



***Ganoderma applanatum*, the Artist's Conk**

Photo by Roger Heidt

The Artist's Conk is one of the most common fungi of Iowa. It is also one of the largest, growing up to nearly 3 feet in diameter. The top surface of *Ganoderma appalanatum* is grey to brown, lumpy, with concentric lines, in fact, quite boring. The real interest though, is on the bottom of the conk, the white pore surface.

Each summer, new pores grow in a layer under last year's pore surface. The new surface is smooth, white, and bruises brown, making it a perfect canvas to draw upon.



Artwork and photo by Jenni Reeves



Artwork by Adam, photo by Roger Heidt

Even if you are not artistic, it is still fun to doodle on the Artist's Conk.



Artwork and photo by Roger Heidt

Click [here](#) to see what an experienced artist can do on a Conk (scroll down to where it shows “Nathan Wilson”, then click on the high res photo).

There is more to know about this fungus beyond the obvious. Often, the top surface is covered with the brown spores. How did they get from the bottom surface to the top? According to past PSMC president Damian Peiper, *G. applanatum* releases its spores when the sun heats the top surface of the fungus. This causes a rising air current around the conk, lifting the spores into the air. Some fall back on the fungus, but most escape into the air current to propagate the species.



Photo by Janet Monk

Like most living things, *G. applanatum* knows which way is up. Unfortunately for the fungus, sometimes the tree it is growing on falls down. The Artist's Conk is now vertical instead of the required horizontal. Not to worry, the next year it simply starts growing horizontal again from the vertical surface, making for some funny looking shapes.

Glen



Photo by Glen Schwartz