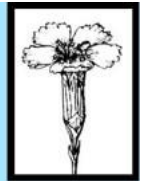


SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



2021 Newsletter

Issue No. 22



2021 open-air committee meeting at Burrow Mump. From left to right: Helena Crouch, Val Graham, Graham Lavender, Simon Leach, Liz McDonnell, Clive Lovatt and Ellen McDouall. Photo: © Steve Parker

Chairman's 2021 Review

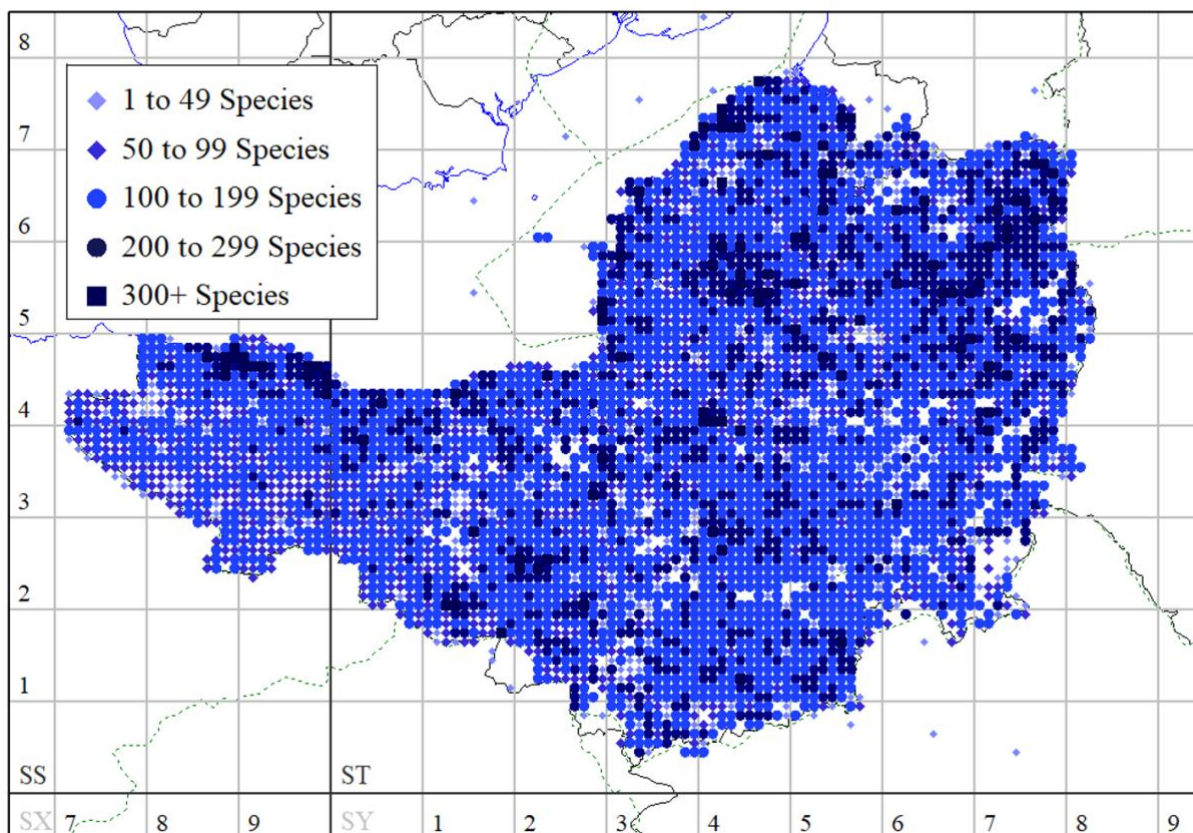
Welcome everyone to the 2021 SRPG Newsletter. I was really pleased that the group were able to restart a programme of field meetings this year. To better manage the group, we introduced a booking system for field meetings and other events, this allowed us to control number and comply with COVID-19 regulations when visiting a site. I hope that smaller groups at field events improves the experience of members on these meetings. With this in mind, we will continue with the requirement to book for SRPG events in 2022.

In November, I was invited to talk to a U3A on the work of the SRPG. "Why do you record plant distributions?" asked a member of the U3A. A really good question. My answer was that knowing the distribution of a plant is the first critical step in conserving a species. It is really important that the information we collect is used by conservation organisations in their site management and future planning. We should, where possible, record a plant's location at a site level so that the information can be used by the landowner.

Planting trees and rewilding are now very much in fashion with landowners and conservation organisations. This is a great approach to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. However, it can be a threat to some open habitats and species. Again, a good understanding of what is present on a site is the critical first step when planning to plant trees or change the management of a site. Remember "right tree, right place" is a good first move in any tree planting project.

Remember Vice County Recorders are more than happy to provide you with information from the MapMate and BSBI database as well as help with plant identification. Our website also has detailed information from the Rare Plants Register on many of the special plants found in the county.

VC5 and 6 Total Species per Monad 2000 onwards



If you have not already discovered it, the SRPG WhatsApp group is a very active discussion forum. It is available free for all members to join. The website continues to be the main way potential new members get involved with the group. Recruitment of new members appears to have slowed a little from previous years. Nonetheless, we remain a very active recording group.

Last winter season, we were unable to hold our regular indoor meetings. These were partly replaced with a series of little projects. Chris Loudon and Linda Everton organised a project to record mistletoe in your local area. This was a very successful exercise, gathering information on the host tree species and abundance by counting the number of bunches on a tree. To support this project, we held a Zoom talk on the biology of mistletoe by *Mr Mistletoe* Jonathan Briggs. Members also took part in the *Chairman's Challenge* recording plants in flower in the winter months in their local 1km square, this generated some good records as well as keeping members interested in recording in the colder months of the year. Reports of First Flowering Dates continued to be submitted by members to Simon Leach.

Our first face-to-face SRPG committee meeting in 2021 was held on the slopes of Burrow Mump. Here we discussed the winter programme and other SRPG business. We decided by a vote that it was probably best if the 2021 AGM be held over Zoom. While I recognise that not everyone is comfortable with or has the resources to use Zoom technology, it feels safer to meet remotely given the ongoing pandemic. It is my hope that by the 2022 AGM we can all meet up again to enjoy a shared lunch, listen to talks and endure one of my *much-loved* quizzes.

Looking forward to 2022, we have a full programme of site visits across the county of Somerset together with more focused learning events. Encouraging new members to join the group and helping them to improve their botanical skills is a key part of the SRPG's work. I look forward to seeing you all again in the field in 2022 and continuing the group's critical work.

By Steve Parker

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Part 1: 2021 Meeting Reports

Sunday 18th April 2021 at Quants SSSI

Leader & Report: Simon Leach



Simon demonstrates an alternative use for wallpaper. Photo: © Graham Lavender

It's never wise to start an account of a day's botanising with an apology. But these were exceptional circumstances in that (due to COVID-19 regulations) our first field meeting of the year had to be restricted to just six people, meaning that some members who were hoping to attend unfortunately had to miss out. So this apology is directed squarely at those who couldn't be with us.

Our aim, on a day of unbroken sunshine and barely a breath of wind, was first of all to visit the Butterfly Conservation reserve in the eastern half of Quants SSSI. We last visited this area as a group five years ago as part of the SRPG/BSBI Dandelion Workshop led by John Richards; ten years ago, we had a joint meeting here with SANHS when the highlight for many wasn't a plant at all but a butterfly, a beautiful just-emerged Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*). We noted that it was actually five years ago *to the day* since that flying visit to check out the dandelions; and what a day it was, too, with 16 species recorded in less than an hour including two new to Somerset, Bluish Dandelion (*Taraxacum melanthoides*) and Retz's Dandelion (*T. retzii*). Three of our party (Graham, Alastair, and Simon) had been here on that occasion.

Today, though, we would make a zigzag traverse of the reserve, then take the track/footpath skirting the northern edge of an SWT reserve (also called 'Quants'),

through Buckland Wood to a second SWT reserve at Ruggin. The whole of the area, including all three reserves, lies within Quants SSSI, which is also a 'Special Area for Conservation' (SAC) — this being a European designation conferred on the site due to the (former?) presence of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly (*Euphydryas aurinia*).

This was to be the first 'official' SRPG field meeting since the beginning of the pandemic more than a year ago; in fact, our first since the New Year Plant Hunt in Taunton at the start of 2020. The highlight of the day was surely just the pleasure to be had from being out as a *group* again rather than on one's own or maybe with one or two others. In the year and a bit since our last meeting our leader had clearly forgotten the pace at which a day's botanising progresses: the two to three hour walk he'd planned could easily have taken us seven hours had we let it. As it was, we just about made it round in five, the walk back from the meadows at Ruggin being done without stopping, although still at a speed that allowed us to make a few useful records along the way.

The great thing about botanising in a group is that each person tends to be attuned to slightly different things; so, if you're part of a group, you end up seeing/being shown far more than if you'd been there on your own. Graham's eye for hybrids, for instance, turned up *Rumex x dufftii* (the hybrid between *R. obtusifolius* and *R. sanguineus*). He sees this a lot in the west of VC5, while the rest of us don't seem to see it at all. More obviously, amongst the Cowslips (*Primula veris*) we spotted several clumps of 'False Oxlip' (*Primula x polyantha*), plus some long-pedicelled Primroses (*P. vulgaris*) that looked as if they could have been back-crosses between the hybrid and Primrose 'proper'. Graham also had us peering closely at violets, with the possibility that some of what we were calling Early Dog-violet (*V. reichenbachiana*) could have been *Viola x bavarica*, the hybrid between 'Early Dog' and 'Common Dog' (*Viola riviniana*). If confirmed, this would be a third record for VC5 of this obviously much-overlooked taxon.

Cath's determination not to be beaten by grasses led to a number of species being recorded that the rest of us would quite happily have ignored until later in the year. She and Chris shared clipboard duties, filling in cards for the two monads we visited— mainly ST1817, plus the south-east corner of ST1818. And it was in ST1818, in the largest and northern-most of Ruggin's meadows that we turned up one of the treats of the day: a lovely colony of Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*). The plants were tiny, at least a hundred of them scattered across about 10 square metres of tightly- grazed turf, plus a few

outliers about 20 metres away. Chris, sadly, had left us by then (it was already three o'clock), but Linda noted the spot and intends to return with her one day soon.



Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*). Photo: © Cath Mowat

One or two of us, as you might surmise, had our heads turned by dandelions, especially in the meadows at Ruggin where these were almost the only things in flower. There's an old (1985) record from this area of a dandelion with black-spotted leaves called *Taraxacum drucei*. But then in 2007 another species, also with black-spotted leaves, was described by Len Margetts, which he called *T. rona*e (touchingly named in honour of his wife, Rona). Ruggin's *T. drucei* was re-determined by Len as *T. rona*e, presumably from a pressed specimen as, frustratingly, it hasn't been seen there since the original record in 1985. So we kept an eye out, just in case. We didn't see it, sadly, but we *did* come across one or two other nice things that we could put a name to, including lots of Nordstedt's Dandelion (*T. nordstedtii*) with its puce-coloured ligule stripes, and in the top meadow a good population of (the only recently described) *T. amicorum*, our very own 'Dandelion of Friends'. The leaf-shape of *T. amicorum* is particularly distinctive, with a lovely elongate terminal lobe.



Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*). Photo: © Graham Lavender

The other main botanical highlight was probably a little patch of Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*) beside the (rather wet) footpath through Buckland Wood.

This turned out to be a new monad record and the first record for the tetrad since before 2000. Marsh Valerian is a declining species in England and listed as 'Near Threatened' on the England Red List. We saw a range of other widespread but declining 'Near Threatened' species, including Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) - originally introduced onto the Butterfly Conservation reserve, Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) - one of our spring targets this year, Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Ragged-Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*) and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*). It is always a surprise to discover that we have to consider these as 'important species', and that they're on our Rare Plant Register too! But not as surprising, perhaps, as the Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) we saw, which is listed as 'Vulnerable' in England, having suffered an estimated >30% decline since the middle of the last century. We are lucky to still have lots of it in Somerset.

Just as we were about to finish, we spotted a lovely colony of Early Purple-orchids (*Orchis mascula*), growing in full sunshine by the hedge near the entrance to the reserve. For some of us, these were our first-flowering 'Early Purples' of 2021. In all, we managed to record about 160 species in our main square, ST1817, out of a monad total that stands in the region of 350. Not bad for so early in the season, and we were pleased to note that our list did contain at least half a dozen taxa not previously recorded in the area, e.g., Graham's *Rumex x dufftii* and Marsh Valerian. Also new to ST1817, we later discovered, was Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), which—like Wood Sorrel and Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), which we also saw — is another of our springtime target species. Less desirably, the 'newbies' included a patch of Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*), growing vigorously beside the path through Buckland Wood not a million miles away from the Marsh Valerian. One to keep an eye on, perhaps.

At the start of the day, Graham was presented with the 'Dandelion Cup' for 2020. He would normally have received this award at one of our winter indoor meetings, but this time it had to be on a lane verge in the Blackdowns! The Cup, instituted in 2017, is awarded each year to the SRPG member making the greatest contribution to our knowledge of the Somerset *Taraxacum* flora. Graham had collected several species new to Somerset in the spring of 2020, including the first record **in Britain** of *T. inclinorum*, a recently described

taxon previously considered to be an Irish endemic. He has now won this award twice in four years. It makes you wonder why the rest of us even bother!



