

Orthotrichum pulchellum

Elegant Bristle-moss

Key 281



Identification A distinctive little *Orthotrichum* with twisted leaves when dry, which grows in loose, slightly branched, yellowish-green tufts that are usually less than 1 cm tall, but may grow to about 2 cm in height. Leaves are 2–2.5 mm long. Unlike most other members of the genus, *O. pulchellum* holds its 1.5 mm long capsules clear of the leaves on a seta 1–2 mm long. These capsules are pale red-brown when old and dry, and have 8 reflexed, orange peristome teeth; when unripe, they are covered by an almost hairless, pale calyptra tipped with dark brown and with a series of dark dots around the lower margin.

Similar species Almost all our other *Orthotrichum* species have straight leaves when dry, although those of *O. tenellum* (p. 651) are sometimes slightly curved, but not nearly as much as those of *O. pulchellum*. The only other members of the genus that also hold their capsules clear of the leaves are the much larger and very different-looking *O. anomalum* (p. 656) and *O. speciosum* (Smith, p. 670). There are three English records of *O. consimile* (Smith, p. 672), and it is well worth getting into the habit of checking *O. pulchellum* in the field for the yellow peristome teeth of this rare moss (they are orange or red in *O. pulchellum*). *Ulota* species (pp. 658–664) have longer, narrower, spindle-shaped capsules and most have very hairy calyptrae.

Habitat There has been a dramatic increase in the abundance of *O. pulchellum* in eastern Britain, and it is now locally abundant in many areas of willow (*Salix*) carr. Further west, it has always been frequent on willows, especially in sheltered places. It also grows in quantity on other hosts, albeit not in the profusion that it does on willow, both on twigs and less often on trunks. There are a few records from shaded stonework.