

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

*Recording all plants growing wild in Somerset, not just the rarities*



## 2019 Newsletter

Issue No. 20

Editor Dee Holladay

2019 was the final year of recording for the next Atlas of the British & Irish Flora being produced by the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland. In Somerset, botanists went flat out to target under-recorded areas and update records for poorly-recorded species. An outstanding 93,000 records were made in Somerset: most, but by no means all, were contributed by members of Somerset Rare Plants Group. As you read the accounts of our 2019 meetings, the enthusiasm for increasing the number of species recorded in each monad is evident. Compare the Blue Map below with the one in last year's newsletter (available from the SRPG website) to see the results of everybody's endeavours. Over 93,000 records in one year is a truly commendable achievement!

Membership of Somerset Rare Plants Group has continued to grow, which is fantastic, but more importantly, the number of attendees at meetings was very encouraging. Enthusiasm for meetings was perhaps demonstrated by the impressive turn-out to botanise at a sewage works!

Workshops are some of our most popular events, indicating the role that SRPG plays in botanical education. Three were held in 2019: a dandelion meeting at the Somerset Heritage Centre, an aquatic

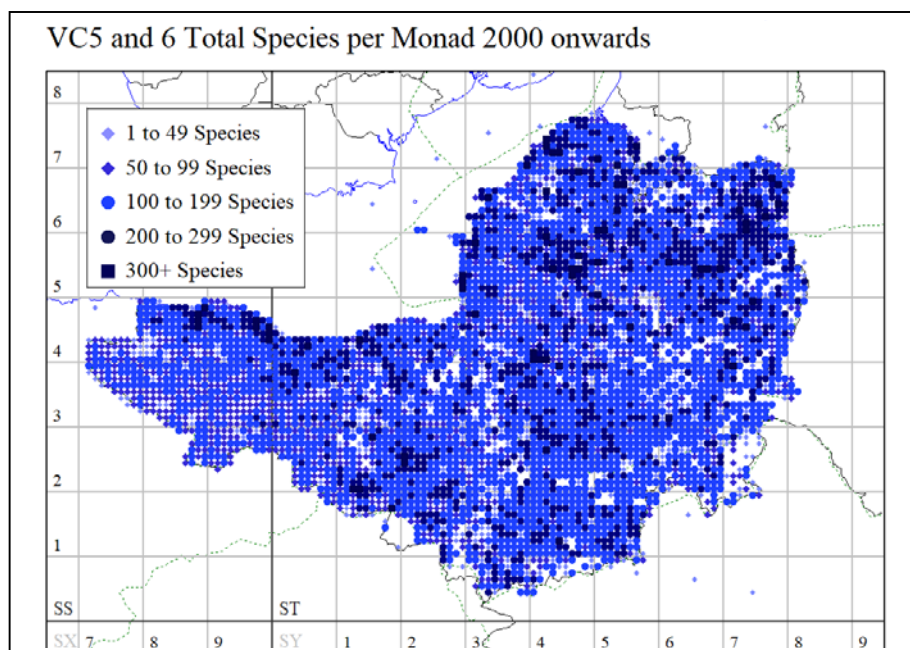
plants workshop at Shapwick Heath NNR and a sedge day at Yarty Moor SSSI, the last two being entirely field-based, each with over twenty attendees. All SRPG meetings have a strong element of teaching, learning and sharing skills, members' enthusiasm for learning is as fervent as the drive to record. Following completion of recording for Atlas 2020, SRPG is likely to have an even stronger focus on improving botanical skills at all levels.

Several of the field meeting reports detail hunts for rarer species and the updating of records for Rare Plant Register taxa. The passion of members for rare plant recording and monitoring is evident at meetings. Updating of records for our rarer and threatened plants will be an intensified focus for SRPG now that recording for Atlas 2020 is complete.

Meetings which concentrated on particular sites, producing a comprehensive list of species present, with detailed locations of rarer species, were popular with members in 2019. We visited some choice SSSIs as well as the alluring sewage treatment works. Such visits also provide useful, high quality data for site owners. Detailed surveys of specific sites will be another post-Atlas 2020 focus of SRPG's meetings.

The completion of recording for Atlas 2020 will enable SRPG to focus on education, site recording and updating records for the Rare Plant Register. General recording will still appeal to many, and with a new Flora of Somerset possibly on the distant horizon, all records will be useful and welcome. For those interested in developing more critical identification skills there is plenty of scope for tackling taxonomic puzzles in Somerset in the coming years.

**Helena Crouch**



## Winter Meetings

### AGM and Members' Meeting

**Saturday 19th January 2019, Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay**

**Report: Liz McDonnell**

This was our annual business and social gathering and 34 members met for coffee and chat before the main event of the day. Following my announcement several months ago to stand down as SRPG Coordinator and Newsletter Editor, suggestions were made that an official committee should be formed, comprising the posts of Chair, Membership Secretary, Meetings Secretary, Treasurer, Website Manager and Newsletter Editor. A letter was sent out to the membership and several people responded with offers to fill or remain in those posts.

The proposed new structure of the SRPG was presented at the meeting, with the names of those who had shown a willingness to be committee members, and there was an opportunity for other members at the meeting to offer their services as well. Members approved the appointment of the following posts: Chair - Steve Parker, Membership Secretary - Ellen McDouall, Meetings Secretary - Graham Lavender, Treasurer - Clive Lovatt, Website manager - Chris Loudon, Newsletter Editor - Dee Holladay. Helena Crouch will continue to compile the Somerset Rare Plant Register and as Vice-County Recorders, Liz McDonnell and Simon Leach would also be part of the SRPG Committee.

The Treasurer reported on the annual accounts. We had £1,717 in the bank at the end of the year (2017: £1,655) and net assets of £1,673 (2017: £1,385). Income of £533 (2017: £516 on a comparable basis) arose from subscription payments from 55 members (2017: 56), sundry donations of £12 and £73 from sales of botanical books donated by members. Expenditure of £245 covered meeting costs, third-party liability insurance and printing costs. In the absence of any significant project costs this year (supplies for the Somerset herbarium) and no net conference costs this resulted in a surplus of £288 (2017: deficit £379). The Treasurer concluded that there was no need to request any increase in the subscription rate as for the time being there are sufficient funds to cover foreseeable eventualities.

Steve gave a brief summary of last year's activities. We had three indoor meetings covering topics on 'rewilding', progress towards Atlas 2020, the

*Bromus interruptus* reintroduction project, Somerset Herbarium and recording Critical Taxa. We took part in the Annual BSBI New Year Plant Hunt, had 16 Field Meetings and one workshop (*Atriplex* spp. & Saltmarsh plants). Graham presented the provisional 2019 Field Meeting Programme (which was finalised later to include 16 site visits and three workshops – *Taraxacum*, *Carex* and Water Plants).

The second part of the morning was spent discussing three questions: Somerset Rare Plants Group name – should it be changed and if so, what should it be called?; what changes if any in the way that the group runs?; and what should SRPG work on after Atlas 2020?. We split into three groups and then returned to pool our thoughts. It was decided by a majority vote to retain the current name of the group. It has developed its own identity and purpose and the idea of merging with other similar botanical and recording groups in the county was not popular. However, useful suggestions for improvement included: more educational meetings and beginners' workshops; more joint meetings with Somerset Botany Group and other groups; further website development to include useful botanical information and guidance/ID keys; and more publicity and links to other groups and organisations. Post Atlas 2020 work would probably follow the guidance to be sent out by BSBI, but suggestions included more emphasis on rare and scarce species, including monitoring, rather than 'square bashing'.



*Ranunculus parviflorus* ©Helena Crouch

After lunch Helena Crouch and Steve Parker gave their reports on the recording highlights in each of their respective Vice-counties. Helena's VC6 report included the following: Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*) recently found on a road verge, which is uncommon in VC6; Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) on an urban wall in Bath, a



very unusual inland record; Wall Whitlow-grass (*Draba muralis*) on Little Solsbury Hill, which confirms a pre-war doubted record; Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) found on a SRPG field meeting on Blackdown, far away from the centre of distribution on the peat on the Somerset Levels; Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*) recorded by SRPG in a dune slack at a new location at Berrow Dunes. SRPG also recorded at Berrow Dunes Small-fruited Yellow-sedge (*Carex oederi*), the first post-2000 record in Somerset; Round-fruited Rush (*Juncus compressus*) was found in many places around Chew Valley Lake; French Oat-grass (*Gaudinia fragilis*) was found at Uphill, Brent Knoll and Ashton Court; Knapweed Broomrape (*Orobanche elatior*) appeared quite spontaneously in Ellen McDouall's garden at Chewton Mendip; Thorow-wax (*Bupleurum rotundifolium*) was found in Norton St Philip on imported topsoil; Tree Spinach (*Chenopodium giganteum*) was found in urban situations in Bath and in Bruton (only recorded previously in Wells); Smilo-grass (*Oryzopsis miliacea*) was a garden escape in Bath; Tall Eryngo (*Eryngium giganteum*) appeared on a verge at Dunball Industrial Estate; *Thalictrum speciosissimum* was found at Burrington Combe and Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*) appeared on road verges in Glastonbury, Frome, Bath and Bristol.



*Bupleurum rotundifolium* ©Helena Crouch

Steve's highlight of VC5 was the re-finding of Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) at Bridgwater Bay, where it had been last recorded in 1969. SRPG volunteers working on the Taunton Herbarium instigated this successful find, when notes on a specimen collected in 1957 directed the 'Friday Group' to the exact site

where it was found. Much work on urban sites in Bridgwater and Taunton had been done this year, collecting many good records, and Wall Common was very well recorded, especially as a SRPG meeting and workshop had been held at that rich coastal locality in Bridgwater Bay. Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*) was found during a SRPG field meeting on the stonework bank of Bridgwater Canal. Celandine Saxifrage (*Saxifraga cymbalaria*) was found on a road verge at Crowcombe Heathfield Station by SRPG – first record in Somerset since 1999. Steve has planned a Sedge workshop on the Blackdown Hills at Yarty Moor during June.

The day concluded with cup of tea and an opportunity to look at the books and plants which had been brought in for sale or swap. £46 was added to Group funds as a result of members' donations and several of us went home pleased with something new for our gardens or bookshelves.

## Somerset Mire Restoration Projects

**Saturday 23rd February, Wedmore Scout Hut**

**Report: Conrad Barrowclough, Julie Merrett & Liz McDonnell**

A very good turnout of botanists made it to a temporary venue in Wedmore (during alterations at the Avalon Marshes Centre) for a day looking at Somerset's peatland sites. Steve Parker introduced the day eloquently as ever, and made the particular point that the group wanted to reorient at least some of the indoor winter sessions to take a more holistic approach to their subjects, including the vagaries of habitat management and restoration, and more general geological, hydrological and ecological background information on their subjects.

The first session of the day was led by Conrad Barrowclough of the Exmoor Mires Partnership. This is a long-running project led by South West Water focusing on restoration of historically drained peatlands in the south west. Conrad started by outlining South West Water's interest in restoring peatland; both as a favourable PR exercise, but also crucially as a tangible asset in terms of provision of clean, steady flows of water. For South West Water, healthy, continuously wet peatlands shed cleaner water more slowly, reducing treatment costs and the requirements for pumping of water to top up resources depleted in dry summer months.

Conrad then focused on Exmoor, outlining the astonishing extent of drainage and associated

'improvement' perpetrated on the blanket bog following the acquisition of the historic Royal Forest by the Knight family in 1815. This damage has been further exacerbated by repeated burning of the blanket bog vegetation, ostensibly in an attempt to improve the grazing value, something that continued on deep peat areas until around 2010. The result of this mistreatment of the blanket bog has been the creation of dry monocultures of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) across vast swathes of Exmoor. Conrad illustrated this historical process with paleoecological pollen data taken from peat cores, which showed increases in charcoal produced by vegetation burning over the past 1000 years associated with sharp declines in *Sphagnum* mosses and a range of upland herbs. Other effects of this mismanagement include lowered watertables and drying, shrinkage and loss of peat, with much of the peatland in the south west now a significant source of carbon emissions, as opposed to the carbon sink of a healthy blanket bog.



Excavator blocking a ditch on Exmoor ©Conrad Barrowclough

Conrad went on to detail the methods employed over the past decade to restore blanket bog on Exmoor, focusing on using specialised excavators to block ditches in order to raise the water table back to the surface level; rewetting the peat and encouraging vegetation change toward a more varied mire flora. Restoration has now taken place on nearly 2,500ha of Exmoor's moorland. The monitoring of restoration has involved extensive volunteer survey effort, with several SRPG members being regularly involved. On sites where restoration has worked well, vegetation transects have recorded dramatic increases in species diversity, with species such as Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), Hair's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) and various mire bryophytes

reappearing. Other more degraded sites are likely to take much longer to respond to works, and Conrad suggested more novel future management and targeted reintroduction of *Sphagnum* mosses may be required in addition to ditch blocking in order to break the stranglehold of *Molinia*.



Restored mire ©Conrad Barrowclough

The other measures by which success has been recorded were also detailed, with the beneficial impacts on wading birds, aquatic invertebrates and otters mentioned. Extensive hydrological monitoring undertaken by Exeter University was also outlined, which demonstrated the effects of the work in a quantifiable raising of the watertable and an increase in flood storage on the restored areas of the moor. Monitoring is undertaken by the use of high resolution drone photography. Finally Conrad rounded off the presentation by mentioning future works, which will largely target the extensive damaged areas of Dartmoor and to a lesser extent Bodmin Moor. A summer field meeting on Exmoor is planned, so that SRPG members can see the ongoing work at one of the peat restoration areas near Pinkery. After his talk, Conrad led an informal vegetative ID session, focusing on mire and heath species of Exmoor which can still be recorded at this time of year by the really determined (or mad) botanist! This included a good range of sedge and allied species, such as Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*), Common Yellow-sedge (*Carex demissa*), Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*), Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), as well as a range of moorland grasses and herbs.

After lunch, Julie Merrett, Reserves Manager for the Somerset National Nature Reserves, gave us a magnificently illustrated talk on the Shapwick Heath

Mire Restoration Project. She first of all described mires and other similar watery habitats and followed this with a short history of the Somerset Levels peat extraction industry. 1961 was the date of the first Nature Reserve agreement with Fisons and most of the habitat restoration started in earnest in 1994. Since then much of the site has been transformed into a watery wilderness of open water and reedbed. But Shapwick Heath NNR contains a wide variety of other habitats, from traditionally managed herb-rich grassland, ferny wet woodland, scrub, fens, mires and ditches rich in aquatic plants and invertebrates. Ashcott Plot is now one of the areas on the NNR where some of the original mire vegetation still remains.

There have been many species that have not fared well during the recent period of large-scale extraction of peat and several are now extinct here, including the Large Marsh Grasshopper, Marsh Fritillary, Nightingale, Shrike Carder-bee and the Nightjar. But new habitats have been created here and new species are finding these to their liking. The importance of the area for wintering birds and summer breeding assemblages is huge. The most famous of these reedbed specialists is the Bittern, rescued from near extinction in Somerset, and Bearded Tit is here too.

NNR staff work with volunteers on the habitat restoration. Some of this is done with specialist machinery, but much is done by hand. Grazing is important and both cattle and goats are used - Highland cattle are especially suited to the wetter area of the mire. Wet woodland is a key habitat on site supporting a rich invertebrate fauna. The area is internationally important for its prehistoric trackways that lie within the remaining peat and water has to be pumped in to keep the water levels high enough to preserve these very precious structures.

Much restoration work is being undertaken on Ashcott Plot to increase the area of mire where scrub and woodland has been slowly invading. Here there is a rich mosaic of heathy grassland, woodland, scrub, mire, ditches and boggy pools. Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) can be an invasive species in these wet peaty conditions, and has to be kept in check. Canada Lows at the west end of the NNR is another rich and diverse area, with a mix of woodland, mire and species-rich grassland. Scrub and woodland invasion is a problem here and a constant area of work. The sale of firewood from the felled timber is beginning to generate income for the reserve.

Site monitoring is showing many signs of encouragement that the habitat restoration is progressing well. *Sphagnum*, Cotton-grass, heathers, sedges and Marsh Cinquefoil (*Comarum palustre*) are all on the increase, but there are still species that they are looking for – Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*), White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) to name a few.

At the end of the afternoon, Liz McDonnell gave a short talk about the need to search for some key species that are known to be under-recorded and asked SRPG members to take part during the coming field season. The first target species to be searched for is Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*), a parasitic plant growing in woodlands and hedgerows which is found in early spring. A list of sites where it has not been recorded since 2000 will be distributed to members for those that wish to help more fully understand the current distribution of this interesting plant. Further requests for help to record other under-recorded species (including Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*)) will be sent out later in the year.

## **Taxonomy Changes ...**

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**Report by Dee Holladay & Liz McDonnell**

There was a good turnout for the last Winter meeting at Wedmore Scout Hut before the start of the Field season. Fred Rumsey started the proceedings by giving an overview of the changes in *New Flora of the British Isles – Fourth Edition* by Clive Stace (which we will be using from January 2020). He reported that nearly 200 alien species had been added. There are a many name changes, some as a result of the discovery of older names, most the result of molecular studies. Most of the changes are at genera level where there has been a trend to split some of them. The ferns are largely unchanged.

Fred went on to give many of the changes in detail, with various comments from the assembled company at the death of some of their favourites! The Lemnaceae are apparently 'sunk' into the Araceae, *Myosoton* becomes *Stellaria*, various umbellifers have been renamed and *Vicia* is now split into 3 genera. A number of changes in the Polygonaceae and ragworts are all now genus *Jacobaea*! He pointed out that a list of changes is available as a PDF from the BSBI website.



Helena Crouch then gave a summary of her paper about *Bolboschoenus laticarpus* (published jointly with Fred and others in *British & Irish Botany*, the online BSBI journal). *Bolboschoenus laticarpus* was first recognised as a species in 2004, but the earliest mention of it in Britain (as *B. maritimus*) was by Pulteney in 1799. The difference between the two is in the inflorescence and in particular in the nutlets! Helena then treated us to an amusing account of cutting these minute structures open to examine them under the microscope (using honey to keep them in one place!). Stace refers to *B. laticarpus* as the 'inland club rush' however *B. maritimus* is also found inland by ponds and rivers.

Simon Leach gave an introduction to recording Knotgrasses (*Polygonum aviculare* agg). Sell and Murrell in the *Flora of Great Britain and Ireland* have split this aggregate into several new species. Simon presented the key characters to look for; length of internodes; leaf size and shape; leaves persistent or falling, length of ochreae and size of achenes.

After lunch, Graham Lavender reported on the activities of the 'Friday Group' (a small group consisting of himself, Ian Salmon, Ro FitzGerald and Jeanne Webb, who botanise in West Somerset). He reported on their plans for botanising in winter and early Spring, to record species such as *Stellaria pallida*, *Erophila glabrescens* and *Poa infirma*. The group's targets for the forthcoming season included *Silene conica* and *Cynodon dactylon* at Minehead Golf Course, hybrid Docks, *Orobanche rapumgenistae*, and *Hieracia* and *Sorbus* species on the coastal cliffs.