Socially-distanced presentation of Dandelion Cup to Graham Lavender.
Photo: © Cath Mowat

Sunday 2nd May 2021 at Clevedon Coast

Leader & Report: Liz McDonnell



Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) on the cliffs. Photo: © Clive Lovatt

Bookings for this second field meeting of the year were more than could be accommodated in one small group of six to comply with COVID-19 restrictions, so Helena Crouch kindly offered to run a second meeting at the southern end of Clevedon. Her separate report will follow this, as the habitats of our respective meetings were very different. The aim of our meeting was not primarily for recording, as this was done on the reconnaissance visit a couple of weeks prior to the

meeting, but for re-acquainting ourselves with some of the plants that we had not seen for a while, separating similar species, looking at details of familiar plants and practising our vegetative ID. It was a bright sunny day, so a perfect day for leisurely plant hunting and the appreciation of getting together again in a beautiful location. We met in Bay Road and set off down to the shore, finding clumps of Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum* subsp. *pulchellum*) and Italian Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum italicum* subsp. *italicum*) at the top of the path. Both of these are persistent garden throw-outs. We looked at a mature tree of Italian Alder (*Alnus cordata*) with its newly emerging heart-shaped leaves. Along with many other people, we made our way along the cliff path and down to the beach at Ladye Bay. Although most of our little group were clad in sturdy outdoor clothes as there was still a chill in the air, there were hardy souls in bathing costumes on the stony beach and even swimmers in the grey/brown sea! The tide was high and the little beach was very crowded, so rather than botanise as planned on the cliffs below, we looked at the tufa-encrusted cliff area close to the steps where Hemlock Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) and Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) were taking advantage of the freshwater seepages there. We made a hasty retreat back up to the coastal path above and continued north-east towards Backhill Sands and Margaret's Bay, clogging the narrow path (much to the annoyance of the many walkers) whilst discussing the subtle differences between the stem-leaf auricles of the two common Sowthistles [Prickly (*Sonchus asper*) has rounded auricles and Smooth (*S. oleraceus*) has pointed auricles] or the differences between Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*) and Early Dog-violet (*Viola reichenbachiana*). We entertained the possibility of hybrids between the two, but came to no positive conclusions about this! We found several plants of Three-veined Sandwort (*Moehringia trinervia*) in the wooded part of the footpath and compared it with Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*). We noted the differences in colour, veins, sepals and petals [entire in Three-veined Sandwort and deeply notched in Common Chickweed] and general 'jizz' – all useful reminders.

Lunchtime was spent on the grassy rocks below the coast path, where fishermen were fishing from the low horizontal rocks. There were many interesting plants here. Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) was frequent in the rough cracks of the conglomerate rocks and some of the plants were fairly large and luxuriant. This little fern is fairly common along this part of the North Somerset coast between Clevedon and Portishead.



Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*). Photo: © Karen Andrews

As well as looking at plants, several invertebrates were noted on the cliff path. We saw a Holly Blue (*Celastrina argiolus*), which is always the first blue butterfly of the year. It was warming in the sun and the pale blue undersides of the wings with small black dots were clearly visible. In the same area, several St Mark's (or Hawthorn) Flies (*Bibio marci*) hovered over the scrub vegetation, their black legs dangling characteristically. We also saw a Tree Bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*), which is easily identified by its ginger-coloured thorax. It is the one species that frequently builds its nest above ground, such as in a nest-box or tree cavity (hence its name). It has spread pretty much across the UK after first being discovered in Wiltshire in 2001, having colonised naturally from the continent.

Clive pointed out several tiny flowering/fruitlet plants of Sea Pearlwort (*Sagina maritima*), with their fleshy blunt-tipped leaves on the thin soils of the low cliff ledges. Margaret's photo shows clearly the fat fruitlet heads of this maritime plant in its native habitat before it took to the salted roads!



Sea Pearlwort (*Sagina maritima*). Photo: © Margaret Webster



Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) in damp crevices in the maritime rocks. Photo: © Liz McDonnell

Other plants here included Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Distant Sedge (*Carex distans*), more Brookweed growing in the damp layers in the rocks and a Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) with round, fleshy leaflets, likely to be var. *maritimus*. We clambered up the steep path back to the coastal path and then shortly climbed more steps up the hill towards the Clevedon Golf course. The wall flora of the Club House included the usual small common ferns, Rustyback (*Asplenium ceterach*), Wall-rue (*A. rotundifolium*) and Maidenhair Spleenwort (*A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrivalens*) and two Stonecrops – Thick-leaved (*Sedum dasyphyllum*) and Caucasian (*S. spurium*).

We walked back through the wooded area of Walton Castle and came across a tiny remnant of limestone grassland beneath Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*), where a few straggly plants of Salad Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *sanguisorba*) were just about surviving. We returned to the cars along Castle Road examining the weeds in the grassy edges and pavements, much to the bafflement of passers-by.

At the end of the meeting, we walked along to the Ladye Bay Green Space and sat on the species-rich grassland area with a stunning view out to sea and to the Welsh coast with a cup of tea and slices of cake to mull over our day's botany. We had added a few taxa to the overall list of species recorded in that area, but it had been an enjoyable day out in a spectacular area of coast with interesting and important species noticed, studied and recorded.

Sunday 2nd May 2021 at Clevedon Pill

Leader & Report: Helena Crouch



Clevedon Pill. Photo: © Helena Crouch

Five members met in sunshine by the church for a walk along the coast south of Clevedon, following the route taken on a previous SRPG walk, led by John Martin in 2011. To our delight, we found White Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata*) in flower by the sea wall, exactly where it was seen on the former walk. Nearby, we saw a Small Copper butterfly (*Lycaena phlaeas*). We walked along the sea wall above the saltmarsh, heading for Gullhouse Point, where we searched in vain for Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*). On the narrow strip of saltmarsh, we recorded Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*) and Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardii*), both Greater and Lesser Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media* and *S. marina*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*) and Common Sea-lavender (*Limonium vulgare*).

By lunchtime, our number had dwindled to four. We sat on logs at the back of the saltmarsh, amongst several large plants of Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*). This species is distinctively hairy, like Red Clover (*T. pratense*) which we found in bud nearby, however the stipules of Sea Clover have long wispy pointed free sections, whereas those of Red Clover have only a short pointed free section beyond the fused parts.

Heading south from Gullhouse Point, we found more large plants of Sea Clover, and recorded Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) on the saltmarsh, as well as English Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*) and the skeletal remains of Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*). Although the English Scurvygrass was in flower, the Thrift was still only tight buds here.



Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) on the saltmarsh. Photo: © Helena Crouch

It was fine all day, but the saltmarsh was bleak, with a biting cold wind - all agreed that this was not a great time of year to visit this habitat!

One of our aims for the day was to update records for Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*). As in 2011, we found it in abundance along the edges of the low cliffs above the upper saltmarsh, the silvery foliage glistening in the sun. We also found it growing in the tarmac of the road along the sea wall!



Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*). Photo: Helena Crouch

We returned along the same route: another member departed when we reached the bridge over the Blind Yeo. The remaining three explored the bank of the Blind Yeo, adding more species to our list, including Fringed Water-lily (*Nymphoides peltata*), which we identified using 'The Vegetative Key to the British Flora' from a leaf fished out by the leader. This was a new hectad record for this invasive aquatic species. Returning across the saltmarsh, we recorded more Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*) and also Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*).

For our final mission, we clambered across rocks on the beach to visit the Tree Medick (*Medicago arborea*) which was first recorded on the cliff at Wain's Hill in 1973 by Miss I.F. Gravestock and Mrs H.R.H. Lance. To our delight, it was in full flower:



Tree Medick (*Medicago arborea*) on the cliffs of Wain's Hill, Clevedon. Photo: © Helena Crouch

Back at the harbour, a third member departed. Alastair and I ascended Wain's Hill, where we met up with Liz and Clive, primarily to search for Dwarf Mouse-ear (*Cerastium pumilum*). This small spring annual was last recorded here in 1997, not seen in the hectad since then. We failed to find any, but we did find abundant Little Mouse-ear (*C. semidecandrum*) and Sea Mouse-ear (*C. diffusum*). On rock outcrops and in sparse turf we saw tiny plants of Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*), Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), Fern-grass (*Catapodium rigidum*) and a few vegetative rosettes of Kidney-vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*). Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) was beginning to flower, forming a stunning patch on some rock outcrops, but our star record was for Spring-sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*), which had not been recorded for the hectad since 1997. It had been an excellent meeting, with sunshine all day. Even the Severn Estuary mud was glistening appealingly!



Severn mud at Clevedon. Photo: © Helena Crouch

Sunday 16th May 2021 at Adcombe Wood/ Woodram Copse

Leader: Simon Leach

Report: Fred Rumsey

The third of the SRPG's post-lockdown meetings saw a select band of five brave the soft Blackdowns' rain to concentrate on recording in two of the four monads which span this interesting ancient woodland complex with some calcareous grasslands. All of the area visited lay within a Woodland Trust reserve, and mostly all within an SSSI - the exception being an area of calcareous grassland from which scattered conifers had been removed and which was being ably grazed by a small group of inquisitive Shetland ponies. We started here and it rapidly belied its lack of designation with Linda finding the first of a good crop of Adder's-tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) in good quality grassland. The *Ophioglossum* had not previously been recorded from the site, ST2217, or indeed the tetrad and was for some the highlight of the day.

It was also nice to find Zigzag Clover (*Trifolium medium*) close by too – definitely an axiophyte (aka squeak inducer in the neighbouring VC). Here too there was a colourful scattering of Early Purple-orchids (*Orchis mascula*) through a mixture of Primulas, some of which were themselves mixtures: the False Oxlip (*Primula x polyantha*) also being new to the monad.



One of several impressive False Oxlip (*Primula x polyantha*) clumps. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

Other novelties for the monad included Bog Stitchwort (*Stellaria alsine*) in wetter trickles near the base of the slope.

Entering the woodland John P. soon diverged from the path, apparently drawn magnetically to a very fine stand of Herb-Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*), although, looking at the picture, perhaps it should be renamed *hexafolia*?



False-Brome (*Brachypodium pinnatum* s. str.), continuing to grow where it was first recorded in the last century by Paul and Ian for the Atlas Flora Project.



View from the glade. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

Can you beat Paris in springtime? Photo: © Fred Rumsey

Close to this was a particularly pretty form of Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*), identified later by Martin Rickard as being of the 'Lineare' group. He commented "A nice thing! Its greatest affinity would be with 'Chardstock' which I found at Chardstock, only a few miles south of where you were... [itself] very similar to the old Victorian cultivar 'Hirondelle'".



Polystichum setiferum 'Lineare Group' – similar delicately divided plants were seen in two places in the wood. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

A particular target for the group was a small, steep glade, not only sought for its merits as a picnic spot with vistas, but because here had been recorded *Gentianella amarella* subsp. *anglica* and Slender Bedstraw (*Galium pumilum* s. str.) in its only known Somerset site¹. Sadly, both appear to have long gone; the area of high-quality low, open calcareous turf extends only a few feet either side of the main animal track running up the glade's centre. The glade has, however, remained open enough to still support another county rarity, Heath



Simon demonstrating the features of *Taraxacum atrocollinum*, a recently described species that was first collected (by Les Tucker) during the BSBI Dandelion Workshop in 2016. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

¹ The taxonomy and status of Slender Bedstraw in Britain has long been argued. Recent molecular studies have shown that the plant on the Mendip limestones is conspecific with the French *G. fleurotii* and it is clearly native. *Galium pumilum* in its strict sense is a declining plant of southern chalk and

limestones which, although now restricted to high quality sites, may be a neophyte.

Even for those of us not overtaken by Dandelion mania it was still nice to be gently introduced throughout the day to a few species of particular local significance by Simon, including *T. atrocollinum*, which translates as ‘Dandelion of the Dark Hill’ – in celebration of it having first been found, and recognised as a new species, in the Blackdown Hills.



Taraxacum amicum, with its large elongate end-lobes to the leaves. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

Especially pleasing was to have him show us *Taraxacum amicum* – the ‘Dandelion of Friends’ – so named by John Richards as a nod to our own friendly botanical group, and in recognition of the fact that the BSBI Dandelion Workshop in 2016 had been held at the Meeting House of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Taunton. It appears to be a real Somerset speciality. Linda, having been shown this species a few weeks earlier at Ruggin SWT Reserve, recognised it immediately. Its distinctive leaves, Simon assured us, would make very fine bookmarks.

Working our way through the woodland at higher level we tried hard not to overlook the trees for the wood – the site has a very impressive array of native species, some of which eluded us, e.g., Wild Service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*), but we added others including English Elm (*Ulmus procera*) and Midland Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*), as well as some often under-recorded conifers such as Western Red-cedar (*Thuja plicata*) with its distinctive pineapple aroma. The *Crataegus* was also a new monad-and-tetrad record – only the second record for hectad ST21 and the first since 2000.

It would have been easy to miss the Mistletoe (*Viscum album*), which one rarely sees in dense woodland canopies, although its host here, Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), frequently supports it in hedgerows.



Midland Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*) – just a single specimen was seen, it stood out as being particularly floriferous. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

Our descent through the wood was enlivened by Simon’s attempts to persuade the sceptical that the sedge on the paths was Thin-spiked Wood-sedge (*Carex strigosa*) and not just Wood-sedge (*C. sylvatica*), or young Pendulous Sedge (*C. pendula*). He eventually wore us down, abetted by some more compellingly broad-leaved material. This too was a new monad record.

By our reckoning we saw just three England Red List NT species – Devil’s-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) and Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), but the abundance of Sanicle, in particular, was worth noting. Several other ‘nice’ woodland plants were good to find, including Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*) and Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), although neither were new for the site. In total we recorded circa 195 taxa, of which about 20 were new to the relevant monad/tetrad, or new for the site.



A return to group botany in wet weather. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

It was a very enjoyable return to field botany as a social activity for most of us, but the merits of having smaller groupings for recording were noted. Our thanks to Simon for all of his efforts... if only he could have controlled the rain.

Saturday 5th June 2021 Crook Peak, Mendip Hills (VC6)

Leaders: Liz McDonnell & Helena Crouch

Report: Liz McDonnell & Helena Crouch



Plant ID on the species-rich slopes. Photo: © Margaret Webster

Bookings for this field meeting were popular and Helena Crouch kindly offered to lead a separate group, with Liz leading a slow, lower-slopes route with an emphasis on identification (the first part of this report), and Helena leading a more adventurous party further afield, to update and add to records on the slopes around Crook Peak itself. We all met at the roadside car park in Webbington Road and Liz's group spent the first hour looking at the botanical riches on the species-rich slopes just inside the gate! There were so many species of interest, especially for those not familiar with the Crook Peak grassland. Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*) were abundant and it was pleasing to see several flowering plants of Basil Thyme (*Clinopodium acinos*), the main centre of distribution in Somerset being the Mendip limestones. This is on the GB & England Red-list as Vulnerable.

We found a few leaf rosettes of Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla verna*) and an abundance of Common Cudweed (*Filago germanica*) on the bare earth of the steep rocky slopes. Also in this habitat were a few tiny plants of Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*). This has long been known here, but it is more commonly known as an arable weed.



Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*) on the bare soil of the south-facing rocky slopes. Photo: © Will Eden

Making our way slowly westwards along the lower path, it was not long before we found Honewort (*Trinia glauca*). This too was flowering and fruiting and we found numerous male and female plants and some that had both flowers. The male plants were much easier to spot, as they resembled tiny pale creamy-yellow cauliflower clusters embedded in the close-cropped turf. The female plants were more cryptic, with the few-branched umbels bearing a small number of fruits.



