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# Foreword

The world is changing. The human population is growing and getting wealthier, it needs space, and the massive construction at the edge of Belgrade is a reminder of how quickly fields can be made into concrete buildings. As habitats go under and the climate changes, species are lost. Others change their habits or shift ranges. Mushrooms that used to appear once in a season are now found twice. To understand the Earth as it is now and as it changes, we need a catalog of life and information about existing species, what they look like and where they grow.

Fungi are among the most diverse of the eukaryotic clades, but are too often ignored in discussions of conservation and stewardship. Fungi are biodiversity's oddities. When a monkey disappears the world takes notice, but we may never know how many fungi are already extinct, lost without fanfare, destined to remain unknown, unnamed. If there is any hope for us to understand the current diversity and ecology of this group, the time to collect natural history data is now.

Cataloging species is a great adventure, and although genetic species concepts are emerging as a standard within mycology, all descriptions begin with morphology. What does the mushroom look like? Is it purple? Are the gills close together, are the spores brown, is the fungus growing in a field or a forest? Emerging technology may change how we define species, but it will never diminish the joy of handling a mus-

hroom. And technology won't work when a new species is discovered and its DNA is unlike the DNA of any known species. This is a familiar experience for mycologists foraging in unexplored territories. Field guides may eventually move from print to silicon, but they will always be a crucial first step to finding a name.

Inventories of Balkan fungi are rare, and the field guide you hold in your hands is critically needed. Although the Balkan Peninsula is included in more general field guides to the mushrooms of Europe, there is every reason to believe that because of its climate and unique placement at a juncture between Europe and Asia, the region will house species that do not grow in other European countries. Branislav Uzelac and his coworkers devoted many years to compiling their list of Serbian species. The book is the first of its kind, and an important work.

I end with a hope that this book will empower the people of Serbia to name and understand the fungi of their country; may it serve as an inspiration and tool for the active stewardship of the landscapes that house the beautiful and rare species of Serbia.

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