Racomitrium sudeticum
Slender Fringe-moss

Identification
Many colonies of this member of the R. heterostichum aggregate can be recognized in the field, especially when they have their distinctive, short (less than 1.5 mm long), egg-shaped capsules. Leaves are about 3–4 mm long. R. sudeticum has narrower leaves than its relatives, and these are tipped by a short hair point, which many leaves may lack. The typical form is a tight cushion of yellow-green shoots, about 2 cm long, but some colonies have shoots twice that length, sprawling like R. heterostichum, and need to be checked microscopically.

Similar species
Sprawling patches or atypically large plants can look like R. affine or R. heterostichum (p. 537), but typical cushions of narrow-leaved plants with short hair points are distinctive. Capsules are not produced as frequently as those of R. heterostichum, but when present they are diagnostically short. R. ellipticum (p. 533) also has short capsules, but these are shiny and dark brown when ripe, and the leaves of R. ellipticum are noticeably opaque through a hand lens and always lack a hair point.

Habitat
This is more of an upland species than R. heterostichum or R. affine, and it is very rare in the western lowlands. R. sudeticum is often abundant at altitudes above 300 m, especially on rocky hillsides or on blocks in scree. It may also grow on soil by late-lying snowbeds.

Photos David Genney (top left), David Holyoak (bottom left) & Robert Goodison (right) Text Sam Bosanquet