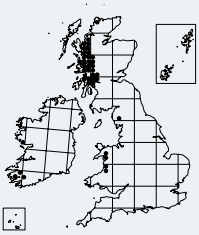
Plagiochila atlantica

P. heterophylla var. *heterophylla*

Western Featherwort



Identification

This species has relatively large (up to 6 mm wide), generally prostrate shoots, forming green to yellow-green, often pure patches. Older, moribund parts tend to be light reddish-brown. The alternate leaves are approximately twice as long as wide (up to 3 mm long, 2 mm wide). The front margin of the leaves lacks teeth (except possibly near the tip), is almost straight and extends down along the stem in an oblique, slightly curved line of insertion. The back margin of the leaf has several coarse, triangular, broad-based teeth that extend around the truncated tip to meet the front margin. When dry, the more oblong younger leaves in the upper part of the stems characteristically become tightly inrolled longitudinally. *P. atlantica* is dioicous. It often forms perianths, but male plants and sporophytes are unknown in Europe.

Similar species

Although this liverwort was collected once two centuries ago, it remained unrecognized for most of the 20th century and was confused with *P. spinulosa* (p. 194). It may, however, be distinguished by its coarser teeth and longer leaves, the uppermost of which are often tightly inrolled when dry. Moist leafy shoots tend to look flatter than those of *P. spinulosa*, whose leaves are more swept back. The perianth is superficially similar to that of *P. spinulosa*, but slightly longer.

Habitat

In the British Isles, this rare but locally frequent species is restricted to Atlantic woodlands, favouring those facing south to east, where it may form extensive mats. It tends to grow on nearly vertical surfaces of acidic rocks, but is also found on trees.

Photos David Long (left) & Gordon Rothero (right) Text David Rycroft