Fruits of Honewort (*Trinia glauca*). Photo: © Sam Braine

The Speckled Yellow moth (*Pseudopanthera macularia*), whose food plant is Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*), was seen nectaring on Honewort. Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) occurred on suitably bare rock outcrops, mostly in the crevices, but further up the slope it was growing on bare open soil in small tufts where the felted lower sheaths were fairly obvious under a hand lens.



Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) grows on these steep, south-facing rocky slopes. Photo: © Jen Weaver

As we climbed higher up the slope, we stopped to compare the small yellow clovers which were growing together – Hop Trefoil (*Trifolium campestre*), Lesser Trefoil (*T. dubium*) and Slender Trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*). We went through the identification keys and examined the details of each.

We looked at the differences between Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Western Gorse (*U. gallii*) and noted patches of the limestone-heath plant community often associated with Western Gorse on the upper slopes of Mendip, where the soils of the wind-deposited loess support species such as Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Brown Bent (*Agrostis vinealis*) and Slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*). We reached the ridge of the Crook Peak peninsula and dropped over to the north-facing slopes to see how the vegetation differed from the dry sun-baked rocky slopes. Here trees and scrub were clothing the lower slopes and the grassy areas at the top were dominated by Tor-grass (*Brachypodium rupestre*), with Meadow Oat-grass (*Avenula pratensis*), Downy Oat-grass (*A. pubescens*) and Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*). Honewort was still fairly frequent in the sward and Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*) was just coming into flower.

Meanwhile Helena's group headed for the peak, pausing regularly during the steep ascent to look at the tiny treasures mentioned earlier, finally sitting down to begin recording as soon as we reached our target monad. We immediately found Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) in the glorious short turf around rock outcrops – we later found thousands of plants on the steep south-facing slopes. The rosettes of Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) were spotted, and diminutive plants of Western Eyebright (*Euphrasia*

tetraquetra). We found a single bush of Small-flowered Sweet-briar (*Rosa micrantha*), and examined Mouse-ears. During the day, we found five species: Common Mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*), Sticky Mouse-ear (*C. glomeratum*), Little Mouse-ear (*C. semidecandrum*), Sea Mouse-ear (*C. diffusum*) and the GB Near Threatened Dwarf Mouse-ear (*C. pumilum*).



Western Eyebright (*Euphrasia tetraquetra*) on thin soils amongst rocks. Photo: © Helena Crouch

In a rocky depression by the path, we checked on White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) which has been known here for at least 30 years.

Below the peak, we also explored an area of limestone-heath, finding two plants of Trailing St John's-wort (*Hypericum humifusum*) in flower, comparing it with nearby Slender St John's-wort (*H. pulchrum*). We also found two small plants of Heath Groundsel (*Senecio sylvaticus*), last recorded on Crook Peak in 1997.

On rocks around the peak, we recorded Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*), Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*), Rough Clover (*Trifolium scabrum*) and Knotted Clover (*T. striatum*). We found Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*), the first record for Crook Peak for over 20 years, and Bur Chervil (*Anthriscus caucalis*). We also found Helena's daughter, who had run to Crook Peak from Black Down! After lunch on the peak, we explored the southern slopes, immediately finding Basil Thyme (*Clinopodium acinos*) and Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) with its fibrous leaf bases.



Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*). Photo: © Fred Rumsey

During the day, we also found Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) several times, the leaves of which are distinctively hairy, whereas Somerset Hair-grass is hairless. The southern slopes of Crook Peak are a mosaic of scrub, limestone-heath, grassland and open stony areas.



Recording on the slopes of Crook Peak. Photo: © Fred Rumsey



Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla verna*) on Crook Peak. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

In a clearing amongst gorse, we checked on the population of Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*) which was first discovered here in 1964 and appear to be thriving.

On lower rocky slopes we found abundant Common Cudweed (*Filago germanica*), last recorded in this

monad in 2004, and small patches of Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla verna*).

A single Broomrape spike was identified as Common Broomrape (*Orobanche minor*), the first record for Crook Peak since 1997. The abundance of Honewort and Basil Thyme on these slopes was astonishing.



Basil Thyme (*Clinopodium acinos*) on rocks on the south-facing slopes of Crook Peak. Photo: © Helena Crouch

During the day, we recorded 154 species in our target monad, adding 25 species to the square and updating records for many rare plants. It had been an excellent day at a very special site with stunning views, fine weather and good company.

Sunday 20th June 2021 Clean Moor (VC5)

Leader & Report: Cath Mowat

Bogs don't appear to attract many people, but Clean Moor had fans, and Linda, Graham, Helena, Mike, Christine, and I met up on the Sunday enthused for a day out – it was a novelty meeting each other, coming out as we were out of the rule-of-six lockdown. It was necessary to have a small group, however, as the site we were visiting was particularly fragile and vulnerable to footfall.

Clean Moor is a small site near Milverton, in effect a clearing in a wet woodland, kept open by the loyal Milverton Conservation Volunteers, without whom the site would be lost to alder trees and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) as it is too wet to graze. The site is very special for its unusual hydrology. It is one of only two sites in Somerset where a mire is fed by lime-rich waters – usually mires are acid. The relatively high pH gives rise to a particular suite of higher plants and mosses, known in the UK's National Vegetation Classification system as M13 *Schoenus nigricans* – *Juncus subnodulosus* mire. True

to the M13 NVC community, there was indeed lots of Black Bog-rush and Blunt-flowered Rush on the mire, but we saw a lot of other things besides.

The slightly drier parts of the mire comprise M24 *Molinia caerulea* – *Cirsium dissectum* fen, characterised by lots of Blunt-flowered Rush.



Hemp agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*) and Blunt-Flowered Rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*) are characteristic of the slightly drier, raised side of the mire. Photo: © Cath Mowat



Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). Photo: © Cath Mowat

We had barely stepped out of the trees and on to the mire when we noticed our first Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*), prominent (in an experienced botanist's eye that is – they were not yet in flower) by its grey colour, then another and another, and we soon discovered that they were scattered through the site, and difficult to avoid walking on.

Orchids were one of the themes for the day. Helena and Graham soon spotted a rare Narrow-Leaved Marsh Orchid and had a prolonged discussion in apparent Latin as to what its current name should be, settling on *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* subsp. *schoenophila*², given that they were growing with the Black Bog-rush (previously assigned to *D. traunsteinerioides*). After that we found patches of Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata* subsp. *ericetorum*) and a scattering of Southern Marsh-orchids (*D. praetermissa*), and then, overtopping these in size and splendour in its hybrid vigour, a single plant of *D. x grandis*, the hybrid of Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), also present on the site, and Southern Marsh-orchid.



Hybrid vigour showing in this *Dactylorhiza x grandis*. Photo: © Cath Mowat

Most plants on the mire were not as colourful as the orchids. Sedges and cotton-grasses are characteristic mire plants and didn't disappoint us. The bright green Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*), identified through the trigonous tips to its leaves, was frequent through the site, together with the silvery-leaved Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and lower numbers of Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*). Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) piggy-backed on tussocks of Purple Moor-grass to avoid the alkaline waters, and round the edges the sedges were more

² See bit.ly/3b51Lag for some useful background. The article cited, by Bateman and Denholm, is available to BSBI members via the BSBI website.

typical of the neighbouring woodland – Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*), Wood Sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) and Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*). The rarities comprised three strict calcicoles: a few plants of Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) and five flowering plants of Broad-leaved Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum latifolium*). Also, where water seeped out of the ground onto the site, we found a single tuft of Few-flowered Spike-rush (*Eleocharis quinqueflora*).



The spring as it appeared in May 2021 (apologies for the not-level photo!) The stonewort *Chara vulgaris* encrusted with lime, was in the water, together with other algae. Photo: © Cath Mowat



Fragrant orchid (*Gymnadenia densiflora*) with Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) behind. Photo: © Helena Crouch

There was beauty in detail. Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*) had been in flower the previous month, but its small, bright green, heart-shaped leaves were visible everywhere, together with patches of the silvery spiky leaves of Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*). Looking carefully among Purple Moor-grass hummocks near the spring, perched above and away from the lime-rich water that would harm them, were the tiny, bright red leaves of Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*).



The bright green leaves and long down-turned bracts of the Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) are just visible among the leaves of Purple Moor-grass and Carnation Sedge. Photo: © Cath Mowat



Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) on the site, taken the previous month. Photo: © Cath Mowat

After spending several hours admiring the variety and interest in such a small site, we left feeling blessed knowing that there are such secret and wonderful places in our county.

Sunday 4th July 2021 Hilcombe Hanging and Beaumont's Wood (VC6)

Leader: Helena Crouch

Report: Fred Rumsey and Helena Crouch



Setting off past Alfred's Tower. Photo: © Karen Andrews

A group of nine assembled to explore some of the woodlands of the Stourhead (Western) Estate, close to Alfred's Tower, at the far southeast corner of Somerset. This area, which is not part of the National Trust holdings, is largely managed as continuous woodland cover. It sits on Lower Greensand, providing a habitat for calcifuges which are scarce in this predominantly base-rich vice- county. It thus shows similarities with the Blackdowns and Quantocks although lacking the species-rich mires which those areas still just about support. The car park is in Wiltshire, necessitating a short walk through grassland dotted with Common Spotted-orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), past the impressive Alfred's Tower, to reach VC6 and our target monad. One of the area's great specialities, Climbing Corydalis (*Ceratocapnos claviculata*), was found almost immediately.



Climbing Corydalis (*Ceratocapnos claviculata*), the Plant of the Day.
Photo: © Will Eden

This delicate scrambling plant was seen repeatedly throughout the day, often in abundance, wherever there had been felling and the canopy had been opened in the drier acidic areas.

The variety of habitats, with drier, more acidic upper slopes above Hilcombe Hanging, broad rides and trackways, and damper, more neutral areas of Beaumont's Wood below, gave us a good chance to see and compare different species of sedges. We found two acid-loving species: Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*), with its dead foliage of a characteristic colour and inflorescences like garden gnomes fishing rods, and the smaller dense swirly mats of Pill Sedge (*Carex pilulifera*). In all, eight species of sedge were seen, the most exciting being Smooth-stalked Sedge (*Carex laevigata*), new to the monad (and indeed the tetrad), in a damp more clayey runnel nearer the base of the slope. Like Climbing Corydalis, this was formerly considered Scarce in VC6 but has recently been found at several new sites and no longer warrants inclusion in the Rare Plant Register.

In surprisingly tall vegetation at the edge of the ride above Hilcombe Hanging, we found Trailing St John's-wort (*Hypericum humifusum*), growing conveniently close to Slender St John's-wort (*H. pulchrum*) with which it can be confused. We stopped and keyed it out using different field-guides, noting the unequal sepals of *H. humifusum*.



Trailing St John's-wort (*Hypericum humifusum*), with unequal sepals. Photo: © Will Eden

This species has leaves with perforations and black dots around the edges, whereas *H. pulchrum* has the perforations but lacks the black dots. In damp areas, we later found Square-stalked St John's-wort (*H. tetrapterum*), which also has perforations and black dots, as of course does Perforate St John's-wort (*H. perforatum*), which we did not see. Trailing St John's-wort was new to the monad. We only saw the one small plant all day, and one clump of Slender St John's-wort.



Trailing St John's-wort (*Hypericum humifusum*) is run through the keys. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

At the edge of the open, often damp, rather sandy trackways we found luxuriant clumps of Bristle Club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*), also new to the monad, and a range of rushes, the most common being Toad Rush (*Juncus bufonius*), often accompanied by very small examples of Bulbous Rush (*J. bulbosus*). During the day we also recorded Soft Rush (*J. effusus*), Compact Rush (*J. conglomeratus*) and both Jointed Rush (*J. articulatus*) and Sharp-flowered Rush (*J. acutiflorus*) which is also jointed!



Bristle Club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*). Photo: © Sam Braine

The salient features of some commonly planted conifers were demonstrated by Helena, with Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), Western Hemlock-spruce (*Tsuga heterophylla*) and the pineapple-scented Western Red-cedar (*Thuja plicata*) all regenerating; some pines and a larch were too small to name.

Another species new to the monad was Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*), found on the centre of a grassy damp ride, its flowers having 4 or 5 petals.

During the day we also recorded Tormentil (*P. erecta*), which always has 4 petals, and Creeping Cinquefoil (*P.*



Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*), bearing flowers with four or five petals, on a woodland ride. Photos: © Fred Rumsey

reptans), Barren Strawberry (*P. sterilis*) and Silverweed (*P. anserina*), which have flowers with 5 petals. Care was taken to check that the trailing plants on the ride were forming lots of good seed, since Stace cautions that it is over-recorded for the Hybrid Cinquefoil (*P. x mixta*).

The forecast had been horrid, but we were lucky that the majority of the day (especially our lunch stop!) was rain-free. The splendid views out to the west alerted us to more incoming squalls and a sensible halt to the day's exploring was called. We recorded 178 species, 28 of them new to the monad which took its post-2000 total up to a respectable 240. It had been a very enjoyable meeting with a good element of education as we puzzled over specimens together.

Sunday 1st August 2021 Westhay Moor NNR (VC6)

Leader: Val Graham

Report: Val Graham and Helena Crouch



Exploring the Wind Pump Field. Photo: © Val Graham

1st August turned out to be a cool day of heavy showers and we all experienced flooded roads and poor visibility as we drove to the site. However, the weather lightened considerably by the time eleven of us set off from the car park.

Westhay Moor National Nature Reserve, south-east of Wedmore, is owned and managed by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. It is mainly an area of former peat diggings now replaced by lakes and reed-beds. The peat in this area, so valuable to the horticultural trade, is sphagnum peat laid down in a huge raised bog which, in early medieval times, filled the low-lying land between Wedmore and the Polden ridge.

The few preserved patches of sphagnum peat are low in nutrients and acidic, which gives rise to the characteristic vegetation. The largest such remnant is the 12 ha area of Westhay Moor known as the Mire which was our principal target for this visit.

We walked up Dagg's Lane Drove and turned west past the Viridor hide. We made our first stop at the edge of the reed-bed on the north side of the track where the yellow flowers of Greater Bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris* sens. str.) could be seen. This was our first insectivorous plant of the day. Also found here was the red-listed plant Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) which had a few of its white three-petaled flowers showing. We also found the very common ditch plant Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) and the non-native – but widespread – Nuttall's Pondweed (*Elodea nuttallii*). On the bank we found several typical wetland plants including Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*) and Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis* sp.), of which more later.

