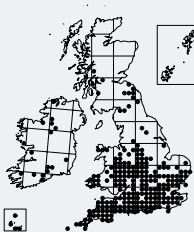


Scleropodium cespitans

Tufted Feather-moss



Identification *S. cespitans* typically grows in extensive, almost pure, dense, usually low and fairly flat patches. The curved, or even arched branches often lie in the same direction, forming thick mats. Shoots are typically 1–2 cm long. Dry leaves retain their shape and are appressed and overlapping, making the mid-green to whitish-green shoots look smoothly worm-like. When moist, the leaves become erect-spreading and the shoots appear less neat. Leaves are somewhat concave and oblong to egg-shaped, about 1–1.5 mm long. They taper evenly at the often broadly pointed tip, but are sometimes narrower (but not drawn out to a fine point). Each leaf has a single, thin nerve. Capsules are very rare; the seta is roughened and the lid is conical.

Similar species Compact forms of *S. tourettii* (p. 755) are difficult to distinguish from *S. cespitans* in the field, but *S. tourettii* has more deeply concave, wider leaves that are broadly egg-shaped. *Cirriphyllum crassinervium* (p. 757) has concave leaves when moist, but its leaf tip suddenly contracts to a short point, and the stout nerve often has a fork in its upper part; the leaves also lose their shape on drying, becoming shrunken. *Rhynchostegium murale* (p. 760) is smaller (branches to 1 cm long), and it does not form deep, extensive patches. Capsules of *R. murale* are borne on a smooth seta and have a beaked lid. *Brachythecium plumosum* (p. 751) has more finely pointed leaves that are usually distinctly curved at the shoot tip. *S. cespitans* may resemble small forms of *Isoetichium alopecuroides* (p. 737), but *I. alopecuroides* normally has a loose, bushy growth form. If in doubt, microscopical examination may be necessary.

Habitat *S. cespitans* is most often found by lowland streams and rivers, normally where there is occasional flooding, on the roots and trunks of trees, and on rocks and boulders, often in a bed of silt. It also occurs on tarmac. A narrow-leaved form (until recently known as *Brachythecium appleyardiae*) occurs rarely on dry limestone rock ledges and walls, typically near the base of vertical cliffs.

Photos Ian Atherton (left) & David Holyoak (right) Text Tom Blockeel