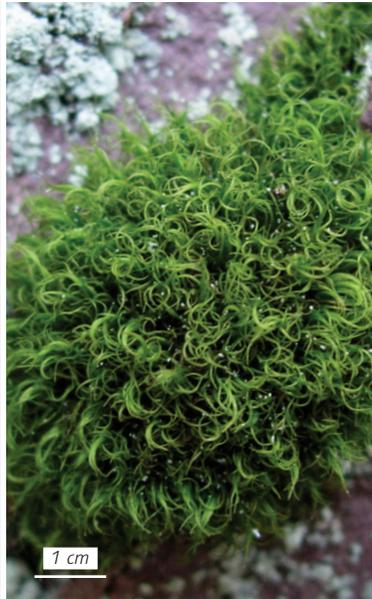
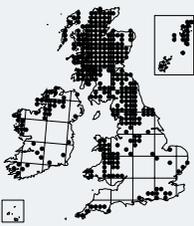


Dicranum fuscescens

Dusky Fork-moss



Identification A medium-sized to large moss (to 10 cm), usually forming dense cushions, but occasionally forming larger patches. The leaves are 4–8 mm long, crisped when dry, narrowly spearhead-shaped, often curved and taper to a long, very fine channelled tip which is normally finely toothed. The nerve is strong, but relatively narrow and may be excurrent at the tip. The nerve lacks teeth at the back above, but the cells here may look roughened when viewed with a hand lens. The inclined, curved, cylindrical capsules are fairly common in the north and west of Britain.

Similar species *D. fuscescens* is a very variable species and confusion is possible with the very common *D. scoparium* (p. 378), the western *D. scottianum* (p. 383), and with the rare *D. flexicaule* (*D. fuscescens* var. *congestum*) (Smith, p. 209) and *D. elongatum* (Smith, p. 209). *D. scottianum* can look very similar to *D. fuscescens* and some plants will need microscopical confirmation. *D. scottianum* has erect capsules, usually has entire leaf margins, a strong and wide nerve in the leaf (up to 30% of the width of the leaf base) and the back of the nerve above never looks roughened. *D. flexicaule* differs in microscopic features of the leaf tip; it appears to be largely restricted to northern Scotland. *Paraleucobryum longifolium* (Smith, p. 237), which often grows through *D. fuscescens* on boulders in a handful of upland sites in Scotland, has a very wide nerve in the leaf (30–50% of the width of the leaf base) and turns almost white when dry.

Habitat On low ground, *D. fuscescens* is found on a variety of hard substrates, especially tree boles and bases, and on boulders and crags, often in exposed sites. Higher in the mountains it also occurs on open rocks in scree, on loch margins and on crags, but also forms a characteristic association with Stiff Sedge (*Carex bigelowii*) on soil where snow lies moderately late in the year.