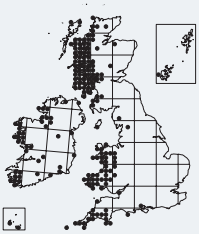
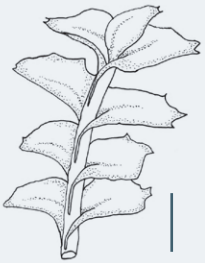
Plagiochila killarniensis

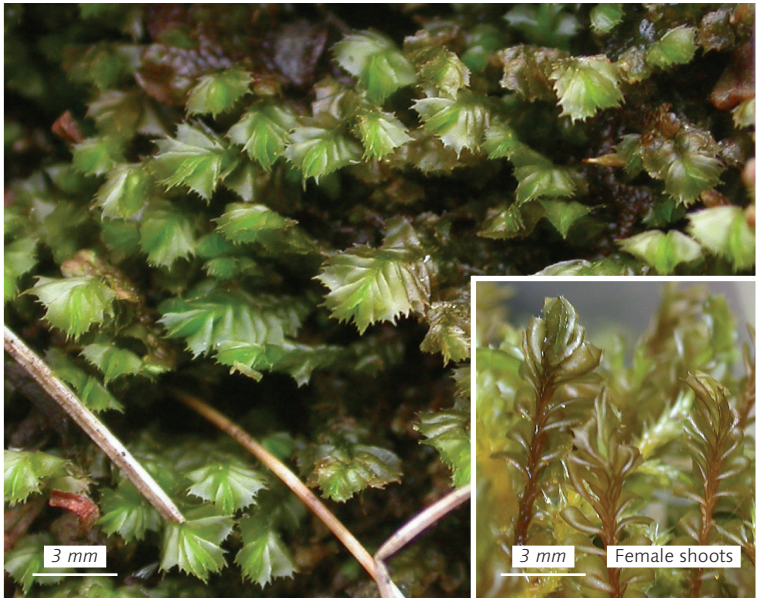
P. bifaria

Killarney Featherwort

Key 76







Identification *P. killarniensis* usually forms dark green, light brownish or purple-brown tufts or patches, although more extensive sheets may develop in favourable sites. Shoots grow up to 3 mm wide, and leaves are alternate and usually appressed and overlapping, with 2 large teeth at the tip and irregular spiny teeth on the back margin. The front margin of the leaf has no teeth and runs well down onto the stem. The insertion line runs practically straight up the centre of the front side of the stem until it bends sharply round in an arch to the back. Leaves are brittle (when dry), and may occasionally break off near the base, thus leaving stems apparently bare in parts, but the leaves do not fall off early. Plants are aromatic when crushed (and also when herbarium specimens are wetted). *P. killarniensis* is dioicous. Both male and female plants occur, but sporophytes are unknown in the British Isles. Perianths are bell-shaped, and do not mature in the British Isles.

Similar species *P. spinulosa* (p. 194) is larger, often yellowish-green, and may form large, swollen cushions. In *P. killarniensis,* the leaves tend to be more perpendicular to the stem and more swept back, and the sharp bend of the leaf margin as it approaches the stem differs from the slight, oblique curve of *P. spinulosa*. If male inflorescences are present, the plant must be *P. killarniensis* rather than *P. spinulosa*. *P. spinulosa* has egg-shaped perianths, not bell-shaped as in *P. killarniensis*.

Habitat Restricted to the milder but still humid parts of the British Isles and is more frequent where the underlying rock is at least slightly base-enriched. *P. killarniensis* typically grows on rocks and trees in Atlantic woodlands, but may reach slopes on higher ground if it can find shelter and humidity there. In the south-west of Britain, it seems more tolerant of exposure than *P. spinulosa*, frequently growing on rocky lane banks. It also occurs in turf on sea cliffs.

Photos Sam Bosanquet & David Rycroft (inset) Drawing Jonathan Graham Text David Rycroft