

Orthotrichum stramineum

Straw Bristle-moss



Identification

This is a delightfully neat looking *Orthotrichum* that usually grows in rounded cushions topped with abundant capsules that sit just above the level of the leaves. From late winter to early summer, these have very pale, dull yellowish calyptrae, with contrastingly dark red-brown tips and very sparse hairs; later in the year, the old, furrowed capsules are dark orange-brown and are abruptly narrowed below a wide mouth, and then wide again below. They have 8 reflexed outer peristome teeth, and a microscope reveals immersed stomata. Careful examination with a lens should show several long hairs around the base of the seta: an almost unique feature among British *Orthotrichum* species.

Similar species

It is easy to imagine that *O. affine* (q.v.) with rather dark calyptra tips is *O. stramineum*, but the real thing is convincingly striking (if in doubt, check the stomata). The latter's neat growth form is a good pointer, although it sometimes grows in more irregular tufts like those of *O. affine*. Another *Orthotrichum* with dark calyptra tips, *O. pulchellum*, has a series of dark dots around the bottom of the calyptra (absent in *O. stramineum*) and also differs in having exserted capsules and the leaves crisped when dry. The overall appearance of *O. pallens* (Smith, p. 676) is similar to that of *O. stramineum*, but its calyptra is brighter yellow, with a bright orange tip and completely lacks hairs. It is usually blunter-leaved than *O. stramineum*, but sometimes has a short, obtuse apiculus on its leaf tips. A few populations have slightly darker calyptrae, making microscope checking even more essential.

Habitat

This is more of an upland edge species than *O. affine*, and is the predominant epiphytic *Orthotrichum* in parts of mid-Wales and eastern Scotland. It is particularly frequent on the trunks of ash trees and on hazel branches, but may be found on all manner of hosts. It is strikingly scarce in oceanic areas, and is almost absent from Ireland.