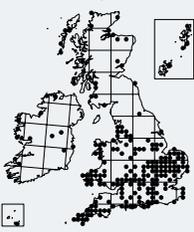


*Brachythecium mildeanum*

Sand Feather-moss



## Identification

This is a rather confusing and anonymous plant, which continues to fox many bryologists. It is fairly robust, the shoots often with rather few, long branches. It forms lax, prostrate patches with ascending tips, or it may become erect when growing among other vegetation. The leaves are commonly 2–3 mm long, narrowly egg-shaped, contracted at the base and gradually tapered to a rather fine point. They may be a bit wrinkled when dry, but are hardly pleated. They are erect-spreading, and the shoots therefore appear less neat than in *B. albicans* and *B. glareosum*. The single nerve ceases below the tip. The leaf margins are untoothed. Capsules (2–2.5 mm long) are occasionally present, and then the smooth setae offer a very useful field character.

## Similar species

*B. mildeanum* is often confused with forms of *B. rutabulum* (p. 746) that grow in similar habitats. Such forms of *B. rutabulum* often have narrower, more erect leaves than usual, but can be distinguished by the finely toothed margins, though this may need to be confirmed microscopically, and by the roughened setae (when present). *B. glareosum* (p. 742) and *B. salebrosum* (p. 743) normally have more strongly pleated leaves. *B. glareosum* also differs in its very fine and frequently twisted leaf tip. *B. salebrosum* may be difficult to distinguish in the field, though it more often grows on wood, and its branch leaves are often finely toothed. It may be necessary to confirm microscopically the more compact group of cells in the basal angles of the leaves in *B. salebrosum*. *B. albicans* (p. 741) is normally more slender with string-like shoots, and the leaves are typically contracted below the tip. *Tomentypnum nitens* (p. 725) has more strongly pleated leaves and a dense felt of rhizoids on the stem.

## Habitat

*B. mildeanum* is a plant of open habitats, in moist grassland, marshes and dunes. In some areas it is a rather common weed on banks, bare ground and gravel by tracks and in gateways.

Photos David Holyoak (left), Jonathan Sleath (top right) & Des Callaghan (bottom right) Text Tom Blockeel