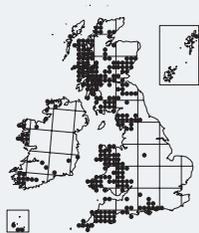


Pterogonium gracile

Bird's-foot Wing-moss



Identification

This medium-sized, rather matt brownish-green or brown moss often grows in pure patches. The erect shoots grow up to 4 cm long, and arise from inconspicuous, prostrate primary stems. They are bare below, but have numerous, short, curved branches above, which all point in the same direction. Each shoot therefore looks like a miniature tree, typically 2–3 cm tall, and a patch resembles a forest bent over in a strong wind. The closely appressed, overlapping leaves give dry branches a very smooth appearance, but on wetting the leaves spread rapidly. The leaves are 1–1.5 mm long, triangular, with a short, sometimes double nerve which does not extend for more than a quarter of the length of the leaf, and a toothed, acute tip. Slender, thread-like branches are often present. Capsules are rare.

Similar species

Scorpiurium circinatum (p. 740) has a similar habit and is easily confused with *P. gracile*, but it has a less tree-like habit and a longer, stronger nerve which almost reaches the tip of its branch leaves. *P. gracile* is a much neater plant than *S. circinatum*, as its branches are smooth when dry and all point in the same direction, whereas those of *S. circinatum* have less closely appressed leaves and are less regularly aligned. *Pterigynandrum filiforme* (p. 685) is like a smaller, more slender version of *P. gracile* with smaller leaves which have a broader, less coarsely toothed tip.

Habitat

P. gracile is rather local on exposed or shaded rocks and boulders. It is often abundant on base-rich igneous rocks such as basalt, gabbro or serpentinite. In other habitats it occurs rather less predictably on acidic rocks or, much more rarely, on base-rich sedimentary rocks. It also grows on bark, typically on the base or trunks of mature trees in open woodland or parkland.