

Bracken

Pteridium aquilinum

Plants · Fronds May-Oct · dead litter all winter



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A large, coarse fern with tall, triangular, three-times-divided fronds borne singly on stout stalks rather than in a shuttlecock — the way to tell it from every other fern here. Bracken covers extensive areas of hillside, moorland edge, rough grazing and woodland clearing throughout Dumfries and Galloway, turning a distinctive rust-brown in autumn.

BEHAVIOUR

It spreads by deep, tough underground rhizomes, so a whole hillside stand can be one clone, potentially centuries old. It shades out almost everything beneath and its dense litter suppresses regeneration, which makes it a serious problem on grazing and moorland. It is carcinogenic to livestock, and its litter shelters the sheep ticks that carry Lyme disease.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Brackens (Dennstaedtiaceae)
FROND	Up to 2 m or more, borne singly
STATUS	Native; abundant, and invasive on grazing and moorland

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