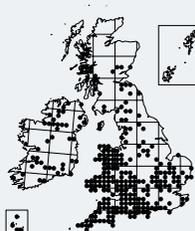


Orthotrichum tenellum

Slender Bristle-moss

Key 283



Identification Tufts of *O. tenellum* are composed of several narrow, upright shoots with appressed leaves, topped by narrow capsules almost completely hidden by a long, sparsely hairy, light green calyptra. The plants are consistently less than 1 cm tall and are often less than 5 mm in height, with leaves 2.5–3 mm long and capsules 2 mm long. Unripe capsules are light green; when ripe or old they become golden brown, and have 8 reflexed, orange outer peristome teeth.

Similar species Small plants of *O. affine* (p. 647) can be confused with relatively tall *O. tenellum*, and checking the stomata with a microscope is often necessary. The narrowness of every feature of *O. tenellum* is distinctive, as is the long calyptra, which almost hides the capsule, whereas the calyptra of *O. affine* and most other species ends well above the base of the capsule. The very rare *O. pumilum* (Smith, p. 677) has shorter calyptrae, and forms tiny (less than 4 mm), squat tufts in contrast to the slightly taller, narrow tufts of *O. tenellum*; it undoubtedly needs checking with a microscope.

Habitat *O. tenellum* is the commonest *Orthotrichum* on trees and shrubs in the Mediterranean, and in Britain is most at home in the south-west. In some coastal areas, it is abundant on elm (*Ulmus*) trunks and willow (*Salix*) branches, as well as a variety of street trees. Further north and east, it occurs in small quantity on ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*) in parkland, or on old elders (*Sambucus nigra*) in hedgerows. Atmospheric pollution caused it to disappear from much of lowland England, but it is now slowly spreading back into the Midlands.