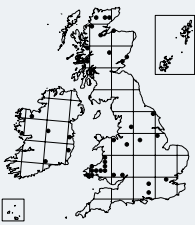


Polytrichum commune var. *perigoniale*

P. commune s.l.

Dense Haircap



Identification

Var. perigoniale looks very different from *var. commune*. It forms rather dense tufts or turfs of tough, wiry, mostly unbranched shoots about 3–6 cm tall, which are usually densely covered with felt-like rhizoids below. The 8–12 mm long, crowded leaves spread when moist (but not widely so, giving the shoots a narrow appearance) and appress to the stem when dry. The leaf 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 more abruptly narrowed than those of *var. commune*, almost untoothed and have a distinctly tapering tip. The capsule, produced in summer, is borne on a reddish seta about 5–9 cm long. It is strongly 4-angled and almost cubic, shorter than for *P. commune*. The young capsule is covered by the long, golden brown, hairy calyptra.

Similar species

More likely to be confused with *Polytrichastrum formosum* (p. 320) than with typical *P. commune* *var. commune* (p. 322), although stunted *var. commune* is sometimes found in the dry habitats favoured by *var. perigoniale*. Microscopical examination of the apical cells of the ridges of tissue is needed for confident identification, so small, upright *Polytrichum* species on dry gravelly ground should be collected for checking. 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. *P. commune* *var. humile* (Smith, p. 129) is a contentious taxon, which differs only in the leaves surrounding the base of the seta, which taper more abruptly to a short tip.

Habitat

A plant of relatively dry, acidic habitats, such as gravel tracks, heathlands, leached sand dunes, sand pits and gravel pits. *Var. perigoniale* is particularly characteristic of shaly forestry tracks in western Britain and is almost ubiquitous in this habitat in mid-Wales (and doubtless elsewhere). It is almost certainly under-recorded, as people have relied on the difference in the leaves surrounding the base of the seta to define the taxon, which is not visible on non-fertile colonies.