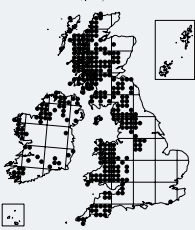


Metzgeria conjugata

Rock Veilwort



Identification The loose patches of *M. conjugata* consist of branched thalli 2 mm wide with strongly down-curved margins edged with a row of straight, double hairs. These and other hairs on the underside of the midrib and on the main thallus are easily visible with a $\times 20$ hand lens. Colonies in typical humid habitats in the west are readily identifiable in the field, but those in drier sites, on tree bases, on limestone or in areas south-east of mid-Wales should be confirmed by checking whether they are monoicous (*M. furcata* is dioicous).

Similar species Colonies of *M. furcata* (p. 246) on rock are generally more tightly appressed to the substrate and have less regularly spaced marginal hairs, which tend to be single rather than in pairs. Confirmation may necessitate checking the sex of colonies, as *M. furcata* is dioicous. The much rarer *M. leptoneura* (p. 248) grows in patches that usually stick out perpendicular to the substrate, and has thalli with very strongly down-curved marginal hairs that almost meet below to form a tube, and has curved marginal hairs.

Habitat A relatively frequent plant in humid gorges and woodlands in the uplands of northern and western Britain, which favours slightly calcareous, siliceous rock faces or blocks of base-rich igneous rock. It often grows with other species that like mildly calcareous conditions, such as *Ctenidium molluscum* or *Trichostomum brachydontium*. Carboniferous limestone is generally shunned, but there are a few records from it, and far more from some other limestones. It is much rarer on bark than *M. furcata*, but very occasionally clothes the base of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees in humid, wooded valleys.