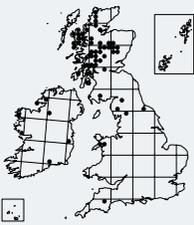# Marsupella sphacelata

Speckled Rustwort

3 mm

0.5 mm

Identification *M. sphacelata* grows in rather loose mats, sometimes erect, but more usually prostrate, varying from shades of greenish-brown through to dark brown or almost black, with some plants from snowbeds yellowish-brown with scorched margins. Shoots are 0.5–3 mm wide, and may grow to 8 cm in length, but much less in drier or less montane sites. Leaves are erect, with the upper part of the leaf sometimes less so and somewhat reflexed, particularly in larger plants. The bilobed leaf varies between 0.5 and 1.5 mm wide and long, and can be wider than long or more elongated. The leaf base loosely sheaths the stem, and the notch is usually narrow and one-quarter to half of the leaf length. The 2 lobes have a rounded tip, but are often quite narrow and rounded-triangular in shape. Dioicous and usually fertile.

Similar species Large, montane forms, particularly those by snowbeds, are fairly easy to recognize by the flaccid shoots with deeply bilobed leaves and an inflated leaf base; when they are flattened, as they often are, they resemble a *Scapania* species more than other *Marsupella* species. However, smaller forms may look like *M. emarginata* (p. 155), which has recurved leaf margins. The rare *M. sparsifolia* (Paton, p. 315) may grow with *M. sphacelata* by snowbeds, and is very similar, though usually smaller; it has male and female organs on the same shoot, with male organs in leaf axils just below the perianth, but the inflorescences look much like those of *M. sphacelata* and it is difficult to distinguish in the field.

Habitat *M. sphacelata* is found in wet places on acidic rocks or gravels in burns and flushes, and is particularly abundant by snowbeds and the associated meltwater channels. It may also occur in other wet and stony places on the margins of rivers or lochs, and on open hillsides, usually high in the mountains, but occasionally on lower ground. Most sites are rather open and often well-exposed to the sun, but rarely dry out.

Photos Michael Lüth Text Gordon Rothero