

a slime mould named *Leocarpus fragilis*

by Karina Knight

Slime moulds are an amazing component of our bushland. While the name might conjure images of fuzz on old bread, or a green slime found in an over-watered lawn, slime moulds are neither of these. They are an amazingly diverse group of organisms that quietly go about their business, mostly unseen.

Slime moulds (*Myxomycetes*) have two main life phases: the 'slimy' part is known as the plasmodium, and the fruit is called a sporocarp. The plasmodium is primarily an assemblage of protoplasm moving across a substrate, grazing on micro-fungi and bacteria, which themselves feed on the substrate as nutrient recyclers or decomposers. Slime moulds are then, in turn, predated on by small insects such as springtails and beetles. The sporocarp forms from the plasmodium when environmental conditions are suitable and are packed full of spores.

Many slime moulds are tiny and not easily observed, however *Leocarpus fragilis* has a large, spectacularly bright yellow plasmodium, which forms large clusters of small, egg-shaped sporocarps each 2–4mm high, that become brown when mature.



Photo – Peter Davison.

Leocarpus fragilis and other slime moulds are most likely to be seen during the wetter months of the year, when enough moisture allows for their food source to proliferate and their spores to germinate. They may be observed on a range of substrates such as bark, old stumps and leaf litter.

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Different life phases of Leocarpus fragilis: plasmodium on the top leaf, beginning to change from plasmodium to fruiting bodies on the stick and the mature, brown, egg-shaped sporocarp on the leaf below.