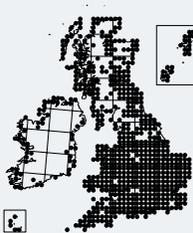


Brachythecium albicans

Whitish Feather-moss

Key 303, 363, 366



Identification *B. albicans* is a distinctive moss because of its pale whitish-green or yellow-green, string-like shoots. The plants are sparsely branched, commonly 2–5 cm long, with tall, mostly erect branches. Their string-like appearance is due to the long but rather slender branches (to about 1 mm wide) and the leaves being appressed and closely overlapping, both when moist and dry. These are egg-shaped, about 1.5–2 mm long, with a long, fine tip and a single nerve ceasing above mid-leaf. The tip, unlike the rest of the leaf, tends to spread slightly outwards, or less often is slightly curved to the side. The leaf surface is slightly pleated, but this is not always very obvious. The capsules have a smooth seta, but are rarely present.

Similar species Larger forms may resemble both *B. mildeanum* (p. 752) and *B. glareosum* (p. 742). Both these species have more gradually attenuated leaves, whereas in *B. albicans* the leaves are usually contracted below the tip. *B. mildeanum* is stouter and the leaves are less neatly appressed and the shoots therefore not string-like. In doubtful cases, microscopical examination may be necessary to check the arrangement of the basal leaf cells. Useful pointers for *B. glareosum* are its habitat on base-rich soil and rocks, its normally more robust size (leaves 2–4 mm long) and the frequently twisted leaf tip.

Habitat *B. albicans* is characteristic of light, well-drained, base-poor soils, especially sand. It is frequent in dunes by the coast. It also occurs in short turf in pastures and over rocks, and less often by waysides and waste ground. Although primarily a plant of acidic substrates, it can also occur on leached soil over limestone, and other base-rich rocks. It is a plant of open habitats and rarely occurs in shade.