

Giant Weta Fungus

Cordyceps kirkii

The body snatcher



Giant weta fungus infesting Cook Strait giant weta *Deinacrida rugosa*. Di Batchelor/Landcare Research

Quickfacts

Poorly known fungus that infests giant weta

Has been only seen twice

Is it in weta moved to other islands?

Where is it?

The Stephens Island giant weta fungus *Cordyceps kirkii* has only been seen twice – in 1922 and 2014. It infests the Stephens Island giant weta on Stephens Island in the outer Marlborough Sounds, and kills and covers its host in a white mould and growing small brown-tipped stalks when it is ready to spread its spores. Stephens Island giant weta have now been successfully translocated to five new predator-free island islands, but it is unknown whether this rare fungus was moved within the translocated weta. There is also a possible record of this fungus on the ground weta *Zealandrosandrus maculifrons* in Westland, but this needs confirmation.

Cordyceps fungi, of which there are over 400 species, are characterised by infesting invertebrates and producing stalked fruiting bodies which erupt through their host's body wall. The 'vegetable caterpillar' that is occasionally seen in New Zealand is the fruiting bodies of *Cordyceps robertsii* and was used as a tattooing pigment by Maori. Some *Cordyceps* species are important for traditional Chinese medicines. The taxonomic relationship of *Cordyceps kirkii* to other *Cordyceps* species is unclear, but in the



interim it is retained in the genus *Cordyceps* in the Family Cordycipitaceae.

What next?

If this fungus is not present on any of the new islands then dead infested weta should be introduced to at least one of these new island homes.

If you find a dead weta that is covered in white fuzz and that has small stalked pale yellow knobs, take a photo and send it to us.

More information

- Website: Landcare Research – Nga Harore o Aotearoa – New Zealand Fungi Database – *Cordyceps kirkii*. [Link](#)
- Scientific paper: Phylogenetic classification of *Cordyceps* and the clavicipitaceous fungi. By Gi-Ho Sung, Nigel L. Hywel-Jones, Jae-Mo Sung, J. Jennifer Luangsa-ard, Bhushan Shrestha and Joseph W. Spatafora. *Studies in Mycology*, Vol. 57, pages 5-59, 2007. [PDF](#)
- Scientific paper: The Hypocreales of New Zealand V. The genera *Cordyceps* and *Torrubiella*. By Joan M. Dingley. *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, Vo. 81, pages 329-343, 1953. [PDF](#)



Photos



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Deinacrida rugosa. Di Batchelor/Landcare Research



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