

Brachythecium glaciale/reflexum

Snow/Reflexed Feather-moss

Identification

These two species are confined to high altitudes in the mountains of Scotland. They are rather similar to each other in their slender shoots (commonly 2–6 cm long), forming thin, intricate, flat patches of a rather open texture, or mixed with other mosses. *B. reflexum* is the smaller of the two, and it has more or less pinnate shoots; *B. reflexum* has less regular, rather long branches. In both species the branches tend to spread widely from the stem and are widely spaced. The leaves become somewhat shrunken and loosely erect or appressed when dry, but spreading when moist. A very distinctive feature is the shape of the stem leaves, which are broadly triangular in their lower half, abruptly narrowed at the base, and terminating in a long slender point which appears filiform when the plants are dry. The leaf bases in both species are decurrent along the stem as rather wide conspicuous wings, which can be observed with a lens when the plants are moist. The clearest mark of distinction between the two species is the length of the leaf nerve. In *B. reflexum* the nerve extends into the apex of the leaf, but in *B. glaciale* it ceases well below the apex. The branch leaves are smaller and have a more ovate shape and shorter apex. Capsules are not common and have a papillose seta.

Text Tom Blockeel

Similar species

The only other *Brachythecium* species with conspicuously decurrent leaf bases is *B. rivulare* (q.v.), but that is a stouter species with shortly pointed leaf apices and it does not occur in flat intricate patches. *B. populeum* (q.v.) has the nerve extending to the apex of the leaf, but otherwise it is very different from *B. reflexum*, with narrow lanceolate leaves and short crowded branches. In its slender size, pinnate branching and the shape of the stem leaves, *B. reflexum* resembles *Kindbergia praelonga* (q.v.), but the shoot tips in *B. reflexum* are narrow and pointed, whereas in *K. praelonga* the leaves spread outwards at the apex of the stem, giving the shoot tips a star-like appearance when viewed end on. In its slender size *B. reflexum* also resembles *Amblystegium varium* (q.v.), but the latter does not have broadly decurrent leaf bases. *B. starkei* (Smith, p. 827) is another Scottish mountain species, distinguished from *B. glaciale* by microscopic characters. It is very rare.

Habitat

B. glaciale and *B. reflexum* are rare and confined to higher altitudes in Scotland, among rocks and in block scree, especially under ferns and on fern litter, and in places with prolonged snow lie.