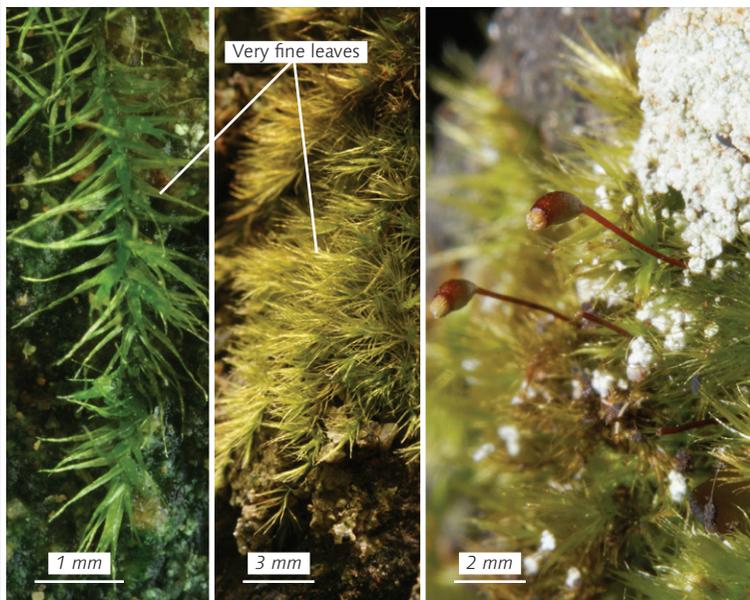
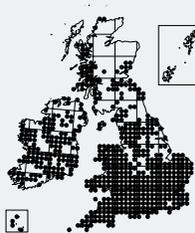


Rhynchostegiella tenella

Tender Feather-moss

Key 357



Identification *R. tenella* has slender, prostrate shoots growing closely attached to the substrate. The branches are short, crowded and more or less erect. The leaves are very narrowly spearhead-shaped, up to about 1 mm long, and taper gradually to a long, fine point. The combination of narrow leaves and crowded branches give the whole plant a silky appearance, especially when it forms large patches, and this is very distinctive once known. The leaves have a single nerve that extends high into the tip. Capsules are often present. The seta is relatively short, about 1 cm long, and smooth. The curved, egg-shaped capsules are 1 mm long and have a beaked lid.

Similar species No other small pleurocarp of dry habitats has such slender leaves. *Brachythecium populeum* (p. 744) is larger, with narrowly egg-shaped to spearhead-shaped leaves, often more than 2 mm. *Amblystegium serpens* (p. 702) lacks the silky appearance of *R. tenella*, and the lower part of its leaves is distinctly egg-shaped. *R. curviseta* and *R. teneriffae* (p. 772) do not have such a narrow, hair-like leaf tip. *Homomallium incurvatum* (p. 801) has leaves that are wider towards the base and turned upwards at the shoot tip. Its capsules have a conical lid. *Conardia compacta* (p. 708) also has leaves broader towards the base, and the shoots form lax patches that appear crinkly owing to the irregularly spreading leaves. It never produces capsules. The very similar *R. litorea* (Smith, p. 859) usually has slightly shorter leaves and a shorter nerve. When fertile, it may be distinguished by its roughened seta, but sometimes the seta is more or less smooth. Plants growing on trees are more likely to be *R. litorea* than *R. tenella*.

Habitat *R. tenella* is a lowland species characteristic of base-rich rocks. It occurs naturally on limestone, chalk and flint, and rarely on the roots and base of trees. It is usually found in places where there is some shade or shelter, including woodland and coastal cliffs. It also occurs widely on bridges, mortared walls and brickwork, especially on their shady sides.

Photos Des Callaghan (left), Richard Lansdown (centre) & Robert Goodison (right) Text Tom Blockeel