Members of SRPG listening to Graham Lavender's talk  
©Dee Holladay

Steve Parker reported that we had done well on general recording, but thought that we should concentrate on grasslands in 2019. Many of the well-known species-rich grassland sites are well recorded,

but he encouraged us to look at churchyards, historic sites and road verges particularly in May and June. Particular species to look out for this year were Adder's-Tongue, Green-winged Orchids, Devil's-bit Scabious, Sneezewort and Rough Hawkbit. He recommended that we use the 'Magic' website for environmental data, aerial photos, SSSI boundaries etc., and it is a useful source of information on habitat and ownership

Liz McDonnell announced that one of the under-recorded species to search for this year would be Autumn Lady's-Tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*). This is, found in late summer and autumn and a spreadsheet of sites to search would be sent out to members nearer the time in August-September.



Two of Simon's herbarium preparations of *Taraxacum* spp  
©Dee Holladay

In a talk entitled 'Reasons to be Cheerful' Simon Leach gave us a glimpse of his amazing botanical study of *Taraxacum* species and his stunning artistic flair for arranging the specimens for the herbarium! They were real works of art. Simon, Graham and Jeanne are the main collectors of Dandelions and his talk was an encouragement to us all to look at *Taraxacum* species with more interest and enthusiasm.

He told us the story of *Taraxacum litorale*, the leaves of which have a long end-lobe, that he had first found in Sherford, Taunton. After a year it had been found in several other places (including Simon's back garden) and it was sent off to Germany for determination. It is now recognised as a new species and John Richards has named it as *Taraxacum amicum*. The SRPG Dandelion group collected a total of 133 species in 2018, which is 52% of the GB list. Graham is the winner of the Dandelion Trophy this year.

## Spring, Summer and Autumn Meetings

### Taraxacum Meeting (VC5)

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019

Report: Graham Lavender



Jeanne Webb demonstrates pressing techniques  
©Graham Lavender

The first Spring Meeting of SRPG started with a meeting at the Somerset County Herbarium (TTN). This herbarium is based on material brought together originally by the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and stored in the museum at Taunton Castle. It is now housed at the Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton, and under the day-to-day care of the South West Heritage Trust.

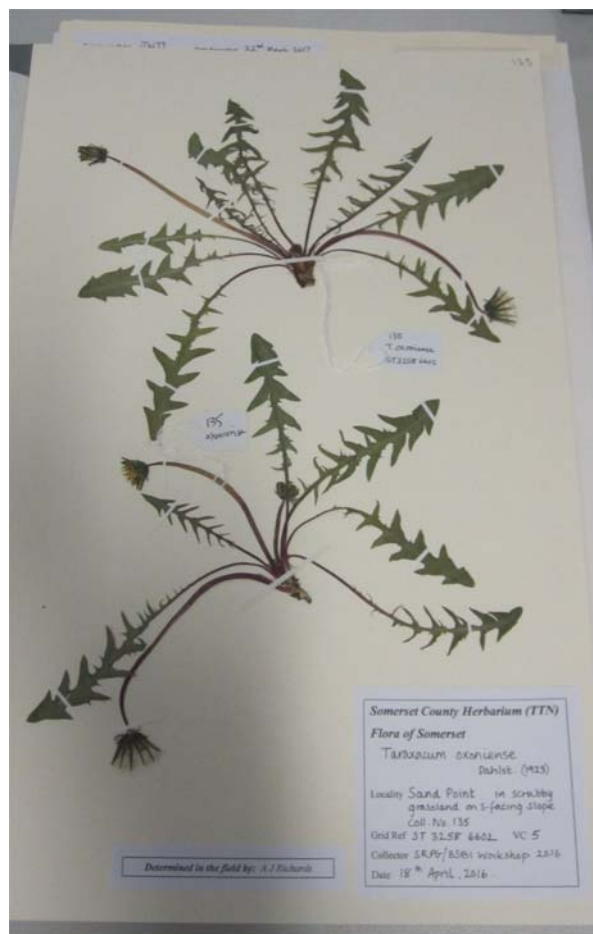
The herbarium has five SRPG members who volunteer once a week to curate the collection; in recent months they have been busy re-organising the specimens to bring them into line with modern taxonomy and nomenclature, and with families, genera and species now ordered according to the 3rd edition of Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles* (2010). They have also been repairing old sheets, putting sheets in new folders, and mounting and adding large numbers of specimens that have been donated by botanists currently working in the county. Four members of the herbarium team were on hand to give guided tours of the collection.

There has been much work done recently on Somerset's dandelion (*Taraxacum*) flora, and the herbarium now houses more than 350 sheets of dandelions accounting for about 140 of the 150-odd species so far recorded in the county. This collection

is of increasing regional and national importance, and includes some fine specimens of a number of taxa rarely collected in Britain such as *Taraxacum subericinum*, *T. pachylobum* and *T. pietii-oosterveldii*.

The focus of this first 'herbarium day' was indeed *Taraxacum*, and after an introduction by Simon Leach (VCR for South Somerset VC5), there was a talk on dandelion taxonomy and identification by Graham Lavender – concentrating on the various 'sections' into which dandelions are grouped to aid identification. Members then had an opportunity to peruse the herbarium collection of dandelions.

After lunch, a visit to the grounds of the Somerset Heritage Centre (and nearby waste ground) provided plenty of fresh material for us to work on. We learnt about how to spot a 'good specimen', how to collect it, and (back indoors) Jeanne Webb explained how to prepare specimens for pressing and drying. We took several plants through the relevant keys, including not only the 'sectional' key at the front of the BSBI *Taraxacum Handbook* but also the detailed 'Plant Crib 3' keys available on the BSBI website.



Herbarium specimen of *Taraxacum oxoniense*  
©Graham Lavender

We were introduced to dandelion terminology too, where terms like 'ligule' and 'bract', for example, do not refer to the same structures as they do in most other plants. Several attendees took away plants for working on at home.

Numbers are limited for any meeting at the herbarium, and it has already been necessary by popular demand to put a draft entry in the SRPG 2020 programme for a second visit, possibly to concentrate on another group, e.g. grasses or sedges. At our winter meetings we have regularly been given short updates on the herbarium, but this was the first time that members had been given an opportunity to see it 'in the flesh'. With thanks to the South West Heritage Trust for providing our meeting venue and for allowing us privileged 'behind-the-scenes' access to what is becoming an increasingly valuable and interesting collection.

## **Court Wood, The Warren and Norton's Wood, Clevedon (VC6)**

**6<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

**Leaders: Dee Holladay & Pam Millman**

**Report: Dee Holladay, Helena Crouch & Liz McDonnell**

Court Wood was originally laid out as a series of pleasure walks for Clevedon Court, with extensive planting of Austrian, Bhutan and Monterey Pines as well as many other species. The top of the hill (The Warren) which gives far-reaching views over the Bristol Channel was originally grassland grazed by sheep, but is now largely dominated by scrub and Holm Oak. Norton's Wood is a much older coppiced woodland whose flora indicates its status as ancient woodland.

Sixteen members of SRPG met for this first Field Meeting of the year on a lovely sunny day. It was decided to divide the group into two in order to record the Northern and North Eastern squares.

Margaret Webster had brought a specimen of the alien New Zealand Bitter-cress (*Cardamine corymbosa*), found growing in a pot in her garden, and by coincidence Fred Rumsey arrived clutching another alien Bitter-cress, *C. occulta*, which he had just found in a tub at Gordano Services. This species has only been recognised in Britain this year and is likely to be overlooked.

Liz's group climbed up through the steep, dark and botanically dull Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*) woodland and on for more than 1km along the top track, ably

led by Peter Holladay who knew all the many paths through the woods and exactly where their target monad started. The first species of interest in the woodland was Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), an early flowering ephemeral plant which disappears completely in summer, so is often missed on later surveys. Several patches were recorded.

The secondary woodland itself was of limited interest, but the area on Court Hill where the woodland path runs out onto open rocky grassland beside a metalled service track was much more interesting. This area runs high above the M5 road cutting and with the motorway traffic roaring and rumbling below, the limestone grassland and south-facing species-rich rock outcrops were explored at length. Ploughman's-spikenard (*Inula conyzae*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*), tiny leaf rosettes of Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*), Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Long-stalked Crane's-bill (*Geranium columbinum*), and Hairy Violet (*Viola hirta*), to name but a few were all recorded here. By the path to the foot-bridge which crosses the motorway a large clump of Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) was recorded. On the bridge itself, Clive found a small vegetative rosette of Narrow-leaved Ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*), which Helena confirmed when the two groups joined up for lunch on the sunny rocks. This alien Ragwort was first recorded in VC6 in 2004 and is found as a casual on roadsides, roundabouts and waste ground.

Meanwhile the second group led by Dee, Pam and Helena began recording once we reached our target monad. We immediately found a good array of ferns, including Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*) and Soft Shield-fern (*P. setiferum*), Hart's-tongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*) and four species of *Dryopteris*: Male-fern (*D. filix-mas*), Broad Buckler-fern (*D. dilatata*), Golden-scaled Male-fern (*D. affinis*) and Borrer's Male-fern (*D. borrieri*). Fred explained the different shapes of the indusia of the last two species. We soon added Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), all indicative of acidic soils. As the path widened we recorded some grassland species, including Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*) and Vervain (*Verbena officinalis*). On exposed rocks at a viewpoint, we found a splendid patch of Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*), the first post-2000 record for this species in this hectad. Here we also found Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*), Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) and a small



patch of Three-nerved Sandwort (*Moehringia trinervia*). Another patch of grassland outside Keepers Cottage added Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) and Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) in flower.



SRPG members enjoy a sunny lunch ©Dee Holladay

After lunch, Liz's group delved back into Norton's Wood down the steep path by the motorway footbridge. The woodland here has a fairly rich ground flora of Wild Garlic (*Allium ursinum*) and Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and we recorded Wood Melick (*Melica uniflora*), Hairy Woodrush (*Luzula pilosa*) and Great Woodrush (*L. sylvatica*). Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) was searched for and found in two locations under hazels on the steep north-facing slopes.

Dee's group headed back to their monad and recorded along Nortons Wood Lane and in the adjacent steeply sloping, north-facing Norton's Wood. Under hazels, Fred found a patch of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*), which was our best record so far, but was soon over-shadowed by two species new to Somerset!

On the north-facing bank of the lane, we stopped to study a Scaly Male-fern which Fred thought might be Pitted Male-fern (*Dryopteris lacunosa*), a species only described in 2011. His identification was confirmed by Roger Golding – a new fern for Somerset on our first meeting of the year. (This species is included in Sell and Murrell's *Flora of Great Britain and Ireland*, but not in the fourth edition of Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles*). Further along the lane, we made another brilliant

record, finding *Cardamine occulta* in a large tub outside a house: this was the second record for Somerset, only a few hours after the first! We recorded 192 species in this monad. It had been a very successful meeting indeed.



Toothwort, *Lathraea squamaria* ©Liz McDonnell

## Cheddar Wood, Mendips (VC6)

Saturday 27th April 2019

Leaders: Liz McDonnell & Clive Lovatt

Report: Liz McDonnell & Helena Crouch

Cheddar Wood is a Site of Special Scientific Interest notified for its ancient woodland, calcareous grassland and acidic dry dwarf-shrub heath. It is also important for its rare plants and rich invertebrate fauna. SRPG was given special access permission from Somerset Wildlife Trust, as it is a Nature Reserve not usually open to the public, and we are grateful to Chris Eyles, the West Mendip Reserves Manager, for showing us the site in preparation for the meeting.

Sixteen members and guests met on a very windy day at the Callow Rock office car park and walked along the roadside footpath before ascending the steep rocky path into the large woodland complex. This was a recording meeting, but we spent some time identifying some of the woodland and grassland plants along the wide access route into the woodland for those participants who were not familiar with them. We were delighted that Margaret Webster soon spotted several spikes of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) growing beneath Hazel stools near the path. These were in fruit and

their pale creamy/white colouring suggested a row of teeth! Surprisingly, we found a large clump of Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*) on a tree by the track: this species is usually on limestone rocks and only rarely epiphytic. Entering the woodland, we delighted in the blue haze of Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), as far as the eye could see. We found other typical ancient woodland indicators including Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* subsp. *montanum*), Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) and Wood Sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) in abundance. Other less common indicator species found in the northern part of the wood were Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), Wood Melick (*Melica uniflora*) and Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*). There were many clumps of Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*), Near Threatened on the GB Red List, along the way and patches of Wood Small-reed (*Calamagrostis epigejos*) were found occasionally too. Purple Gromwell (*Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum* now *Aegonychon purpureocaeruleum*) was abundant in places, sometimes spreading in huge patches through the ground flora. The timing of our field meeting was perfect to see this rare species flowering well with its intense blue flowers.

We recorded several Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*) trees, frequent here in Cheddar Wood. The wind continued its noisy business, but inside the woodland canopy it was fairly sheltered and calm as we made our way to the north-west corner where the main access road runs along the northern boundary. The effects of Ash die-back were evident, especially on the dead twigs of many saplings along the way.

Lunch was taken in the sun on a species-rich grassy bank where Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla verna*, formerly *P. tabernaemontani*) was frequent and flowering profusely. This narrow strip of scrubby limestone grassland was so species-rich that it was decided to record this section in detail rather than go inside the fenced and grazed enclosure. A large patch of Dwarf Mouse-ear (*Cerastium pumilum*) was growing on an anthill by the path. This updated an *Atlas Flora of Somerset* record and was a reminder that this is an ideal time for searching for this tiny ephemeral annual on other thin limestone grassland and rock outcrops on Mendip and other areas of Somerset where it is under-recorded.

Other species of interest at the lunch stop were Meadow Oat-grass (*Avenula pratensis*), Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*), Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*). Further east, the grassland and scrub species indicated a limestone heath habitat, with Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*) and Slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*) and then this gave way to a bare, thin-soiled area very close to the edge of the working quarry. We found a wide variety of plants that need open conditions to flourish including Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acris*), Dwarf Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*), Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Carlina Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), Long-stalked Cranesbill (*Geranium columbinum*), Hairy Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis* subsp. *vestita*), Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*), Hairy Rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*) and Spotted Hawkweed (*Hieracium maculatum* agg.). Several orchid species were found here including leaf rosettes of Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) and Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), and flower buds just emerging from the wide paired leaves of Common Twayblade (*Neottia ovata*).

By the end of the afternoon, the wind was still gusty, but it was sunny and fairly warm. Both the woodland and grassland habitats of Cheddar Wood were very rich and we had recorded a wide variety of common, scarce and rare species (172 species in one monad, 101 in the adjacent one, taking the post-2000 totals to 278 and 243 respectively), so altogether a very good day's botanising.

## **Hedgecock Hill Wood (VC6)**

**Sunday 28th April 2019**

**Leaders: Steve Parker & Simon Leach**

**Report: Simon Leach**

Nine members and friends met at Ham Hill Country Park, to explore Hedgecock Hill Wood and surrounding area. Our aim was to record principally within two monads, ST4816 and ST4916, although in ST4716 a few interesting species were noted in the grassy verges and banks close to where we parked, including Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*) and Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*).

Both our target squares had been well recorded fairly recently by John Poingdestre, so the pressure was off as far as ‘square-bashing’ was concerned. We struggled to add very much new. The woodland wasn’t especially varied or rich in species, and much of the ground flora didn’t quite match up to expectations. But this certainly wasn’t a wasted visit; sometimes, especially when shedding winter rustiness, it is good to be able to dawdle, reacquainting ourselves with species at a gentler pace.

In our first square, ST4816, we added five species, perhaps the most notable being a single plant of Wild Tulip (*Tulipa sylvestris*) inside the woodland. We saw plenty of Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*) – complete with the rust gall *Puccinia albescens* – while new to the square were Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) and Pignut (*Conopodium majus*). Perhaps the most surprising discovery, though, were some bright scarlet leaf-roll or ‘pleat’ galls on Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), which we later learnt had been caused by the gall-midge *Contarinia acerplicans*. Seldom seen in Britain, it is the first time this gall has been recorded in Somerset.



‘Pleat’ galls on Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), caused by the gall-midge *Contarinia acerplicans* ©Simon Leach

In the second square, ST4916, we added nine taxa to the list, including two subspecies of Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna* subsp. *fertilis* and subsp. *verna*). Also new for the monad was Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*) and Wild Plum (*Prunus domestica*), the latter along the western edge of the woodland on St Michael’s Hill. We lay in the grass for a while to make the most of the spring sunshine, before wandering into ST4917 where John showed us a patch of Martagon Lily (*Lilium martagon*). Further up the slope on St Michael’s Hill we also saw much

Common Twayblade (*Neottia ovata*) and a colony of Garden Solomon’s-seal (*Polygonatum x hybridum*). The woodland ground flora seemed to be richer here than on Hedgecock Hill. There were some impressive displays of Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), while Early Dog-violet (*Viola reichenbachiana*) and Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), which were both ‘missing’ from Hedgecock Hill, were much in evidence.

We returned to the car park on Ham Hill via ST4817, taking in the northern-most section of Hedgecock Hill Wood. This did, at least, have a healthy population of Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), a species listed as ‘Near Threatened’ on the England Red List – and so one of our ‘target’ species for the county’s Rare Plant Register.

It had been a lovely spring walk in the woods. Apart from the plants, we saw Bee-flies, Speckled Wood and Red Admiral butterflies, a Queen Wasp, and Tree Bumblebees (*Bombus hypnorum*) nesting in a Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*).

## SRPG/WFS East Quantoxhead (VC5)

Sunday 12th May 2019

Leaders: Ro FitzGerald & Graham Lavender

Report: Ro FitzGerald & Graham Lavender

Choosing locations for meetings can be surprisingly complicated, and the pressure of Atlas 2020 recording added another element to the exercise this year. Should one go for under-recorded squares, and risk boring those who bother to attend? Should one revisit top rarities? Is there sufficient parking? How difficult is the terrain? The autumn programme-planning season can be quite fraught! The East Quantoxhead area is actually quite well recorded. My own life in Somerset began here in 1987, when lodgings in the village were my base for the South West Rare Plant Survey, which covered Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall. Life was mostly on the road, but I’d hardly ever been in Somerset, and thanks to the WFS seasonal Hunts (my lifelong pleasure and relaxation) I started botanising locally at once.

This slice of the coast, between the River Parrett and Blue Anchor and bordering the northern Quantock edges, is mostly highly calcareous, layers of limestone interspersed with clays giving the famous ‘stripy’ lias cliffs. The East Quantoxhead Estate also has a remarkable land history, having been Luttrell property for more than seven centuries (Court House was their original seat before they married



into Dunster a mere 500 years or so ago!). Tenanted farms were traditionally managed, with a characteristic pattern of small woods, pasture and arable. Until about the 1990s many of the woods were managed for rough shooting, so kept reasonably clear of brambles and ivy. Recently of course this kind of time-consuming management has been abandoned, but the relict flora has considerable interest, including Rare Plant Register species such as Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*). Summer recording had been done on a stormy day in August 2018, but it was decided to update the spring flora.

Enough members of both societies booked to allow for two parties. Graham's group headed for some of the eastern woods, while the rest of us spent most of the day in East Wood. This includes a recent plantation of little botanical interest, but the main part of the wood has a much more 'ancient woodland' character, and we were very lucky with a perfect sunny day with small birds such as Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers in full song. The wood treated us well from the start, producing one of the target species Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*) at once – thrilling for me as I had only a shaky memory of seeing it here years ago. Commoner plants (but still notable in this area) such as Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) were in lavish flower. After eating our sandwiches sitting in long grass in a clearing, the upper part of the wood was examined, and the field edges surrounding it.



