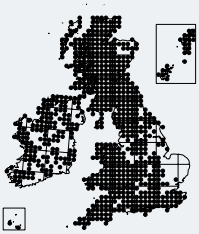
Plagiochila porelloides

Lesser Featherwort

Key 76



Identification This variable liverwort forms green to dark green mats that look like small *P. asplenioides*. Shoots are up to 6 mm wide, and leaves are up to 2.5 mm wide and 3 mm long, alternate, egg-shaped to rounded, usually with small teeth along most of the margin, becoming sparser towards the front base. The front margin of the leaf is reflexed, and extends down onto the stem. Its insertion line is oblique, slightly curved, and reaches the front midline of the stem. Thread-like branches are present and bind shoots together into a mat. *P. porelloides* is dioicous, and when male inflorescences are terminal, they may stand out as pale yellow, attenuated tips to the shoots. Perianths are oblong and laterally compressed.

Similar species Plants that appear intermediate between *P. asplenioides* (p. 192) and *P. porelloides* may cause difficulty, but *P. asplenioides* looks more robust, even when plants are small or shoots short. *P. britannica* (Paton, p. 417) is much less common than *P. porelloides* and *P. asplenioides*, and is distinguished from them principally on the basis of larger leaf cells and a straight leaf insertion line on the front of the stem. If possible, select good candidates for microscopical examination – keeping a stem of *P. asplenioides* to hand for direct comparison is a useful trick. Thread-like branches are sparse in *P. britannica*, and patches of it (and of *P. asplenioides*, where thread-like branches are absent) have less integrity than those of *P. porelloides*. The obscure *P. norvegica* (Paton, p. 420) is known in Britain from a single stone in Dorset, has a divided leaf tip and coarse teeth all round the margin, but is now thought to be a form of *P. porelloides*. *Pedinophyllum interruptum* (p. 191) has a leaf-free zone on the front on the stem, and the leaf margins (as opposed to the tip) never have teeth.

Habitat *P. porelloides* colonizes a wide range of sheltered localities, from woodland banks to streamsides and broken slopes in the uplands. *P. britannica* appears to be restricted to substrates that are base-rich or at least influenced by base-rich water.

Photos Robert Goodison (left) & David Rycroft (right) Text David Rycroft