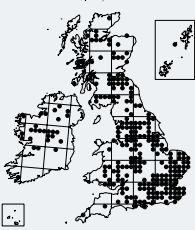


Polytrichastrum longisetum

Polytrichum longisetum

Slender Haircap



Identification This species forms short to moderately tall (1.5–10 cm) loose tufts, open carpets or solitary, dark greenish shoots. The rather stiff, straight leaves (rarely soft, recurving and laxer when unusually growing in damp places) gradually taper to a finely toothed, brownish point. They are typically somewhat less than 1 cm long, have a distinctly broad, toothed leaf blade, the nerve bearing 20–40 ridges of tissue. The capsule is less acutely 4- to 6-angled than those of its commoner counterparts and is not uncommon in summer. It is only partly covered by the calyptra when mature.

Similar species Most similar in size and general appearance to small plants of the more frequent *P. formosum* (p. 320) and also likely to be confused with stunted plants of the usually much larger *Polytrichum commune* agg. (pp. 322–323), which, however, tend to favour wetter, less well-drained, boggy environments. Both have more ridges of tissue on the upper surface, combined with a narrow leaf blade that is scarcely visible to the naked eye. The capsule of *P. formosum* is more distinctly angled and more completely covered by the calyptra when first mature; that of *Polytrichum commune* is more cubic and 4-angled. *Polytrichum juniperinum* (p. 325) may be similar in size and stature, and occurs in similar habitats, but differs in its incurved leaf margins lacking teeth.

Habitat *P. longisetum* often colonizes disturbed, acidic ground, for example burnt heaths and woodland. It may grow on rotten wood as well as soil. It may be locally frequent in clear-felled woodlands on peat and has occasionally been noted on rocks by upland streams. In Scandinavia, where it is more frequent, it often inhabits damper, swampy woodland. It may well be overlooked to an extent in the British Isles, but in many areas, especially in the west, *P. longisetum* seems to be generally uncommon and somewhat ephemeral.