We walked north from here to see the "totem pole": a 4m pole with a carved pelican on top and a beaver at the bottom which represents the height of the raised bog surface in 700 AD and the typical residents at that time. 1300 years of climate change, and particularly drainage and peat extraction have made enormous changes to the landscape here.

Turning south again we noted the sharp contrast between the birch-alder carr and a long ditch at the edge of the mire. The abruptness of the vegetation change is somewhat artificial as this ditch and the Mire are protected by a buried barrier of plastic sheeting to prevent loss of water and ingress of nutrients.



A North American native at Westhay Moor. Photo: © Helena Crouch

The most eye-catching plant here was the North American pitcher plant Trumpets (*Sarracenia flava*) [insect-eater number 2]. This species has been known at this location for a number of years but does not seem to be spreading.

From there we went through a kissing gate to the main Mire compartment where the vegetation is dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) with scattered Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Soft-rush (*Juncus effusus*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Alder-buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*).

As we had had plenty of rain, surface water was visible in the lowest lying area known as the scrapes, where we saw Common and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium* and *E. vaginatum*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*), Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) [insect-eater number 3], Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Feathery Bog-moss (*Sphagnum cuspidatum*).



Round-leaved Sundew in flower on the Mire growing on dried-out Sphagnum (taken during the heatwave a few weeks earlier)
Photo: © Alison Uren



Marsh Pennywort with Cottongrass growing through a carpet of Sphagnum – now re-hydrated and colourful. Photo: © Val Graham

Ferns are also prominent on the mire, in particular Narrow-leaved Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) with its narrow pale green fronds and pale straw-coloured scales on the rachis, and the magnificent Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*).

After sheltering from a heavy shower under an oak tree at the southern end of the mire, while we had lunch, we walked across the field to the south where the wind-pump brings water (and, unfortunately, nutrients) onto the Mire. We met the on-site team of environmental managers – Exmoor ponies.



Exmoor ponies. Photo: © Val Graham

A ditch near the wind-pump yielded Lesser Water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*). One member saw a Sundew in this field, but we had hoped to find more, especially as the surface was wet in places with several sedges present. Next, we walked through a strip of woodland with a ferny understory of Royal Fern, Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*), Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) was re-found beside the path. There is a lot of surface water in this woodland now thanks to work by SWT last winter to install another waterproof barrier along the southern edge of the wood, which it is hoped will reduce water loss from the Mire as a whole.

Returning along the west side of the Mire, which is dominated by Bracken we detoured to admire the richly aromatic stand of Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) and more examples of Royal Fern.



Bog Myrtle with Royal Fern (showing brown fertile fronds) and Downy Birch. Photo: © Val Graham

We carried out a search for Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*), where it had been previously reported, but failed to find any. We had some cause to doubt the earlier record as it generally seems to prefer higher nutrient (fen) conditions (Lockton, 2021). Some of us went to look at it later along the Sweet Track at Shapwick Heath where the vegetation is quite different.



Bifid Hemp-nettle showing the notched lower lip. Photo: © Karen Andrews. Photo below shows downcurved edges of lip under a microscope. Photo: © Val Graham



During the day, we found both Common Hemp-nettle and Bifid Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis tetrahit* and *G. bifida*). We discussed the distinguishing features of these very similar species. The key is the lower lip of the flower, which is notched in the latter but straight in the former. The lower lip also tends to be flat in Common Hemp-nettle, but with downcurved sides in Bifid Hemp-nettle.

References

Lockton, A.J. (accessed 2021). Species account: *Thelypteris palustris*. Botanical Society of the British Isles, bsbi.org.

15th August 2021 Wellington Monument (VC5)

Leader & Report: Steve Parker



Recording at the base of Wellington Monument. Photo: © Steve Parker

This meeting was aimed at beginners rather than looking for rare plants. Five members were joined by a guest, Carolyn Ellis, to look at the grassland habitats and the mire grassland known as Castle Fields Reserve.



Castle Fields SWT Reserve. Photo: © Steve Parker

Walking from the National Trust car park toward the monument we could see that the major restoration work had almost been completed. The grassland around the monument is species rich, at the time of the visit the vegetation had not been cut, a sign asked visitor not to walk over the grass and we were happy to comply with this request. We spent an hour keying out some of the more frequent species using *The Wildflower Key* and talking about how we go about recording, using the recording cards and the need for accurate grid references especially for rare species.

In the *Atlas Flora of Somerset* there is a reference to Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) being “found near the base of Wellington Monument” in 1993. Karen Turvey remembered seeing the plant on the site about 20 years ago. She and Alastair Stevenson went to search the area where Karen had seen the plant. They returned some 15 minutes later having not found Moonwort, the grass was too long, and it was probably a bit late in the season. (After the field meeting Karen confirmed the location with Tony Price, see map below). We hope to revisit next year to see if Moonwort still survives at this only known location on the Blackdown Hills.



Historic location of (*Botrychium lunaria*). Photo: CC Google Earth

Recording was going well so we had lunch before walking down hill on to Castle Fields, here we were greeted by a herd of cattle that were doing excellent work in grazing the species-rich mire. The grassland has many plants of Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), and Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*). Our small group walked across the grassland calling out the names of the plants they were finding. Linda Everton had walked down the hill and came back with Dyer’s Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*). However, when we went to get a grid reference, it took 10 minutes of searching to relocate a very large patch of Dyer’s Greenweed which was fruiting well.

Returning up the steep hill we found a large bush of the hybrid Willow *Salix x multinervis* = Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*) x Eared Willow (*Salix aurita*). A few of us then walked through the Beech *Fagus sylvatica* woodland, but this added very few species to the days list. On returning to the car park a total of 141 species had been recorded. All agreed a most enjoyable day and it was good to be out botanising again.

References

Green Paul R, Green Ian P and Crouch Geraldine A. *The Atlas Flora of Somerset*. 1997

**Sunday 5th September 2021
Fern Workshop at Priddy Mineries and Stockhill (VC6)**

Leaders and Report: Helena Crouch and Fred Rumsey



A hybrid fern new to Priddy Mineries: *Dryopteris x deweveri*. Photo: © Helena Crouch

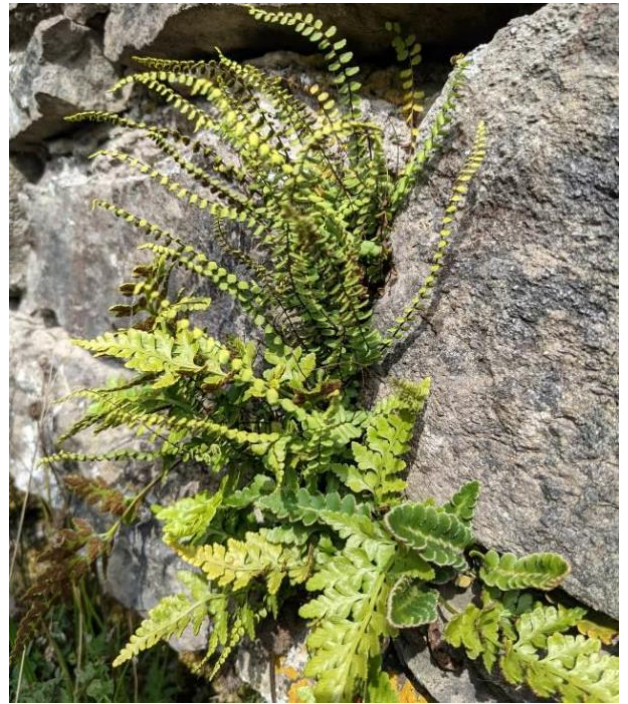


SRPG pteridologists assembling at Stockhill for the Fern Workshop. Photo: © Graham Lavender

On a misty Mendip morning, twelve members assembled by the car park at Stockhill for the SRPG Fern Workshop. After running through the plan for the day and the likely risks, the leaders began by explaining the difficulties of fern identification. In the absence of flowers, identification relies heavily on vegetative characters, so time was spent explaining terminology and useful features, in particular the different degrees of frond division. With the aid of specimens from Helena's garden, common pitfalls in fern identification were discussed: particularly the importance of studying a mature specimen, and the incredible variation which some species exhibit, which makes them such interesting garden plants yet maddeningly difficult to identify! We also looked at available field guides, and distributed handouts listing ferns of Somerset and those species to be seen on the day.

We set off to spend the morning at Priddy Mineries. Our first stop was the site of Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*), sadly no longer visible in September. This rare plant, Vulnerable on the England Red List, grows here on a large tump of mining spoil, evidence of the site's past industrial importance for the mining of lead. Two lead-tolerant plants were flowering on the tump: Spring Sandwort (*Sabulina verna*) and Sea Campion (*Silene uniflora*), both species with very interesting distributions in Somerset. Walking out along the Monarch's Way, we began to see Male Fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) and Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), although we were distracted by a short visit to a linear slag heap to see another lead tolerant species, Alpine Penny-cress (*Noccaea caerulescens*). Nearby, we stopped to study the differences between Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*) and Narrow Buckler-fern (*D. carthusiana*).

Continuing along the Monarch's Way, reinforcing identification of these four ferns, we paused by the pool to admire vast swathes of Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and to study the Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*), with its brown "hinge" between petiole and leaf lamina. Our destination was the derelict buildings of St Cuthbert's Leadworks, where six species of fern grow on walls: three in the photo below and also Wall-rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), the common Intermediate Polypody (*Polypodium interjectum*), and many plants of Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), which in VC6 is almost restricted to the Mendips.



Three species of *Asplenium* together on a wall: Rustyback (*A. ceterach*), Maidenhair Spleenwort (*A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrivalens*) and Black Spleenwort (*A. adiantum-nigrum*).
Photo: © Helena Crouch.

Two members had to leave, but the remaining group had lunch beside Harebells amongst the ruins of the leadworks, then viewed the piles of slag, now mostly colonised by plants, before heading back towards Stockhill. A unanimous decision was made to detour up the hillside, through treacherous Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) to see Limestone Fern (*Gymnocarpium robertianum*) on the remaining stonework of a flue of the Chewton Minery.

Returning carefully down the hillside, looking at the many Buckler-ferns on the way, Fred and others spotted plants with broad, relatively flat fronds, yet with pale scales on the rhachis. A frond was collected: later microscopic examination revealed that the spores were mis-shapen, confirming it as *Dryopteris* x *deweveri*, the hybrid between Broad Buckler-fern and Narrow Buckler-fern (see photo above), new to the hectad.

The day had turned hot and sunny, so we were glad to return to the woods of Stockhill for the afternoon session. Following a small path through the plantation, Broad Buckler-fern and Lady Fern were the dominant species, along with Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) in places, but we soon found Hart's-tongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*) and Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*). Bravely, we began to look closely at species in the *Dryopteris affinis* Complex – the Scaly Male-ferns.



Brittle Bladder-fern on a derelict wall at Priddy Mineries. Photo: © Will Eden.



Limestone Fern at Priddy Mineries. Photo: © Helena Crouch

Fred explained that many of our commonest ferns have evolved through a two-step process. Firstly, hybridisation may occur, resulting in a vigorous but typically sterile plant. In time, errors during the processes of cell division may then result in the production of plants which have double the number of chromosomes, and are fertile. As the parents of a hybrid are often closely related and similar, it is not surprising that the new **polyploid** species may be difficult to separate from the parents of the original hybrid. Some of the ferns which cause the most difficulties in identification have, however, arisen through a different method. Following initial hybridisation, they have developed a different non-sexual means to reproduce which still involves the production of spores. The Scaly Male-ferns exemplify

this strategy, known as **apogamy**, a form of **apomixis**. These plants, unusually, produce spores which have the same number of chromosomes as the plant which shed them, instead of having only half the number, as is typical in sexual species. On germination these develop into gametophytes in the normal way, but although they bear the sexual organs the female parts are non-functional. The surrounding cells still give rise to a mature sporophyte fern plant. The fact that they have functional male parts means that they can still hybridise with sexual species and any such hybrids are then also able to reproduce apogamously. In this way the *Dryopteris affinis* complex has developed, with further forms arising through mutations also being perpetuated by this strategy.

We stopped to examine Borrer's Scaly Male-fern (*D. borrieri*), the commonest Scaly Male-fern in many areas. It is similar to Male-fern in stature, with thin stipes bearing pale scales, and fronds with the lowest pinnae being relatively long. The pinnules are typically square topped with acute teeth. We examined the indusia, which flare up as they ripen, to look like small Chanterelle mushrooms, or inside-out umbrellas! Next, we found the relatively rare Narrow Scaly Male-fern (*D. cambrensis*), distinguished by its boat-shaped pinnae, dense dark, cinnamon-coloured scales on the rachis and indusia like mushrooms (or umbrellas) with thin edges.



Studying a Narrow Scaly Male-fern. Photo: © Helena Crouch

In Somerset, the most frequent of this group is Golden Scaly Male-fern (*D. affinis*), but at Stockhill these are uncommon and usually stunted by the toxic lead-rich soils. We did eventually find some splendid specimens, with glossy sword-shaped fronds, thick stipes with dense

golden scales, and indusia which look like sturdy umbrellas.

The exhausting heat caused another member to turn back, but others were retained with the promise of Lemon-scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*) and were not disappointed. We found several beautiful plants beside a broad ride.

The rachis of this species is strikingly yellow; the whole frond is a pale yellow-green. The pinnae are distinctively much reduced in size towards the base of the frond, a feature distinguishing this from all other native species, and shared with Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*, later seen by some in Helena's garden).



Sori of Lemon-scented Fern. Photo: © Will Eden

The sori of Lemon-scented Fern are distinctively arranged around the edges of the pinnules and the indusia shrivel early. The young fronds bear yellow stalked glands, which produce the lemon scent, and the unfurling fronds are covered with silvery scales and have a spiky appearance. This is a fern of damp acidic soils, and although not uncommon on Exmoor, the Quantocks or the Blackdowns, in VC6 it has a very restricted distribution and is Scarce, found on the acidic parts of the Mendips and on the Lower Greensand of the far eastern edge.

Two more members turned back, but the remaining seven had more ferns to see, although for a while we were completely distracted by some young lizards!



