeroki Bór peatland complex, 53°36'20.77"N, 21°37'56.79"E. First published record from this host.

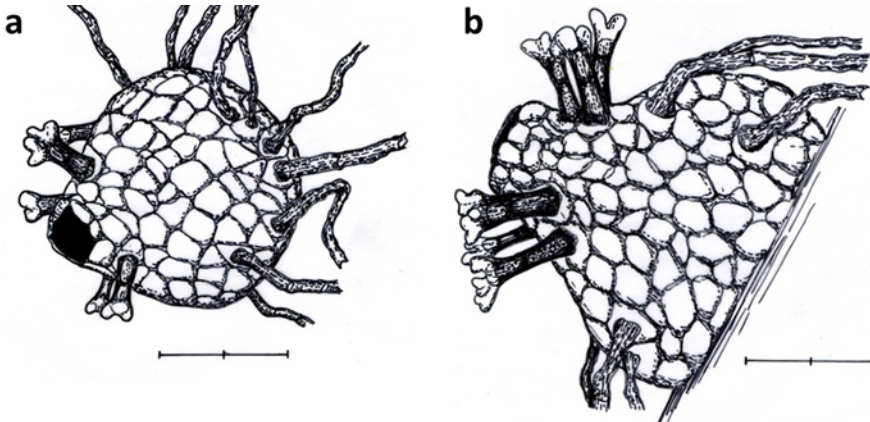


Fig. 1 Specimens of *Wentomyces* sp. collected on poor fen. Pseudothecium with characteristic dichotomously lobed setae around ostiole; specimen from *Sphagnum* sp. (a). Specimen from *Vaccinium oxycoccus* (b). Scale bars: 20 μm .

Discussion

Despite of more than a century since its discovery, the taxonomy of the genus *Wentomyces* remains extremely complicated. It was raised by Koorders [12], to encompass a single species, *W. javanicus* Koord., characterized by superficial, hypophyllous mycelium with superficial pseudothecia (perithecia in original description) possessing in the upper part characteristic, melanized, dichotomously branched at the apex setae, and on the lower part of the ascomata brownish, long hair-like hyphal appendages (although called setae in the original description); asci clavate with eight ascospores; ascospores hyaline, with median septa; no paraphyses. Koorders himself mentions, however, that his material is sparse, and mostly immature, and that the color of mature ascospores could potentially change to brownish, although he states this was unlikely [12]. The original herbarium material of the type is unavailable [13,14], and this is the cause for several taxonomical rearrangements of this genus, of which none can still be considered final, because epitypification was never conducted. Hansford [15] first mentioned the possible synonymy of the *Wentomyces* and *Dimeriella* Speg., but it was Müller and Arx [13], who finally concluded that these two genera are in fact synonymous, and have given the name *Wentomyces* priority over *Dimeriella*, and eleven other generic names

considered synonymous. It has to be noted, that in their understanding of the genus, the shape of the setae was no longer considered specific, therefore *Wentomyces* fide Müller and Arx [13] included also species with simple, acute or blunt setae; in addition some taxa included have sparse paraphysoids. Farr [16] however claimed *Wentomyces* to be a doubtful genus, which should not be used in favor of *Dimeriella*. This was further applied and expanded by Barr [17], who rejected *Wentomyces*, and transferred six species (including two subspecies) with dichotomously branched setae to *Neocoleroa* Petrak, and one lichenicolous species with straight, acute setae to *Raciborskiomyces* Siemaszko. To further complicate the situation, this rearrangement is not widely and uniformly accepted. In addition, Etayo and Sancho [18], transferred two lichenicolous taxa with straight setae to *Niesslia* Auersw. Because of this chaos, it is even difficult to estimate the correct number of the species included in *Wentomyces*. After their treatment from 1962 [13], Arx and Müller [19] concluded that *Wentomyces* contains “about 50 species”, the large number being of course due to synonymization of *Dimeriella* with *Wentomyces*, and this was later adopted by Kirk et al. [20].

Search in Index Fungorum database [21], however, brings only 21 records, with 20 species and two subspecies. Of these, *Wentomyces fuliginosus* (Woron.) E. Müll. is treated as a synonym of *Antenulariella fuliginosa* Woron., *Wentomyces hirtulus* (Speg.) E. Müll. as a synonym of *Dimeriella hirtula* Speg., and *Wentomyces peltigericola* D. Hawksw. as a synonym of *Niesslia peltigericola* (D. Hawksw.) Etayo. Search in the MycoBank database [10] brings the same number of results, but without clear statements on the status of the abovementioned three species, suggesting 20 existing species for *Wentomyces*. That is due to the fact, that no formal combinations were created for the vast majority of *Dimeriella* species to be included in *Wentomyces*, even in the abovementioned studies by Müller and Arx [13], and Arx and Müller [19].

