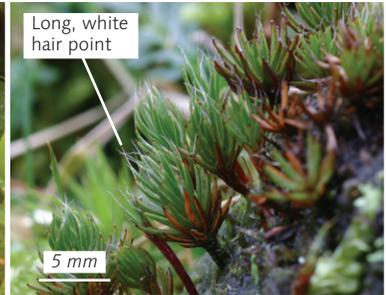


Polytrichum piliferum

Bristly Haircap

Key 91



Identification A low-growing (usually about 4 cm or less) species that forms open patches. Shoots have a characteristic shape, the short leaves being densely clustered at the shoot tip, leaving the reddish stem somewhat bare below. The greyish-green leaves are about 3 mm long, and the tip is drawn out to a long, white hair point, most noticeable on dry shoots when several tips project above the rigid, appressed leaves as a terminal brush. Each leaf has untoothed, incurved margins that partly hide longitudinal ridges of tissue on the upper surface. As with *P. juniperinum*, the male shoots in spring are particularly conspicuous owing to the highly coloured, modified leaves that form a deep reddish, terminal 'flower' (bottom right photograph). The inclined, 4- to 5-angled capsules, commonly produced in summer, are borne on a 1–3 cm long, reddish seta.

Similar species Generally unmistakable within its genus on account of the long, white hair points to the leaves. Rarely these are less well-developed and then microscopical examination may be necessary to distinguish this species from small examples of *P. juniperinum* (p. 325). *P. juniperinum* has more evenly spaced leaves with a brownish tip and its nerve supports more ridges of tissue (usually more than 35 as opposed to the 30–35 of *P. piliferum*). The leaves of *Campylopus introflexus* (p. 400) also have a long hair point, but its leaves are much less thick than those of *P. piliferum*.

Habitat Like *P. juniperinum*, this is a common and widespread species and is an effective colonist and pioneer of dry, acidic substrates. It prefers a somewhat more open, mobile substrate than *P. juniperinum* and is most frequent on disturbed, acidic sands and gravels and on bare patches in sandy, heathy grassland in the lowlands. It is also widely distributed and common in upland areas: on disturbed, stony substrates such as path edges, scree beds, exposed, montane ridge tops, river shingles and gravelly lake margins. It is sometimes found on dry peat as a colonist of burnt moorland.