Bird's Nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) ©Liz McDonnell

These areas yielded some excellent records for species characteristic of the lias but not always easy to find – in the wood these included Spurge-laurel (*Daphne laureola*), and something completely new and exciting – Bird's-nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) which even the Green twins had not previously found here! Two last-year spikes were found, dry and brown of course but identifiable, adding significantly to the sparse VC5 records.

The field edges were interesting too. Most arable round here is highly intensive now, but the lias has been corn country since prehistory and some of the threatened weeds still manage to maintain a seed-bank – today one rape field edge had a thick border of thousands of Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*) which is uncommon but can make lavish appearances in this area. Returning to the village car park, thinking of cake and scones at the wonderful Chantry Tea Gardens in Kilve, added interest came from a relict grassy bank between wood and arable, which has species such as Common Restharrow (*Ononis repens*), Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), and Hairy Violet (*Viola hirta*).



Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*)  
©Ro FitzGerald

A final treat came during tea itself, as the groups exchanged news of their efforts, when a rather shrivelled fern was spotted in the stone steps of an old barn. This turned out to be a local target species, the Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*). This fern is restricted to limestone and lime mortar in old walls, so naturally has a very hard time with modern 'tidiness' and repointing. An 1866

herbarium specimen at Kew is labelled 'Between Holford and St Audries', and had tormented me with many unsuccessful searches – but there it was, right in the designated area! A mediterranean species, it loses its leaves in summer (as it was beginning to in May) but when the September rain came it produced beautiful clumps of shapely fronds. Keep a lookout! It has a different giz to the ubiquitous Quantock and Exmoor Polypody (*P. interjectum*) often with shorter fronds, characteristically obviously wider below half way, giving a deltate triangular shape. Roofs and walls round Dunster church give a good display to study.

Graham's group of eight travelled by car to where Ro had kindly arranged parking on a farm giving us a walk of possibly a hundred yards to the target wood, but there was so much of interest at the edge of the arable field that it took us perhaps an hour to get to the wood. Not our target monad but the opportunity to look at specimens we had not seen for almost a year was too hard to resist.

Simon and Helena were both on top form and yellow crucifers were looked at in detail and Black-grass (*Alopecurus myosuroides*) examined. A Pepperwort (*Lepidium* spp) on the track was keyed out with the usual reference books and since the stigma exceeded the notch on top of the fruit it was determined as Smith's Pepperwort (*Lepidium heterophyllum*). However later examination with assistance of BSBI Crucifers handbook by Tim Rich was more equivocal. The Handbook allows for the stigma to slightly exceed the notch in *Lepidium campestre* and together with yellow anther colour (some red/purple in *heterophyllum*), oblong fruit (as opposed to ovate) and vesicles on fruit surface it was apparent that *Lepidium campestre* was more likely. An emailed photo of the fruit enabled Tim Rich to indeed confirm it as Field Pepperwort (*Lepidium campestre*).

A Dock with fruit still retained from previous years caught the eye and had fruits of Wood Dock (*Rumex sanguineus*) but with small teeth from Broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*) which is very characteristic of the hybrid between the two, *Rumex x dufftii*.

Into the wood at last and Helena showed us all the features that identify *Dryopteris borrieri* which proved to be a 10K record almost certainly not rare in the Hectad but one of the difficult *Dryopteris affinis* agg group which is poorly recorded due to difficulties in identification. In the first monad, the

one we were not really recording, we increased the monad total from 11 to 194.

After lunch the target species were Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*) and Greater Butterfly Orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha*). Although it is possible that Butterfly Orchids still exist within the wood but they eluded us as the site of the past records for Green-winged Orchids, a lovely sloping area of ancient grassland, had been put to the plough. The verge of the field did reveal such delights as Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) but these were just a few plants to remind us of what had once again been lost to intensive agriculture. One last delight on the homeward path was an enormous Black Poplar (*Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*) although recorded in the past it was good to find it still standing. Next stop was Kilve tea room....

## Clatworthy (VC5)

**Saturday 18th May 2019**

**Leaders: Ellen McDouall & Graham Lavender**

**Report: Ellen McDouall**

Nine of us met up on the west side of Clatworthy Reservoir, with the aim of surveying two under-recorded squares over farmland for which we had special access permission – thanks to the tenant and Wessex Water. As well as upping the number or records, we also wanted to search suitable habitat for Greater Broomrape (*Orobanche rapum-genistae*) after it reappeared beside the reservoir last year.

In the morning we went south to ST0230. Here we recorded in rushy grassland and scrub along a small stream, finding Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*) and Pink Purslane (*Claytonia sibirica*); the latter a non-native with a liking for water-courses but without the invasive tendencies of the Indian Balsam found at the north end of the reservoir.

Next came the field with the target gorse scrub habitat for the Broomrape – and so much more. At first it seemed a fairly mundane, somewhat acid field and the first find of note was a novelty – a lovely white and double form of Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*); we found several more during the course of the day. Next Graham found a dandelion – *Taraxacum faeroense* to be exact – and was very well pleased with it. More on this from Graham later. Working our way back across the field, we fruitlessly searched half the Gorse for Broomrape



until we came on a large seepage. Here we found an excellent mire community with Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) very common. Amongst these we found plenty of Round-leaved Crowfoot (*Ranunculus omiophyllus*), Common Yellow Sedge (*Carex demissa*) and Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*). Common Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica* subsp. *sylvatica*) was scattered through the mire with its glabrous calyx distinguishing it from Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*) with its pubescent calyx.

Away from the boggy centre of the field, we found quantities of Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Lousewort, Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis* subsp. *vestita*) and a good mix of grasses including the acid grassland specialist Velvet Bent (*Agrostis canina*). Then more Gorse was searched for Broomrape spikes, but again disappointment, however we achieved a total of 114 records for the square.

On the way back to the cars for lunch we diverted at a likely-looking bank and were rewarded with an Eyebright, later confirmed as *Euphrasia confusa*, which I see from the NBN website has been given the English name of Little Kneeling Eyebright. Possibly a better description of the identifying botanist than the plant!

After lunch, the first target going north was a gully with Gorse scrub along the top. More searches for Broomrape, asking ourselves if we knew what we were looking for and if perhaps we were too early – again nothing was found. As co-leader I was delegated to lead the afternoon meeting which consisted of surveying the fields just west of Clatworthy reservoir, the reservoir shore itself is in the same monad but the subject of an SRPG meeting in 2001.



*Taraxacum faeroense* ©Graham Lavender

Before I get to the details it falls on me to expand on one plant of the mornings meeting which to me at least was one of the main highlights of the day. At the south end of Clatworthy again in fields to the west we found a spring on a hillside which produced the perfect habitat for one of our loveliest Dandelions, *Taraxacum faeroense* which enjoys living in wet hilly habitats, a spring flush on hillside being its idea of heaven. It's very easy to identify as one of the very few Somerset Dandelions to have spotted leaves, coupled with appressed bracts and pinkish washed out ligules it is unmistakable. This I believe is the first time a spotted Dandelion has been recorded on a SRPG field trip and is indeed a red letter day. [This identification was later confirmed by John Richards – Ed]

So on to the afternoon session. Semi-improved grass fields were order of the afternoon and unlike the morning the prospective spring seemed to have almost dried up and revealed little. John was on form but seemed to be finding as many lizards as plants, the Common Lizards did seem to be enjoying one of the early warm days of the year, however he did get back to botanising when he found an Eyebright in flower. Mid May is very early for Eyebrights to be flowering but this small patch of some 50 plants was easily identified by its long glandular hairs as *Euphrasia anglica*. Remembering that this monad had previously been recorded by an SRPG meeting we were very pleased to increase the total from 100 records to 166.



*Orobanche rapum-genistae* ©Ellen McDouall



Within the same monad we finally had a look along the reservoir path to see if we could locate the Greater Broomrape (*Orobanche rapum-genistae*) found the previous year. Indeed we could and Linda spotted the first spike of what would prove to be a total of 11 spikes in two locations, interestingly both groups of spikes were equidistant from Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*). Possibly not as exciting as the *Taraxacum faeroense* but still an excellent finish to the day.

*Post-script by Ellen McDouall:* Well, I was delighted to find the Broomrape. It confirmed the correct season and that if broomrape had been on the Gorse patches we searched earlier, then we would have found it. Therefore, it is almost certainly restricted to the reservoir enclosure and possibly a strain that prefers Broom to Gorse. This information will help with future management.

## Flax Bourton, North Somerset (VC6)

Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019

Leaders: Liz McDonnell & Margaret Webster

Report: Liz McDonnell, Helena Crouch & Clive Lovatt

The meeting at this location was primarily to record in the steep woodland in Bourton Combe, but Clive Lovatt offered to lead an additional urban recording party north of the A370 in under-recorded monads for those who didn't want to tackle steep terrain or who needed to leave early.

The Bourton Combe party first braved the busy main road traffic to access the quiet green lane up to the woodland. We started recording as soon as we reached our allotted monad and one of the first interesting locations in the wood was a disused quarry which is now well vegetated and shaded by mature trees. Kidney Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hirsuta*) had previously been recorded in this quarry and this non-native species was easily found as it formed a large flowering patch. In the same area, we found many plants of Small Balsam (*Impatiens parviflora*), an annual with small yellow flowers on fine delicate pedicels.

We made our way on the rocky footpath up through the broad-leaved wooded valley, finding several species of fern including both Soft and Hard Shield-ferns (*Polystichum setiferum* and *P. aculeatum*), Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), Borrer's Male-fern (*Dryopteris borreii*) and a large shuttlecock-shaped fern which Helena tentatively

identified as *Dryopteris lacunosa*, a recently-described species within the *D. affinis* group which we found new to Somerset on our first SRPG meeting of the year. Several *D. affinis* experts within the British Pteridological Society subsequently confirmed this identification – the second record for Somerset.



SRPG at lunch ©Margaret Webster

We cut up through the steep woodland slope to reach a grassy clearing where many limestone grassland species had been recorded more than 10 years ago. We took the advantage of the flat terrain and a convenient log to have our lunch break and then searched the small area of scrubby grassland and cliff edges to add to our species list.

A good range of interesting species was recorded here including Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Lady's-bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Purging Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Salad-burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *sanguisorba*) and Mouse-ear-Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*). Two very small remnants of open rock outcrops on the cliff edges supported Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*), Spring-sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*), Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*) and a small patch of Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla tabernaemontani*).

After exploring these grassy and rocky habitats we plunged back into the semi-natural woodland, where Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) dominated the ground flora. Other species here included Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) in the damp valley bottom, Hairy St John's-wort (*Hypericum hirsutum*), Wood Melick (*Melica uniflora*) and Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*) and both the Early Dog-violet

(*Viola reichenbachiana*) and Common Dog-violet (*V. riviniana*).

At the top of thecombe, the path opens out to the fenced quarry edge. This is a recently disturbed quarry spoil bank and had many ruderals of interest to the botanist. Field Pepperwort (*Lepidium campestre*) was abundant here, with Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*), Long-headed Poppy (*Papaver dubium*) and Weld (*Reseda luteola*).

Meanwhile Clive had led a small group along the roadsides and cycle path in ST5169, Flax Bourton, recording over 100 taxa along the urban 200m of Station Road, a significant advance on the two species previously recorded in the monad. This was partly due to the unfenced front gardens having lawns derived from old meadow, so plants such as Spring-sedge (*Carex caryophylla*) and Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and both Hawkbit (*Leontodon*) species unusually occurred in an urban situation other than a churchyard. Ultimately, because of the variety of suburban habitats - arable margins, a cycle track, a railway cutting and bridges, a stream and another bridge, and a more modern housing estate, and footpaths - we got 226 taxa without seeing anything particularly exciting. However, after this small group dispersed, the leader briefly wandered in the adjacent monad, ST5170, which produced two good plants on a south-facing calcareous rocky outcrop conveniently close to a footpath in the middle of a ryegrass ley: Small-flowered Sweet-briar (*Rosa micrantha*) in flower and Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*), a plant having a 'good year'.

At the end of the afternoon, the remaining weary botanists met up for a cup of tea from Liz's 'pop-up café' in the boot of her car, and to chat about the day's finds in the botanically rich woodland and urban habitats of Flax Bourton.

## River Tone and the site of the former Grand Western Canal, Greenham (VC5)

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2019

Leaders: Christine Loudon & Linda Everton

Report: Christine Loudon & Linda Everton

Nine of us met behind Greenham Hall in Tremlett Farm yard, which provided not only a roof over our heads during the 11.00 am downpour, but also a wide area of excellent cracked concrete, old walls and rubble for the traditional half an hour to get out of the car park. Thanks to the new owners of the farm for offering this facility. Slender pearlwort

(*Sagina filicaulis*) and Procumbent Pearlwort (*Sagina procumbens*) were noted and discussed as was Lesser Swinecress (*Lepidium didymum*). An unusual white form of Hedgerow Cranesbill (*Geranium pyrenaicum*) was also recorded.

The plan was to record in two different monads in a fairly unrecorded area near the River Tone, which is the boundary between Somerset and Devon for some of its course here, and also the area around the canal. There is also a small part of a monad nearby which is in Somerset (the remainder being in Devon) which was provisionally included but this proved an optimistic target by inexperienced planners! Two is plenty.



Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*)

©Chris Loudon

We started by walking down to the River Tone bridge where abundant Western Polypody (*Polypodium interjectum*) was seen, and fortunately not too much Indian Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), which prevents access to the river higher up. Then we walked along the road, into a different square and a different habitat, noting Yellow Oat-grass (*Trisetum flavescens*) on the drive of Greenham Barton, a 14th century manor in the process of restoration, where the new owners were keen to get information about the flora on their land. The fields around were not very diverse, but a pond provided Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*) on the way to a

marshy field of about 3 hectares adjacent to the old canal, where the towpath has become a footpath.

Hopes for a variety of sedges and wetland flora here were not realised; only more Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*) than I've seen before in a single day. We did see some typical marsh flora: Southern Marsh Orchids (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*), Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), some Wood Club-rush (*Scirpus sylvaticus*) and Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*).

After a rather damp lunch near the canal path gate (where well-used copies of Poland were admired, and got a bit damper and more well-used), we walked back along the footpath through a wooded area to the road, stopping at the churchyard.

On a different route back up to the car park, we saw Dewberry (*Rubus caesius*) distinguished from Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) by the larger flowers and weak curved prickles. On the farm drive we saw hybrids of *Platanus orientalis* and Great Brome (*Anisantha diandra*) a large grass unfamiliar to most of us. Another surprise was the discovery, at the entrance to the yard, of five plants of the Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*).

A successful day of enjoyable recording; learning a lot, sharing information in the group. Not great weather and not quite the variety we'd hoped for after our very successful searches to find Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) by the river in the early spring. But there are new, sympathetic owners of all the areas we visited so surely the diversity will increase under different management.

## **Sedge (*Carex*) Workshop at Yarty Moor**

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

**Leaders: Steve Parker & Helena Crouch**

**Report: Fred Rumsey & Simon Leach**

An encouragingly large group of 23 turned out for this visit which had been organised to more precisely document the plants of this Wildlife Trust Reserve and to give people an opportunity to get to grips with the genus *Carex*; sedges being a notable component of the vegetation, with 20 species previously recorded. Recording on earlier visits (2001/2 & 2011/2) had resulted in some slightly dubious records (several sedges amongst them) which needed to be checked, but as important was the need to localise the records more accurately – the site being in two monads (and tetrads) and

earlier records seeming to have been made at centroids and even then in the wrong place!

Having all negotiated the impressive potholes guarding the car park, the group split into two. One group was to concentrate on the recording at Yarty and had those folk who had some confidence in their sedge ID ability but were keen to practise on more, while a second group who were less confident went with Steve and Simon to get to grips with the basics on these tricky plants elsewhere. Sadly Liz who had been scheduled to lead was poorly, so Helena took charge of the form and marshalled a group of 14 down through the woodland and across the road onto the reserve. Some time was spent near the entrance where in bracken-invaded heathy grassland Lesser Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*) had previously been seen – sadly today it eluded us. Our mission was to record in one monad only (ST2316), the other, at the far end of the site had been searched in 2018 but would clearly repay further visits.

The site is bounded by a wooded stream at the base of the slope, fringed by wet, sedge-dominated areas, above which is a partially scrubbed hillside with acid seepages and marshy grasslands. The choicest areas were where low-nutrient status and grazing had maintained low, open mire communities on the slope, poaching giving some small treasures such as Bristle Club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*) and Leafy Rush (*Juncus foliosus*) the chance to thrive. As we made our way towards these areas we were pleased to find Wood Horsetail (*Equisetum sylvaticum*) with its delicate profuse branching and chaffy stem sheath teeth. Very scarce in much of the county this has local concentrations in the Blackdowns and on Exmoor.

The marshy grasslands soon revealed scattered plants of Yellow Bartsia (*Parentucellia viscosa*) sadly not yet in bloom – this hemiparasite like Yellow Rattle can reduce the vigour of coarser species creating a more open diverse community. In somewhat heathier mire areas we found its relative Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), the low open vegetation it was in, distinctly spongy underfoot, supported one of the great treasures of the site that we had hoped to find, the diminutive insectivorous Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*). It grew with Common Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) although sadly we did not re-find Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*), now virtually extinct in Somerset, which had been recorded here previously and was one of our targets.





Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*) ©Fred Rumsey

With these grew a range of Cyperaceous plants which gave us the opportunity to compare and contrast, these included the tufts of Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*) along with the fine-leaved Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) and one patch of Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*) which grew with Common Yellow-Sedge (*Carex demissa*), but the hybrid between them, previously recorded here by Paul and Ian Green, was not refound.

The rather sloppy muddy runnels through the rushes supported a range of dactylorchids, mostly Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), in one place with Southern Marsh-orchid (*D. praetermissa*) and a compellingly vigorous intermediate plant we decided was their hybrid. Nearby and just down the slope was a small population of the purple-pink flowered Early Marsh-orchid (*D. incarnata* subsp. *pulchella*), a very local acid-mire specialist. Here too were Meadow thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Bog St. John's Wort (*Hypericum elodes*) and Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*).

More deeply rutted and damp places upslope had Bog-bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), the last of its fringed white flowers just finishing. Drier areas supported some nice patches of Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) – a common plant in upland Britain but with a restricted distribution in Somerset. From this

drier vantage point we could see the grazers, a happy herd of Devon Reds, who were clearly doing an excellent job on site but were, along with some very tempting areas, the 'Square Dragon' informed us, "in the next monad"! Having reached our invisible boundary we made our way up to the hedge-line at the top of the reserve to try to take in some different habitat and bump up our species count. This provided us with a longer list of ferns and gave us an epiphytic *Umbilicus* too! We admired more Smooth-stalked Sedge (*Carex laevigata*) which we could compare with its close relative Green-ribbed Sedge (*C. binervis*), both showing the flappy tongues on the inner face of the leaf sheaths but differing in the colour of their glumes and foliage. We thought it likely that past records of *C. distans* from the site were errors for small *C. laevigata*. Similarly we were inclined to discount past records of the bigger aquatic species (*C. riparia*, *C. acutiformis* and *C. vesicaria*) for which we could find no suitable habitat. Even so we had found 13 species of sedge on site, a fourteenth *C. pendula* lurked back by the car park, out of the reserve.



