

Pluteus umbrosus var. *albus*, the white form of Velvet Shield

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On 25th November 2023 I was looking for fungi in woodland at Whitlingham Country Park on the outskirts of Norwich.

The woods have a good supply of dead, rotting tree trunks, especially Beech and Elm and are a good place to find species of *Pluteus*. In past years I've found several species there: Deer Shield (*Pluteus cervinus*), Yellow Shield (*P. chrysophlebius*), Goldleaf Shield (*P. romellii*) and Velvet Shield (*P. umbrosus*). Ashen Shield (*P. cinereofuscus*), Willow Shield (*P. salicinus*) and Flame Shield (*P. aurantiorugosus*) have also been recorded from the site.

I noticed a single, white fungus fruitbody growing from the base of a dead Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) log (Fig. 1). It looked like a species of *Pluteus*, but not one I had seen before, so I took it home for a further look.



Fig. 1. The fungus in situ, on a Beech log. Photo © Jeremy Bartlett

The cap was 60 mm across, bright white and slightly granulose. The stipe measured 80 x 5 mm and was white and fibrillose, with a slightly bulbous base where it was attached to the wood. The whole fruitbody turned yellow-ochre as it aged and dried. Its odour was very faint, perhaps of radish. The spores measured on average 5 x 6.5 µm.



Fig. 2. The fungus a day after collection. Photo © Jeremy Bartlett.

The colour of the fruitbody and its slightly bulbous stipe base led me to identify it as *Pluteus semibulbosus*, for which there were three previous records in Norfolk.

However, I am very aware of my fallibility when identifying fungi and it seemed like a good idea to dry the fruitbody and pass it to the Norfolk Fungus Study Group's DNA team. They have featured in recent articles in *Field Mycology*, looking at unusual fungal specimens and species of webcap (*Cortinarius*). The team are used to me passing them hard to identify fungi, a few of which have been new for the

county. Occasionally my identification is correct, but not this time.

The conclusion from DNA analysis was that I'd found the white variety of Velvet Shield, *Pluteus umbrosus* var. *albus*. It is a first for Norfolk.

According to *Funga Nordica*, *Pluteus umbrosus* var. *albus* is very rare. It doesn't feature in Kibby Volume 2 (2020) or in the *Field Mycology* article *Getting to grips with Pluteus* (Illife, 2011), though it has a brief mention in *Fungi of Temperate Europe* (Læssøe & Petersen, 2019). Photographs are scarce but there are some online on the Danish 'Svampe Databasen' website.

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Fig. 3. Typical *Pluteus umbrosus*. Photo © Mark Joy.

[This variety was described from Denmark where it is considered as very rare, I don't know of any previous British records — Editor].

References

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