

# DOWNNS PARK NATURE NOTES

## ENJOYING THE RAIN



The recent abundant rainfall has given new energy to the park's flora and fungi – not to mention the insects!

As you round the trails, you may notice groups [above left] of an unusual plant that seems to be enjoying a population boom. When it emerges from the leaf litter, the Indian pipe – also known as the corpse plant – is waxy white from top to bottom. It's often mistaken for a fungus, but it's actually a native wildflower and is considered a parasite. It does not contain chlorophyll, the substance that makes other plants green.

Most of our Indian pipes are white, but we do have a few pink ones. All grow four to six inches tall. The single bell-shaped flower [above right, with a chewed hole] dangles from the top. A close look at the stem will reveal scale-like leaves. As the Indian pipe ages, the entire plant will blacken and shrivel.



Later in the year, be sure to watch for a large fungus that seems to do well when the soil has been moist. The eastern cauliflower mushroom [left] can grow wider than a foot in diameter, and the convoluted top looks like brain coral. Here in the park, the cauliflower mushroom grows at the base of oak trees and near decaying stumps.

Animals large and small love to nibble on it.

– *Dave Cohn, naturalist volunteer*