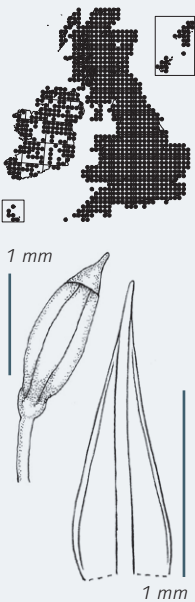


Ceratodon purpureus

Redshank

Key 180, 224, 233, 240



Identification

This very common and very variable species forms cushions or patches which vary from yellow to mid-green through red to purplish-brown, with shoots to 3 cm. The leaves are typically 1.5–2 mm long, narrowly triangular, the lower ones appressed to the stem, the upper somewhat twisted and wavy when dry, normally held away from the stem or slightly reflexed when moist. The leaf margins are recurved almost from the base to the tip. The nerve is stout and ends in the tip of the acutely pointed leaf, which usually has a few coarse teeth. Capsules are common, red-brown, inclined when mature, swollen at the base and strongly furrowed when dry. The setae are distinctively purple-red.

Similar species

Dense, reddish patches of *C. purpureus* with abundant capsules are reasonably easy to recognize, but plants without capsules can be confused with a number of species with triangular leaves and recurved margins. This confusion will probably persist until the moss has been collected on a tiresome number of occasions, but the shiny leaves and translucent cells of *C. purpureus* are usually good pointers. The very rare and decreasing *C. conicus* (Smith, p. 165) is a lime-lover, and grows on shallow, calcareous soil over limestone, on walls and paths, and in quarries. It holds its capsules erect (not inclined as in *C. purpureus*), is usually yellowish-green, with leaves less twisted when dry, but can be difficult to distinguish from *C. purpureus* when non-fertile. A *Ceratodon* on lime-rich substrate is worth checking for *C. conicus*.

Habitat

One of our commonest and most cosmopolitan mosses, occurring on a wide variety of acidic, well-drained substrates, particularly peaty or sandy soil. It is frequent in heathland and acidic grassland, on walls and roofs, and can be particularly abundant on fire sites. It also occurs in more exotic places ranging from bird perches on rocks or fence posts, to old bones and old boots.