



# small wonders

## *Bulbilomyces farinosa*

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Photographs by Joseph Warfel

Let's say you're walking along the edge of a river when you suddenly notice what looks like an aggregation of white styrofoam balls resting on top of a log. The balls in question are small. *Very* small. The largest ones are hardly more than half a millimeter in diameter, and the smallest are almost invisible to the naked eye. Let me introduce you to *Bulbilomyces farinosa*, a so-called aero-aquatic fungus.

Actually, let me introduce you to *Aegerita candida*, the anamorph of *B. farinosa*. Its white balls are diaspora-laden sclerotia (also called dikaryotic propagules) very loosely attached to their woody substrate. Along comes rising water, and away they go. In fact, they'll keep on going until the water level drops.

How can these sclerotia stay afloat? The answer to that question confirms Sam Ristich's frequent rhetorical question, "Ain't Ma Nature a fascinatin' lady?" They capture an air bubble and use it just like a person uses an inner tube. Here I might add that Ma Nature is also a highly

selective lady, for only a very small percentage of the balls will end up on the appropriate substrate, a deciduous log.

The teleomorph phase is a saprobic crust fungus that, not surprisingly, fruits near rivers and streams. Look for a pale grey, finely papillose resupinate entity that typically forms a mat beneath or around the sclerotia. Microscopically, that mat can be recognized by its large cystidia, urniform basidia, and relatively thick-walled cyanophilous spores.

You might mistake a *Mycena* for another *Mycena*, a *Peziza* for another *Peziza*, and especially a *Russula* for another *Russula*, but I can't really think of anything else you might mistake *A. candida*'s styrofoam balls for ... except perhaps King Kong's dandruff. That dandruff is seldom encountered, however. But if you visit the nearest river whose waters tend to rise and fall, sooner or later you'll find this issue's small wonder. †







