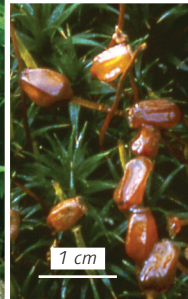
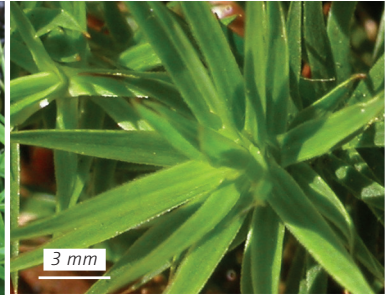
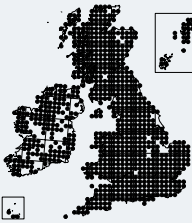


*Polytrichastrum formosum**Polytrichum formosum*

Bank Haircap

Key 95



Identification A medium-sized plant with erect, unbranched, scattered shoots in loose tufts, 5–10 cm tall, and leaves 1 cm long or slightly more. The bright, dark green, straight leaves hug the stem, becoming wavy and duller when dry. The spreading, narrow, triangular limb extends from a matt, colourless sheathing base. Narrow, colourless margins are distinctly toothed, and become inrolled to protect the up to 70 ridges of tissue on the upper surface of the nerve as the leaf dries out. The (4-) 5- to 6-angled, erect to inclined, rather rectangular capsule with a long (2 mm) lid is borne on a 2.5–6 cm seta, yellowish above, red below. Capsules are frequent and covered by the calyptra when mature.

Similar species Can be confused with stunted plants of the usually taller *Polytrichum commune* (pp. 322–323); this favours wetter, less well-drained, boggy environments. When fruiting, *P. commune* can be told by its more cubic, 4-angled capsule on a longer seta, and the swelling at the base of the capsule is more disc-shaped and more distinctly separated from the capsule by a constriction. *P. commune* has longer, narrower leaves arising from a longer, shinier sheathing base, and they are usually less distinctly curved away from the stem when moist than in *P. formosum*. In addition, the back of a moist, fully developed leaf of *P. formosum* has a V-shaped ridge formed by the back of the nerve, whereas the back of a *P. commune* leaf is rounded. The rarer *P. longisetum* (p. 319) has a wider leaf blade, with very wide, colourless margins that are easily seen during a superficial examination, and fewer ridges of tissue. When fruiting, the more obscurely angled capsule further distinguishes *P. longisetum* from *P. formosum*.

Habitat Typical of deciduous woodlands in the lowlands, on soils from strongly acidic to nearly neutral, but most frequent where mildly acidic. Also occurs in upland woodlands on leached soils and well-drained moorlands. It can be found on lowland heaths, avoiding the wettest areas favoured by *Polytrichum commune* and the drier, more exposed substrates of *P. piliferum* and *P. juniperinum*. It occasionally grows in block scree.

Photos Des Callaghan (left), Fred Rumsey (top right), John Birks (bottom centre) & David Genny (bottom right) Text Fred Rumsey