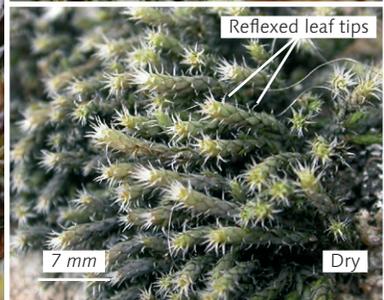
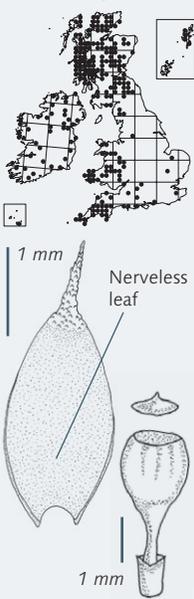


Hedwigia stellata

Starry Hoar-moss

Key 116



Identification

The 3–10 cm long, irregularly branched shoots of *H. stellata* form loose tufts and patches. They are glaucous green or brownish when moist, becoming pale grey as they dry. The concave, oval leaves are about 2.5 mm long, lack a nerve, and usually have a wide, colourless tip that forms a characteristic white triangle. When moist, the leaf tip is held at an angle of 45–90° from the stem; when dry, the tip becomes reflexed or recurved, giving shoot tip a starry appearance. Some forms of *H. stellata* have slightly curved leaves, but otherwise are not distinct from normal forms. Spherical or slightly elongated, yellowish or orange-brown capsules often form in spring and summer. They are wide below the lid, with a red mouth, and have a very short seta, so are almost hidden between leaves that have long, fine teeth on the upper margins.

Similar species

When dry, the very similar *H. ciliata* (Smith, p. 691) holds the tip of its leaves erect or at about 45° from the stem, whereas dry *H. stellata* holds its leaves reflexed or recurved from the stem. Moist plants can only be distinguished by microscopical examination of bumps on the backs of the leaves and at the leaf tip, and it is unwise to identify the scarce *H. ciliata* in the field. *H. integrifolia* (p. 666) is yellowish-green, brown below, and its leaves do not have a colourless tip. *Schistidium crassipilum* (p. 511) and other *Schistidium* species are darker brown-green, with nerved leaves and red capsules, and occur on base-rich substrates. *Racomitrium heterostichum* (p. 537) and other *Racomitrium* species have nerved leaves and capsules that are held well clear of the leaves on a long seta. *Grimmia laevigata* (p. 521) has similarly concave leaves, but these have a broad nerve and it grows in low cushions rather than loose patches.

Habitat

H. stellata grows on hard, unshaded, south- or west-facing, acidic, siliceous or igneous rocks and boulders on moors, mountains, and beside lakes. *H. ciliata* is also sometimes found on igneous rocks, but is slightly more frequent on sandstone roof tiles. *H. stellata* also grows on trees in central and eastern England.

Photos David Holyoak (left), Michael Lüth (top right) & Sam Bosanquet (bottom right)
Drawings Jonathan Graham Text Mark Lawley