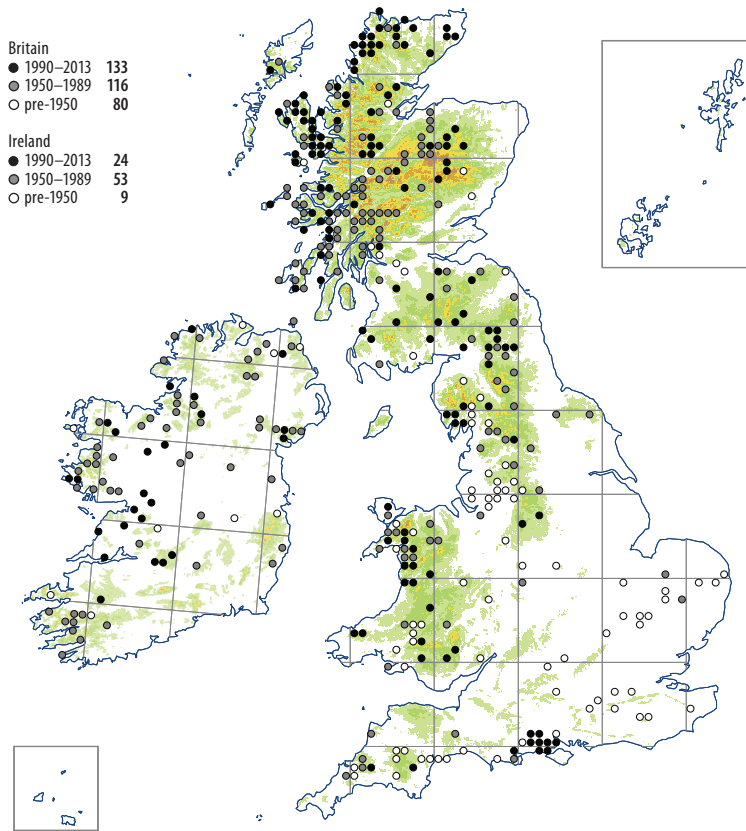


# *Splachnum ampullaceum*



A specialised colonist of old decaying dung that remains moist and decays slowly, and therefore confined to wet, acid ground. Characteristic habitats are grazed heathland, rough acid pastures, edges of fens, moorland and boggy ground. It is most common on cattle dung, perhaps because cattle are the stock most often used to graze suitably rough grassland and wet heath, but it also occurs on the dung of other herbivores. It appears to be more demanding of moisture than *Splachnum sphaericum*, and is rarely if ever found on bones or other animal remains. Altitudinal range: 0–450 m.

During the 20th century, *S. ampullaceum* provided a classic example of the fate of an ecologically specialised species in a changing environment. Its almost complete disappearance from much of lowland England was caused

by the destruction of its habitat by drainage and agricultural improvement, the drying out of the remaining areas of wet heath because of falling water-tables, and reduced levels of grazing. More recently it has declined even in some suitably grazed areas of wet heath. Thus it has disappeared on Bodmin Moor (Cornwall), where it was once frequent (Holyoak, 2012). This is likely to be an indirect result of the widespread use since the 1980s of ivermectin, an endectocide drug used to control parasites in domestic stock. Very low concentrations of such drugs kill dung flies, and it is now clear that the use of ivermectin has caused a widespread decline in these and other coprophilous insects (Cox, 1999).

Autoicous; capsules are common, mature in summer. The capsules emit a strong odour that attracts insects, which disperse the spores. The spores are held in clumps by a sticky material and this helps to ensure that both sexes of dioicous species are dispersed simultaneously (Koponen, 1990).

Circumpolar Boreal-montane. From Iceland, the Faeroes, Scandinavia and northern Russia south to northern Spain, N Italy and Montenegro. Tajikistan, C and E Asia, Japan, Sulawesi. N America (south to Oregon and New York).

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