

Area of old tarmac supporting a variety of bryophytes including *Ceratodon conicus*.



C. purpureus (left) and *C. conicus* (right) side-by-side on the soil as they were collected, with their characteristic leaves (inset).

Ceratodons side-by-side

The restrictions of 2020 encouraged local bryophyte recording. On the way down to the Brackmills industrial estate one day I took a footpath crossing a mossy patch of old tarmac in a field gateway. Among the species growing there was *Ceratodon conicus* – a familiar moss from previous finds and indistinguishable morphologically from *C. conicus* collected at Pitsford Quarry in 2014 (which had capsules examined by Tom Blockeel, and was sequenced at RBGE).

With three recent Northamptonshire sites this was a nice but not startling discovery. But it is curious – this *Ceratodon conicus* was growing right alongside typical *Ceratodon purpureus*. They seemed clearly distinct from one another, no plants were found which couldn't be referred to one or other species, both macroscopic and microscopic features were consistent.

Others recording *Ceratodon conicus* have noted *C. purpureus* nearby (e.g. Martin 2014), but none suggest they were so close that it is not reasonable to postulate local variation in the pH

of the substratum. *C. conicus* is reckoned to be a calcicole; *C. purpureus* is supposed to be calcifuge. A return visit was made and enough soil scraped from the hard surface for a pH measurement: 7.4. Thus *C. purpureus* is the one growing on the “wrong” substratum. This would seem to be very unusual but is not unprecedented, see for example Preston & Hill (2019).

Ceratodon conicus is undoubtedly rare. It may be under-recorded but it is a pretty little moss, distinctive and unlikely to be missed by an experienced bryologist on hands and knees (think *Bryum* with the texture of *Ceratodon*). To find both *C. conicus* and its close relative side-by-side is even more unusual. Perhaps we should do more crawling in unlikely places (and on hard surfaces!), with an eye for the companion plants.

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References

- Martin, P. (2014).** *Ceratodon conicus*: Scarce Redshank or Common Patio Moss? *Field Bryology* 111: 26–30.
- Preston, C.D. & Hill, M.O. (2019).** *Cambridgeshire's Mosses & Liverworts*. Pisces Publications, Newbury.