Smooth-stalked Sedge (*Carex laevigata*) ©Fred Rumsey

While it was sad that we hadn't been able to refind some treasures, such as the *Drosera intermedia*, this was tempered with the knowledge they may still survive in the next monad. The group after all had recorded its almost constant associate White Beak-Sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) there in 2018. In total we

recorded 192 taxa in what was just one small corner of a monad, indicating how rich a site this is. It felt good to be able to correct and properly localise records for this important reserve and it was a very happy group that reconvened in the car park just as the weather took a turn for the worst.

Meanwhile Steve and Simon's group spent a leisurely day exploring a range of woodland ride, scrub, damp heath and mire habitats which held a decent range of sedges. We saw Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*) beside the forest track, together with smaller amounts of Wood Sedge (*C. sylvatica*). In patches of damp acidic grassland we noted both Oval (*C. leporina*) and Star Sedge (*C. echinata*) in good quantities. Further on, a species-rich Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*) mire had plenty of Common Sedge (*C. nigra*) and the odd plant of Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*) too, although our attention wandered here to take in various things that weren't sedges – like Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), and Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), and little puddles and trickles with both Round-leaved (*Ranunculus omiophyllus*) and Ivy-leaved (*R. hederaceus*) Crowfoots. But at our lunch stop we found Common Yellow-sedge (*C. demissa*), while nearby heathy grassland held Green-ribbed (*C. binervis*) and Carnation Sedge (*C. panicea*).

In the afternoon we headed into another area of mixed heathland, mire and bracken-dominated scrub. Here we found a large population of Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*), along with Fen Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*), to add to the Marsh (*G. palustre*) and Heath Bedstraw (*G. saxatile*) seen earlier. We also saw Pill Sedge (*C. pilulifera*), our tenth and final sedge of the day. We were happy with the sedges we'd found – it was good to proceed at leisurely pace, and to spend time working through keys to learn (or relearn) the characters distinguishing one sedge from another.

As usual, the find of the day wasn't one we'd been anticipating. As we climbed back up the hill towards the car park, in the trackside conifer plantation we suddenly became aware that the dim woodland floor was being lit up by a scattering of pale fruiting bodies of the Stinkhorn fungus (*Phallus impudicus*). We saw both the early 'egg' stages, semi-buried in the leaf litter, and the foul-smelling 'phallic' stage. Of the latter, there were probably ninety or more. Amid much chuckling, this seemed like an appropriately flippant finale to a flipping good day.

## White Sheet Down (VC6)

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019

Leader: Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

Although now in administrative Wiltshire, the chalk downs of White Sheet are in VC6 because they are in the parish of Kilminster which was part of Somerset until 1896. Thirteen members assembled on a nice summer's day to explore the delights of this species-rich chalk grassland (after cake). A steep S-facing bank immediately arrested progress. Still within sight of the cars we recorded Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*), Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*), Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and Chalk Milkwort (*Polygala calcarea*). We soon found our first orchids: Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), Twayblade (*Neottia ovata*), Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and several Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*).



Frog Orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*) ©Fred Rumsey

Ascending some steps we entered a new monad, examined some roses, and found our first Frog Orchids (*Coeloglossum viride*). Members spread out to search for these diminutive treasures: altogether we recorded 50 plants, including some to the east and west of the previously recorded population.



We also found a single Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) on the steep south-facing bank, just within VC6. The vice-county boundary here is extremely complex and White Sheet Down spans several monads, which presented a continual challenge to the leader/VCR!

After lunch by a tumulus, we searched for Field Fleawort (*Tephrosia integrifolia* subsp. *integrifolia*) where it was last seen by Helena and Fred in 2010, but not found since then, despite searches. This species is Endangered on the GB Red List (Vulnerable in England) and has never been found elsewhere in VC5 or VC6. We failed to find any plants so this attractive plant should probably be considered Locally Extinct in the Somerset Rare Plant Register. Disappointed, we headed for an earthwork, the Cross Dyke, where members had been promised blue sheets of Chalk Milkwort (*Polygala calcarea*). Sadly it was mostly over, but we could imagine the spectacle and examined the non-anastomosing veins of the sepals. In Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*) the veins on the sepals are “anastomosing” – they diverge then join again; in Chalk Milkwort they simply diverge.



SRPG group ©Fred Rumsey

The most interesting parts of White Sheet Downs are the steep slopes of the edges. A march across the top brought us to the north end of the SSSI, where the promise of Fragrant Orchids was fulfilled (phew!) Here the most exciting find of the day was made by Mark Kitchen when he spotted several patches of leaves of Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*). This Nationally Scarce species is included in the SSSI citation for White Sheet Hill, but has previously only been recorded in parts of the SSSI in South Wiltshire (VC8) and has never been known in this part of VC6, where it is recently recorded only from Brean Down, Crook Peak and the Avon Gorge.



Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*) ©Fred Rumsey

Heading back along the north-east edge of the hill we found our seventh species of orchid, Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), and a few plants of Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*), both in fruit. Meadow Saxifrage is Scarce in VC6 and this is the site of its largest population. It had been a great day, with fine weather, good company, the discovery of a new site in VC6 for a Nationally Scarce species and a chance to see species of chalk grassland, an unfamiliar habitat in Somerset.

## Weston-super-Mare Sewage Treatment Works, Bleadon (VC6)

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Leaders: Ellen McDouall & Ellie Phillips

Report: Helena Crouch & Liz McDonnell

On a hot day, seventeen members met to explore the delights of Weston-super-Mare sewage treatment works. This is a large holding owned by Wessex Water which includes the treatment works, conservation ponds, reedbeds and grassland, saltmarsh and organic arable. The sewage works and conservation land including saltmarsh were all created around 2000 and the sewage works site has undergone at least two rounds of major redevelopment since then, making it a good candidate for ruderal weeds. Thanks go to Wessex Water for granting us access and to Ellie Phillips for being our official escort.

The site, although small, straddles two monads, so we split into two groups. Ellen and Liz led a group to the western half and immediately started recording around the gravel, tarmac and buildings, making our way to the south-west corner of the enclosure, which was rough grassland, tall herb and willow scrub. The most notable feature of the rough grassland was the abundance of Grass Vetchling



(*Lathyrus nissolia*). This was mostly in fruit, but a few of the beautiful bright pink little pea flowers on long slender stalks were still visible amongst the long grass-like leaves – the feature that makes this plant so difficult to spot in grassland when not in flower. As we made our way along the western boundary, we were delighted to see large clumps of Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*) with its prickly fruiting heads.



Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*) ©Dee Holladay

The water-filled ditch, which runs around the perimeter of the sewage works enclosure, was of great interest, with several plants of Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*), Horned Pondweed (*Zannichellia palustris*), Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), a few plants of Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*) and a few flowering plants of Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) low down the bank near the edge of the water. We found several huge (1m+) plants of Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*) in tall grassland along this western boundary ditch. A surprising feature of one of the damp gravelly areas beside the sewage settling tanks was the presence of hundreds of plants of Hard-grass (*Parapholis strigosa*). This is a saltmarsh species not usually associated with man-made habitats, but is likely to be just outside the fence on the saltmarsh of Bleadon Levels (which surrounds this sewage works), and has now found a suitable niche within the Sewage Works complex.

Meanwhile Helena and Ellie led a group recording in the east half of the site. We were interested to find Lesser Bulrush (*Typha angustifolia*) and Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) in the peripheral ditch, with Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*). A good array

of leguminous species included Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea (*L. latifolius*), Hop Trefoil (*Trifolium campestre*), Smooth Tare (*Vicia tetrasperma*, now *Ervum tetraspermum*) and, most excitingly, Sea Clover (*T. squamosum*). This species is GB Scarce, although not scarce in either VC5 or VC6: both groups found several huge patches within the site. On gravelly areas we recorded Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), Squirreltail Fescue (*Vulpia bromoides*) and six plants of Sticky Groundsel (*Senecio viscosus*), which had no post-2000 record for this hectad and appears to have declined considerably in Somerset since 2000. We also found a single plant of Eastern Rocket (*Sisymbrium orientale*) with its distinctive pods about 10cm long, another neophyte which is recorded less frequently nowadays. Four plants of Field Penny-cress (*Thlaspi arvense*) at the southern edge encouraged hopes that arable fields nearby might be interesting.



Field Penny-cress (*Thlaspi arvense*) ©Dee Holladay

In the afternoon, we again split into two groups: Helena and Ellen and six others set off to explore arable field margins. Sadly they were rather less exciting than the sewage treatment works! Beside a track we found Awned Canary-grass (*Phalaris paradoxa*), a neophyte which is becoming increasingly common but was new to several members. It is a distinctive grass with a fat spike-like panicle. In a field margin, Andrew discovered Green Field-speedwell (*Veronica agrestis*), which was an excellent record as this species appears to have

declined in Somerset. We compared its fruits with those of Common Field-speedwell (*V. persica*) and examined the patent glandular hairs on the capsules. We fished in ditches, but these were also disappointing, although we did find Fennel Pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*, now *Stuckenia pectinata*) and two different water-starworts which were confirmed from specimens as Common Water-starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*) and Blunt-fruited Water-starwort (*C. obtusangula*).



SRPG at Weston Sewage Works ©Dee Holladay

Meanwhile Liz and a small group ventured out onto the nearby saltmarsh near Stroud Pill. This was mostly upper saltmarsh dominated by dense Sea Couch (*Elytrigia atherica*) and difficult to walk across, but in lower depressions, we found Greater Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media*), Annual Sea-blight (*Suaeda maritima*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) and abundant Sea Arrowgrass. We walked briefly along the edge of the River Axe where Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*), English Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*) and Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*) were abundant on the gloopy grey mud. On the way back across the saltmarsh, we recorded more plants of Wild Celery, a single plant of Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) and one small clump of Thrift (*Armeria maritima*).

Back at the car park, we shared tea and cake and the two groups exchanged notes about their botanical finds of the day. The expected ruderal weeds were in short supply, but more than made up for by the abundance of interesting and unexpected finds around the sewage works.

## Pinkery Exploration Centre (VC5)

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2019

Leaders: Conrad Barrowclough & Morag Angus

Report: Conrad Barrowclough

We gathered on a fine morning (by Exmoor standards) at the Pinkery Centre, one of the original isolated farms established by the Knight family, who 'reclaimed' much of the moor following acquisition of the Royal Forest in 1815. Sadly, said 'reclamation' largely centred on establishing very extensive drainage systems on the peaty blanket bogs of the moor, resulting in considerable damage to the plant communities of the mires. Much of the work of the South West Water led Exmoor Mires Partnership has focused on blocking these old drains, thereby raising the watertable, rewetting the adjacent peat and triggering habitat change to something hopefully a little more representative of a mire than pure Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*)! This trip aimed to meander up Short Combe, a small peaty valley south of the Pinkery Centre, to visit some restoration works installed by the Mires Partnership several years ago, recording as we went.

Heading back down the road toward the main road, we clambered up a couple of the rocky outcrops that flank the track, recording Early Hair-grass (*Aira praecox*) and comparing notes on determining Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*), before turning north off the road and heading up Short Combe. We quickly moved into lush valley mire vegetation, and picking our way up the valley, Narrow Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) and Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*) were both encountered. Exmoor is a real stronghold for the latter, and it's easy to forget just how scarce it is in the north and east. In more acidic pockets *Sphagnum* mosses and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) were frequent along with Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). Minerotrophic flushes further up the valley yielded other interesting records, including Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Fen Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*), Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*), Common Yellow-sedge (*C. demissa*), Tawny Sedge (*C. hostiana*), and the hybrid *C. hostiana* x *demissa*. The hybrid was new to many of us, but reassuringly easy to identify, looking large a tall *C. demissa* with a top bract far exceeding the length of the flowering spike.

Reaching flatter ground towards the top of the combe, we encountered numerous areas where the ditches leading to the stream had been dammed by



the Mires Partnership, forming pools and very wet areas of quaking bog. Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) was plentiful in these spots, accompanied by Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*). Drier heathy areas away from the pools were characterised by good blanket bog flora with plentiful *Sphagna*, Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*).

We then circled back toward the Pinkery Centre, via a very beautiful area of unimproved grassland with flushes in the valley where the farm is situated. The wetter pockets in this area abounded with *Wahlenbergia*, Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), and unusually large stands of Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) and Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*). In the drier areas, thousands of Eyebright (*Euphrasia anglica*) plants were in flower, along with another *Euphrasia*, suspected as a possible hybrid (*confusa x anglica?*), which was collected for later determination. The overall effect, with the tiny flowers of the Eyebright littering the hillside, was wonderful; and drew to a close a day's varied recording in excellent company.

## SRPG/WFS/SAHNS Holford Combe (VC5)

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2019

Leaders: Ro FitzGerald & Graham Lavender

Report: Ro FitzGerald & Graham Lavender

Trying to refind old records for uncommon plants usually involves historical research – reading old county floras, looking at herbarium specimens, searching for journal articles – but this time the inspiration for the meeting came from a happy chance rather than hard work! A small team of SRPG members works on the Somerset county herbarium TTN which is housed in Taunton Heritage Centre, and on our regular day we eat our sandwiches in the reception hall. Last year surplus back numbers of SANHS Proceedings were offered there for sale at £1 a copy, and they made interesting lunchtime reading.

The Botanical Section report for 1933 told of a meeting in Holford Combe, and listed some of the plants seen. These included a number of Quantock target species such as Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*) and Allseed (*Linum radiola*, syn. *Radiola linoides*). This area has a rich list of uncommon plants, and it turned out that many records had not been updated post 2000, so the idea

was formed to meet for a concerted search, close to the time of year of the original meeting.

This proved popular, and more than 20 members gathered from all three societies. The start was made memorable by a noble SANHS member bringing his beautifully maintained Austin 7 car, made in the year of the original meeting, to set the scene, and a traditional vasculum was also produced.



SRPG members admire the 1933 Austin 7 ©Ro FitzGerald

Two groups were organised, with Graham leading the fittest up to the watershed between Holford Combe and Hodders Combe, where a cluster of the most challenging records are located at an altitude of about 250m. As well as plants which might reasonably be expected in damp parts of the hill, the historic records have two 'one offs' – Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), which is almost extinct in Somerset, and an introduced population of Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*). The latter was known here for about 30 years, but had not been seen since the 1990s, though another population still flourishes on Exmoor. These were carefully searched for (the locations are reasonably identifiable) and are almost certainly lost. Bracken growth seems to be increasing, and this may be degrading some damp and open habitats, and searches were made difficult for part of the time by weather turning to torrential rain! However this group had a number of splendid finds to balance the negative results, and these are described in Graham's report.

The other group took a more leisurely look at the lower end of Hodders Combe, and then explored the village and churchyard. The Green twins had recorded many 'escapes' here, up to about 1997, and Holford still has plenty of roadside interest. Before the rain we also enjoyed excellent sightings



of the magnificent Silver-washed Fritillary flitting among willows near the former bowling green. It was interesting too to be following the road above the famous gorge, home of the rare Tunbridge Filmy-fern (*Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*) in its only Quantock site, and also the mysterious 'gametophyte' form of the Killarney Fern. These plants are in the adjacent monad to the one we were recording, but some people went down the steep track to look at the gorge, where one of the odder Holford records *Hydrangea macrophylla* has persisted for more than 20 years on the bank of the stream! Sudden conditions were beginning to lower mood by the middle of the afternoon, so a stop for hot coffee at the welcoming Plough Inn was a great reviver, though our clothing style possibly lowered the tone a bit from when Virginia Woolf (who was notoriously difficult to feed) was reported by Leonard to have enjoyed 'a good supper' there on their honeymoon! Although the road edge village habitats were always going to yield modest finds, we were very pleased to have raised the monad total to a very respectable 268, and of course we had plenty of lively discussions about whether things near gardens were 'in' or 'out' for the purpose of Atlas 20/20 recording!

All in all, a lucky flip through an old journal had led to an adventurous meeting, and a valuable exercise in identifying and searching for local target species.



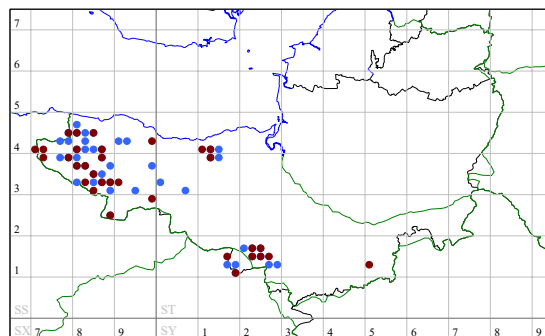
SRPG on the trail ©Fred Rumsey

Graham's group, had the task of moving up the combe at a relatively fast pace to the site of past records for some key species last recorded pre 2000. We were guided by details extracted from the past "front of cards", of which we have not only the actual old cards but also a summary in the so-called "Wallpaper" files. It should be pointed out that all this information is available to SRPG members with an email request to Helena or me. The key targets were *Hypericum elodes*, *Pinguicula grandiflora*,

*Eleocharis quinqueflora*, *Sibthorpia europaea*, *Wahlenbergia hederacea* and *Dryopteris aemula*. I am going to deal with each in turn and try to highlight the value of targeted recording.

*Hypericum elodes* was last recorded at the site in 1993 and, whilst we searched the potential boggy areas for it, we were unable to locate it. This is not necessarily the end of the search since the records are pre 2000 and hence before widespread use of GPS and it is possible that we missed the site.

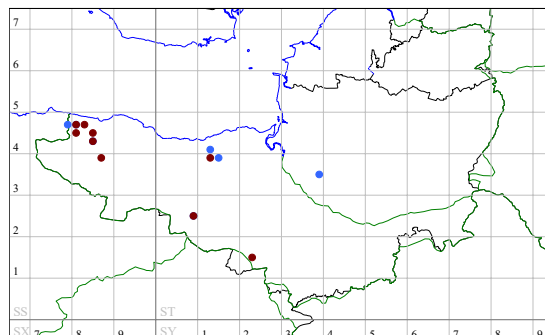
Hypericum elodes (Marsh St John's-wort)



This is the current Somerset summary of the distribution of *Hypericum elodes* as of August 2009 with blue dots as pre 2000 records and red dots as post 2000 records. On the Quantocks we have found three out of five pre 2000 records, a similar picture across VC5 suggests a significant reduction in *H. elodes* sites by possibly as much as 40%. Clearly, this rate of loss cannot be maintained without serious consequences and indeed *A Vascular Plant Red List for England* by P. Stroh *et al* (The Red List) has the species as "Near Threatened" with a 24% reduction in Area of Occupancy. Our failure to re-find *Hypericum elodes* is therefore disappointing but perhaps not unexpected.

*Pinguicula grandiflora* is recorded in Holford Combe, originally in 1969 and lastly in 1992. This is probably of much less concern as it is regarded as an introduction. It was not found here and remains at one site at Robbers Bridge on Exmoor and doing well there with hundreds of plants present.

