**Buxbaumia aphylla**

Brown Shield-moss

Identification

This species is unmistakable when in capsule, earning it the nickname ‘bug-on-a-stick’. It has no green leafy parts, and the disproportionately large capsule arises from a brown filamentous mat. Plants tend to be solitary and often ephemeral, so may not persist for long in one place. The stout, purplish seta is usually 5–10 mm long, and supports a glossy, brown capsule, 5–6 mm long and asymmetrically egg-shaped. The upper surface of the capsule is flattened with angular edges.

Similar species

The capsules of _B. aphylla_ could only be confused with mature or old capsules of the rare _B. viridis_ (p. 337). _B. aphylla_ capsules are held more erect than mature (brown) _B. viridis_ capsules. At maturity the surface of a _B. viridis_ capsule peels away, whilst that of _B. aphylla_ does not.

Habitat

It is sparsely but widely distributed across the British Isles, in shady habitats, especially coniferous woods, where it favours rotten wood, or humic well-drained sandy soils. It also occasionally colonises colliery spoil.

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**Key 85**

Photos John Birks & Stewart Taylor (inset) Drawing & Text Sharon Pilkington