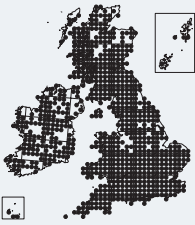


Thamnobryum alopecurum

Fox-tail Feather-moss

Key 332



Identification This is about the largest of our tree-like mosses (3–6 mm tall), and typical plants do indeed resemble miniature trees. The upright stems bear small (less than 2 mm long), triangular, scale-like leaves whereas the branches have dark green leaves 1.5–2.5 mm long, that are egg-shaped and have an acute tip. The nerve is very robust. Coarse teeth at the tip of the branch leaves are easily visible under a hand lens and, in good light, the rounded leaf cells are visible. Capsules are very occasionally produced.

Similar species Well-grown plants are very distinctive. *Climacium dendroides* (p. 674) is more like a miniature palm tree with denser, stiffer, stubbier branches; it also has stem leaves with a rounded (not pointed) tip and more elongated leaf cells. Stunted plants could be confused with *Isoetecium alopecuroides* (p. 737), and ones which are not so obviously tree-like with *Eurhynchium striatum* (p. 764), but these have much less coarsely toothed leaves. Three other very rare species of *Thamnobryum* occur in Britain: the native *T. angustifolium* (Smith, p. 725) and *T. cataractarum* (Smith, p. 726) have narrower leaves, and the garden escape *T. maderense* (*Field Bryology* 88, 4–5) has branches that are strongly arranged in one plane.

Habitat *T. alopecurum* grows on rocks by streams and rivers, often at or just above the normal water level, and on shaded coastal and inland rocks. It also grows on the ground, coppice stools and tree bases in at least mildly base-rich woodland. Detached balls of *T. alopecurum* are sometimes found in some quantity on woodland floors.