The yellow rachis of Lemon-scented Fern. Photo: © Karen Andrews

to compare this with the Broad-leaved Pondweed seen earlier. Under trees we finally saw Hard-fern (*Blechnum spicant*) growing splendidly on the edges of ditches. A large patch of Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) was growing in a ditch: we were able to compare this with the Broad-leaved Pondweed seen earlier. Beside ditches, we saw Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*) in flower and we admired carpets of Fringed Bog-moss (*Sphagnum fimbriatum*). The final fern of the day was another Scaly Male-fern. On the pre-walk, the leaders had found some very beautiful examples of *Dryopteris paleaceolobata*. This is an extremely neat fern with glossy fronds and pinnules with distinctively crimped edges, neatly twisted and curving away from the rachis.

During the day, we had seen twenty species of fern and found a hybrid new to the hectad. The remaining hot weary participants made their way back to the car park, and three members joined the leaders for tea and cake in Helena's garden.



The neat, crimped, twisted pinnules of *Dryopteris paleaceolobata*.
Photo: © Helena Crouch



Attentive botanists in the field. Photo: © Graham Lavender

Sunday 19th September 2021 at Comwich

Leader & Report: Graham Lavender

September is one of the more reliable months for outdoor meetings and again the weather didn't fail us. Eight members met outside the pub at Comwich for the final planned meeting of the summer season of 2021. One of the advantages of a late meeting is the opportunity to closely examine the fruiting characteristics of taxa and, indeed, with a slow walk up the bank of the River Parrett and a circle through the marshes, plenty of opportunities for discussion presented. One of the early interesting finds was when Steve started digging in the village cricket pitch which is immediately adjacent to the coastal path to show us the bulbs of Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*). Soon we were all doing it and it was clear that they were locally abundant in the very short turf. Cricket pitches, as such, are not a noted habitat for this Rare Plant Register plant but it may be worth digging a few more up to prove or disprove that!



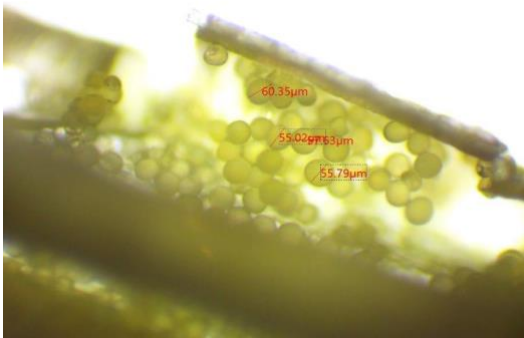
Kattegat Orache (*Atriplex x gustafssoniana*) bracteoles. Photo: © Graham Lavender

Less controversial but still challenging were the Oraches. With bracteoles fully developed it was the right time to puzzle over them. Spear-leaved Orache (*Atriplex prostrata*) was fairly easy to find, but a second taxa with

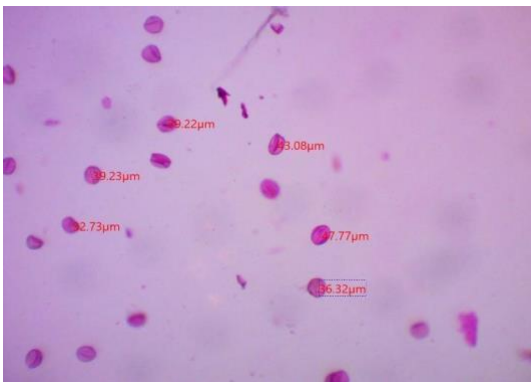
very variable size of bracteoles was determined, after careful review, as the hybrid between Spear-Leaved and Long-Stalked Orache (*A. prostrata* x *A. longipes* = *A. x gustafssoniana*). Babington's Orache (*Atriplex glabriuscula*) managed to elude us despite careful searching and previous records at the site.

Next a close look at the Saltmarsh-grasses (*Puccinellia*). Most frequent was Common Saltmarsh-grass (*P. maritima*), but on the edge of the coastal path, we found a smaller, more delicate plant that was most likely to be Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass (*P. distans*) but stubbornly did not have the reflexed lower branches. After a little searching, we did find some with reflexed branches, vouchers were taken, and all had lemmas of around 2mm, clearly separating them from the much larger lemmas on *P. maritima*.

Cord-grasses (*Spartina*) are represented in VC5 by records for both Common Cord-grass (*S. anglica*) and Townsend's Cord-grass, a hybrid with Smooth Cord-grass (*Spartina maritima* x *alterniflora* = *S. x townsendii*), the exact distribution of each is unclear. Vouchers from Comwich show normal pollen and are clearly within the size of *S. anglica*. A photo of *S. x townsendii* (from Porlock marshes) shows the much smaller irregular pollen for comparison.



Common Cord-grass (*Spartina anglica*). Photo: © Graham Lavender



Townsend's Cord-grass (*Spartina x townsendii*). Photo: © Graham Lavender

Steve had arranged for us to enter the Steart marshes, so we left the coastal path for a diversion to the landward side of the sea wall. A herd of cows were doing a magnificent job controlling the vegetation and, as a result, providing ideal conditions for hybrid docks. Clustered Dock (*Rumex conglomeratus*) and Broad-leaved Dock (*R. obtusifolius*) were present in the field and the slightly scruffy appearance of a hybrid beckoned. *Rumex x abortivus*, the hybrid between the two, was identified from its mix of features from both parents.

A few interesting grasses were noted both in the cow field and the edge of an adjacent arable field. Yellow Bristle-grass (*Setaria pumila*) was scattered, and a few specimens of Canary-grass (*Phalaris canariensis*) were seen.



Yellow Bristle-grass (*Setaria pumila*). Photo: © Graham Lavender

In all, three monads were recorded and updated. It is worth noting that the first monad, ST2542, although well recorded in the past, still had an increase in records from 232 to 255 showing that, with good sites, there is always more to find.

Thanks to all participants of the meeting for all contributions.

Saturday 30th October 2021 Weston-super-Mare

Leaders & Report: Liz McDonnell & Helena Crouch

The aim of the meetings held over this weekend was to record plants in flower to coincide with the Wild Flower Society's Autumn Week Hunt (recording plants in flower in the last seven days of October). Twelve members met at the western promontory of Weston-Super-Mare. As there were so many of us, we decided to form two groups and Helena took a party further south to the



Birnbeck Pier, Weston-super-Mare. Photo: © Liz McDonnell

Knightstone area to plant hunt in the separate monad of ST3161. Liz's group started in the car park of the old Birnbeck Pier. This structure is now sadly derelict, but the blocked-off approach road is a wonderfully scruffy area full of an interesting mixture of wild, planted, and self-sown plants irresistible to the field botanist. Although the aim was to find as many plants as possible in flower, we could not miss the opportunity of recording *all* of the species that we encountered (apart from those which had been obviously planted in the gardens and municipal flower beds). The Birnbeck group fossicked amongst the drinks cans and other detritus to find Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*) still with a few flowers visible amongst the fruits. We wandered down towards the old booking office and the remains of Hard-grass (*Parapholis strigosa*) were clearly visible as clumps of pale brown stiff stalks amongst the green leaves of other pavement plants. This is an annual species and most of the fruiting segments of the spike had broken off and had dispersed to germinate again in this rather unusual urban habitat (although the coastal rocks were only a few metres away over the sea wall). There were several large dense clumps of Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*) by the old booking office and at the base of the heavily graffitied fence. We eventually found a couple of flowers to add to our growing list of flowering plants. Several clumps of False Fox-sedge (*Carex otrubae*) were growing in a shady damp area and one large clump of Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*) was found between the wall and tarmac on the promenade – far from its favoured saltmarsh habitat. We puzzled over rosettes of Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) and Prickly Oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), trying to spot the different prickly characteristics of each – not easy! Having spent far too long in the car park, we made our way up to the municipal park of Prince Consort Gardens. Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) was occasional on the limestone rock outcrops and self-

sown in the flower beds and we found a few rather bedraggled flowers still persisting. Annual Wall-rocket (*Diplotaxis muralis*) was frequent as a pavement weed and still widely flowering. We had lunch in the ornate Victorian shelter as the rain swept in from the sea and were horrified to see that Hottentot-fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*) had been planted in the gardens.



Hottentot-fig in one of the flowerbeds. Photo: © Liz McDonnell

This is a large spreading South African succulent and is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which states that it is an offence to plant it or allow it to spread onto adjacent land or into the wild. We removed a large clump but found that it had been planted in other areas of the garden. (Liz later contacted the Parks and Open Spaces department of North Somerset Council to report this offence. At the time of writing, no response has been received). This municipal open space is managed and maintained by 'Friends of Prince Consort Gardens' and an attempt had been made to establish wildflowers in a strip of land along the eastern railings. Here we found plants including Fodder Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *balearicum*), Bladder Campion (*Silene vulgaris*), Corn Marigold (*Glebionis segetum*) and Purple Viper's- bugloss (*Echium plantagineum*) – the latter two still in flower. We suspected that the two ponds had been planted up with native aquatic species, but as there were several non-natives there too, it was difficult to know which ones should be recorded. However, we did what we could and recorded species such as Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), Fool's-water-cress

(*Helosciadium nodiflorum*), Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and a few strands of Ivy-leaved Duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*). One spike of Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*) was found on ivy-clothed rocks amongst the rockery plants and succulents. We made our way back to the car park and completed our day's botanising. The count-up at the end of the day revealed that Liz's group had recorded 54 species in flower and had added a further 34 to the monad total, which for a late October date was encouraging.

Meanwhile Helena's group of five headed for Knightstone to record in the coastal monad stretching from the Marine Lake to the Sea Lawns, over half of which is sea! We recorded Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*) on the way: only the second recent record for the hectad. In paving by the Marine Lake, we were dismayed to find Hottentot Fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*) spreading from nearby planters. Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*) was found in flower and Lesser Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia marina*) was growing in the pavement. Against the low wall surrounding Knightstone, a smart vegetative garden Sea Holly was spotted: the parent plants were soon tracked down, in a flowerbed, and identified as Variable-leaved Sea Holly (*Eryngium variifolium*), a new vice-county record. A second self-sown plant was found, in fruit, under a boat against the sea wall! Meanwhile in the flowerbed we found Sea Fern-grass (*Catapodium marinum*).



Variable-leaved Sea Holly (*Eryngium variifolium*) at base of a low wall.
Photo: © Helena Crouch

In a street, two saplings of Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) were found, self-sown from a tree in the adjacent park; this was also the source of a small self-sown Cider Gum (*Eucalyptus gunnii*), another new vice-county record.

Exploring the playground, one plant of Suffocated Clover (*Trifolium suffocatum*) was discovered, growing in a cell of some plastic grass mat.



Suffocated Clover (*Trifolium suffocatum*). Photo: © Helena Crouch

In VC6, this species is restricted to Berrow Dunes, Sand Point, and the Beach Lawns of Weston-super-Mare: our plant was nearly 1km north of plants on the Beach Lawns. We made our way through a car park, recording Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*) under some trees, and headed for the churchyard of St John the Baptist. The species-rich turf included Hoary Plantain (*Plantago media*), Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Lesser Hawkbit (*Leontodon saxatilis*), Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*) and many plants of Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*).

We reached the tranquil Victorian pleasure grounds of Grove Park in time for lunch. Giant Viper's-bugloss (*Echium pininana*) is naturalised here, with hundreds of plants self-sown along the edges of paths and borders. We recorded Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) and Spiked Milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) in the pond. After lunch we made our way back to the seafront, finding self-sown Cabbage-palms (*Cordyline australis*) growing in the pavement, and a smart clump of Silver Ragwort (*Jacobaea maritima*, formerly *Senecio cinerea*) nearby, at

the foot of a lamppost. This is abundant on the seafront rockeries, where the hybrid with Common Ragwort, *J. x albescens*, was also recorded.



Silver Ragwort (*Jacobaea maritima*) on the pavement at the base of a lamppost. Photo: © Helena Crouch

In the extreme south of our target monad, we reached the Beach Lawns. Here we found Toothed Medick (*Medicago polymorpha*) in flower, Bermuda-grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) and a small clump of Rescue Brome (*Ceratochloa cathartica*).



Toothed Medick (*Medicago polymorpha*) at the edge of the Beach Lawns. Photo: © Helena Crouch

On a damp area, we were surprised to find a large clump of Hard Rush (*Juncus inflexus*) and one plant of Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*). Heading back through town, we found distinctively pale plants of Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*) around the base of a street tree and a few plants of Fiddle Dock (*Rumex pulcher*) in a lawn behind the Winter Gardens. Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) was in flower on a verge in the nearby Town Square.

Altogether, we recorded 194 species, taking the post-2000 total to 243 in our target monad, which is pleasing, especially since more than half of the 1km square is in the sea! We found 64 species in flower.

Sunday 31st October 2021, Taunton (VC5)

Leader & Report: Simon Leach

This was, in essence, a re-run of a late-October field meeting held in 2018. The aim, as last time, was to see how many wild plants we could find still flowering in a single day during the last week of October. In the interests of science, our route would be more or less the same as in 2018, starting at Silk Mills Park and Ride and heading into town across Longrun Meadow, through Goodlands gardens and along the river and canal to Firepool/Obridge, then up onto Trenchard Way and back via Chip Lane, Staplegrove Road and the path out to Roughmoor that runs along beside Turner's Allotments and Frieze Hill community orchard.

Our party was a depleted one. At least three late cancellations, one due to COVID-19, meant there were just four of us, three of whom had also been present the last time we did this walk. The day went much as planned, the weather was blustery with the odd shower but was otherwise sunny; and it felt at times like we were watching a blockbuster movie that some of us had seen three years earlier. We even found we knew a few of the lines, with new finds coming to mind shortly before we found them!

Like last time, we lingered for at least an hour in the car park — you wouldn't expect anything less, would you? — and there were rich pickings to be had, including Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*), Wall Bedstraw (*Galium parisiense*), Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium pusillum*) and Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*)—the last of these in exactly the same spot where Graham found it in 2018.

A strip of former arable to the north of Roughmoor pond produced Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) and Thyme-leaved Speedwell (*Veronica serpyllifolia*). There was also much still-flowering Prickly Ox-tongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), plus both Creeping (*Cirsium arvense*) and Spear Thistles (*C. vulgare*). In rough grassland around the pond there was Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), and the dregs of some just-about-still-flowering Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*).