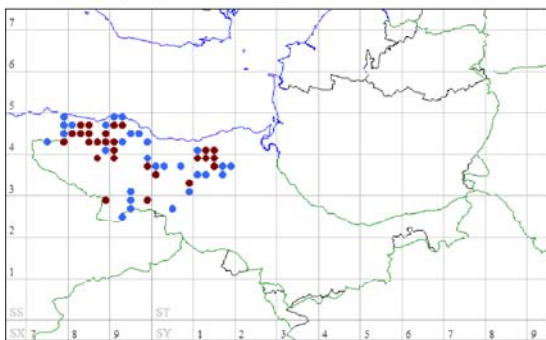
Eleocharis quinqueflora (Few-flowered Spike-rush)



*Eleocharis quinqueflora* is a native, on the Somerset Rare Plant Register (SRPR) and perhaps of particular interest as it was among a number of select taxa singled out in The Red List as currently of least concern. Numbers since 1930 have been relatively stable whereas there had been a very significant decline pre 1930. It is therefore important that all old sites are checked. Although *E. multicaulis* was found, we were unable to find *E. quinqueflora* which was disappointing. On a more positive note our Yarty meeting in 2018 found it at a new site and to date all Exmoor sites checked have had a positive result.

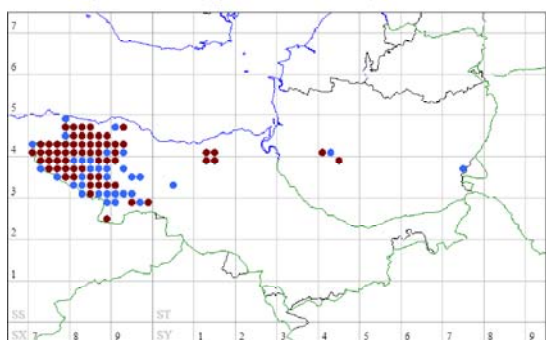
The other good news is the red dot on the Quantocks was a record Ian and I made this year and is the first post 2000 record on the Quantocks for *E. quinqueflora*. With nine current sites in VC5, *quinqueflora* remains on the SRPR as "Scarce".

*Sibthorpia europaea* (Comish Moneywort)



*Sibthorpia europaea*, also on the SRPR, was also a target having been last recorded at our target site in 1968. Not only were we successful in finding *Sibthorpia* but it was fairly frequent in both of our morning monads. As can be seen from the map it has now been found in around 50% of its old pre 2000 records on the Quantocks and it is not unreasonable to suggest that further searching will be equally successful.

*Wahlenbergia hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Bellflower)

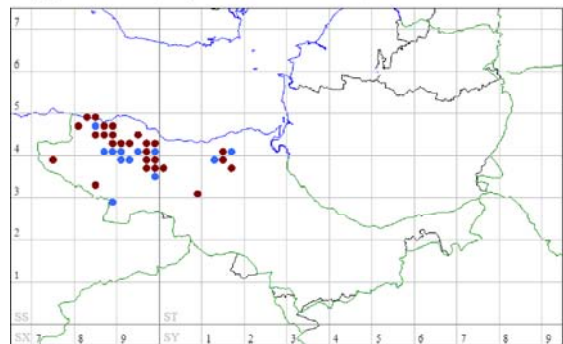


*Wahlenbergia hederacea* is rare in VC6 and it was very pleasing for many who rarely see this plant to find it within our target area. The target mire last

had a record for *Wahlenbergia* in 1955 and not only was it located in good quantity but it was also found in an adjacent monad.

We are now in the position that *Wahlenbergia* has been found in all its pre 2000 Quantock sites with perhaps a little work still needed, particularly on the Exmoor fringes. This result perhaps more than any others highlights the value of targeted recording.

*Dryopteris aemula* (Hay-scented Buckler-fern)



Last but not least; *Dryopteris aemula*, a fern with relatively limited distribution in Somerset, with Exmoor as its stronghold and the Quantocks as an outlier. In the event we found just one fern on its typical habitat of a steep bank beside a stream. It is hard to gauge whether *D. aemula* has lost area of occupancy since 2000 or whether the two sites it has not been recorded in the last 20 years are due to lack of searching.

In all a mixed result; some old records found such as the *Wahlenbergia*, the probability that the *Pinguicula* has been lost and the diminutive *Eleocharis quinqueflora* easily overlooked. Targeting will become increasingly important if we are to accurately determine the change in distribution of our key plants on The Somerset Rare Plant Register.

## Curry Rivel (VC5)

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2019

Leaders: Cath Mowat & Steve Parker

Report: Steve Parker

This meeting was advertised as a chance to search the area for rare arable species that were once recorded in the Curry Rivel area. After meeting at St Andrews Church, it was agreed that we would record just in ST3925, this monad had very few recent records. Our recording started on the small village green where many plants of Hoary Plantain (*Plantago media*) were flowering in the well mown grass. Next into the churchyard, which was also a well managed, but species-rich sward, with Autumn

Hawkbit (*Scorzonoides autumnalis*) flowering freely. At the base of the churchyard wall were the dried-up remnants of Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*). On waste ground a few tall plants of Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*) were spotted from the gateway and a member of the group climbed the gate to take a sample to confirm the identification, this species appears to be spreading in VC5. Moving out of the village to arable farmland Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) and Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*) were found growing together in the corner of the field, these species were also found in the next field close to farm buildings, sadly however very few other arable species were growing the arable margins. At the edge of the monad we retraced our steps and headed back to the village and on to a modern housing estate.



SRPG members, Curry Rivel ©Steve Parker

Lunch was eaten while sitting on the bank of a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) a small drainage feature designed to reduce flooding. It was here during lunch we started to notice many plants of Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*) growing around the edge of this area, this arable plant is unlikely to survive here very much longer as the soil will not be regularly disturbed. Walking through the housing estate Garden Lobelia (*Lobelia erinus*) was seen growing as a street weed with the now very common Water Bent (*Polypogon viridis*), a grass that seems to be in every village and town in Somerset. We made our way to the main road and then down a side street to the other edge of the monad and on some waste ground a single specimen of *Rumex x pratensis* was seen. Crossing a small meadow Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) was found both in full flower and fruit. We made our way back to the church to add up the day's score: a total of 195 plants was added to the 1KM square. We didn't find any super-rare arable species; they may have

been lost during construction of the modern housing estates or intensification of farming practices.

## SRPG/RoAM Water Plants Workshop, Shapwick Heath NNR (VC6)

Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019

Leaders: Steve Parker & Julie Merrett

Report: Liz McDonnell

This was a joint meeting with Recorders of the Avalon Marshes (RoAM). 23 members of SRPG & RoAM and guests met at the Avalon Marshes Centre. As our usual classroom at the centre was not available on this occasion, the workshop was held entirely in the field. Steve, who knows the ecology of the NNR very well, led us down to the 'Cotton Grass Field', part of the low-lying grazing marsh, to look at plants in the ditches that separate the damp species-rich fields. From his chosen position on the south side of the ditch, Steve pointed out species of interest and we hauled out some of the water plants with grapnels and long poles. The dominant aquatic plant in this first ditch was Greater Bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*), making dense underwater mats. Its bright yellow flowers were held out of the water on slender stems. We examined the finely dissected leaves and numerous bladders, but could find no creatures inside.



Steve Parker goes fishing in the rhyne. ©Dee Holladay

Continuing down the ditch, we found a few thin strands of Marsh Stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*) and Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*). Marsh Cinquefoil (*Comarum palustre*) was frequent in the water amongst the young stems of Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). Its dark red flowers had long since gone over, but its distinctive pinnate leaves with five leaflets were easy to spot in the water. Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) was abundant along both sides



of the ditch and on the banks. We compared the colour and shape of several duckweeds, including Least Duckweed (*Lemna minuta*), Fat Duckweed (*L. gibba*) and Greater Duckweed (*Spirodela polyrhiza*).

The large group straggled down to the eastern end of the field and crossed the wooden plank bridge into the fen. This is a tall herb fen with Greater Tussock-sedge (*Carex paniculata*), Reed Sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*) and many plants of Milk-parsley (*Thyselium palustre*). The latter is categorised as Vulnerable in the GB and England Red List and is a Somerset Rare Plant Register species. It is the food plant of the Swallowtail Butterfly, but there are no reliable records of this butterfly from Shapwick Heath or Somerset.



Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) ©Dee Holladay

We made our way through the tall herb fen to the main track and had lunch sheltering from the rain. The weather improved as we walked along the route of the Sweet Track (one of the Neolithic trackways across the central Somerset peatlands). This is a damp, ferny jungle path, with abundant Marsh Fern, Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Narrow Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) and large clumps of Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*). The Tussock Sedge tussocks were huge along the path through this wet woodland habitat. The meadows had recently been cut for hay and there was very little regrowth, but the sedge-rich sward was noted and plants of interest here included Ragged-Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*, now *Jacobaea aquatica*) and Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*).

Walking back along the edge of Decoy Lake, we dipped our grapnels into the water and pulled out Soft Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum submersum*). This is much less common than Rigid Hornwort (*C. demersum*), with which it was growing. Another species of Bladderwort (*Utricularia australis*) was flowering abundantly in the open water of the Roughet and we hauled some out to examine the wide lower lip of the flower, which distinguishes it from Greater Bladderwort. We walked back to the Visitor Centre along the track of the old railway line and passed large banks of Narrow-leaved Everlasting-pea (*Lathyrus sylvestris*). This was fruiting well, with thousands of developing pods, but a few of the orange/pink flowers were still hanging on.

Back at the car park and cafe, some of us shared cake and then did some extra plant recording (some botanists don't know when to stop!) Several interesting casuals and non-natives were recorded around the car park gravel and the wasteland where the new classroom is soon to be built. Thorn-apple (*Datura stramonium*), Green Bristle-grass (*Setaria viridis*), Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*), Tobacco-flower (*Nicotiana x sanderae*) and Love-lies-bleeding (*Amaranthus caudatus*) were growing here, whilst in the car park and amongst the newly planted perennials and shrubs, Goat's-rue (*Galega officinalis*) was growing vigorously in several places. It was a good learning day, not only of water plants, and it was a good introduction to the botanical riches of the Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve and SSSI for those members who had not visited before.

## Tyntesfield (VC6)

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2019

Leaders: Pam Millman & Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

This meeting was arranged as a celebration for Pam's very special birthday, as she has done much recording at Tyntesfield for the National Trust over the years. Seventeen members assembled initially, with two more joining at lunchtime and another two for tea. We were very grateful to the National Trust who allowed us free parking and access to the estate.

In the morning we focussed on recording in the western part of the estate (ST4971) as this monad had a relatively low species total. As always, recording began before we left the car park: Clive

pointed out Sweet-briar (*Rosa rubiginosa*) planted in the hedge, together with the non-native subspecies of Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea* subsp. *australis*) which has medifixed hairs with both arms appressed to the abaxial surface of the leaf.



Pam Millman ready for action! ©Fred Rumsey

Checking the route a fortnight earlier, the leaders had found a population of Purple Gromwell (*Aegonychon purpureocaeruleum*, formerly *Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum*) which they were keen to show members. It was agreed that this patch, extending 6m along a hedge bank, could be a newly discovered native population of a Nationally Rare species, which was a great start to the meeting. We then split into two groups for better coverage, reassembling at a nice viewpoint for lunch. It was good to find Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) and Spurge-laurel (*Daphne laureola*); between us we added 77 species to the post-2000 records for the monad, taking the total to a respectable 222.

After lunch, we reassembled at the garden entrance, where Liz and Simon joined us and we nearly gained two additional botanists from Cumbria who were visiting Tyntesfield, but they had to drive home! We spent the afternoon recording within the gardens, finding a new species for Tyntesfield just beyond the entrance gate: Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium pusillum*), at the dry edge of a verge. This

species is probably under-recorded, but well worth looking for on dry verges.

Our first stop was a fenced round pond, with abundant Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*), but also, worryingly, a small patch of the very invasive Curly Waterweed (*Lagarosiphon major*). To everyone's amusement, Fred nobly waded in and removed this alien thug.



Fred Rumsey removing alien water plants! ©Dee Holladay

Our target plant for the day was Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*), which had been known for many years on the lawns in front of the house – indeed Pam recorded 560 plants in flower in 2004 – but it was feared lost after restoration work on the roof (and associated scaffolding) and changes in lawn management. This species is Near Threatened on both the England and GB Red Lists. We were therefore delighted to find 42 large healthy rosettes in the tightly mown but species-rich lawns; there were probably many more. Another good find, on the bank by the tennis courts, was Large Thyme (*Thymus pulegioides*), the first record for ST57 since pre-2000.



Hunting for *Spiranthes spiralis* ©Dee Holladay



As we marched swiftly towards the walled vegetable garden, Liz and Clive spotted the alien Krauss's Clubmoss (*Selaginella kraussiana*) in the lawn under shrubs. We entered the vegetable gardens via a sheltered courtyard planted with Australian Tree-ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*). On one of these we were excited to find the epiphytic Australasian Kangaroo-fern (*Phymatosorus diversifolius*). It has almost certainly arrived with the tree-fern, and has not yet become naturalised beyond its vector of introduction, so its status was a subject of debate! The tree-fern also supported another Australasian passenger, the liverwort *Heteroscyphus fissistipus*.



Kangaroo-fern (*Phymatosorus diversifolius*) ©Helena Crouch



Henbit Dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*) ©Helena Crouch

The walled vegetable gardens themselves have had a few uncommon archaeophytes which some members might rarely see, and at Pam's request the gardeners had kindly left us a particularly "weedy" patch to explore, beside their impressive display of pumpkins! Here we found Small Nettle (*Urtica urens*), Henbit Dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*), Green Field-speedwell (*Veronica agrestis*) and also

the alien Shaggy-soldier (*Galinsoga quadriradiata*), which has spread noticeably in VC6 since the last Atlas.

Pam had already left by this time, to head home and prepare for a tea party, leaving the remaining members with a strong incentive to finish on time. Our progress back to the car park was interrupted by the exciting discovery of seven flowering spikes of Autumn Lady's-tresses on the species-rich bank behind the chapel – a previously unknown population of this pretty orchid. In the afternoon we recorded 170 species, adding 36 species to Pam's list for the gardens of Tyntesfield (ST5071) and taking the total for the monad to 373 species. Only three monads in VC6 have a higher total! This would have been a fitting end to an excellent day's recording; however the highlight of the day was still to come. Pam had very kindly invited all members back for birthday tea and cakes in her beautiful garden, by which time the sun was shining. With an additional two arriving for tea, Pam and John hosted a party of 22 in their lovely garden and conservatory, which was a brilliant end to a special celebratory day.

## Langport

**Sunday 6th October 2019**

**Leaders: Helena Crouch & John Poingdestre**

**Report: John Poingdestre**

Fourteen members assembled in Cockle Moor car park for the penultimate meeting of the season. It was soon decided that the southeast quadrant of the town was the area which would provide the greatest variety of interest and was most in need of records.

Wending our way up The Hill, past the backs of fine old houses, we searched for untidy assemblages of weeds, but as with many urban areas the sprayer had beaten us to it. Those we did find were mostly garden escapes. We found a tiny Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) high on a wall, presumably grown from a seed stashed by a bird. The ancient church at the top was rather more interesting, having an unusual *Oxalis* amongst the flagstones, which later keyed out as Sussex Yellow-sorrel (*Oxalis dillenii*), distinguished from Upright Yellow-sorrel (*Oxalis stricta*) by its reflexed pedicels in fruit and simple white hairs. Green Bristle-grass (*Setaria viridis*) was also growing in the paving and Wall Lettuce (*Mycelis muralis*) was frequent on the walls. The turf areas had Hoary Plantain (*Plantago media*)



and Rough Hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*), with spreading Slender Speedwell (*Veronica filiformis*) which is almost ubiquitous in churchyards now.

Further along The Hill we found a large rosette on the pavement, which a few members recognised as Giant Scabious (*Cephalaria gigantea*). Dropping down onto the moor south of the town, we encountered several garden escapes along the footpath, including Italian Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum italicum* subsp. *italicum*) and Druce's Crane's-bill (*Geranium x oxonianum*), both increasingly found outside gardens, and two species in the family Boraginaceae: Abraham-Isaac-Jacob (*Trachystemon orientalis*) and Great Forget-me-not (*Brunnera macrophylla*). We explored some ditches, finding Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), Greater Duckweed (*Spirodela polyrhiza*) and some flat Fat Duckweed (*Lemna gibba*) and stopped for lunch on the banks of the Long Sutton Catchwater.

The River Parrett forms the VC boundary here and large stands of Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*) were the most obvious botanical feature, alongside more widespread species. We puzzled over long linear leaves in the water, over a metre long, but use of a grapnel revealed them to be a very unusual linear form of Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*) which many of us had never seen before. Helena leaning precariously out over the river bank gave two of us visions of being left holding an empty jacket, but thankfully it never came to that.

We followed the densely nettle-edged embankment of the Parrett to Huish Bridge, then continued alongside the equally enriched bank of the Long Sutton Catchwater, finding Corn Parsley (formerly *Petroselinum segetum*, now *Sison segetum*) by a gate and the dead spikes of Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) in an abandoned pasture. The area around the abattoir was botanically dull and we almost gave up on a footpath which appeared to go through gardens, as our chattering alerted some aggressive-sounding dogs; but we were welcomed through and added a few more species to our list before heading to St Mary's church at Huish Episcopi, where we admired carpets of Sowbread (*Cyclamen hederifolium*) naturalised in the churchyard. It had been a very enjoyable day, with a respectable total of 267 species recorded, taking the post-2000 total number of species in the monad to 310, the highest in the hectad.

## Bridgwater (VC6 & VC5)

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Leader: Helena Crouch & Simon Leach

Report: John Poingdestre & Simon Leach

A large group of members and friends gathered at what is becoming a regular venue, namely Morrisons car park in Bridgwater. The date of the meeting coincided with the Wild Flower Society's Last Week Hunt and we split into two competitive groups, one either side of the River Parrett, which conveniently divided the group into VC5 and VC6 aficionados. Initially we intended to record only those species in flower, however the VC6 group (with no WFS members present) reverted to what we know best, recording all species in a relatively blank monad.



SRPG members find *Stachys arvensis* at Bridgwater  
©Helena Crouch

Leaving Simon's group on the west side of the river, we headed to the Town Bridge to cross to VC6. Immediately, Liz pointed out several dead but still recognisable specimens of Eastern Rocket (*Sisymbrium orientale*) growing around the bridge ramparts. Another somewhat similar crucifer Annual Wall-rocket (*Diplotaxis muralis*) occurred nearby on verges. Wandering along a track behind some lock-up garages, our noses confirmed the identity of a couple of plants of Stinking Tutsan (*Hypericum hircinum*), new to the hectad, self-sown at the base of a wall. We were surprised to find Common Calamint (*Clinopodium ascendens*) by a fence surrounding waste ground.

Heading to a sunlit churchyard for lunch, we puzzled over a small plant on the pavement against a house: Helena duly recognised it as Narrow-leaved Ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*), first found in Somerset in

2004 and now spreading in the county. A second plant was found in the churchyard.

After lunch we headed to the Castle Field Industrial Estate, typically tidily manicured, but with a few scruffier areas providing richer hunting grounds for urban botanists. In a shrubbery, we were surprised to find Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), which perhaps arrived with the mulch. On a rough verge we were amazed to find 18 plants of Field Woundwort (*Stachys arvensis*) in full flower, the first post-2000 record in this hectad for a species now in steep decline in arable fields.



