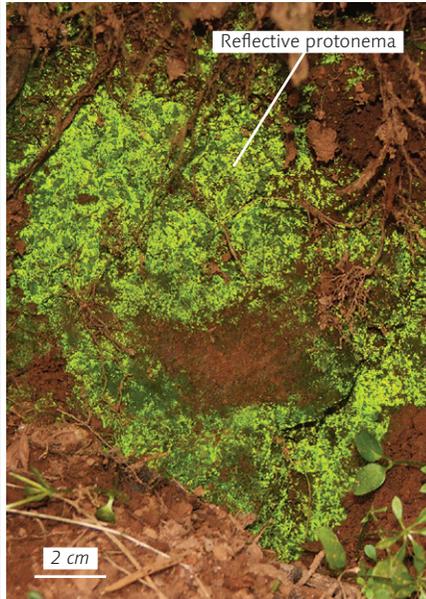
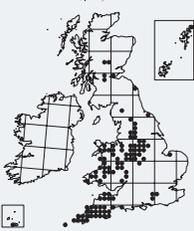


*Schistostega pennata*

Goblin Gold

Key 96

**Identification**

The scattered, frond-like shoots of this unique moss emerge from a persistent protonema that has refractive, lens-like cells causing the plant to shine like cats' eyes. The shoots are like tiny palm fronds up to 1.5 cm long, with 2 opposing ranks of nerveless leaves. The capsule is egg-shaped, lacks a peristome, and is borne on a long seta.

**Similar species**

The fronds may be mistaken for a species of *Fissidens* (pp. 404–417), but the nerveless leaves mark *S. pennata* as different. Beginners might even take it for a leafy liverwort (e.g. *Calypogeia* species, pp. 85–90, which may be growing nearby), but the capsule, although lacking a peristome, is typical of mosses. However, the luminous quality of the protonema, shining out from dark places, is unique in British and Irish bryophytes.

**Habitat**

Famously a denizen of dry, crumbling earth just inside rabbits' burrows, this plant also grows in dark sandstone crevices, recesses and other stygian places where other vegetation cannot compete with it. Many suitably dark places are too wet for *Schistostega*, so it is far from ubiquitous.