This situation clearly indicates that the genus *Wentomyces* is in urgent need for revision, and the chaos here is corroborated by the fact, that there are no molecular sequences of any of the described species [22]. It is also worth noting, that the names *Wentomyces* and *Dimeriella* are on the preliminary draft of the list of protected generic names for fungi [23], and therefore the taxonomic and phylogenetic relationships between and within them will have to be resolved.

If the MycoBank classification system is adopted, the genus *Wentomyces* comprises species, which grow as saprotrophs and/or biotrophs on plants, and as specialized lichenicolous fungi (Tab. 1). Most plant-associated taxa grow hypophyllously, with only few recorded also from plant stems. Some authors label *Wentomyces* spp. as pathogens, causing leaf spot diseases ([24] for *W. javanicus*). It appears, that some taxa can also penetrate leaf cuticle [e.g. *W. clavisetus* (Doidge) Arx] [15]; in case of lichenicolous taxa, Hansford [25] mentions that *W. lichenicola* (Hansf.) D. Hawksw. penetrates the thallus of a lichen. Lichenicolous species occur on terrestrial lichens (*W. peltigericola* on *Peltigera* spp.), but also on epiphyllous lichens (*W. lichenicola* on *Fellhanera* and *Bacidina*). According to the USDA fungus-host database [26], there are 38 published reports on 14 species of *Wentomyces* from 16 countries; half of the reports are from tropical countries; these are however incomplete data, because many other reports, especially for lichenicolous species, exist (Tab. 1). There is a recent finding of *Wentomyces* sp. from Poland [27] on dead leaves of *Rhododendron tomentosum* Harmaja from poor fen. We know also on the findings on other Ericaceae from raised bog in Siberia (N.V. Filippova, personal

Tab. 1 Summary of the distribution and substratum colonized by all known *Wentiomyces* spp.

Species	Substratum	Locality	References
<i>Wentiomyces alpinus</i> Nograssék Syn. <i>Neocoleroa alpivaga</i> (Nograssék) M.E. Barr	<i>Silene acaulis</i> (A); <i>Carex firma</i> (B); <i>Saxifraga caesia</i> (C); <i>Saxifraga paniculata</i> (D)	(A) Sweden; (B–D) Austria	(A–D) [32]
<i>W. clavisetus</i> (Doiège) Arx Syn. <i>Dimeriella clavisetata</i> Doiège; <i>Coleroa claviseta</i> (Doiège) Hansf.	Asteraceae, e.g. <i>Vernonia anullifolia</i> (A); <i>Erlangea marginata</i> (B); <i>Cordia</i> sp. (C); <i>Varronia</i> sp. (D); <i>Mikania</i> sp. (E) Leaves of <i>Clusia melchiorii</i>	(A) Uganda; (B) Malawi; (C,D) West Indies, Costa Rica, northern South America; (E) East and South Africa, Ghana Venezuela, Brazil	(A) [13,15]; (B) [26]; (C–E) [33]
<i>W. clusiae</i> J.L. Bezerra & Poroca <i>W. dryadis</i> K. Holm & L. Holm Syn. <i>Neocoleroa dryadis</i> (K. Holm & L. Holm) M.E. Barr	Dead leaves of <i>Dryas octopetala</i> (A); <i>Cassiope tetragona</i> (B)	(A,B) Norway (Svalbard)	[26,34] [35]
<i>W. fimbriatus</i> (Dearn. & House) M.E. Barr Syn. <i>Venturia fimbriata</i> Dearn. & House; <i>Lasiosternum fimbriatum</i> (Dearn. & House) M.E. Barr; <i>Neocoleroa fimbriata</i> (Dearn. & House) M.E. Barr	On languishing leaves of <i>Antennaria</i> sp. (A); <i>Achillea millefolium</i> (B); <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> (C); <i>Saxifraga caespitosa</i> (D); <i>Silene acaulis</i> (E)	(A) USA; (B,D,E) Canada; (C) Sweden	(A) [36]; (C) [26]; (B,D,E) [37,38]
<i>W. fuliginosus</i> (Woron.) E. Müll. Syn. <i>Antennulariella fuliginosa</i> Woron.	Live leaves of <i>Ilex aquifolia</i> L.	Caucasus	[13]
<i>W. hansfordii</i> (Syd.) E. Müll. Syn. <i>Acarothallium hansfordii</i> Syd.	Leaves of Rubiaceae (cf. <i>Canthium</i> sp.)	Uganda	[39]
<i>W. hirtulus</i> (Speg.) E. Müll. Syn. <i>Dimeriella hirtula</i> Speg.; <i>Asteromyxa hirtula</i> (Speg.) Theiss. & Syd.	Live leaves of <i>Baccharis</i> spp.	Brazil, Ecuador	[13,33,40–42]
<i>W. inconspicuus</i> Spooner <i>W. indicus</i> Tilak, S.B. Kale & S.V.S. Kale <i>W. javanicus</i> Koord.	Leaf litter of <i>Poa flabellata</i> Leaf litter of <i>Ixora parviflora</i>	South Georgia (Antarctica) India	[43] [44]
Syn. <i>Dichaetis javanica</i> (Koord.) Clem. & Shear	Dead leaves of <i>Ficus elastica</i> (A); dead leaves of <i>Kentia forsteriana</i> (B); leaf spot on leaf of <i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (C); leaf spot on leaf of <i>Ficus elastica</i> (D); leaf spot on leaf of <i>Persea gratissima</i> (E); <i>Sorghum vulgare</i> (F)	(A) Indonesia (Java); (B) France (pot plant); (C–E) Burma; (F) Papua New Guinea	(A) [12,13]; (B) [29]; (C–E) [24]; (F) [26]

