

Polytrichastrum longisetum

Slender Haircap



Identification

This species forms short to moderately tall (1.5–10 cm) loose tufts, open carpets or solitary, dark greenish shoots. The rather stiff straight leaves (rarely soft, recurving and laxer when unusually growing in damp situations) gradually taper to a denticulate brownish point, they have a distinctly broad, toothed leaf blade, the nerve bearing 20–40 lamellae. The capsule, which is less acutely 4–6-angled than those of its commoner counterparts, is not uncommon in summer. It has longer peristome teeth and is only partially covered by the calyptra when mature.

Similar species

Most similar in size and general appearance to small plants of the much more frequent *P. formosum* (q.v.) and also likely to be confused with stunted plants of the usually much larger *Polytrichum commune* agg. (q.v.), which, however, tend to favour wetter, less well drained boggy environments. Both have more lamellae on their upper surfaces, combined with narrow laminae that are scarcely visible to the naked eye. The capsule of *P. formosum* is more distinctly angled and more completely covered by the calyptra when first mature; that of *Polytrichum commune* is more cubic and 4-angled. *Polytrichum juniperinum* (q.v.), which may be of similar size and stature and occurs in similar habitats, differs in its incurved, edentate lamina margin.

Habitat

A plant of heaths and acid woodland in the British Isles, which often behaves as a pioneer species colonizing disturbed acidic environments, including soil and well-rotted wood. It may be locally frequent in clear-felled woodlands on peat and has occasionally been noted on rocks by upland streams. In Scandinavia, where it is more frequent, it often inhabits damper, swampy woodland environments. It may well be overlooked to an extent in the British Isles, but in many areas, especially in the west, *P. longisetum* seems to be generally uncommon and somewhat ephemeral.