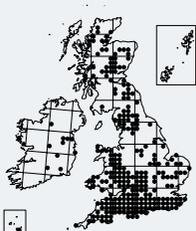


Leucodon sciuroides

Squirrel-tail Moss



Identification Shoots of *L. sciuroides* are typically 4–5 cm long. When dry, vigorous colonies of this medium-sized or large, brownish-green or brown moss have tightly appressed leaves, with stems and branches curved like a longbow. Leaves are about 3 mm long. The sparsely branched stems are attached to the substrate only at the base. Moist plants are less immediately distinctive, but can be identified by the longitudinally pleated leaves, which taper to an acute, but not finely pointed tip, lack a nerve, and have rounded cells. Tiny, easily detached branchlets are often found in a mass at the stem tip, but capsules are rare.

Similar species *Homalothecium sericeum* (p. 738) is a much commoner species that grows in similar habitats. Its leaves have longitudinal pleats, but *H. sericeum* is usually glossy and golden green rather than matt brown, and its narrowly triangular, more finely tapered leaves have a nerve and elongated cells. *Platygyrium repens* (p. 800), which also has deciduous branchlets at the tip of its shoots, and *Hypnum resupinatum* (p. 805) are often more richly branched and even the sparsely branched mosses customarily ascribed to *H. resupinatum* lack the characteristic curvature of *L. sciuroides*. When moistened, dry *Leucodon* leaves spread out almost instantly, whereas these other species respond more slowly to rehydration. Vigorous shoots of *Orthotrichum lyellii* (p. 648) may have a similar habit to that of *L. sciuroides*, and also rehydrate rapidly, but they always have a conspicuous dusting of branched gemmae over the leaves.

Habitat *L. sciuroides* is uncommon in most districts. It grows on trees with base-rich bark such as ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), on base-rich rock outcrops, stone monuments or gravestones.