Into Longrun Meadow, and we made a beeline for Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*) which was flowering well and seems to be increasing in the westernmost flood-retention basin — an unlikely habitat for it. There was also some flowering Lady's-bedstraw (*Galium verum*) and, on the bank along the southern boundary of the basin we noted several patches of Grass-leaved Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) still with one or two flowers showing.

The rest of Longrun didn't produce a great deal, although we were impressed by the abundance of flower-heads on both Red and White Clovers (*Trifolium pratense* and *T. repens*), plus we found a few plants of still-flowering Lesser Trefoil (*T. dubium*).

We spotted Russian-vine (*Fallopia baldschuanica*), Traveller's-joy (*Clematis vitalba*) and Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) on our way out of Longrun, before making good use of Tesco's 'facilities', before heading across to French Weir Park where we were bemused by a not-quite-flowering broad-leaved grass. We posted it on WhatsApp while we stopped for a bite of lunch, and the consensus seemed to be that it was some kind of *Sorghum* — a 'first', apparently, for hectad ST22 whichever species it turned out to be³.

At Goodlands Gardens, as last time, we spotted White Melilot (*Melilotus albus*) and Henbit Dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*), while Balkan Spurge (*Euphorbia oblongata*) was still to be seen on waste ground by the canal close to the new COVID-19 vaccination centre at Firepool Weir.

Trenchard Way, in the vicinity of the railway station, had been subject to some 'tidying up' of its verges since 2018, and the new multi-storey car park has resulted in the destruction of one particularly species-rich grassy bank. Even so, there were plenty of plants to be had here, including Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Hoary

Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), more Small-flowered Crane's-bill, and a few high-and-dry plants of Water Chickweed (*Stellaria aquatica*, but still known to most of us as *Myosoton*).

On verges around the Chip Lane/Staplegrove roundabout we searched unsuccessfully for Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*), which actually hasn't been seen since it was discovered here during our equivalent meeting in 2018. But on the roundabout itself we saw flowering Viper's-bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) which is seemingly a new record for the monad/tetrad. From there, the path back to the Park and Ride was uneventful, apart from some well-naturalised Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) close to what used to be Old Harry's reclamation yard.

We had fewer pairs of eyes this time, but still managed a creditable 134 species in flower during the day. Add in a few extras found after the meeting had officially closed — like the Adria Bellflower (*Campanula portenschlagiana*), Trailing Bellflower (*C. poscharskyana*) and Fool's-parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*) lighting up the pavements and walls in my street — and the grand total of 141 compared favourably with the 158 seen in 2018. Once again, the urban heat bubble, an Indian summer and a complete lack of October frosts had combined to guarantee us another good haul.

2022 SRPG Meetings Programme

We look forward to seeing you at an SRPG event in 2022. A list of events appears below with full details available on the SRPG website. Please note the importance of booking in advance with the event leader.

Important: Advance Booking is essential to ensure any COVID restrictions are complied with and for health and safety of all participants. Also some of the meetings will have restrictions on numbers either due to limitations on parking, site limitations or simply to ensure a good ratio of experts to participants at the meeting. The meeting leaders will have the final decision and responsibility for organisation of the meeting.

Meetings start at 11am except where a 10.30am start is indicated.

Graham Lavender, Meetings Secretary

³ The species was later identified as Great Millet, *Sorghum bicolor*. See Plant Records for 2021 for full details.

List of Planned 2022 Events

Saturday 19th February. Winter Twigs meeting, Taunton

Saturday 26th March. Recording and mapping meeting, Shapwick

Sunday 10th April. Orchard Wood, Netherclay, near Corfe (VC5)

Saturday 23rd April. Beginners/Improvers Plant Identification Workshop, Shapwick

Saturday 7th May. Cross Quarry, near Axbridge (VC6)

Sunday 22nd May. Workshop on Clovers (*Trifolium*), Stolford (VC5)

Sunday 29th May. Langford Heathfield (VC5)

Saturday 18th June. Church Town, Backwell (VC6)

Sunday 26th June. Large Thyme (*Thymus pulegioides*); Ham Hill, Stoke Sub-Hamdon (VC5)

Sunday 3rd July. Churchyard and River Barle, Simonsbath (VC5)

Saturday 9th July. Witch Lodge Fields, Netherclay, north of Staple Fitzpaine (VC5)

Wednesday 20th July. Bridgwater and Taunton Canal and Northmoor SSSI (VC5)

Saturday 6th August. Middle Hope, North Somerset (VC6)

Saturday 27th August. Backwell Lake and Nailsea (VC6)

Saturday 17th September. Clevedon Moor (VC6)

Sunday 18th September. Tintinhull (VC5)

Sunday 2nd October. Saltford (VC6)

Sunday 30th October. Bath (VC6)

Link to full programme details on SRPG Website:

<https://www.somersetrareplantsgroup.org.uk/meetings-programme-2/>

Part 2: Articles 2021

A Dandelion update

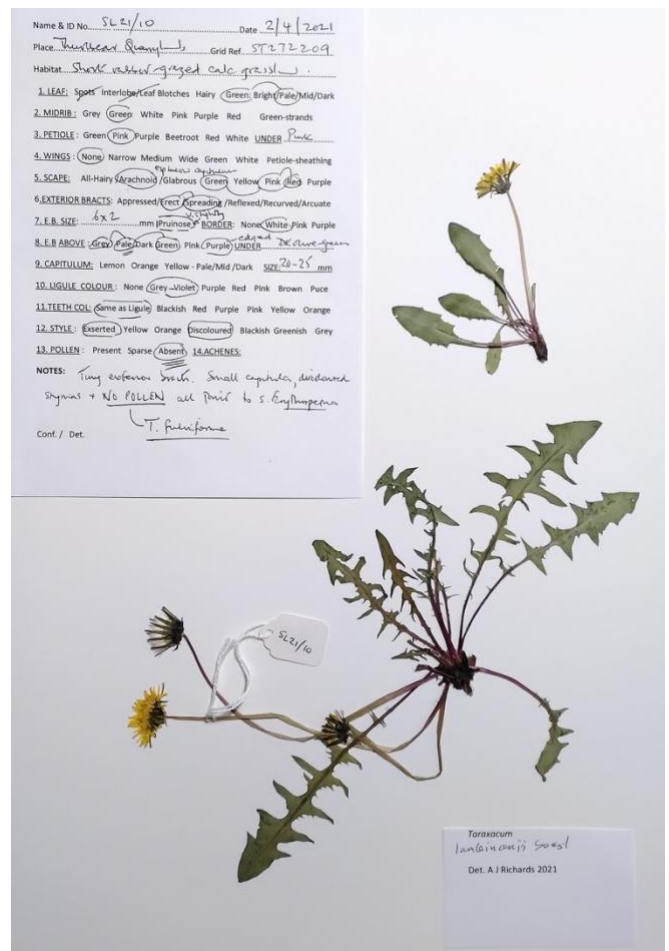
By Simon Leach, Graham Lavender & Jeanne Webb

Our studies of the Somerset *Taraxacum* were hampered somewhat in 2020 by the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, but we were fortunate in 2021 that the third lockdown began to ease by the time the dandelion-hunting season was properly up and running.

New county and VC records for 2020 were included in Helena's 'Plant Records' in last year's SRPG newsletter, with four species new to the whole of Somerset (*Taraxacum angulare*, *T. berthae*, *T. inclinorum*, *T. stictophyllum*) and two new to VC5 only (*T. nitidum*, *T. angustisquameum*). Of these, the undoubted star of the show was *T. inclinorum*, a recently-described species that, until found on Exmoor, was presumed to be an Irish endemic. A report of the 2020 records can be found in *Somerset Archaeology & Natural History* (Lavender *et al.* 2021).

In 2021 it was the discovery of *T. lambinonii* – never before recorded in Britain and Ireland – that was especially noteworthy. Apart from our two records, this member of section Erythrosperma was also recorded in 2021 in Sussex by Tim Rich, but you'll find it's missing from the excellent new 'Field Handbook' (Richards 2021) as all three records were made after the book had gone to press – a prime example of something being already out of date by the time it's published! *T. lambinonii* is a mainly French/Italian/Spanish species, and could well be a previously-overlooked native in Great Britain. It was originally described from Switzerland and is named for the highly respected Belgian botanist and lichenologist Jacques Lambinon.⁴

In 2021 we found, between us, ten species new to Somerset, plus one new to VC5 and another new to VC6. All identifications have been determined or confirmed by the national referee for *Taraxacum*, John Richards (AJR), with voucher specimens to be lodged in the SANHS/Somerset County Herbarium (TTN) housed at the Somerset Heritage Centre under the care of the



Taraxacum lambinonii, a new species for Britain which was collected from two localities in Somerset in 2021. Photo: © Simon Leach

South West Heritage Trust. We list the relevant records below, where GEL = Graham Lavender, SJL = Simon Leach, and JW = Jeanne Webb. Those taxa described in Richards (2021) as being probably or certainly introduced in Britain are shown with an asterisk before the name.

Taraxacum acutifidum – Minehead, Seaward Way (SS98374519), on grass verge, 7 Mar, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum cambricum – Ashton Court (ST5471), in woodland beside footpath, several plants, 8 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR; first record for VC6. A British and Irish endemic with a predominantly westerly distribution.

****Taraxacum exsertum*** – Minehead industrial estate (SS97504615), on grass verge, 16 Mar, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset. [The dot for ST04 on the map in Richards (2021) is an error (AJR pers. comm.).]

⁴ Apart from the dandelion, Lambinon (1936-2015) also has an alga (*Cyanobotrys lambinonii*), a puffball (*Lycoperdon*), two lichens (an *Opegrapha* and a *Peltigera*), a fern (*Asplenium*) and a sea-lavender

(*Limonium*) that bear his name. Not that we're biased, but we have a sneaking suspicion we know which one would have given him the greatest pleasure.

Taraxacum inopinatum – Hurlstone Point (SS89984824), in coastal clifftop grassland, 25 Mar, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum lambinonii – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST272209), in short rabbit-grazed calcareous grassland, 2 Apr, SJL, det. AJR, having been provisionally identified by SJL as *T. fulviforme*; Colton, Bird Hill (ST06113624), probably hundreds of plants, with *T. argutum*, on grass verge of forest track surfaced with limestone chippings, 20 Apr, JW, det. AJR, having been provisionally identified by JW as *T. parnassicum*; first and second records for VC5, Somerset and Britain.

Taraxacum ochrochlorum – Dunster Station (SS99554475), on grass verge, 13 Mar, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5.

Taraxacum pachymerum – Cleeve Hill, Watchet (ST05664261), in calcareous grassland, 2 May, JW, conf. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

****Taraxacum severum*** – Dunster (SS99454404), on grass verge of roundabout, 22 Mar, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

****Taraxacum speciosiflorum*** – Taunton, Obridge (ST23652526), on partly shaded raised verge and bank beside cycle-path, with *T. britannicum*, 2 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset. A seemingly rare species in Britain, this is the first record for SW England.

Taraxacum spiculatum – Honeymead Two Gates (SS80483929), on grassy road verge next to open moorland, 30 Mar, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum subnaevosum – Drybridge Combe (SS76093850), on verge of open moorland, 12 May, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset. A GB endemic with a northern, often upland, range centered on N England and Scotland; this appears to be the first record for SW England.

Taraxacum wallonicum – Colton, Bird Hill (ST05783618), several plants in a field with plenty of *T. britannicum*, 8 Apr, JW, conf. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset. Only the second record away from its stronghold in SE England where thought to be 'probably native' (Richards 2021).

With the new species added in the last two years, and following one or two corrections, the *Taraxacum* flora of Somerset now stands at 170 species: 157 in VC5 and 93 in VC6. An up-to-date checklist of the county's *Taraxacum* species is available on the SRPG website.⁵

References

Lavender, G.E., Webb, J., Richards, A.J. & Leach, S.J. (2021 in press). Somerset Dandelions (*Taraxacum*) – 2020 update. *Somerset Archaeology & Natural History* 164.

Richards, A.J. (2021). *Field Handbook to British and Irish Dandelions*. B.S.B.I. Handbook No. 23. Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, Durham.

George Wade Garlick (1915-1999) and his exploration of Leigh Woods, Bristol, VC6, in the 1950s

By Clive Lovatt

At the SRPG online meeting held on 27th March 2021, I gave a short visual presentation about GW Garlick and his survey of the flora of Leigh Woods (VC6) and the rest of the Avon Gorge, Bristol. The full presentation is intended for a 'History of Somerset Botany' webpage on the SRPG website.

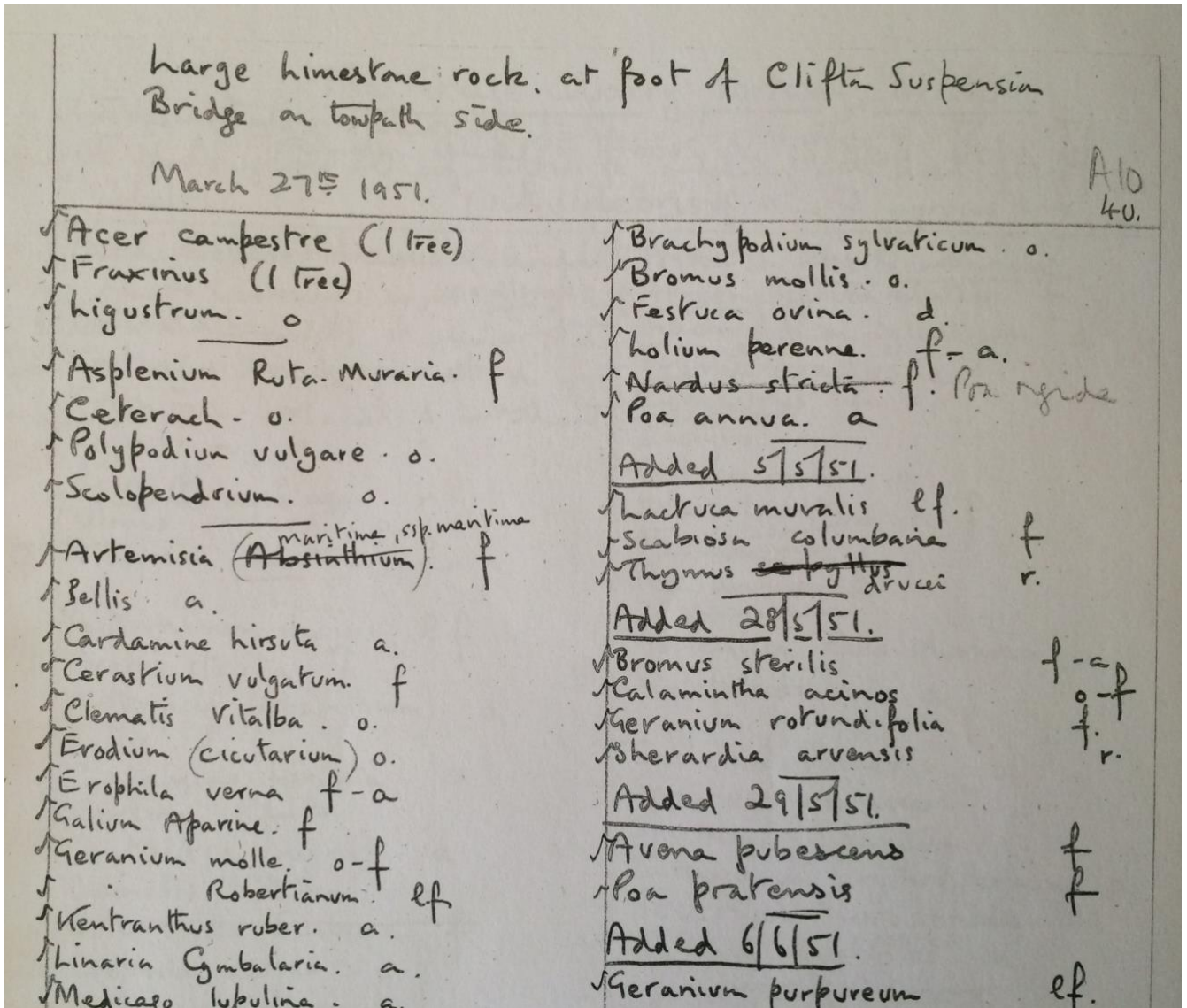
Garlick lived in Yate, Gloucestershire for nearly 50 years and worked as a schoolteacher. He came from north Lancashire where he also made a notable contribution to botany.



