

*Sphagnum fallax**S. recurvum* var. *mucronatum*, *S. brevifolium*, *S. isoviitae*

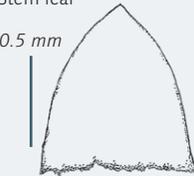
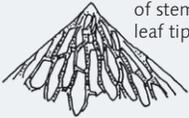
Flat-topped Bog-moss

Section Cuspidata



Stem leaf

0.5 mm

Detail
of stem
leaf tip

Identification

Medium-sized, green to mustard-brown, growing in carpets. Male plants may have a contrasting darker tip to the capitula and spreading branches. Capitula are convex and usually stellate, with developing branches in neat pairs, obvious between the capitula rays. Branch leaves are weakly to clearly in straight lines. Spreading and pendent branches are well-differentiated; the pendent branches are almost white, appressed to and hiding the stem, about as long as or shorter than the spreading branches. The stem leaf is more or less triangular, as long as wide, or a little longer (length less than 1.5 times the width), with a sharply pointed tip that has a minutely pinched apex. When dry, spreading branch leaves are conspicuously recurved. Capsules are occasional.

Similar species

S. fallax is the commonest of the three species into which *S. recurvum* of earlier Floras has been divided, the other two being *S. angustifolium* (p. 307) and *S. flexuosum* (p. 308). Stem leaves in all three are closely appressed to the stem, and can be difficult to see. It is important to obtain a clear view of several stem leaves, so as to reliably assess the shape of the tip. Plants with stem leaves clearly pinched at the tip are *S. fallax*. If the stem leaf appears at all rounded, fringed or notched at the tip, it is likely to be *S. angustifolium* or *S. flexuosum*. Terrestrial, stellate forms of *S. cuspidatum* (p. 302) look superficially similar, but its stem leaf is more acutely pointed and much longer than wide, there is only 1 (less neat-looking) juvenile branch between the capitulum rays (or none discernible) and leaves at the end of spreading branches are curved. Also see the very rare *S. balticum* (p. 304).

Habitat

Very common in a wide range of permanently damp or wet habitats, including nutrient-poor to intermediate fens, and pools and runnels on bogs.

Photo David Holyoak Drawings Sharon Pilkington Text Andy Amphlett & Sandy Payne