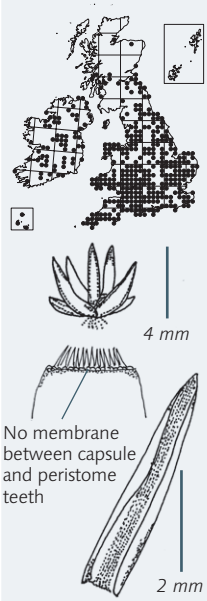
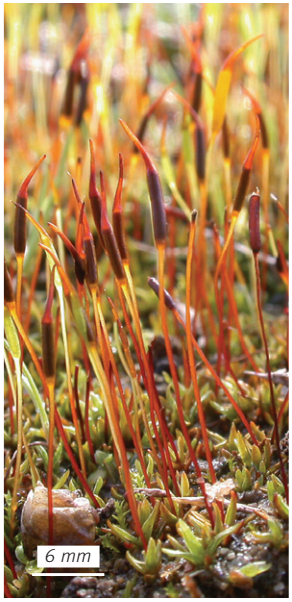
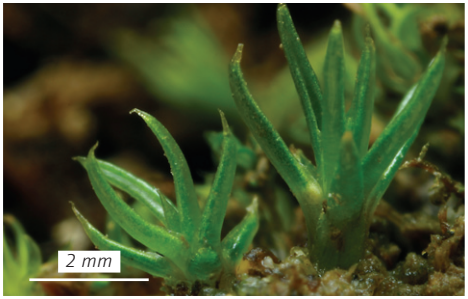
Aloina aloides

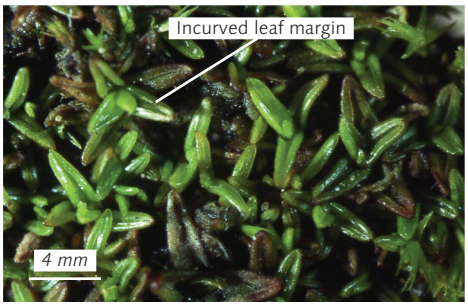
Common Aloe-moss

Key 89









Identification Like other members of the genus, *A. aloides* has stiff, rigid leaves held in a rosette. The plants are tiny (2–5 mm tall) and typically occur as dark green to reddish-brown patches or as individual plants. The leaves are 3–4 mm long, glossy, untoothed, dark green and succulent, held erect or up to 45° from the stem when moist, but incurved when dry. They are much longer than wide, with incurved, translucent margins, making them look distinctly hooded. The nerve ends in the leaf tip, or extends just beyond it, sometimes forming a short point. Capsules are usually abundant from autumn to spring, and are the key to certain identification in the field. When ripe, the capsule is often markedly inclined, and crucially, the lowest part of the peristome is not membranous, so the teeth appear to come directly out of the capsule's mouth. The calyptra is hairless.

Similar species In size and habit *A. aloides* is very similar to *A. ambigua* (p. 473). However, the presence of an obvious membrane between the capsule mouth and peristome teeth in *A. ambigua* will distinguish them. Material without capsules cannot generally be identified beyond species-pair level in the field. *A. aloides* may also superficially resemble small species of *Pogonatum* (pp. 316–317), but that genus has coarsely toothed leaves and a hairy calyptra. Newcomers to *Aloina* may also confuse *A. aloides* with small *Polytrichum juniperinum* (p. 325) or *P. piliferum* (p. 324). Both of these *Polytrichum* species have long, drawn-out leaf points, which are red-tipped in *P. juniperinum*, and elongated into a colourless hair point in *P. piliferum*.

Habitat *A. aloides* is a characteristic member of the sparse bryophyte turf on the floor of chalk pits and limestone quarries, often mixed with other tiny mosses, and liverworts such as *Leiocolea turbinata*. It is also found in other base-rich habitats, such as sparsely vegetated banks, sand dunes, crumbling mortar on walls and base-rich sandstone.

Photos David Holyoak (left), Des Callaghan (top right) & Christine Rieser (bottom right)
Drawings & Text Sharon Pilkington