The Maltese Mushroom (Cynomorium coccineum

**Looks Like a Fungus but not a Fungus.**

Michael Mullan came across this interesting plant on holiday...so I Iooked it up

On some Mediterranean coasts grows a rare plant, know as Maltese mushroom or Maltese fungus, although not a fungus. It is not green, looks strange, but is a plant.

Scientists named it *Cynomorium coccineum* -*coccineum* is due to its scarlet colour. The Maltese mushroom spends most of its life underground, parasitic on its host plants ( there are several depending on the soil). It can infect more than one host plant-even different species and at the same time.
Pant species infected are usually from Rockrose,Goosefootand Tamarisk families. All host plants which like salty areas.
The plant grows in dry, rocky or sandy soils close to the sea.
The Maltese mushroom has a rhizome attached to roots of its host through cup-like appendages. It has no root system or leaves and blooms in late spring.
A dark-red or purplish fleshy stem (most is underground) with scaley leaf like appendages emerges from soil.
The spike grows up to 30 cm long with minute tightly packed scarlet flowers.
It has a strong, sweet odour which attracts flies, its main pollinators.
Once pollinated the flowers dry and the spike turns black.
The Maltese mushroom is found in Lanzarote, on North African coast, southern Spain and Portugal to southern Italy and Mediterranean islands.
Its range extends south to the Arabian Peninsula and east to Mongolia and western China.
In China, it is know as "suo yan".

