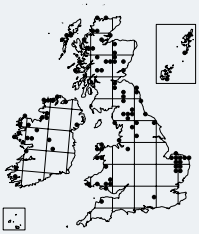
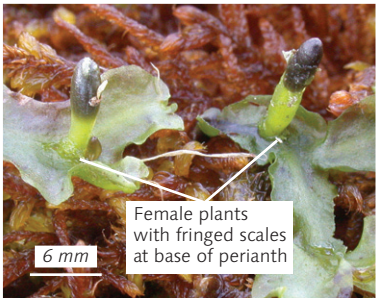
Moerckia hibernica (*flotoviana*)

Irish Ruffwort





Identification This yellowish-green liverwort usually has very wavy margins to its thallus; these margins are much thinner than the midrib. Thalli are up to 7 mm wide. It grows as scattered plants and is dioicous. The upper side of the midrib of male thalli is covered by abundant, fringed scales, each hiding a spherical male organ. Female plants have similar scales around the base of the tubular perianths. Slightly elongated capsules are fairly frequent in late spring. *Moerckia* smells rather fishy. Recent studies indicate that most British plants identified as *M. hibernica* are the similar *M. flotoviana*, and that true *M. hibernica* is restricted to non-alkaline sites in a few places in the Scottish and Irish mountains. A microscope is needed to distinguish these species.

Similar species *M. blyttii* (Paton, p. 532) replaces *M. hibernica* at altitudes above 750 m in the Scottish Highlands. It grows in gravelly, wet, acidic places, especially by late-lying snow. It is usually a bit more robust than *M. hibernica*, but the main differences lie in the brownish rhizoids (colourless in *M. hibernica*) and in the scales on female thalli, which lack the fringes of *M. hibernica*. *Pellia* species (pp. 235–237) differ from *M. hibernica* in lacking fringed scales and in being duller, darker green, whilst the similar-sized *Pallavicinia lyellii* (p. 238) grows on acidic ground. *Blasia pusilla* (p. 240) has gemmae in flask-like receptacles and/or in clusters. *Aneura pinguis* (p. 241) has thicker, greasier-looking, dark green thalli. Almost all *Fossombronia* species (pp. 228–233) have purple rhizoids. Colonies in dune slacks may be mixed with *Petalophyllum ralfsii* (p. 234), which has characteristic parallel ridges of tissue on its upper surface.

Habitat A scarce plant of gravelly, highly calcareous places in the uplands, and in fens and dune slacks in the lowlands. Gravelly flushes on limestone in upland districts are particularly favoured, but *M. hibernica* also grows on calcareous upland streamsides and on tufaceous faces by waterfalls. In fens, it tends to creep through *Scorpidium cossonii* and *Campylium stellatum*.

Photos John Birks (left), David Holyoak (top right) & David Long (bottom right) Text Sam Bosanquet