



## Wandering the Woods with Matt

Candleflame Lichen  
(*Candelaria* sp.)

Observed March 1, 2022

at Pocono Creek  
Nature Preserve

This is the time of year when cabin-fever has really set in for me. Sometimes the weather is nice and I'm itching to get outside and look for early signs of Spring. And then it can get very cold again and chase me back indoors.

A good thing to look for this time of year are lichens. Often lichens are underappreciated, perhaps because many people don't really understand them. A lichen is the result of algae and fungi teaming up, on a cellular level, to create a "composite organism." The algae cells give the lichen the ability to photosynthesize, while the fungal cells provide structure and allow the lichen to grow out of water in many diverse environments.

If you start looking for them, you'll find lichens absolutely everywhere in nature. Among plenty of other places, they can be found attached to tree bark, fallen branches, boulders, and on the ground, often interspersed with moss. They occur at sea level and in alpine regions and over 20,000 species have been described, with many more yet to be described. Lichens are happy to attach to human-made substrates as well, but are sensitive to air pollution. Actually, they have been used as air quality indicators because of this sensitivity.

One of my favorite lichens is a tiny burst of sunshine, known as Candleflame lichens (*Candelaria* sp.).

Last week, I came across one at the Pocono Creek Nature Preserve in Tannersville. The golden lichen in the center of the photo (below) could be covered with a half-dollar. The close-up photo that follows shows the lichen's intricate structure.





A more familiar lichen is the British soldier lichen (*Cladonia cristatella*), observed here at Kurmes Nature Preserve (Phoebe Snow entrance):



Lichen ID is notoriously challenging, with microscopy often required. For those who want to take up the challenge, I suggest a few on-line resources:

<https://lichenportal.org/>

<https://www.waysofenlichenment.net/>

[https://www.sharnoffphotos.com/lichen\\_info/index.html](https://www.sharnoffphotos.com/lichen_info/index.html)

Happy lichen hunting!