Tab. 1 (continued)

Species	Substratum	Locality	References
<i>W. cf. javanicus</i>	Decomposing leaves of <i>Pistacia lentiscus</i> , <i>Phillyrea angustifolia</i> and <i>Cistus</i> spp.	Italy	[45]
<i>W. lichenicola</i> (Hansf.) D. Hawksw. Syn. <i>Dimeriella lichenicola</i> Hansf.; <i>Neocoleroa lichenicola</i> (Hansf.) M.E. Barr	<i>Asterothyrium leucophthalmum</i> on leaves of <i>Acalypha fruticosa</i> (A)	(A) Uganda; (B) United Kingdom	(A) [25,46]; B [47]
<i>W. lichenicola</i> subsp. <i>boutellei</i> Bricaud, Cl. Roux & Sérus.	<i>Fellhanera boutellei</i> on leaves of <i>Buxus sempervirens</i> (A); <i>Bacidina</i> sp. on leaves of <i>Buxus sempervirens</i> (B); <i>Bacidina cf. vasakii</i> on leaves of <i>Buxus sempervirens</i> (C); <i>Woessia</i> sp. on trunk of <i>Sorbus</i> sp. (D)	(A–C) Spain; (A) France; (D) Luxembourg; (E) United Kingdom; (F) USA; (G) Austria	(A–C) [46]; (D) [48]; (E–G) [47]
<i>W. cf. lichenicola</i> subsp. <i>boutellei</i>	<i>Lecania cuprea</i>	Lithuania	[49]
<i>W. melioides</i> (Berk. & M.A. Curtis) E. Müll. Syn. <i>Asterina melioides</i> Berk. & M.A. Curtis; <i>Dimerosporium melioides</i> (Berk. & M.A. Curtis) G. Martin; <i>Parodiopsis melioides</i> (G. Winter) Maubl.; <i>Chaetostigma melioides</i> (Berk. & M.A. Curtis) Syd.	<i>Baccharis halimifolia</i> (A); leaves of <i>Lagenophora pumila</i> (B); <i>L. huegelii</i> (C); <i>L. stipitata</i> (D); <i>Baccharis</i> sp. (E); <i>Coryza</i> sp. (F); <i>Erigeron</i> sp. (G)	(A) USA; (B) New Zealand; (C,D) Australia; (E–G) North and South America, Bermuda; (H) Brazil	(A) [50]; (B) [51]; (C,D) [26]; (E–G) [33]; H [47]
<i>W. molarifer</i> Scheuer Syn. <i>Neocoleroa molarifera</i> (Scheuer) M.E. Barr	Dead leaves and stems of <i>Carex davalliana</i> (A); <i>Carex baldensis</i> (B)	(A) Austria; (B) Germany	[52]
<i>W. oreophilus</i> (Speg.) E. Müll. Syn. <i>Dimerosporium oreophilum</i> Speg.; <i>Venturia oreophila</i> (Speg.) Theiss.; <i>Dimeriella oreophila</i> (Speg.) E. Müll. & Arx	Dead leaves of <i>Rhododendron ferrugineum</i>	Austria, Germany	[53,54]
<i>W. pandei</i> S.K. Bose <i>W. peltigericola</i> D. Hawksw. Syn. <i>Raciborskiomyces peltigericola</i> (D. Hawksw.) M.E. Barr; <i>Niesstia peltigericola</i> (D. Hawksw.) Etayo	Leaves of <i>Crataegus crenulata</i> <i>Peltigera apthosa</i> (A); on dead portions of thalli of <i>P. leucophaea</i> (B); <i>P. rufescens</i> (C); <i>P. britannica</i> (D); <i>Peltigera</i> sp. (E); <i>P. praetextata</i> (F); <i>Stereocaulon depressum</i> (G); <i>S. rivularis</i> (H); <i>Peltigera scabrosa</i> (I); <i>P. didactyla</i> (I)	India (A,C,D) Norway; (A,D,E) Greenland; (A) the Faroes; (A,C,H–J) Russia; (A) Austria; (A,D,G) Canada; (A,D,F) Spain; (A) Sweden; (B) Great Britain; (D) USA; (A) Iceland	[21] (A) [55–71]; (B) [72]; (C) [57,63]; (D) [65,66,73–75]; (E) [73]; (F) [66]; (G) [64]; (H) [63,64]; (I,I) [63]

