

Microscopist in isolation

First, let's put things in context for future readers. As I am writing these lines the world is in the midst of a global pandemic. Covid-19, a serious, potentially deadly, virus has forced a good portion of the population to self-isolate in order to limit the spread of the disease. Individuals live through it differently, some taking it better than others.

I live in Montreal, in a third floor apartment. The city has been locked down for nearly two weeks; people are ordered to stay home and limit their time out; we can go to a park for a few minutes about once a week, keeping our distances from each other. I don't have a big yard, but fortunately, there is a large park a short distance away where I can go to stretch my legs. And in that park there is a ditch...

So what you say? Hey, I'm a microscopist, and everywhere there is water there are millions of potential subjects to be seen under the microscope.

Yes, I do spend a lot of time watching movies and binging on TV series, but it's also nice to break that routine and do something a bit more constructive. So on my second outing to the park I brought along a few empty film canisters, which I commonly use to pick up samples for the microscopes. I picked up some decomposing vegetation along with some of that standing water.

Back to the lab a few minutes later I took a few drops of that dirty water and placed it under the lens of a Wild M20 phase contrast microscope. And the fun began... Over the course of a few days that water, which eventually began to turn smelly, was the source of many interesting beasties, many of which I had never seen before. Searching over Micscape, in a book (Guide to Microlife by Kenneth G. Rainis and Bruce J. Russell), and with Google, I was able to give some tentative names to those microorganisms.

I do have a large collection of slides but playing with the living is a lot more fun, and a lot more challenging for the photographer, than looking at static subjects. So if, like me, you find yourself confined to your own living space get out the microscope and look at whatever small subjects happen to be in your close proximity.

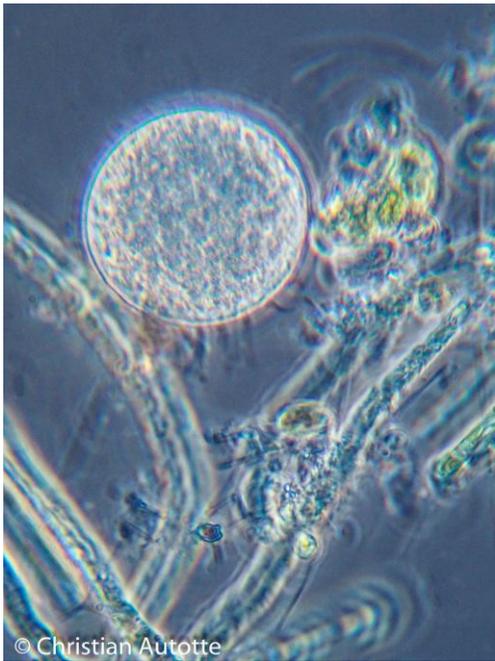
And whatever you do, stay safe and healthy.

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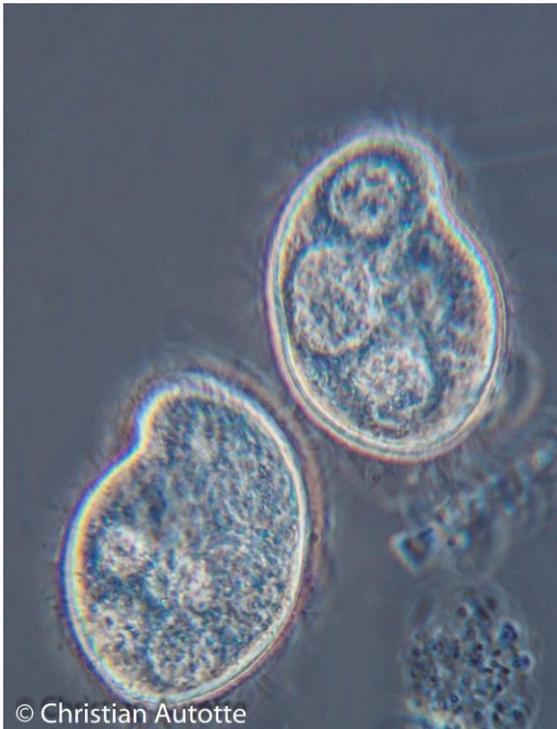
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