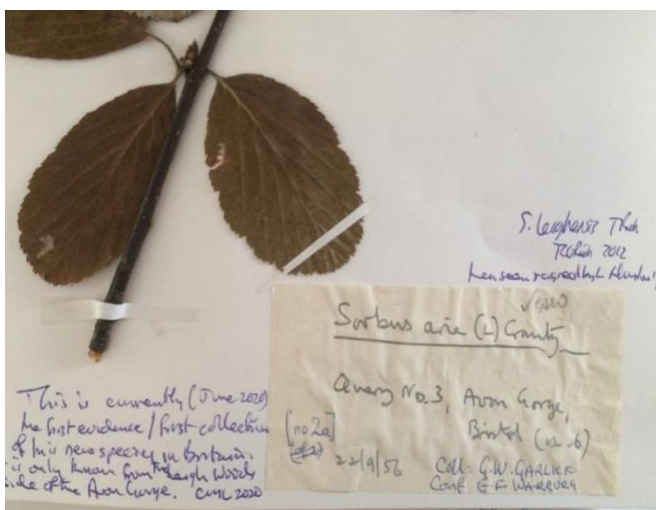
George Garlick in Leigh Woods, March 1982.
Photo: © Clive Lovatt.

He began his survey on Easter Sunday 25th March 1951, and the following Tuesday, exactly 70 years before the date of my presentation, he recorded his first site on the North Somerset side of the gorge (see below). He went on to make 9,068 abundance records mostly resolvable to at least 1km square resolution, with 572 different plants over 129 contiguous survey sites, most of them delimited on a large hand-drawn map.

⁵ See https://www.somsetrareplantsgroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Somerset-Dandelion-checklist-Nov_-2021_FINAL.pdf



Garlick's survey sheet for a site under Leigh Woods first recorded on 27th March 1951. Original in the Archives of the Bristol Naturalists' Society. Note some identification difficulties prior to the publication of *the Flora of the British Isles* by Clapham, Tutin and Warburg in 1952. Photo: © Clive Lovatt from a copy.



Garlick's gathering, on 22nd September 1956, is the first known collection of *Sorbus leighensis*, Leigh Woods Whitebeam. EF Warburg, the then expert on whitebeams, could not distinguish it from *Sorbus aria*, Common Whitebeam. Photo of a specimen in Hb CML

Garlick was particularly pleased when on 24th August 1951 he discovered *Phegopteris connectilis*, Beech Fern, in Leigh Woods, describing the 'lovely golden fronds which catch the wandering rays of sunshine'. Fascinated by the variety of whitebeams, and the way several different species 'rubbed shoulders together' in one of the quarries, in 1956 he was the first to collect *Sorbus leighensis*, Leigh Woods Whitebeam, later described by Tim Rich in 2009.

2020/2021 Mistletoe Survey

By Liz McDonnell

Winter is the best time to spot the semi-parasitic plant Mistletoe, when most of the host trees and shrubs on which it grows have dropped their leaves and the clumps are more easily recorded. In the autumn of 2020, SRPG launched a survey for members to take part in over the winter of 2020/2021. Our MapMate database showed that there were certainly Mistletoe hotspots in certain parts of Somerset, but that many old records had not been updated for many years, so a new concentrated effort to send in records was initiated and announced on the SRPG website. An online data-entry form was devised encouraging members to submit individual casual records direct to SRPG. In addition, for those members who had multiple records to submit, a spreadsheet was sent out to fill out and send in later. The data that was collected included the obvious bits of information that constitute a botanical record (who recorded the Mistletoe, where found [including grid ref] and when was it seen), but other information including the host tree or shrub; number of trees that it is growing on; associated birds and insects; type of habitat; and any other relevant details including photos. All this was coordinated by Linda Everton and Chris Loudon with the help of Tony Price from SERC, who generated a distribution map of the records as they were submitted over the period of the survey.

The survey commenced in November 2020 and ran until April 2021 and proved to be popular with members over the winter months. In all, 42 members and friends submitted a total of 1451 records, either on-line or by sending in multiple records on a spreadsheet. A wide range of host trees were identified during the survey, the overall favourite being varieties of cultivated apple and in many parts of Somerset it is especially abundant in cider apple orchards. The next most popular hosts are Hawthorns, Poplars, Limes, Maples and Willows. Some common Somerset tree species are rare as Mistletoe hosts and during our survey, only four records were submitted growing on Birch, two on Elm, and only one positive record on Elder. A prize was offered for the first contributor who sent in details and photographic evidence of Mistletoe growing on Oak, but there were no such records and the prize is still unclaimed!

During our survey, we were fortunate to receive a fascinating talk on Mistletoe by Jonathan Briggs who

talked at length about the ecology, the traditions and conservation of this parasitic species. His book *A Little*

Book about Mistletoe is of great interest and is recommended for those that want more information. For the winter 2020 edition of the Exmoor magazine, Ro FitzGerald wrote a timely article on Mistletoe titled 'No Kissing on Exmoor', where she described the history, distribution and cultural importance of this strange plant, especially in relation to Somerset.

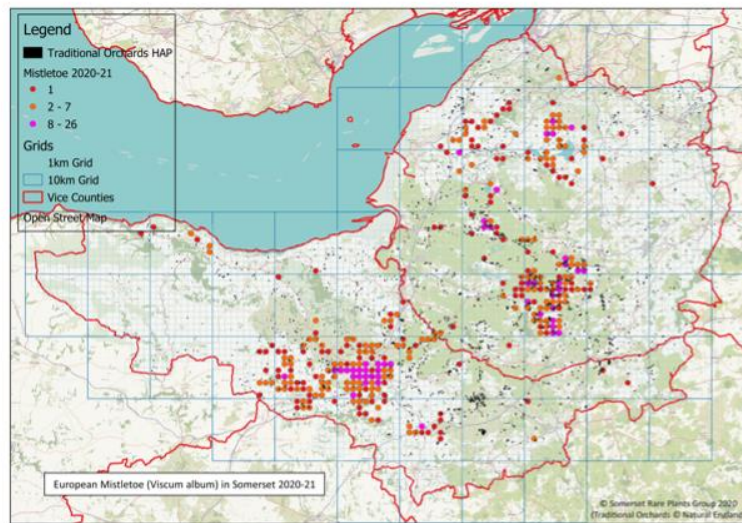
For my own contribution to the survey, sometimes accompanied by other SRPG members and friends, I recorded Mistletoe mainly around Wedmore and Cheddar as well as many other locations further afield. I put a notice about our survey in my local Parish Magazine and as a result, visited orchards and gardens that I would not have known about and met many people who were fascinated to learn more about this strange plant. I talked to a local farmer about the apparent increase in the occurrence of Mistletoe, especially in old cider apple orchards. He reported that he regularly cuts the Mistletoe from his apple trees to prevent them from deteriorating from excessive growth of the parasite. I saw many sad examples of old apple trees which are collapsing and dying under the weight and abundance of too many clumps.



Cider apple tree at Baltonsborough, broken from the weight of too much Mistletoe. Photo: © Liz McDonnell

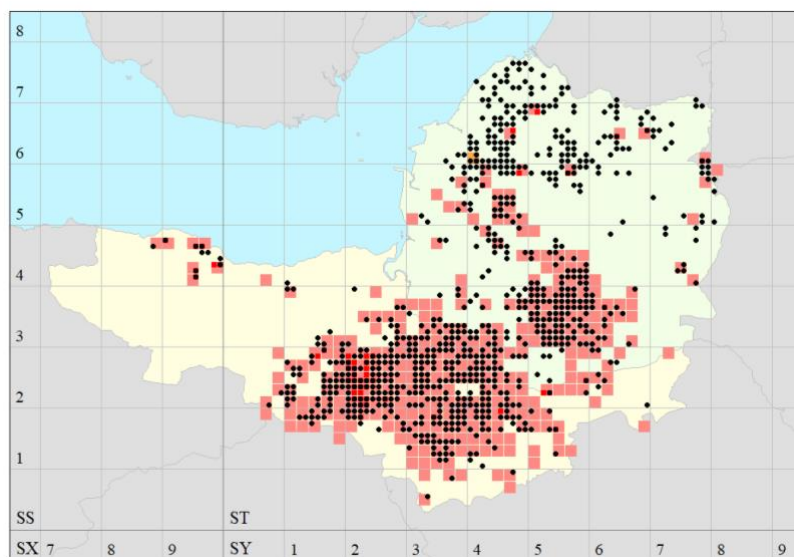
Linda contacted Sheppy's, a commercial cider company based between Taunton and Wellington, to ask them how they deal with Mistletoe in their orchards. They have around 20,000 apple trees and acknowledged that Mistletoe is a major problem for them. It is infesting all of their orchards and is a particular problem on the older trees. They tolerate a certain amount of Mistletoe on their old trees but try not to let them be overwhelmed. They harvest the Mistletoe and sell it in their farm shop at Christmas and use it in large quantities in their annual wassail ceremony. They are also aware of the wildlife interest of their orchards and especially the many redwings and fieldfares that come for the apples in first and then feast on the mistletoe.

The number of records submitted in the SRPG 2020/2021 survey was remarkable and added considerably to our knowledge of the distribution of this species in Somerset. The map below indicates the large number of records that were received during the survey period and roughly indicates the main areas of concentration in the county, but it does not accurately reflect the current distribution of Mistletoe in Somerset, as many areas were not visited.



Distribution of Mistletoe, *Viscum album*, from records sent in during the survey period.
Map: Tony Price

The latest MapMate Mistletoe map below gives a very good indication of the distribution in Somerset (but please note that some of the survey records are not yet added to the database). Although the on-line facility for submitting records has now closed on the SRPG website, the VC5 & VC6 Recorders are always keen to receive your records, so do continue to send them for the continual update.



Somerset distribution of Mistletoe, *Viscum album*.
Sepia squares - pre 1987, red squares - 1987-1999, black dots - post 2000.
Map: Helena Crouch

Willows Not Weeping

By Ro FitzGerald



Desmond Meikle OBE (18 May 1923 – 8 February 2021).
Photo: © Jeanne Webb

Somerset has many connections with willows. The wetlands of the Levels have supported the genus since prehistory, and they have been used in many areas of life for millennia and are still grown as a crop for various arts and crafts. The iconic pollards frame views of Glastonbury Tor and the wide fields and rhynes of Sedgemoor. Ever since I first knew of him it has seemed to me a perfect turn of history that Desmond Meikle, author of the BSBI *Willows and Poplars* Handbook which so many of us use, should be someone who lived for much of his life in the county, and of course as I'm a Vc5 resident it seemed especially good that his home was in Wootton Courtenay on the edge of Exmoor.

There are other connections to both Desmond and his beloved willows which bring his life and work even closer to SRPG members. Jeanne and Tim Webb were for 40 years his close friends (and latterly life and business helpers), and he passed on to Jeanne valuable willow knowledge so that we can all now call on her experience with this difficult group. We even have a strong interest in Simon and Vicki Leach's brilliant cricketer son Jack when he wields bats made of the wood!

Of course, the best-known aspect of Desmond's life was his distinguished work as a taxonomist at Kew, and his authorship of the superb *Flora of Cyprus*, but his Somerset life and the many friends he made here are the key to a delightful event created by Jeanne and Tim to commemorate his death (which came earlier this year). COVID-19 restrictions finally allowing this, a lunch was arranged in Wootton Courtenay village hall on 12th August. Desmond himself always loved a party and had himself helped to plan this before his death! It was quite the best memorial event I've experienced. It was attended by neighbours and friends with a scattering of distinguished botanists – two of these spoke movingly, acknowledging Desmond's help as their careers started (to end at the highest levels in Edinburgh and Kew), and Dr Irina Belyaeva the international willow queen (who Desmond had collaborated with) came from Russia! Jeanne had prepared a wonderful spread of memorabilia – photos, medals, publications – and Jen's Pantry served an excellent lunch. People brought a flower from their gardens to create a 'village bunch' to be taken afterwards to the church, and toasts were drunk in a British sparkling wine. Good wishes came too from his country of origin, Ireland, and a copy of the *Flora of County Fermanagh*, to which he contributed importantly, was on show.

This felt like a perfect celebration, bringing close all the enjoyment of knowing Desmond, his jokes, his enormous knowledge, and his unfailing generosity. It was so far from the gloom of some 'memorial' occasions – rather it gave enjoyment and inspiration to keep botanising and treasure one's friendships. We are lucky in SRPG, not only living in a willow heartland, but sharing it with Jeanne, Tim, and for so many years Desmond himself.