Field Woundwort (*Stachys arvensis*) ©Fred Rumsey

Continuing around a corner we found several large plants of White Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata*) in flower. Another excellent find was made by Andrew, who discovered some tall fruiting Hare's-foot Clover (*Trifolium arvense*) by a fence around a lorry park. Nearby was a group of the larger branching form of Fern-grass (*Catapodium rigidum* subsp. *majus*). We also found large plants of Hawkweed Oxtongue (*Picris hieracioides*) and a clump of Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acris*) in flower.

Returning around the trading estate along East Quay, we found Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*) and a few plants of Sticky Groundsel (*Senecio viscosus*) in flower. In a gravelly area at the base of a fence, Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*) made its appearance. Its yellowish-green look, small size and all stalked leaves at right angles to the stem were sufficient for identification, despite the absence of

apetalous flowers. It was heartening to see so many rosettes of Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*) on the mown verges, as its fate in the wider agricultural landscape is perhaps less secure.



White Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata*)  
©Fred Rumsey

Although we hadn't left enough time to linger over tea back at Morrisons, our efforts had produced a list of 248 species in our VC6 monad, roughly split 60:40 native:alien.

Meanwhile the nine-strong VC5 group were, for the most part, following a similar route to one taken on a previous SRPG visit in June 2018. So these were well-recorded monads, meaning that we could put aside our natural tendency to record absolutely everything. Today, just for one day, if it wasn't flowering we could happily ignore it. Well, that was the theory, anyway.

We had barely left Morrisons car park and the list was underway. Smooth Sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*) was our first find, growing against a wall with plenty of Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*) and Prickly Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*). We quickly knocked off the usual pavement and wall plants – Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*), Prickly Oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), Wall Barley (*Hordeum murinum*) and the like – before encountering an unlikely assortment of still-flowering wetland species around the pond in the little park beside Elmwood Avenue, and in the roadside ditch on the other side of the road. These included Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*), Purple Loosestrife



(*Lythrum salicaria*), Water Figwort (*Scrophularia auriculata*), and two sedges, False Fox (*Carex otrubae*) and Remote (*C. remota*).

In the little (seemingly unnamed) park at the end of St Saviour's Avenue we found plenty of Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) still in flower, while a path verge close to the subway under the A38 turned up Green Field-speedwell (*Veronica agrestis*) to add to the Grey (*V. polita*) and Common (*V. persica*) already noted. We also had an opportunity to get to grips with a number of alien *Oxalis* species, seeing good amounts of both Procumbent (*O. corniculata*) and Upright (*O. stricta*) Yellow-sorrels, while at the pink end of the spectrum we had both Pink (*O. articulata*) and (much less common) Garden Pink (*O. latifolia*) – the latter growing with Shaggy-soldier (*Galinsoga quadriradiata*) as a flower-bed weed in 'Stork's-bill Park'. Henbit Dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*) we found lurking at the base of a dog-poo bin, with its easily-overlooked offering of tiny late-season flowers.



Another find: *Cucurbita moschatus* ©Fred Rumsey

Along Old Taunton Road we noted (still flowering) Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*), which we had seen here during our previous visit to ST3036. The admittedly not flowering self-sown Spanish Gorse (*Genista hispanica*) was a new, and unlikely, record of a much-planted species that only rarely seems to make the leap into the wild. Barely a leap, in this case, as these prickly youngsters were growing in cracked tarmac within a few feet of their parents!

We lunched beside the canal, paid our respects to the well-known colony of Dwarf Elder (*Sambucus ebulus*), then headed back to the A38 before wandering along various back streets and alley-ways en route to Morrisons. Afternoon highlights included both Mouse-ear-hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*) and Fox-and-cubs (*P. aurantiaca*), Atlas Poppy

(*Papaver atlanticum*) – a new monad record – and a curious broad-leaved, yellow-flowered thing that was either Siberian (*Sedum hybridum*) or Kamchatka Stonecrop (*S. kamtschaticum*). This is a difficult species-pair, but the overwintering shoots and leaves, and smallish flowers, suggested that our plant was probably *hybridum* – a good record, as this would be only the third or fourth time it's been noted 'in the wild' in VC5.

Perhaps the most surprising find of the day, though, was a little clump of flowering Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*) – an exceptionally 'early' spring-flowerer in our list of otherwise 'late' summer-flowering species. With a spring still in our step, but time running out, a few of us made one last dash across 'The Meads', picking up Stone Parsley (*Sison amomum*), Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) and Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) in the process.

Back at Morrisons, at the end of a thoroughly enjoyable day, we supped our mugs of tea and totted up the list. Our final total for VC5 was a very respectable 123 taxa. We should stress taxa rather than species, since this included several hybrids, notably the dock *Rumex x pratensis* and the ryegrass *Lolium x boucheanum* – the latter a new monad record.

[The VC6 group added 38 spp in flower to those recorded by the group in VC5. The overall total, both groups combined, was 161. Remarkable!]



Hare's-foot Clover (*Trifolium arvense*) in Bridgwater ©Helena Crouch



## Articles

### White Rock-rose Survey at Purn

Jenny Greenwood & Millie Wilson

The White Rock-rose (*Helianthemum apenninum*) is a Nationally Rare species restricted within the UK to only a few localities in north Somerset and south Devon. It is found on limestone rocks and can be distinguished from its close relative, *H. nummularium*, with which it often occurs, by its delicate white flowers, grey-green leaves and strongly inrolled leaf margins. Both species can be found at Purn Hill SSSI, an Avon Wildlife Trust reserve in North Somerset, along with their hybrid, Sulphur Rock-rose (*H. x sulphureum*), which displays a varying range of intermediate morphologies with pale yellow flowers.

*H. apenninum* has long been known to occur on Purn Hill, being described by J. W. White as abundant in his *Flora of Bristol*, and the presence of this species contributed to the designation of the site as a SSSI on the recommendation of Francis Rose in 1990.

Given the rarity of this plant, Avon Wildlife Trust periodically undertakes surveys of both the plant and the general condition of its habitat. The species requires bare rock and closely-grazed grassland (such as the sward produced by rabbit grazing, which is currently abundant at Purn) in order to thrive, and it is particularly vulnerable to scrub encroachment. The site was surveyed in April 2019 by Monitoring Officer Jenny Greenwood and Wild Paths Placement Millie Wilson.

**Methodology:** Flowering plants of *Helianthemum apenninum* and *H. x sulphureum* were marked with flags. The number of individual plants was counted as far as possible, but due to the creeping/trailing nature of the plants, it was difficult to determine in a few rare cases. If in doubt the clump was counted as a single plant. The number of flowering stems per plant was also counted in order to gain an overall estimate of plant size. Flowers (including those that had already lost their petals) and buds were included in this estimate. Plants were only counted if they were clearly white or sulphur-coloured. Sometimes it was not possible to reach the plants, as they were situated on rock faces; in these cases, the number of plants was estimated, but no head count was undertaken.

For this survey, only those plants in flower were counted as the aim was to try and assess plant size as well as number. A number of non-flowering plants

were also present, however due to time constraints, experience of the surveyor and difficult weather conditions, it was judged best to avoid surveys of the vegetative shoots in this instance.

**Results:** In total, at least 118 plants were present in the survey, two being *H. x sulphureum*. Of these, eight were unreachable. Of the 110 plants whose flowering heads were counted, the plants had an average of 11.7 heads per plant, with a maximum of 113 and a minimum of one.

A previous survey undertaken on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2003 by AWT surveyors Justin Smith, Rebecca Price and Peter Yarrow found 135 White Rock-rose plants and 64 hybrids, a total of 199 plants. No methodology was given, and it is unclear whether vegetative plants or only those in flower were recorded.

This means that the two surveys may not be directly comparable, but taking the White Rock-rose only, this is only a small difference between the numbers obtained by the two surveys, which is encouraging.

The difference between the number of hybrids is much larger, but the low numbers found (2) in the 2019 survey is judged to be an underestimate as more than this were visible on a visit earlier in April by one of the surveyors. The hybrid shows intermediate morphology between the species, so it is possible that *H. x sulphureum* generally flowers later in the year (the flowering period for *H. apenninum* is given as April-July in Rose, whilst that of *H. nummularium* is May-September). In future, surveys of the Rock-rose at Purn should include vegetative plants, which will reduce the error associated with survey date, but will require further familiarisation with the vegetative characters if the White and Sulphur Rock-rose are to be differentiated.



**Fig. 1.** Extent of White Rock-rose on Purn Hill (not all specimens are visible in photograph), showing that scrub is encroaching on the area from the direction of the cliffs.

©Jenny Greenwood



**Fig. 2.** Plants of White Rock-rose contending with overshadowing from Gorse above and crowding from Cotoneaster below. ©Jenny Greenwood

It was estimated that around 10% of the population was growing in or next to scrub, including Cotoneaster, Gorse, Ivy, Hawthorn and Bramble growing up from the slope (Figs 1 and 2), but this figure may be higher. A couple of specimens were seen growing off the sheer rock face where it was exposed, but given that much of it is obscured by climbing scrub, the numbers here could be much higher. Given that this area also supports the majority of the population of Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) and Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) as well, this survey recommends that scrub clearance from the rock face should be a matter of priority.

#### **Addendum:**

On a site visit on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2019 to look for Honewort, further patches of White/Sulphur Rock-rose were discovered in areas previously unsearched. A further 16 plants were seen in flower, bringing the total up to 134 plants.

## **Nit Grass**

### **Liz McDonnell**

Nit-grass (*Gastridium ventricosum*) is a very fussy grass. It is an annual species of well-drained calcareous grassland, especially on south-facing slopes where grazing animals have broken the turf to expose bare soil. It is also an occasional weed in arable fields. The photo shows the pale green grass in flower. The tiny anthers are very prominent and the bases of the individual spikelets are beginning to swell, to form small hard 'nits' (as in headlice eggs).

In Britain it has a scattered southern distribution, and in Somerset it has been recorded from several locations on the Poldens, a few places on Mendip and its outlying hills, Crimson Hill near Hatch

Beauchamp, Bathealton and a few coastal areas near Watchet. It is Nationally Scarce; it is listed on the Somerset Rare Plant Register and is a notified plant species on two Somerset SSSIs – Cleeve Hill and Aller Hill. As part of the 'targeting' work undertaken by SRPG in 2019, Nit-grass was chosen as one of several under-recorded species and many of the locations that were recorded by Paul and Ian Green for the 1997 *Atlas Flora of Somerset* (AFS) had not been revisited since 2000. We felt that it was necessary to look for this species before the end of the Atlas 2020 recording window, so that it would adequately reflect its status in Somerset, and contribute to the current national distribution.



Nit Grass (*Gastridium ventricosum*) ©Jeanne Webb

Our MapMate database showed mostly tetrad (2x2km sq.) distribution of this species in Somerset, but not all of the precise locations or grid references were entered, so it was not easy to attempt a search for a small annual grass without the essential location details. Thankfully, a paper copy of the original data collected for the AFS on the rare and scarce species exists in the form of what we know as the 'Wallpaper Files' (lever-arch files covered in floral wallpaper!). Nearly all the locations where the AFS recorders found Nit-grass were listed with 6-figure grid references, date of finding, and notes about abundance and site details useful for re-finding this species. As part of the targeting process, all these sites for which there were no post-2000 records were entered on a spreadsheet and listed in hectad (10km sq.) order. This listing was done in August of this year, so it was rather late in the season for searching for a species that is visible from May to October, but this spreadsheet was sent to several SRPG members in the hope that they could search for Nit-grass in as many of the old sites as possible in their areas.



Several of us entered into the search and I took on the former sites on the outlying hills of Mendip, such as Nyland Hill, Lodge Hill, Ben Knowle Hill and Hay Hill as well as several of the sites on the Polden Hills. Some of these I searched on my own, and others in company with other SRPG members and friends and we re-found it in many of the original sites. It was extraordinary to me that this small delicate annual grass was still present in some of the same niches and localities where it was found more than 30 years ago. It seems very site-faithful where the conditions remain suitable for it and where there is little or no competition. Jeanne Webb searched the coastal areas near Watchet and was pleased to re-find it at Cleeve Hill SSSI in one of the glades where it hadn't been seen for a while. After much searching, she also found a thin scattering of it in thick limestone grassland.

In 1984 or thereabouts, Ro FitzGerald had found a site in the corner of a field adjoining the Blue Anchor cliff which Jeanne re-found in 2000, but the site became covered in thick coarse grasses and it had not been seen there since. However, during this 2019 search, she found that it had migrated further up the field and had spread into the next two fields where there was lots of bare soil. But Jeanne's most spectacular Nit-grass find in this area was in a wheat field where she had first found a few plants in 2016. She had informed the landowner and asked him to look after the site, as it was a rare grass and would not survive if treated with herbicide. To her amazement this year, she found that the whole corner of the field was entirely covered in thick wads of Nit-grass. The number of plants was estimated at over 56,000 plants and both Jeanne and the farmer were delighted.

John Poingdestre also took this search to heart and re-found the Nit-grass at Aller Hill SSSI from where our records were very poor and out of date, on Socombe Hill, Moorlinch and on Launcherley Hill in almost the exact location that the Green twins found it in 1988. Andrew Robinson also re-found it this year at Uphill, just south of the church.

However, there were some sad tales too, of un-grazed or under-grazed slopes where conditions are no longer suitable for this species which needs open soils in which to germinate and thrive and which cannot tolerate any crowding or shading. There were several sites on the Poldens where Brambles and tall herbs were dominant and several more that were becoming too overgrown for it to remain much longer. The under-management of sites is a common

problem not only for *Gastridium ventricosum*, but for many of our grassland species and I fear that some of these sites will no longer exist as valuable species-rich, botanically important sites at the next round of a *National Atlas of the British Flora*.

At the end of this year, 19 of the old locations for Nit-grass had been searched by several SRPG members, and 11 of them were found to still support this little Nationally Scarce grass. Since 2000 it has been recorded from 12 hectads (10km sq.) in Somerset. Old sites in ST02 or ST32 were either not revisited over the last 20 years or Nit-grass was not found in them, so they will not appear in the latest date class in the forthcoming Atlas 2020. It may still occur in those areas, but searching there will now have to wait for the next field season.

This and other targeting projects were very worthwhile and lots of important records of rare and scarce plants were made by many members of the SRPG. I found it particularly satisfying to search for a species that was thought to have been lost from a site, and to find that it had been there for 30 years or more. It was also great fun.

### **A Surprise Discovery: Autumn Lady's-tresses** Karen Netto (Andrews)



Autumn Lady's-tresses, *Spiranthes spiralis*, hidden by grass ©Karen Netto (Andrews)

The orchid season was drawing to a close. At the start, I was somewhat despondent. Having returned to Somerset in early 2019, I relished the chance to revisit my childhood botanising haunts more frequently. I knew where the orchids used to be. Time and time again, I returned disappointed. Intensive farming and invasive plants seemed to have taken hold where I expected to find Orchids, Bluebells, Primroses and Violets. I am pleased to



report that the year is ending on a high, thanks to Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*).

It was a chance discovery on a Bank Holiday walk in a very familiar area. I was actually thinking about heading home, when I sat down to eat an apple. It was a bright and breezy day. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of flickering white in the grass. I knelt down and discovered the exquisite, white flowers of Autumn Lady's-tresses. I had no idea that they could even be found at this location.

There were lots of grockles about. Thankfully, they were oblivious to my excitement and blind to the flowers. The tiny Orchids were hard to see even when I was right on top of them. I eventually found about 10-12 flower spikes.

On my return home, I read up about these delicate orchids in my identification guides. I told my local Somerset Vice-Recorder of my surprise find. I thought she would know all about them as this is a popular site. Can you imagine my astonishment when she revealed some time later that Autumn Lady's-tresses hadn't been recorded at this site since 1997? Wow!

Autumn Lady's-tresses is an extraordinarily delicate and pretty plant. The foliage and stem is greyish-green. The braid-like pattern up the stem is the origin of the vernacular name. They made me think of marzipan. They seemed unreal, like the delicate sugar paste floral creations made by master bakers. Nature is quite the craftswoman. Autumn Lady's-tresses favours short, dry, nutrient-poor grassland. High nitrogen and phosphorous levels in the soil from intensive farming threaten its survival. It is usually found on calcareous soils and sand dunes, growing in symbiosis with root fungi or mycorrhizae. The plants can spend many years underground without flowering. The flowering phase at summer's end is short and easily missed.

I revisited the spot some weeks later. The flowers were no longer present. The area had been grazed by rabbits and possibly cattle, but numerous rosettes were now obvious to me. It is possible that there will be a gap of a few years until the flowers of Autumn Lady's-tresses are seen at this site again. It was nonetheless great to end the orchid season on such a high. Hope is revived that I will see the orchids of my childhood again next year.

## Colour in the Margins Update

Alison Mitchell

### CitM Monitoring and Advisory Officer (Mid-Somerset Hills and North Downs)

Summer 2019 proved another busy but fruitful survey season for the Colour in the Margins (CitM) project in Somerset. My time is split between Somerset and the North Downs but with the help of some fantastic volunteers and brilliant colleagues, we have managed to cram in lots of extremely valuable conservation work protecting rare species across the Mid-Somerset Hills.

In 2019 CitM held 5 training sessions/workshops in Somerset which were attended by 23 different volunteers, 12 farmers/land managers, 5 farm advisors and 2 conservation professionals. The first of these was a volunteer training event at Fivehead Arable Fields SSSI at the beginning of June. The training was delivered by Cath Shellswell, Steve Parker and myself and covered CitM project information, survey methods, species identification, background to the SSSI and an introduction to SRPG. 17 people attended the training and whilst we were rained off in the afternoon field session, the feedback from the attendees was very positive.



Fivehead Arable Fields SSSI ©Alison Mitchell, Plantlife

Another of these events was a technical workshop aimed at farmers and farm advisors held at a farm near Langport. This session was delivered by Tim Clarke of FWAG and was intended to provide farmers and industry professionals with more information on the management prescriptions for arable plants, how to treat problem species and agri-environment scheme options. The training was well received and we have developed further relationships with attendees.



*Anthemis cotula* on a Somerton Farm ©Alison Mitchell, Plantlife

During the 2019 season, we visited 12 farms and found priority species in 18 fields. These included a total of 10 fields with Spreading Hedge-parsley (*Torilis arvensis*), as well as a rather sorry-looking Corn Buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*) and an occurrence of Pheasant's-eye (*Adonis annua*), the latter brought to our attention by a local botanist. Our surveys have also turned up other threatened species including Shepherd's Needle (*Scandix pecten-veneris*), Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*), Slender Tare (*Vicia parviflora* – now *Ervum gracile*) and Stinking Chamomile (*Anthemis cotula*). We continue to work with the owners/managers of all of these farms and they have been very receptive to incorporating management for arable plants into their fields.

The first of our reintroduction projects took place recently at Apex Park near Burnham-on-Sea. Apex park is owned and managed by Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) and has an active and dedicated 'Friends' group. The site has a range of amenity areas and semi-natural habitats and is a very popular public attraction.

