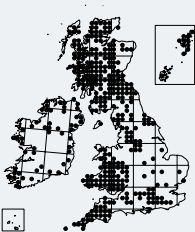
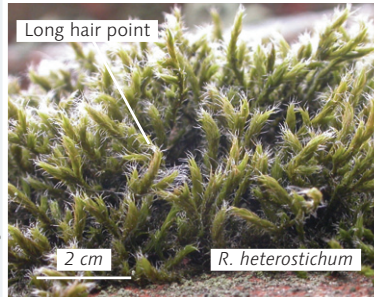
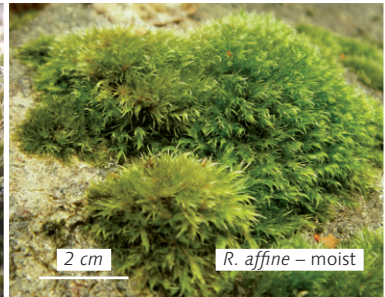
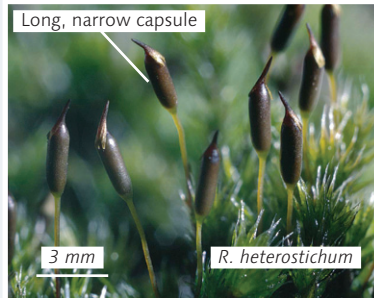
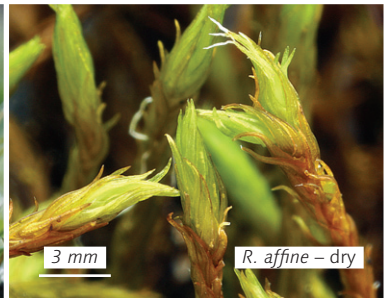


Racomitrium heterostichum/affine

Bristly/Lesser Fringe-mosses

Key 116, 125, 204

*R. heterostichum/affine**R. heterostichum**R. affine* – moist*R. heterostichum**R. affine* – dry

Identification

Field identification of the *R. heterostichum* aggregate is unwise as its members are very variable. They grow as loose patches on non-calcareous rocks, especially in dry, sunny places. Shoots are typically 2–4 cm long, with leaves 3–4 mm long. All have long (over 2 mm), narrow capsules on a long seta, and most have hair points, with several branches per stem, but hair-point length and the degree of branching vary. Hoary plants with straight leaves on exposed upland rocks tend to be *R. heterostichum*, and plants with short hair points and leaves pointing in one direction in humid gorges in the western lowlands tend to be *R. affine*. Intermediate forms may be either, so it is essential to check the nerve section microscopically.

Similar species

Plants with short hair points can be confused with the more narrowly leaved, often densely tufted *R. sudeticum* (p. 536), which has distinctively short capsules. Those without hair points may look like *R. fasciculare* (p. 538), which has distinctively short branches, *Grimmia ramondii* (p. 532), which has a sharp leaf tip and a winged back to the nerve, or *R. aquaticum* (p. 535). *G. trichophylla* (p. 529) and *G. decipiens* (p. 531) occur in similar places, but grow as neater cushions of little-branched shoots with curved setae. The very rare *R. himalayanum* (Smith, p. 465) is a montane calcicole that grows in large, sprawling patches that often decay at the centre. The shoots have short branches, and leaves have a wavy hair point when dry. Shoots of the very rare *R. macounii* subsp. *alpinum* (Smith, p. 459) are usually reddish, and grow on acidic rock by streams and on wet rocks in the mountains. *Hedwigia stellata* (p. 665) has leaves without nerves.

Habitat

Many siliceous or igneous, rocky habitats in northern and western Britain support the *R. heterostichum* aggregate, including boulders on hillsides, drystone walls, rock faces in gorges and upland crags. Lowland colonies have been noted on tiled roofs of slate or sandstone, gravestones, and in railway cuttings.

Photos Fred Rumsey (top left), Sean Edwards (bottom left), David Genney (top right) & Des Callaghan (bottom right) Text Sam Bosanquet