Tab. 1 (continued)

Species	Substratum	Locality	References
<i>W. sibiricus</i> (Petr.) E. Müll. Syn. <i>Neocoleroa sibirica</i> Petr.	Dry stems of <i>Vaccinium myrtilloides</i> (A); dead stems of <i>Filipendula</i> sp. (B); leaves of <i>Larix decidua</i> (C); <i>Vaccinium</i> sp. (D)	(A) Russia (Siberia); (B–D) Great Britain	(A) [13,76]; (B,C) [14]; (D) [26]
<i>W. tajjanae</i> S. Y. Kondr. Syn. <i>Niesslia tajjanae</i> (S. Y. Kondr.) Etayo <i>W. vanensis</i> Tilak & Talde <i>Wentomyces</i> sp.	Parasymbiotic on <i>Pseudocypripedium coronata</i> (A); <i>Sticta</i> cf. <i>boschiana</i> (B); <i>Lobaria</i> sp. (C) Dead leaves of <i>Ficus benghalensis</i> <i>Parmelia caperata</i> (A); dead leaves of <i>Rhododendron tomentosum</i> (B); <i>Croton antisiphiliticus</i> (C); <i>Dianella revoluta</i> (D); <i>Hevea brasiliensis</i> (E); <i>Hibiscus elatus</i> (F); <i>Lagenophora huegelii</i> (G); <i>Pandanus</i> sp. (H); dead leaf of <i>Eucalyptus coccifera</i> (I); dead stem of <i>Chamerion angustifolium</i> (I)	(A) Tasmania, New Zealand; (B) Papua New Guinea; (C) not indicated India (A) Spain; (B) Poland; (C) Brazil; (D,G) Australia; (E) Brunei; (F) Venezuela; (H) Mauritius; (I,I) Great Britain	[77] [21] (A) [46]; (B) [27]; (C–G) [26]; (H) [78]; (I,I) [79]

communication, 2014). Distribution of *Wentomyces* spp., together with substrata on which they were recorded, as compiled from the literature, is given in the Tab. 1. Strikingly, some species or specimens [e.g. *W. alpivagus* Nogrsek and *W. fimbriatus* (Dearn. & House) M.E. Barr, or *W. fimbriatus* and *W. sibiricus* (Petr.) E. Müller] were recorded from identical plant host species, raising a question about their true taxonomic status.

There is an interesting suggestion about possible anamorph genus drawn by de Hoog et al. [28], who have examined a herbarium material of *W. javanicus* deposited by Joly [29]. Joly [29] depicted anamorphic fungus, which he had isolated in pure culture from ascospores of his specimen of *W. javanicus*; de Hoog et al. [28] noted the resemblance of this anamorph to *Rhinocladiella anceps* (Sacc. & Ellis) S. Hughes (recalled also by Arzanlou et al. [30]). Unequivocal link between these two morphs was however not demonstrated; moreover, according to molecular analyses species from the genus *Rhinocladiella* and similar *Ramichloridium* are placed predominantly within *Chaetothyriales* and *Capnodiales*, with possible teleomorphs for *Rhinocladiella* in *Capronia* spp. [30,31].

Our specimens could not be identified to the species level, because we have not observed asci and ascospores, and the sole gross morphology of pseudothecia and setae, or host species, do not provide firm characters. *Wentomyces oreophilus* (Speg.) E. Müll. described from *Rhododendron ferrugineum* L. has straight setae, and therefore cannot be considered conspecific with our finding (as was incorrectly assumed by Wilk et al. [27] regarding another specimen from poor fen). *Wentomyces sibiricus* (Petr.) E. Müll., described from *Vaccinium myrtillus* L. could be one possibility. Worth noting is the fact, that the specimens presented here differ greatly from the specimen presented by Wilk et al. [27], being in all respects smaller (42–50 µm versus 87.5–170 µm) and having less ramified setae. We cannot even state for sure, that both specimens reported here represent the same or different species, and therefore further research aimed specifically at habitat- and host- preferences of non-lichenicolous *Wentomyces* spp. is certainly needed.

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Authors' contributions

The following declarations about authors' contributions to the research have been made: collected material, performed final identification, conducted literature study, prepared drawings and wrote the manuscript: MW; helped writing the manuscript: JP; designed the methods, performed initial identification, and helped writing the manuscript: MWR.

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