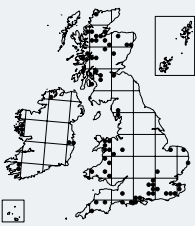


Cryptothallus mirabilis

Aneura mirabilis

Ghostwort



Identification It requires a specific search to find this ghostly white liverwort, but it is well worth the effort of carefully lifting (and then replacing) patches of *Sphagnum*. *C. mirabilis* is a medium-sized (0.5–2 cm long) species, with an irregularly branched thallus, and looks rather like a white *Aneura* with slightly more vertical thallus sides. Its lack of chlorophyll is unique among British liverworts. Capsules are produced occasionally.

Similar species This is our only white liverwort and is almost totally unmistakable. The only potential confusion for the unwary is provided by birch (*Betula*) rootlets coated in off-white fungal mycorrhizae. These are circular in cross-section, whereas *Cryptothallus* has a flattened thallus, like other liverworts.

Habitat Finding this unusual liverwort involves carefully rolling back carpets of *Sphagnum* around the base of birch (*Betula*) trees in wet woodland. It tends to grow about 15 cm down, at the level where leaf litter forms a relatively compact layer. It avoids permanently wet places, as well as dry peat. It favours birch, but other trees are sometimes used. It sometimes grows under other bryophytes or under leaf litter, but the chances of finding it then, other than serendipitously, are very slim. Be sure to replace any *Sphagnum* that you disturb.