SDC have been cultivating plots within the park for a number of years and these areas provide ideal conditions for the reintroduction of rare arable plants. The seed from a variety of species including *Ranunculus arvensis*, *Torilis arvensis*, *Scandix pecten-veneris*, Broad-fruited corn salad (*Valerianella rimosa*) and *Anthemis cotula* were collected from Fivehead Arable Fields and have now been sown in Apex Park. This 200m<sup>2</sup> area will be annually ploughed in autumn in order to provide the best conditions for the reintroduced species.

We have been incredibly fortunate to have had 27 individual volunteers donate the equivalent of a whopping 40 working days to the project in Somerset in 2019, with five particularly dedicated

volunteers taking on surveys/sites independently. We really cannot thank all of our generous, motivated and knowledgeable conservation volunteers enough. Their contribution is crucial to the success of this project. Not only does it allow us to work with more farmers to counter the plight of rare arable plants but also to forge new and stronger relationships between local landowners and recorders, which is invaluable!

2020 is the final year of the Colour in the Margins project and there is so much more we want to do! If haven't already been involved and would like to volunteer please contact Zoe Morrall, Outreach Officer (Zoe.Morrall@plantlife.org.uk) or myself (Alison.Mitchell@plantlife.org.uk), we'd love to hear from you!

## Unwelcome Plants!

### Steve Parker

The Somerset Levels is a very special wetland landscape, with over 7000 ha notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. There are many threats to the wildlife of these wetlands, but there is one threat that Somerset Rare Plants Group members can help to combat. This can be done by reporting as quickly as possible the location of two very invasive species, this can help stop them spreading.



Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*)  
©Steve Parker

Top of the list of the most invasive species is Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*). This plant was first found in Somerset in the River Tone just east of Taunton in 2003. In many ways you have to admire the plant as it's a great survivor, growing rapidly and colonising new water courses so very fast. The Environment Agency (EA) and the Internal Drainage Boards (IDB) have been battling with this invader at scattered sites across Somerset, but their



best efforts so far have failed to eliminate the plant from any site. However they have at least managed to reduce the damage it causes to the native species.



Water Primrose (*Ludwigia hexapetala*)  
©Steve Parker

Number two on my list of undesirables is Water Primrose (*Ludwigia hexapetala*). This is a very pretty plant but like Floating Pennywort spreads quickly and out-competes the native flora. A contact in the EA told me that in 2018 they spent £10,000 trying to remove the plant for some lakes near Bridgwater. On Pawlett Hams, the landowner has just about given up trying to remove the plant from his ditches and will be forced to fill the ditches in!

So if you see either of these unwelcome plants, report them to one of the vice-county recorders. We will make sure the EA and IDB do all they can to stop their spread.

## Taunton Herbarium Update

### Report: Liz McDonnell and the herbarium team

Throughout the year, we have continued to work on the Taunton (TTN) Herbarium. Meeting each Monday, the five of us, Liz McDonnell, Ian Salmon, Jeanne Webb, Simon Leach and Ro FitzGerald have re-ordered the specimens from the old 'Dandy' system to Stace 3 taxonomic sequence.

It became clear, as we protected the specimens in their new genus and species folders, that we would not have sufficient space in the existing cupboards to house all the thousands of specimens. Funding was obtained from the Museums panel of the SW Heritage Trust for more matching wooden cupboards. These were swiftly and expertly made by a skilled SANHS member to the standards demanded by the SW Heritage Trust for the curation of this

important collection of pressed and dried plants, some of which date from the 1820s.

We have started to look into the history of the Taunton herbarium and Ian and Ro have both gathered information during the year on the individual botanists/collectors and also how the collection came into existence. Ian has worked tirelessly on the herbarium database updating the taxonomic sequence and adding new items when specimens are newly accessioned. Throughout the year we have mounted personal collections of various groups of plants, including Willows, Sea-lavenders and Dandelions. The latter have been collected by the keen SRPG *Taraxacum* team (mainly Graham Lavender, Jeanne Webb and Simon Leach) and have been determined or confirmed by Professor John Richards (BSBI referee). The *Taraxacum* collection in TTN is now considered a nationally important one.

Several other personal collections of plants are also being considered for inclusion in the Taunton herbarium and I have been mounting and cataloguing my own collection of more than 300 Somerset specimens for this purpose. Herbarium collections are not just bits of dried history, but often contain voucher specimens which are the only evidence for a plant having been in a certain place. Also, as we all know from the Stace 4 name changes, taxonomy is not fixed, and in the future some herbarium specimens may need to be re-examined and re-identified. TTN is a valuable reference and historic collection of (mainly) Somerset plants and our aim is to ensure that this treasure is well catalogued, curated and accessible.



One of the herbarium cupboards with specimens safely housed and ordered in Stace 3 taxonomic sequence.

Photo ©Liz McDonnell



## New Eyes in Old Haunts

### Karen Netto (Andrews)

My return to live in Somerset in January 2019 has meant that I have been able to revisit many of my childhood botanical haunts. Family anecdotes relate that I was always mad about plants. It probably started with daisy chains on my grandparents' lawn. The hobby turned into a full-blown craze at age 13, after walking on flower-strewn cliff-tops during a May family holiday to Guernsey. On our return, I was forever out roaming the local Mendip Hills, woods, meadows, grass verges and moors with my Collins Wild Flower Guide. One of my favourite spots was Cheddar Wood with its haze of native Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).

I've never lost my love of plants. Botany never appeared as a career option. In those days, you either had to take all Arts subjects or all Science subjects. I had a recognised talent for languages, but wasn't an all-rounder in science subjects. There wasn't enough plant content in Biology A level for me and I was way too squeamish to be cutting up rats. It's funny how with each passing year my interest in science and technology has increased alongside my languages.

My London-based career meant that my plant fascination had to take a different form. Gardening and garden visits provided my plant fix for many years, coming as I did from a long line of gardeners. My love of wild flowers or 'weeds' makes me somewhat of a family oddity. I encouraged my sons to grow seeds, flowers, fruit and vegetables in the garden. Unfortunately, their initial interest didn't last beyond primary school years.

The opportunity to go on a group wild flower holiday to Greece arose in Spring 2017. I jumped at it. The holiday reignited my childhood craze for wild flowers. Most of all, I realised how many wild flowers we have lost in Britain. The flowers in Epirus and Corfu were buzzing with insects. I was enraptured.

My translation work had gradually leant towards environmental themes. My two lifetime interests merged. I met Dr Jonathan Mitchley at a Linnean Society event and found myself enrolled on the MSc in Plant Diversity at the University of Reading in September 2017. His enthusiasm for plants and that of Dr Alastair Culham was catching.

There is so much to learn about plants. My Latin proved useful, but there were embarrassingly huge

gaps in my understanding and memory at other times. I hadn't used a microscope since my school days – and they never let us have our own back then. After years of working in an office, I loved field botany best of all – whatever the weather. The course was over far too quickly. I had to carry on learning on my own.



Wild flower tour of Epirus, Greece. Crown Vetch, *Securigera varia* with grasses. ©Karen Netto (Andrews)

I returned to Somerset with new eyes. I was despondent that there were so few orchids about. The Cowslips (*Primula veris*), that had always accompanied them, were also thin on the ground. The Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), seemed to grow so much further up the hill at Cheddar Wood than I remembered. The banks were not as full of Primroses (*Primula vulgaris*). There were lots of grasses and sedges about that I had never paid attention to before. The woodland sedges must always have been interspersed with my favourite Bluebells, but I had no recollection of them. I had no-one to guide me as a child. I was unaware of the BSBI or any local wildflower groups.

In January 2019, I participated in the BSBI New Year Plant Hunt on my own. I later discovered that I had walked on, not just one side, but three sides of Liz McDonnell's house in the process. Had I known that one of the North Somerset Vice-County Recorders lived there I wouldn't have dared!

I finally met Liz on a Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG) meeting at Cheddar Wood. I have greatly benefited over the past year from having a botanical recorder on my doorstep and I would like to thank Liz for all her encouragement. She's helpful when I am confused about a plant identification. It's also lovely to have someone local who shares my ability to talk about plants and botanical books for hours over a cup of tea. Botany is still a pastime that I

enjoy on my own sometimes, but I now appreciate all the botanical recording events with the Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG) and the occasional joint recording trip.

There's no cure now: I'm completely hooked on plants.



Purple Gromwell, (*Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum*), in Cheddar Wood ©Karen Netto (Andrews)

## (Yet more) Dandelions in VC5!

**Simon Leach, Graham Lavender & Jeanne Webb**

Perhaps the most exciting development on the dandelion front in 2019 concerned a specimen collected in 2017 and determined by the national expert John Richards (AJR) as *Taraxacum litorale* (Leach & Richards 2018a, 2018b, and SRPG Newsletter 18: pp 43-4). We speculated that this scarce and declining species of wet grasslands of the Baltic region may have arrived in Taunton on the clothing or footwear of an agricultural worker from Eastern Europe, or possibly on the tyre treads of a farm vehicle. It was, after all, found beside a lane leading to a farm employing many casual workers from Eastern Europe, as well running an import-export business buying and selling agricultural machinery.

This explanation became less plausible when, in 2018, what seemed to be the same species was found at further locations in and around Taunton. Also, amongst specimens collected in 2017 there was one from Simon's back garden that had been determined as a rather odd-looking *T. britannicum*, but a further collection in 2018 suggested that this, too, was *T. litorale*. With more specimens there came growing uncertainty about the true identity of this dandelion, not least because *T. litorale* is supposed to be pollen-less whereas our plants

usually had pollen. AJR consulted with a German taraxacologist, Ingo Uhlemann, who looked at our material and concluded that it really couldn't be *T. litorale*, and that the peculiar combination of floral and leaf characters didn't seem to match any known taxon from mainland Europe.

Thus, in early 2019 AJR described the Somerset plant as a new species within section *Celtica*. He gave the name *T. amicorum*, meaning 'Dandelion of Friends'. As he explained, "the name [*T. amicorum*] refers both to the Society of Friends [Quakers], whose Meeting House in Taunton was the venue for the BSBI *Taraxacum* workshop in 2016, and to the friendly circle of botanists in the Somerset Rare Plants Group who were inspired by that workshop to tackle the *Taraxacum* flora in their area" (Richards 2019). It is currently not known outside Somerset, so is likely to be either an English or a GB endemic. For sake of completeness, and to correct previous published references to *T. litorale*, all records of *T. amicorum* are listed below.

We also list here several more records of *T. atrocollinum*, another section *Celtica* species that we included in a previous report under its 'working name' (SRPG Newsletter 18, pp 42-3), and which (like *T. amicorum*) has now been formally described and named (Richards 2019). It was first collected during the 2016 BSBI/SRPG *Taraxacum* workshop by Les Tucker, and we still fondly refer to it by its local nickname 'Tucker's Beauty'! Its scientific name, *T. atrocollinum*, means 'Dandelion of the Dark Hill', commemorating the location of its discovery in the Blackdown Hills. It really is a rather distinctive, characterful and (dare we say it) beautiful dandelion, and although we have now found it in a couple of sites in the west of the county it does seem to have a distribution very much centred on the Somerset/Devon border in the Blackdown Hills.

*T. chlorofragale* is another recently described species (Richards 2019), recorded for the first time in Somerset in 2019. Like *T. pietii-oosterveldii*, found in our area in 2018 (SRPG Newsletter 19: p. 32), it is a dandelion included within the morphologically variable '*T. nordstedtii* group'. Unlike *T. amicorum* and *T. atrocollinum*, *T. chlorofragale* is also known to occur in mainland Europe (Netherlands and Denmark).

In addition to these three recently described species, we also list below, in alphabetical order, six other taxa for which our records represent county and/or VC5 'firsts'. Dates refer to 2019 unless otherwise



stated. All records are based on material collected by us and determined/confirmed by AJR; in every case, voucher specimens are being deposited in the Somerset/SANHS herbarium in Taunton (TTN). Collectors: GEL = Graham Lavender; SJL = Simon Leach; JW = Jeanne Webb. With these additions, the *Taraxacum* flora of Somerset now stands at 156 species, 140 in VC5 and 90 in VC6.

***Taraxacum amicum*** – [1] Taunton, Sherford Road, in lane-side flower border (ST22482326), 1 May 2017, SJL, det. AJR (this is the specimen originally determined as *T. litorale* and illustrated in SRPG Newsletter 18, p. 44). [2] Taunton, Tangier Way/Wood Street, grassy road verge (ST22562483), 14 Apr 2018, SJL, det. AJR, voucher deposited at Cardiff (NMW), and designated the 'TYPE SPECIMEN'. [3] Taunton, brick path in back garden of 15 Trinity Street (ST23502440), 9 Mar 2017 and 6 May 2018, SJL, det. AJR (originally determined as *T. britannicum*). [4] Thurlbear Wood, edge of path through woodland (ST26732060), 8 May 2018, SJL, det./conf. AJR. [5] Adcombe Wood, footpath/track through woodland (ST229184), 18 May 2018, SJL, det./conf. AJR. [6] Orchard Wood, wood-bank beside public footpath (ST252201), with *T. atrocollinum* and *T. laticordatum*, 15 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR. [Also: G.B. Gruffy SWT nature reserve, in rushy grassland (ST476564), 13 May 2017, R.D. Randall, det. AJR (although originally 'indet'); the sole record for VC6.]

***Taraxacum amplum*** – [1] Taunton, Longrun Meadow, grassy verge of footpath nr Tesco supermarket (ST219246), 23 Mar, SJL, det. AJR. [2] Brushford, in grassy lay-by at edge of village (SS92242559), 11 Apr, GEL, det. AJR. First and second records for VC5 and Somerset.

***Taraxacum atrocollinum*** – records listed here are in addition to those given in SRPG Newsletter 18, pp 42-3. [1] Putham Lane, on bank of damp sunken lane (SS93313891), 25 Apr 2018, GEL, det. AJR. [2] Corfe, lane verge nr church (ST23211970), 9 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR. [3] Bishopswood/Churchinford, verge of B3170 (ST23881277), 9 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR. [4] Bishopswood, in lane verge and hedge-bank (ST242127), many plants, 9 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR. [5] Orchard Wood, wood-bank beside public footpath (ST252201), with *T. amicum* and *T. laticordatum*, 15 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR.

***Taraxacum chlorofrugale*** – [1] Barlynch Wood, grassy road verge/start of footpath to Louisa Gate (SS93472810), 30 Mar, GEL, det. AJR. [2] Culbone, verge of lane/moorland edge (SS84914746), 31 Mar,

GEL, det. AJR. [3] Colescombe Wood, on S side of wood in steep S-facing well-grazed agriculturally unimproved field (SS88074552), 29 Apr, GEL, det. AJR. First and subsequent records for VC5 and Somerset.

***Taraxacum dilaceratum*** – [1] Daws Wood, grassy verge in lay-by (SS92493046), 30 Mar, GEL, det. AJR. [2] Taunton, grassy road verge on Bindon Road (ST207250), 31 Mar, SJL, conf. AJR. First and second records for VC5.



*Taraxacum dilaceratum* from grass verge of Bindon Road, Taunton. Voucher specimen to be held in Somerset County Herbarium (TTN). ©Simon Leach

***Taraxacum euryphyllum*** – [1] Hawkcombe Woods, in woodland beside stream (SS86394549), 13 May, GEL, det. AJR. [2] Hawkcombe, grassy verge of bridleway opposite The Hunting Lodge (SS87674576), 19 May, GEL, det. AJR. First and second records for VC5 and Somerset.

***Taraxacum haworthianum*** – Bossington, in S-facing neutral coastal grassland (SS90124791), 23 May, GEL, det. AJR. First record for VC5.

***Taraxacum kernianum*** – Willett Hill, edge of track through woodland (ST09823392), 12 Apr, JW, det. AJR. First record for VC5 and Somerset.

***Taraxacum obliquilobum*** – Hawkcombe, garden path of Higher Combe (SS88394584), 29 Apr, GEL, det. AJR. First record for VC5 and Somerset.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to John Richards for his continuing interest in the *Taraxacum* flora of Somerset, and for examining and pronouncing upon our collections.

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## Gall of the Year 2019 – *Plagiotrochus quercusilicis*

### Simon Leach

This year's 'gong' goes to a gall found on leaves of Evergreen Oak (*Quercus ilex*), caused by the sexual generation of the gall-wasp *Plagiotrochus quercusilicis*. A southern European species with a distribution centred on France, Italy and the Iberian Peninsula, it is a recent arrival in Britain having been first recorded in 2004, in Cornwall. Since then this gall wasp has been noted from a thin scatter of sites along the south coast of England including the Isle of Wight, as well as outliers in London and on the east coast in Essex where it may have been accidentally introduced on imported trees.

On 23 May 2019 *P. quercusilicis* was recorded for the first time in Somerset, when Aidan Houlders and I came across several Evergreen Oaks laden with galls close to the railway station at Watchet (ST07344335). Aid who lives in Birmingham and has a particular interest in steam railways rather than plant galls – which meant that while one of us got terribly excited the other one was wondering what all the fuss was about!

The galls are really quite striking, unmistakable and unmissable structures. Each affected leaf carries a single large, ovoid or globular gall which is bright red, hard, multi-chambered and sparsely hairy (Fig. 1). Affected leaves are often much reduced in size, the gall then taking over more or less the whole leaf blade, with just a narrow fringe protruding.

Like *Trioza centranthi*, featured in last year's newsletter, this is a species that seems to be on the move, so it would be well worth keeping an eye out for it anywhere in the county where the host tree grows – but maybe especially on or near the coast. If you are searching for it, do also watch out for the chocolate- or rust-coloured 'felt' gall caused by the gall-mite *Aceria ilicis* (Fig. 2). This is another Mediterranean/southern European species, but it is probably now quite frequent in our area, inland as well as on the coast – although still greatly under-recorded. Amazingly, the first Somerset record for *A. ilicis* (12 October 2013) came from the very same Evergreen Oaks at Watchet station – and even coincided with another visit from the same friend! (Poor chap.)



Fig. 1 Galls of the gall-wasp *Plagiotrochus quercusilicis* on leaves of Evergreen Oak (*Quercus ilex*) ©Simon Leach



Fig. 2 'Felt' galls on Evergreen Oak (*Quercus ilex*) caused by the gall-mite *Aceria ilicis*. This shows chocolate-brown erinea on underside of leaf; upper surface is smooth and slightly raised or blistered. ©Simon Leach



# Plant Records for 2019

## Helena Crouch

In 2019, over 93,000 records were made for vascular plants in Somerset, which is a phenomenal achievement. Thank you very much to everyone who sent any records, all of which contribute to the BSBI's Atlas 2020 project as well as being useful at a local scale. Most new Somerset/Vice-County records were inevitably for alien species, although excitingly two native hybrids were found new to Somerset. Many significant records were made for native taxa, including Rare Plant Register species, some of which are listed in the third section. Note that records for *Taraxacum* species are listed separately. All records below are for 2019 unless otherwise stated. Those marked with an asterisk are neophytes (recent introductions). Recorders and referees whose names appear more than once have been abbreviated as follows:

CVWG	Cam Valley Wildlife Group
SRPG	Somerset Rare Plants Group
HJC	Helena Crouch
RFitzG	Ro FitzGerald
RG	Roger Golding
DEG	Dave Green
RJH	Rupert Higgins
GEL	Graham Lavender
SJL	Simon Leach
EJMcD	Liz McDonnell
EllenMcD	Ellen McDouall
SJP	Stephen Parker
JP	John Poingdestre
RDR	Rob Randall
GHR	Gill Read
TCGR	Tim Rich
APR	Andrew Robinson
FJR	Fred Rumsey
ITS	Ian Salmon
GS	Georgina Shuckburgh
PDS	Paul Stanley
JW	Jeanne Webb

Where reference is made to Green, P.R., Green, I.P. & Crouch, G.A. (1997) *The Atlas Flora of Somerset*, it is abbreviated to *AFS*.

