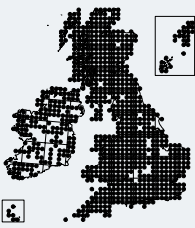


Polytrichum juniperinum

Juniper Haircap

Key 91



Identification A medium-sized *Polytrichum*, forming extensive, open patches of unbranched, erect shoots about 3 to 4 cm tall, with leaves up to about 1 cm long. The reddish stems are clothed with evenly spaced, greyish-green leaves with untoothed margins and a distinctive, red-brown tip. When dry, the leaf margins are strongly inrolled, and the leaves are slightly flexed and appressed to the stem, the whole shoot becoming sharply pointed and slightly glaucous in appearance. In spring, the male plants are very conspicuous, with their bright, reddish-orange, modified leaves forming small terminal 'flowers' at the shoot ends. The erect to sub-erect capsules, which are commonly produced in summer, are usually 4-angled, with a crimson, beaked lid, and are borne on a reddish seta 2–5 cm long.

Similar species *P. juniperinum* differs from *P. piliferum* (p. 324), which may grow with or near it, by the absence of a long, white hair point to the leaves. *P. strictum* (p. 326) is virtually indistinguishable from *P. juniperinum* microscopically, but is a much taller, densely tufted plant of wet habitats whose lower stems are clothed with a dense, off-white felt of rhizoids. Other species of *Polytrichum* and *Polytrichastrum* have leaf margins with abundant teeth that can easily be seen with a 20 hand lens. The much smaller (less than 5 mm tall) *Aloina* species (pp. 471–473) are lime-lovers and have narrow, cylindrical capsules.

Habitat A common species of dry, exposed, acidic habitats, frequently occurring as a pioneer on recently disturbed or burnt, acidic soils. *P. juniperinum* is abundant in many freely draining habitats, especially in lowland areas. Favourite habitats include dry, grassy heaths, grassland in fixed dunes, spoil on quarries and collieries, forestry tracks, soil-capped walls and boulder tops. It sometimes grows on leached soil overlying limestone and occasionally on gravelly graves.