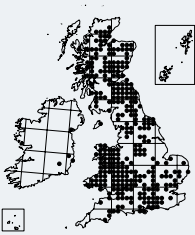


*Orthotrichum stramineum*

Straw Bristle-moss

Key 282



## Identification

This delightfully neat-looking *Orthotrichum* species usually grows in rounded cushions 0.5–1 cm tall, topped with abundant capsules that sit just above the level of the leaves. Leaves are 2.5–3 mm long, and capsules are 2 mm long. From late winter to early summer, these have a very pale, dull yellowish calyptra, with a contrasting dark red-brown tip and very sparse hairs. Later in the year, the old, furrowed capsules are dark orange-brown, abruptly narrowed below a wide mouth, and then wide again below. They have 8 reflexed outer peristome teeth, and a microscope reveals immersed stomata. Careful examination with a hand lens should show several long hairs around the base of the seta: an almost unique feature among British *Orthotrichum* species.

## Similar species

It is easy to imagine that *O. affine* (p. 647) with a rather dark tip to its calyptrae is *O. stramineum*, but the real thing is convincingly striking (if in doubt, check the stomata). The neat growth form of *O. stramineum* is a good pointer, although it sometimes grows in more irregular tufts like *O. affine*. *O. pulchellum* (p. 652) also has dark-tipped calyptrae, but there is a series of dark dots around the bottom of the calyptra (absent in *O. stramineum*); it also differs in having capsules held clear of the leaves, and leaves that crisp when dry. The overall appearance of *O. pallens* (Smith, p. 676) is similar to that of *O. stramineum*, but its calyptra is brighter yellow, with a bright orange tip, and completely lacks hairs. It is usually blunter-leaved than *O. stramineum*, but sometimes has a short, blunt point on the tip of its leaves. A few populations have slightly darker calyptrae, making microscopical checking even more essential.

## Habitat

*O. stramineum* favours the upland edge more than *O. affine*, and is the predominant *Orthotrichum* of trees and shrubs in parts of mid-Wales and eastern Scotland. It is particularly frequent on the trunks of ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and on branches of hazel (*Corylus avellana*), but may be found on all manner of hosts. It is strikingly scarce in oceanic areas, and is almost absent from Ireland.

Photo & Text Sam Bosaquet