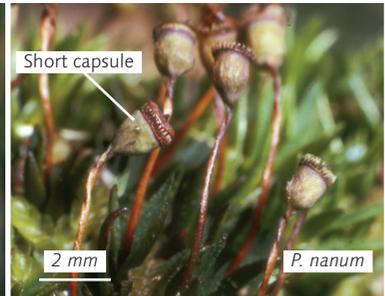
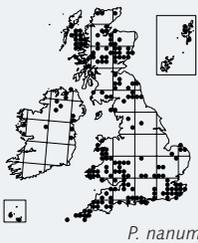


*Pogonatum nanum/aloides**Polytrichum nanum/aloides*

Aloe Haircap/Dwarf Haircap

Key 94



Identification

As its name suggests, *P. aloides* resembles a small Aloe, with its short, stiff, dark green, rather triangular leaves arranged in a rosette-like tuft on short, stout, reddish stems. *P. nanum* looks like a small version of *P. aloides*, but variations in *P. aloides* make identification of non-fertile colonies impossible. Individual shoots of both species tend to emerge from a low, persistent, vividly green protonemal felt. The shoots are less than 1 cm tall and most conspicuous when crowned by male inflorescences or sporophytes. Individual leaves are 3–4 mm long, with blunt, multicellular marginal teeth along much of the blade. The upper surface of the leaf above the colourless sheathing base is largely covered by longitudinally orientated, parallel plates of cells. Capsules are commonly produced on a 3–4 cm tall reddish seta, and provide the only reliable means of identification. The short, almost spherical capsule of *P. nanum* is distinct from the upright, shortly cylindrical capsule of *P. aloides*. In *P. aloides*, the capsule wall is very pale, whereas in *P. nanum* it is mid-green when unripe. The calyptrae of both species are densely hairy.

Similar species

P. urnigerum (p. 317) is generally larger, both in shoot height and leaf length, and differs in its glaucous, grey-blue colour. *Oligotrichum hercynicum* (p. 327) is typically paler, and has incurved leaves.

Habitat

P. aloides is a fairly common colonist of bare, loose, acidic soils, usually sheltered and often where heavily shaded. It is relatively widespread in the uplands, but appears to have declined in lowland Britain, where it grows on steep, sandy, loamy banks on the root plates of fallen trees in woodlands. *P. nanum* has declined more dramatically and is now largely restricted to coastal areas, with a few widely scattered inland colonies. Bizarrely, it also grows on a few mountain tops in the Inner Hebrides.