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Cryptogam of the Month-January 2009



Usnea scabrida

Usnea scabrida is a common epiphytic lichen species found in drier open forest areas of the south-western Australia. This grey green shrubby species (often 5 cm tall) is usually found growing on old fence posts, mature shrubs and trees but in many instances seen only on the ground after storms. Easily overlooked as it grows in the tree tops where it obtains nutrients and moisture from low moist clouds and mists. The rough texture of the dense short fibrils and large plate like apothecial discs are simple characters that help identify this species. When handling this species it feels sandpapery especially when dry. There are three subspecies occurring in Australia of which *Usnea scabrida* subsp. *scabrida* is the only one found in WA.

This species can be confused with *Usnea subalpina* which has longer thinner apothecia with long fibrils (short simple thread like structures) and may occur together in the southern forest areas of WA

Usnea has a world wide distribution with about 500 species of which 37 occur in Australia.