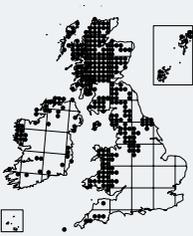


Oligotrichum hercynicum

Hercynian Haircap

Key 90



Identification A small, distinctive moss, whose short (0.5–3 cm), upright, scattered stems are usually quite vividly green; they become duller and less obvious when dry. The incurving leaves, up to 5 mm long when lax and shaded, but usually shorter, are awl-shaped, with a broader sheathing base. The upper surface has about 12 rather wavy ridges of tissue, which are partly covered by strongly inrolled margins, giving the leaf a solid appearance. The leaves become even more inrolled and curved as the plant dries. *O. hercynicum* is dioicous, and male plants are smaller than females. Its capsules, which are fairly frequently produced from late summer onwards, are erect and shortly cylindrical, with a beaked lid, and are borne on a yellowish seta about 2 cm long. The calyptra differs from those of most related genera in having only a few long hairs – hence the generic name.

Similar species Reasonably distinctive in appearance, particularly once the ridges of tissue on the upper surface of the leaves have been spotted. Other thick-leaved, similarly coloured, small acrocarps, such as *Aloina* species (pp. 471–473) differ in leaf shape and habitat, and are easily distinguished if capsules are present. *O. hercynicum* is more likely to be confused with species of *Pogonatum* (pp. 316–317), which differ in their more rosette-like form and flatter leaves that are not incurved, or with the very scarce, montane *Polytrichastrum sexangulare* (p. 321).

Habitat Confined to loose or disturbed, acidic mineral soils and largely restricted to upland districts. As well as being a frequent component of the vegetation of made-up paths in montane areas, *O. hercynicum* can be abundant in loose, stony detritus, on mountain tops, on frost-heaved soil and on consolidated scree on slopes below crags.