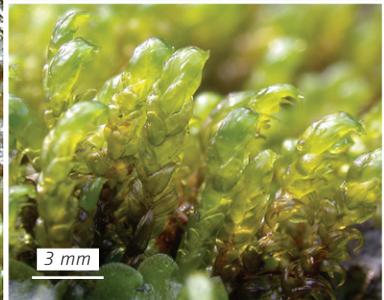
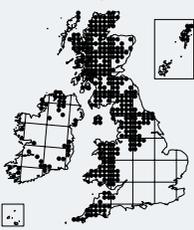


Hygrohypnum ochraceum

Claw Brook-moss



Identification

H. ochraceum is best recognized in the field by its combination of habitat (swift-running streams) and form (concave leaves which are egg-shaped and distinctly curved in the upper part). Plants are medium-sized, with irregular pinnate branching, the branches normally prostrate and parallel with the stem because they grow in and near running water. It typically forms large, soft, green or brownish patches with stems 2–10 cm long. The larger leaves are about 1.5–2 mm long, oblong or broadly spearhead-shaped, with a fairly wide, blunt tip. The nerve is variable, often short and double and therefore indistinct, sometimes longer and single. Its most important character is difficult to observe in the field. The cells in the basal angles of the leaf are large, inflated and colourless, forming small but distinct patches. Capsules are rare.

Similar species

H. luridum (p. 731) is the most likely source of confusion, and the two species cannot always be distinguished in the field. Habitat can be a useful pointer, as *H. ochraceum* does not occur on calcareous rocks, and is very rare in lowland sites. Plants with a strong nerve are more likely to belong to *H. luridum*, and the latter is more often fertile. *H. eugyrium* (p. 734) is also similar, but its coloured group of cells at the basal leaf margins can sometimes be detected with a good hand lens if leaves are pulled from the stem. *Brachythecium plumosum* (p. 751) has rather curved leaves when growing by streams, but occurs above normal water level, and has a more acute leaf tip. *H. polare* (Smith, p. 802) is known only from one locality by a mountain lochan in northern Scotland. It resembles *H. ochraceum*, but has a very stout single nerve that extends to the leaf tip. *Platyhypnidium alopecuroides* (p. 759) occurs in the same habitat as *H. ochraceum* and is of similar size, but the leaves are erect, not curved.

Habitat

It grows attached to rocks, and embedded in sand, less often on tree roots, in swift-flowing hill streams, by waterfalls and sometimes in seepages. The substrate is usually more or less acidic.

Photos Michael Lüth (left) & David Holyoak (right) Text Tom Blockeel