## New Somerset Records

\**Argyranthemum frutescens* (White Marguerite) – Chilton Polden (ST37903970), 1 May, in gutter, N side of road, JP, VC6.

\**Cardamine occulta* – Gordano Services (M5) (ST50987566), 6 Apr, five plants in planter at edge of

car park, outside Starbucks, FJR; Clevedon, Nortons Wood Lane (ST42397225), 6 Apr, eight plants in a tub outside 'Norwood', on S side of lane, FJR (conf. TCGR), VC6.

*Carex x boeninghausiana* (*C. paniculata* x *remota*) – The Drift, Chard (ST34630821), 10 Oct, one large tussock, near both parents, in alder carr, JP (conf. Mike Porter), VC5.

\**Cotoneaster microphyllus* (Small-leaved Cotoneaster) – Cross Quarry (ST4154), 9 Jul, several prostrate bushes on Cross Quarry cliff edges, EJMcD & Tony Robinson (conf. HJC), VC6.

\**Cotula australis* (Annual Buttonweed) – Home Farm Holiday Centre (ST10694294), 8 Mar, covering c. 20-30% of a grass strip 4m x 1.5m at Touring parking site No 13, RFitzG, GEL & ITS (conf. Eric Clement), VC5.

\**Cotula coronopifolia* (Buttonweed) – Bath, Newton Park (ST693645), 31 Aug, by stream in pasture, RDR, VC6.

*Dactylorhiza incarnata* subsp. *pulchella* (Early Marsh-orchid) – Yarty Moor Reserve (ST23561607), 16 Jun, thirteen plants in flower/fruit in glorious mire, SRPG (det. FJR), VC5. First record for this subspecies in Somerset.

*Dryopteris lacunosa* – Clevedon, Nortons Wood Lane (ST42457225), 6 Apr, one plant on bank on S side of lane, FJR (conf. RG); Bourton Combe (ST50516872), 1 Jun, one plant at side of footpath, HJC (conf. Alison Evans, RG & FJR), VC6.

\**Eryngium bourgatii* (Mediterranean Sea-holly) – Bristol Airport, A38 E of (ST51286489), 20 Jul, one striking blue plant on the verge of A38, RJH, VC6.

\**Francoa sonchifolia* (Bridal Wreath) – High Littleton (ST64545874), 22 Feb, one plant at S edge of field to N of Sixpence, HJC & DEG, VC6.

\**Geranium yeoi* (Greater Herb-Robert) – Weston-super-Mare, Worle (ST35216304), 24 Jan, three plants, one in flower, at edge of alley between Pilgrims Way and Tormynton Road, HJC & FJR, VC6.

\**Haloragis erecta* 'Wellington Bronze' (Erect Seaberry, Toatoa) – East Quantoxhead, Court House (ST13694360), 30 Oct, one large bushy plant growing in timber yard, RFitzG, VC5.

\**Helleborus niger* (Christmas-rose) – Huntworth Business Park (ST30573487), 31 Jan, one plant on side of path, SJP, VC5.

\**Linum grandiflorum* (Crimson Flax) – Churchill Batch (ST4459), 16 Jul, several plants in disturbed area of the Crown Inn car park, probably from a seed packet, EJMcd & EllenMcD, VC6.

\**Nothoscordum borbonicum* (Honeybells) – Bath, Walcot Parade (ST752657), 13 Sep, Pennant paving below railings, RDR, VC6.

\**Persicaria glabra* (Denseflower Knotweed) – Bath, Prior Park (ST76156345), 19 Aug, eight plants on waste ground by former tea shed, HJC & DEG (conf. John Akeroyd), VC6. Third record for Britain and first since 1984.

\**Phymatosorus diversifolius*, now *Zealandia pustulata* (Kangaroo Fern) – Tyntesfield (ST50597118), 6 Sep, one plant on trunk of tree fern in sheltered courtyard at N corner of Kitchen Garden, HJC & FJR, VC6. Almost certainly arrived with the tree fern.

*Scutellaria x hybrida* (*S. galericulata x minor*) – Lanacre (SS82493600), 31 Jul, two plants in flower amongst many vegetative *Scutellaria* plants on S bank of river, c. 3m from edge, GEL, VC5.

\* *Sedum kimnachii* – Walton-in-Gordano, Farley (ST428745), 12 May, coast path near chalets, spread from local garden but rapidly taking over large areas, RDR, VC6.

\* *Sempervivum arachnoideum* (Cobweb House-leek) – Bath, Bloomfield Drive (ST73846286), 12 Nov, few clumps on old wall at E end of road, HJC & DEG, VC6.

### New Vice-County Records

*Crepis biennis* (Rough Hawk's-beard) – Holnicote Estate Office (SS91214631), 14 Jun, 38 plants on grass verge opposite estate office turn, corner between A39 and Selworthy road, GEL (det. RFitzG), VC5.

\**Griselinia littoralis* (New Zealand Broadleaf) – Weston-super-Mare, Kewstoke Road (ST35056354), 24 Jan, one large shrub on bank on NE side of road, no other planted shrubs so may be self-sown, HJC & FJR, VC6.

\**Knautia macedonica* (Macedonian scabious) – Holford (ST1541), 11 Aug, one plant on lane verge close to houses, SRPG & Wild Flower Society, VC5.

\**Lonicera henryi* (Henry's Honeysuckle) – Hawkcombe Woods (SS87574582), 5 Jan, escaped from garden of long-empty house, now self-seeding on banks of stream, GEL, VC5.

\**Luzula nivea* (Snow-white Wood-rush) – Bath, Victoria Bridge Moorings (ST74226495), 29 Dec, one plant self-sown in stonework of quay, from plantings on nearby bank, HJC, VC6.

*Rosa x rothschildii* (*Rosa canina x sherardii*) – Bratton (SS94654621), 8 Oct, in hedge by stream, GEL, VC5.

\**Sasaella ramosa* (Hairy Bamboo) – Forton, Blackland Lane (ST34030685), 10 Oct, a clump on north side of short side lane leading to the ford, EJMcd & GHR, VC5.

\**Scilla peruviana* (Portuguese Squill) – Westbury Quarry (ST505504), 15 Jun, one plant in flower near rim of quarry and another, not in flower, a few feet away, Pat Steele, VC6.

\**Spiraea douglasii* (Steeple-bush) – Corston, W of (ST6865), 31 Aug, roadside from garden refuse, RDR, VC6.

\**Trifolium tomentosum* (Woolly Clover) – Taunton (ST23592520), 21 May, one flowering/fruitlet plant on roadside bank in open short mown sward on droughty soil, with *Torilis nodosa*, *Plantago coronopus* and *Trifolium dubium*, SJL (conf. David Pearman, Chris Preston and HJC), VC5.



*Trifolium tomentosum* ©Simon Leach

\**Zantedeschia aethiopica* (Altar-lily) – Blue Anchor, Marshwood Farm (ST02344286), 28 Aug 2015, one plant in field ditch near farm, JW, VC5.



### Other Interesting Records – *Native species*

*Adonis annua* (Pheasant's-eye) – Parchey Bridge (ST35143787), 25 May, one plant with c.100 flowers on W bank of ditch parallel to King's Sedgemoor Drain, N of car park, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1938.



*Adonis annua* at Parchey Bridge ©Helena Crouch

*Bupleurum tenuissimum* (Slender Hare's-ear) – Bridgwater, E of (ST322365), 28 Aug, many plants on both verges of A372, either side of M5 bridge, APR, VC6. First post-2000 record for ST33 and for an inland site.

*Carduus x stangii* (*C. crispus* x *nutans*) – Bath, Odd Down Park & Ride (ST73286132), 3 Jul, one plant on gravelly mound in 'mitigation area' S of car park, with both parents, HJC & CVWG; (ST73196135), 10 Jul, several more tall plants nearby, HJC & DEG (conf. Tim Rayner), VC6. Fifth record for VC6 and first post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.



*Carduus x stangii* at Odd Down, Bath ©Helena Crouch

*Carex humilis* (Dward Sedge) – White Sheet Downs (ST80623602), 23 Jun, 12 patches on SE-facing bank above track at N end of SSSI, SRPG (found by Mark Kitchen), VC6. First record for VC6 part of White Sheet Hill SSSI.

*Chenopodium glaucum*, now *Oxybasis glauca* (Oak-leaved Goosefoot) – Lipyeate (ST68775017, ST68805015), 13 Aug, 11 plants on piles of dumped soil in field, HJC & Peter Watson, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset since 1938.

*Crassula tillaea* (Mossy Stonecrop) – Burnham-on-Sea (ST30364829), Feb, scattered at Plots 21 and 28 of caravan park, PDS, VC5. New site for species previously only recorded in a few sites in the E of VC6.

*Eleogiton fluitans* (Floating Club-rush) – Stock Moor Bridgwater (ST29233520), 7 Jul, a large colony 1 X 17m on edge of large pond, SJP, VC5. New hectad record for a VC5 Scarce species.

*Fumaria bastardii* (Tall Ramping-fumitory) – Brean (ST296585), 18 Apr, by car park, Jo Parmenter & David Lester (conf. TCGR), VC6. First record for VC6 since AFS.

*Fumaria purpurea* (Purple Ramping-fumitory) – Middlezoy, N of (ST37503467), 15 May, two plants in grassy field on E bank of rhyne, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1903.

*Gymnocarpium robertianum* (Limestone Fern) – Mells, Colliers Way (ST73505034), 5 Jun, three plants on damp N-facing buttress on E side of disused railway bridge along the Colliers Way cycle path, HJC & CVWG, VC6. Updates a pre-1896 hectad record for Nationally Scarce species.

*Polystichum* x *bicknellii* – Forton, Chard (ST34060727), 3 Aug, with both parents in damp woodland between stream and disused railway line, EJMcd & GHR, VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

*Radiola linoides* (Allseed) – Pitney (ST438292), 5 Oct, in a garden pot filled with Bradford's Builders' Sand, presumably arrived as seed in the sand, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1960.

*Ranunculus arvensis* (Corn Buttercup) – Somerton, S of (ST4926), 9 Jul, Alison Mitchell (Plantlife), VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.

*Rosa x dumetorum* (*R. obtusifolia* x *canina*) – Barford Park (ST23343626), Sep, in hedge on L just before entering the park on road, GEL, VC5. Third record for VC5 and first since AFS.

*Rosa x rothschildii* (*R. canina* x *sherardii*) – 10 Oct, Luckwell Bridge (SS90483827), a short distance down footpath from Thorne Lane; Bossington Marsh (SS88194768), 12 Oct, in hedge 12m past small bridge; Selworthy Great Wood (SS91514628), 19 Oct, just before entering wood, GEL, VC5. Second, third and fourth records for VC5.

*Rosa x scabriuscula* (*R. canina* x *tomentosa*) – Englishcombe, S of (ST7161), 3 Aug, trackside, RDR, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.

*Scutellaria x hybrida* (*S. galericulata* x *minor*) – The Drift, Chard (ST34630821), 10 Oct, frequent in alder-sallow carr, scrambling over adjoining plants, JP, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

*Tragopogon x mirabilis* (*T. porrifolius* x *pratensis*) – Longrun Meadow (ST21512517), 30 May, with both parents, Keith Gould (conf. SJL & SJP), VC5. Third record for VC5 and first for VC5 and Somerset since AFS.

*Trifolium ornithopodioides* (Bird's-foot Clover) – Podimore Services (ST53782501), 16 Jun, 12 plants in fruit on edge of verge at W side of car park, FJR, VC6. First inland record in VC6 and a new hectad record for a VC6 Scarce species. Still present at the only other inland Somerset site, in Vivary Park, Taunton, where first found in 2010.

*Vulpia ciliata* subsp. *ambigua* (Purple Fescue) – Dunster Beach (SS99724547, SS99804532, ST00244477), 12 Jul, locally frequent around path next to golf course and in front of chalets (seaward side), GEL, ITS, RFitzG & JW, VC5. First post-2000 records for VC5.

### Other Interesting Records – Alien species

\**Abutilon theophrasti* (Velvetleaf) – Herons Green (ST5559), 27 Aug, 1 plant, RJH, VC6. Second post-2000 record for Somerset.

\**Amaranthus caudatus* (Love-lies-bleeding) – Avalon Marshes Centre (ST426414), 31 Aug, few plants on waste ground by tea shop (site of new classroom), SRPG; Street (ST477352), 15 Oct, self-seeding on roadside, APR, GS & Linda Everton, VC6. Fourth and fifth records for VC6 and first post-2000 records for Somerset.

\**Anchusa azurea* (Garden Anchusa) – Shapwick (ST41123882), 9 Jun, one plant on farm dump, JP, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first for Somerset since AFS.

\**Aster lanceolatus* (Narrow-leaved Michaelmas-daisy) – Bath, Odd Down (ST730616), 14 Sep, on

road verge, RDR; Launcherley, Wellesley Farm (ST557438), 28 Sep, in weedy corner of field near houses, APR, GS, Fiona Davis & Hilary Brownnett, VC6. Fourth and fifth records for VC6 and first since pre-2000.

\**Capsella rubella* (Pink Shepherd's-purse) – Brean (ST300554), Feb, [in caravan park]; Burnham-on-Sea (ST30384831), Feb, many thousands, PDS, VC6. Third and fourth records for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Cuscuta campestris* (Yellow Dodder) – Faulkland, Somerset Lavender Farm (ST74045420), 4 Sep, abundant on Niger crop at SE edge of lavender field, HJC & DEG, VC6. Third site for VC6.

\**Bergenia x schmidtii* – Westbury Quarry (ST5050), 10 Aug, EJMcd, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.

\**Chenopodium giganteum* (Tree Spinach) – Bath, Walcot Street (ST75086518), 1 Jan, many plants on a shallow bank between car park and access road, DEG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and fourth for Somerset.

\**Cynara cardunculus* (Globe Artichoke) – Mark (ST36894793), 5 Jul, three tall flowering plants on side of ditch at the side of a grassy drive, more than 100m from nearest house, EJMcd, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first since AFS.

\**Euphorbia myrsinites* (Broad-leaved Glaucous-spurge) – Middlezoy (ST37363269), 20 May, one plant at base of roadside wall, not sown or planted, JP, VC6. Second record for VC6.

\**Euphorbia x pseudovirgata* (Twiggy Spurge) – Newton St Loe, Claysend Farm (ST710641), 7 Sep, on road verge, RDR, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.

\**Genista hispanica* (Spanish Gorse) – Bridgwater (ST30183656), 27 Oct, at least four seedlings/young plants established in hard tarmac surface adjoining shrubbery in which this species had been planted, SRPG, VC5. Second record for VC5 and first since AFS.

\**Glebionis coronaria* (Crown Daisy) – Chilton Polden (ST37903970), 1 May, one large plant at base of roadside wall behind telecoms pole, not planted, but outside a garden with a wide variety of plants, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1939.

\**Iberis sempervirens* (Perennial Candytuft) – Churchill Batch (ST4459), 19 Feb, garden throw-out on scruffy area in car park of the Crown Inn, EJMcd & EllenMcd, VC6. Second site for VC6.



\**Iris orientalis* (Turkish Iris) – Hengrove (ST6069), 4 Jun, RJH, VC6. Second site for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Knautia macedonica* (Macedonian scabious) – Bath, Sydney Buildings (ST758647), 15 Sep, self-sown in Pennant paving, RDR, VC6. Second record for VC6.

\**Lappula squarrosa* (Bur Forget-me-not) – Cheddar Reservoir (ST443542), 2 Oct, one plant on shore of reservoir, RJH, VC6. Second post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Lathraea clandestina* (Purple Toothwort) – Bath, Cedric Road (ST73216572), 10 May, in garden which backs onto Gainsborough Gardens Woodland (where this was first found in 1954), Juliet Reid, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1998 at only known site.

\**Malcolmia maritima* (Virginia Stock) – Bath, Widcombe (ST752636), 5 May, base of wall, RDR, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.

\**Mauranthemum paludosum* (Annual Marguerite) – Batheaston (ST781674), 13 May, in paving at base of wall, RDR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first since 1871.

\**Nicotiana alata* (Sweet Tobacco) – Chilson Common (ST3304), 24 Oct, flowering on farm tip, JP, VC5. Second record for VC5.

\**Oxalis dillenii* (Sussex Yellow-sorrel) – Langport (ST42242674), 6 Oct, in paving at S side of church, SRPG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Philadelphus coronarius* (Mock-orange) – Broomfield (ST22253197), 3 Jun, lane-side hedge-bank in otherwise “natural” hedgerow vegetation, SJL, VC5. Second post-2000 record for VC5.

\**Physalis peruviana* (Cape-gooseberry) – Oath (ST38142771), 20 Sep, several plants about to flower on railway bridge embankment, JP, VC5. Fourth record for VC5 and second since AFS.

\* *Pyracantha rogersiana* (Asian Firethorn) – Ford Farm Slopes LWS (ST36463920), 30 Aug, self-seeded shrub, JP, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Sedum hybridum*, now *Phedimus hybridus* (Siberian Stonecrop) – Bridgwater, Rhode Lane (ST301360), 24 Oct, one young plant in pavement at base of garden wall ('parent' clump in adjoining garden), SJL, VC5. Fourth record for VC5 and second since AFS.

\**Senecio inaequidens* (Narrow-leaved Ragwort) – Taunton, Venture Way (ST24012588), 14 Jun, one plant on roadside at base of fence outside City Plumbing Supplies; M5 Motorway (ST3033), 18 Jun,

one plant on central reservation, S bound carriageway, just S of Bridgwater junction (24); Monkton Heathfield (ST26052731), 24 Oct, one plant on verge S side of A3259, opposite Blundells Lane and Proctor's Farm, SJL, VC5. Fourth and subsequent records for VC5.

\* *Spiraea salicifolia* (Bridewort) – Westonzoyland (ST35903575), 3 Jun, well grown shrub at side of field gateway on the moor, JP, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.

\**Zantedeschia aethiopica* (Alta-lily) – Taunton (ST22412451), 21 Jun, next to stream behind Tower Lane/Willow Tree restaurant/Taunton Central Mosque, undoubtedly originally planted, but appears to be spreading into 'semi-wild', SJL, VC5. Second record for VC5.

## SRPG Membership and Contacts

Somerset Rare Plants Group annual subscription is currently £8, payable in January of each year. Payment can be made by cheque or direct into SRPG account. Contact the Treasurer Clive Lovatt (see below) for payment details. Members attend meetings at their own risk. Field meeting leaders carry a list of emergency phone numbers so please contact Ellen McDouall if you have not completed a membership form, so that she has the telephone numbers of those to contact in case of illness or accident.

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