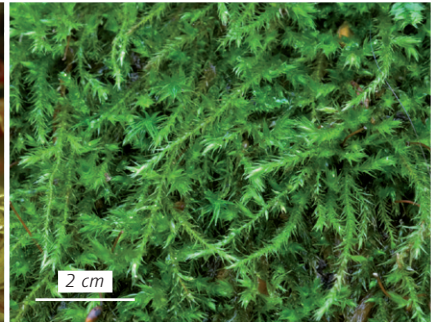
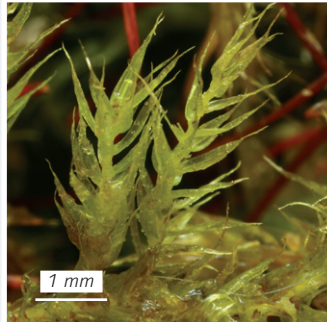
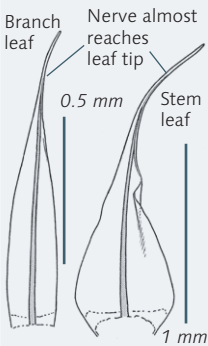
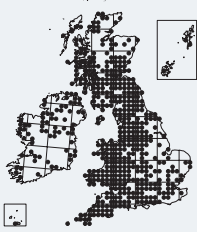


*Brachythecium populeum**Sciuro-hypnum populeum*

Matted Feather-moss

Key 369



Identification

B. populeum has fairly slender, prostrate shoots which are closely attached to the substrate, with short, erect, crowded side branches. Branch leaves are about 1 mm long, spearhead-shaped and narrow to a long, fine point. Stem leaves are similar, but a little broader. The leaves are crowded and appressed when dry, giving the shoots a silky appearance. A very important character is the strong nerve, extending almost to the tip of the leaf, and this can usually be confirmed with a hand lens. Curved and egg-shaped capsules with a conical lid are often present. The seta is roughened.

Similar species

B. populeum resembles *Homalothecium sericeum* (p. 738), though *H. sericeum* is often more robust, more markedly yellow-green and has curved branches. It is easily distinguished from *B. populeum* by its strongly pleated leaves, and its cylindrical capsules (when they are present). *B. velutinum* (p. 745) has narrow leaves, but they lack the very fine, slender tip of *B. populeum*, and the nerve ceases well below the tip. Some compact forms of *B. plumosum* (p. 751) with straight leaves may be mistaken for *B. populeum* when growing away from water, but the nerve ceases below the tip and the setae are smooth towards the base. The rare *B. glaciale* and *B. reflexum* (p. 750) are confined to Scottish mountains, but differ in having patches of distinct cells at the leaf base that run onto the stem, appearing as wide wings, and they have broader, roughly triangular stem leaves. *Rhynchostegiella tenella* (p. 771) has even narrower leaves than *B. populeum*, only slightly widened towards the base, and it is a more slender plant. The capsules of *R. tenella* have a beaked lid.

Habitat

B. populeum is often found on stones on the ground, but also on larger boulders and crags, on old walls and on compacted soil. It favours base-rich substrates, but also grows on slightly acidic, siliceous rocks. It also occurs on the branches, trunks and roots of trees, especially species with a base-rich bark, such as ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). It prefers light to moderate shade and is frequent in woods and hedge banks.

Photos Des Callaghan (left), Sam Bosanquet (top right) & Lars Hedenäs (bottom right)
Drawings Sean Edwards Text Tom Blockeel