Ephemerum recurvifolium
Strap-leaved earth-moss

Identification
A minute plant, the tiny, short (up to 2 mm tall) shoots emerging from a persistent dark green or brownish protonema. The recurved, 1.5 mm long leaves have a strong nerve, and are not or only very weakly toothed. Capsules are common in winter; they are surrounded by the leaves, and have an obliquely pointed tip.

Similar species
The much commoner E. serratum and E. minutissimum (p. 504) have more strongly toothed leaves, and no (or only a very faint) nerve. Of rare members of the genus (Smith, pp. 391–397), E. cohaerens most resembles E. recurvifolium, but has more strongly toothed leaves. E. sessile has narrow leaves which are erect or held at an angle to the stem, and a capsule with a straight tip; E. hibernicum (Journal of Bryology 27, 89–95) is similar to E. sessile, but has wider leaves with a few large, marginal teeth. All these three rarities are principally species of silty mud on reservoir margins and muddy tracks. Other species with sessile capsules, such as Aphanorrhegma patens (p. 567) and Phascum cuspidatum (p. 486), are much larger. Microbryum rectum (p. 488) is similar in size to E. recurvifolium, and occurs in similar habitats, but holds its capsules above the leaves. Discelium nudum (p. 560) is another very small species, but does not particularly resemble Ephemerum as it consists of a persistent protonema with vestigial leaves and a capsule on a long seta.

Habitat
E. recurvifolium grows on bare, mildly calcareous earth, particularly in arable fields and on molehills in pastures. It may also occur on shallow soil over calcareous rock, for example in disused quarries and churchyards.

Photos Alan Orange Text Nick Hodgetts