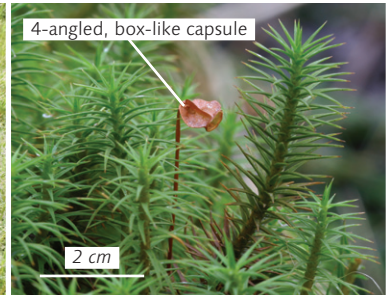
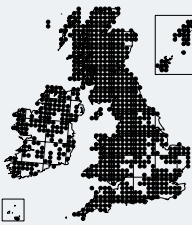


Polytrichum commune var. *commune**P. uliginosum*

Common Haircap

Key 95



Identification Well-grown, large, hummocks or turfs of this species are unmistakable. They consist of tough, wiry shoots up to 40 cm long (usually about 20 cm). When moist, the 8–12 mm long, narrowly spearhead-shaped leaves spread or strongly curve away from the stem, with a glossy sheathing base, giving a starry appearance viewed from above. When dry, the margins become inrolled, wavy and gently twist around the stems. The margins are sharply toothed and the broad nerve is covered with up to 70 ridges of tissue. The leaves surrounding the base of the seta are longly tapering and toothed above. The 4-angled, box-like capsule, produced in summer, is borne on a long (to 12 cm), reddish seta. It is erect when young, becoming inclined to horizontal with age; its lid is shortly beaked. The young capsule is covered by a long, golden brown, hairy calyptra.

Similar species It can be distinguished from the usually shorter var. *perigoniale* (p. 323) and var. *humile* (Smith, p. 129), both plants of drier ground, by its more strongly toothed, evenly tapering leaves surrounding the base of the seta. *Polytrichastrum formosum* (p. 320) is also a shorter plant of drier, usually more shaded habitats; its sheathing leaf base is less glossy and the leaves are a little broader. The 5- to 6-angled capsule with a longer beak and a base that is not separated from the capsule by a constriction, borne on a shorter seta distinguishes *P. formosum*, but often (especially with plants from wet heaths) microscopical examination of a leaf section is necessary. However, the back of a moist, fully developed leaf of *P. formosum* may have a V-shaped ridge formed by the back of the nerve, whereas the back of a *P. commune* leaf is rounded.

Habitat Found in a wide range of damp, acidic habitats, tolerating shade and moderate amounts of pollution and nutrient enrichment. It often abounds on wet moors in the uplands, but is also frequent throughout western, lowland Britain in wet woodlands, bogs, ditches, by lake margins, on heaths, etc. In the drier south-east it is perhaps most frequent in old gravel pits and sand pits by pools under willow and birch scrub.

Photos Sean Edwards (left), Des Callaghan (top right), Gordon Rothero (bottom centre) & David Genney (bottom right) Text Fred Rumsey