First Flowerings in 2021

By Simon Leach

In the end, we probably grew a bit weary of recording first flowering dates (FFDs) – or maybe it was just me? Even so, our attempt to keep track of spring in 2020 persisted surprisingly well into the autumn and winter, helped along by a second lockdown in November 2020 and then a *third* from January 2021 onwards. Our project had begun with the first Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum maculatum*) of 2020, so it seemed only right, in the end, that we should keep it going at least until the first Lords-and-Ladies of 2021. A full year, one complete circuit of the sun, and on the threshold of another spring about to unfold and unravel in its own particular way. But, at least for our group, this felt like the right time to stop – and a good moment to move on.

In early 2021 there were the occasional first-flowering alerts on the ever-lively SRPG WhatsApp Group, but for the most part records of FFDs in 2021 – especially those after the middle of March – were once again from the Taunton area and made by me. This was the continuation of an obsession that had begun in 2008 and still showed no sign of abating – despite curses from the rest of the family and the usual New Year’s resolution to have a break to maybe do something different and more interesting. I could easily find something different to do – but more interesting? Really?

Results of the first flowerings project in 2020 had been posted on the SRPG website as they were written, and these were subsequently edited and published in last year’s newsletter. A few additional reports were posted online covering the period October 2020 to February 2021, while *all* the pieces, right through to the end of March 2021, plus a lengthy introduction to the project, were later ironed out and stitched together as a stand-alone pdf ‘exhibited’ at the BSBI’s (virtual) Annual Exhibition Meeting in November. I wouldn’t want to force it on anyone, but if you’d like a copy you’re very welcome to get in touch.

Turning now to spring 2021, here’s a quick summary of the chief points of interest. The most immediately obvious thing was how different 2021 was to the spring of 2020. We had more frosts in January 2021 alone than in the first three months of 2020 put together; and then, in the second week of February we caught the western edge of a ‘beast from the east’, with sleet, hail and even snow on several days. Each cold snap seemed to stall spring’s progress, and at least from mid-

February onwards it became clear that spring was ‘running late’, with many FFDs one to two weeks behind the dates recorded in 2020. This can be seen in Fig. 1, which for 326 species compares FFDs in 2021 with those recorded in 2020. Species coming into flower later in 2021 than in 2020 are represented by dots *above* the diagonal line, while those with *earlier* FFDs have dots *below* the line. Overall, FFDs in 2021 were (on average) 11 days *later* than in 2020.

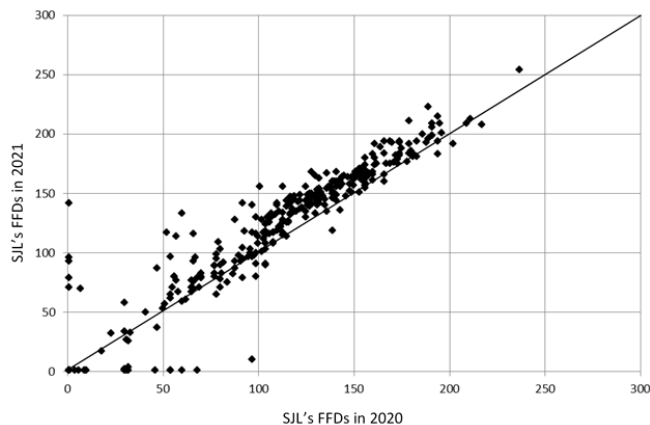


Fig. 1. FFDs for 326 species in 2021, plotted against their FFDs in 2020. Dates are shown as day no. (1 January = day 1). The diagonal line marks the line along which the data-points would lie if 2021 FFDs were identical to those recorded in 2020; above the line is later than the 2020 date, below the line is earlier

A good example of a species with delayed onset of flowering in 2021 was Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) (Fig. 2), which in Taunton was nearly three weeks later than in 2020.



Fig. 2. Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), typical of many summer-flowering species in being markedly later starting to flower in 2021 than in 2020 – in this case, 19 days later. Photo: © Simon Leach

The 2021 FFDs can also be compared with average FFDs recorded for the decade 2008-17 (Fig. 3). As can be seen by comparing Fig. 3 with Fig. 1, the dots are now clustered much more closely to the diagonal line, indicating that dates for most species in 2021 were not that far away from their decadal averages: overall, they were (on average) 4 days *earlier*.

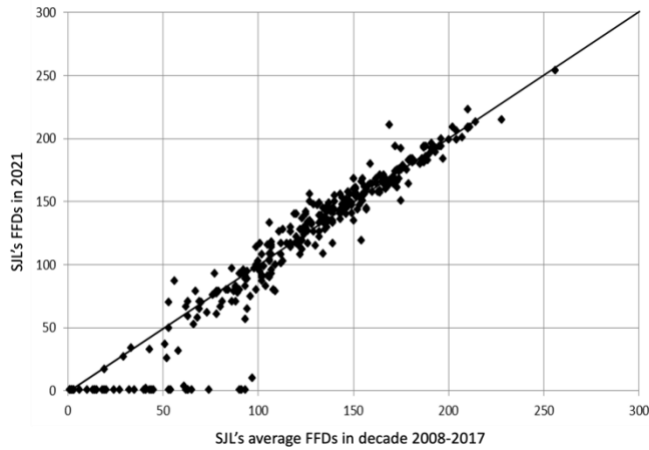


Fig. 3. FFDs for 333 species in 2021, plotted against their average FFDs for the decade 2008-20017. Dates are shown as day no. (1 January = day 1). The diagonal line marks the line along which the data-points would lie if 2021 FFDs were identical to the decadal averages; above the line is later than the decadal average, below the line is earlier.

For sake of completeness, and perhaps a more meaningful perspective, we can also compare the 2021 FFDs with Walter Watson's dates in the early 20th-century. You'll notice that this produces a strikingly different picture (Fig. 4), with a clear majority of the data-points falling well below the line. Indeed, for the 333 species recorded, FFDs in 2021 were (on average) a not-inconsiderable 18 days *earlier* than in Watson's day.

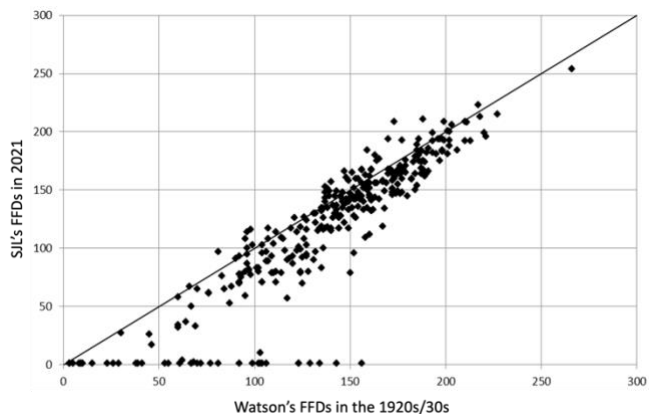


Fig. 4. FFDs for 333 species in 2021, plotted against 'average first flowering times' given by Watson. Dates are shown as day no. (1 January = day 1). The diagonal line marks the line along which the data-points would lie if 2021 FFDs were identical to Watson's; above the line is later than Watson's date, below the line is earlier.

Which is a roundabout way of saying that one's perception or appreciation of the rate of progress, or the relative 'earliness' or 'lateness' of spring 2021 (or indeed *any* spring) depends very much on what one is comparing it against: against the previous year 2021 was really rather *late*, whereas against the previous decade's-worth of springs it was fairly typical but maybe just a touch *early*. In contrast, compared to Watson's springs of nearly a century ago it was, like so many springs since 2008, *extraordinarily* early. Dear old Walter, as I've said before, would surely be incredulous at the apparent absurdity of early 21st-century FFDs.

It would be interesting, if only we could time travel, to compare FFDs today with those recorded by Somerset botanists in the *next* century. A hundred years from now, you have to wonder whether even today's earliest dates might seem to be almost laughingly late.

Except that, as we already know, this really is no laughing matter.

Peter Mountford remembered by his SRPG friends

By Clive Lovatt

Having passed 21, settled down with a constitution, and with an expanding newsletter and membership, and now regularly electing Honorary Members, it seemed important for us to pause and together remember one of our members who died in 2021. And so we did at the AGM on 29th January 2022. Earlier, hearing of his passing, several of us had shared our recollections of the late Peter Mountford.

Peter was briefly a member in recent years and as his health and fitness to drive slipped, so several of us had the pleasure of his company as a passenger when we took him to field meetings, and to our 20th anniversary conference in 2017. This was a chance to catch up with someone we had known as the Warden of three VC6 NNRs, Leigh Woods (the Avon Gorge NNR, in the 1980s), Gordano Valley and Ebbor Gorge. Thus far, we have been unable to trace anything other than an English Nature work photo, possibly at Fyne Court in late 1993, where he stands above the crowd behind the back row.



Peter Mountford stands tall at the back of an English Nature group photo believed to have been taken at Fyne Court on 16th December 1993.
Photo: © English Nature contributed by Simon Leach

Peter was a modest man, and the internet reveals that he was the first warden of what is now an NNR at Spurn Point, Yorkshire, for the then Yorkshire Naturalists' Trust (later the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust). He served there for three years from March 1960 until joining the Nature Conservancy Council. As Yorkshire's only island (and then only according to the state of the tide) it is especially important for birdwatchers. During Peter's time an average of 300 a year overnighted there.

Libby Houston related 'that Peter was unintentionally the reason I ended up as a botanist, in the Avon Gorge'. Armed with shears she was engaged in conservation work 'under his instructions and eye - below the Observatory, and above Bridge Valley Road, so he was certainly involved with the whole Gorge'. She added that not inclined to write himself, he helped a succession of students of Dr Lewis Frost with their University project work, and no doubt he was equally supportive to local naturalists.

He attended a Bristol Naturalists' Society meeting in February 2017 at which Tim Rich talked about gathering seed for the Millennium Seed Bank, and one of the dandelions Tim mentioned was from a marshy habitat in a Kent nature reserve, and Peter recognised the place from a photo. 'I was warden there for 17 years', he said. 'How surprising to have such a thing and not have realised it', he added, with an element of pride and no complaint that he had not found it out for himself. I recall him asking if I could find a copy of the

BSBI *Sorbus* handbook, for him to catch up with the subject, but I regret it was out of print and unobtainable second-hand. Simon Leach told us he later lent him his copy for a couple of years.

Peter died in hospital in Bath on 10th November 2021 after a stroke. He is left by his wife Maggie at their home in Wells. Their two children, both sons, had died earlier, one as recently as 2020. At Peter's request, no guests were invited to his funeral. Liz McDonnell received the sad news from Mrs Mountford. Two or more of us sent cards of condolence, with assurance that Peter was, as he still is, remembered by his friends.

Clive Lovatt

Since contributing this article to the SRPG newsletter, Clive Lovatt has sadly too passed away. He was a dear man, kind-hearted, gentle, patient, generous, and incredibly knowledgeable. His wisdom, always lightly worn, would more than likely be served up with a hint of mischief and fun. He will be greatly missed by his SRPG friends.

An obituary for Clive will appear in the next SRPG newsletter along with an article on the website.

Plant Records for 2021

Compiled by Helena Crouch

During 2021, despite lockdowns and other restrictions, more than **71,000** records were made for vascular plants in Somerset: nearly **22,000** in **VC5** and over **49,000** in **VC6**, which is a phenomenal achievement. Thank you very much to everyone – members of SRPG and others – who sent any records. As always, the list of new Somerset/Vice-County records is dominated by alien species; however, there are some noteworthy native additions to each Vice-County and many other significant records were made for native taxa, including Rare Plant Register species, some of which are listed in the third section. *Taraxacum* species new to Somerset or to VC5 or VC6 are listed in a separate note. All records below are for 2021 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:

HJC	Helena Crouch
RFitzG	Ro FitzGerald
DG	Dave Gibbs
IPG	Ian Green
DH	David Hawkins
RJH	Rupert Higgins
RVL	Richard Lansdown
GEL	Graham Lavender
SJL	Simon Leach
DCL	David Leadbetter
AJL	Alex Lockton
DJMcC	David McCosh
EJMcD	Liz McDonnell
SJP	Stephen Parker
JP	John Poingdestre
FJR	Fred Rumsey
PAS	Pat Steele
NFS	Nick Stewart
MAW	Margaret Webster
SRPG	Somerset Rare Plants Group
WFS	Wild Flower Society

Where reference is made to the *The Atlas Flora of Somerset* (Green, P.R., Green, I.P. & Crouch, G.A., 1997; Wayford and Yeovil: privately published) this is denoted as *AFS*.

New Somerset Records

**Agapanthus praecox* (African Lily) – Porlock Weir (SS86664771), 30 Jul, 2 plants growing in shingle on road verge, GEL, VC5.

**Dicksonia antarctica* (Australian Tree-fern) – The Parks (SS87634681), 24 Mar, 12 plants to around 1.5m tall scattered along 30-40m of earth bank above footpath, presumably self-sown from nearby Greencombe garden, GEL & N. Ramsay, VC5.

**Eryngium variifolium* (Variable-leaved Sea-Holly) – Weston-super-Mare, Knightstone (ST31246181, ST31256183), 30 Oct, 1 vegetative plant in paving and 1 fruiting plant beneath a boat against low sea wall, SRPG, VC6.

**Gilia capitata* (Blue-thimble-flower) – Coxley Wick (ST530441), 2 Jul, on soil heaps deposited in a field by Mill Lane, PAS, VC6.

Hypochaeris radicata subsp. *ericetorum* (Cat's-ear) – Dunster Beach (SS99934508), 30 May, on seaward side of chalets, GEL, det. John Parker, VC5.

**Lepidium virginicum* (Least Pepperwort) – Yeovil (ST55561599), 27 Jul 2020, several plants around a drain in Princes Street, IPG, VC5.

**Lithodora diffusa* 'Heavenly Blue' (Gromwell) – North Petherton (ST28903302), 22 Apr, on outside of garden wall, SJP, VC5.

**Miscanthus x giganteus* (Giant Silver-grass, Elephant-grass) – Cheddar Head (ST51095199), 24 Jun, one huge clump in rough grassland near scrub, EJMcD, VC6.

Sagina x micrantha (*S. procumbens* x *subulata*) – Minehead, North Hill (SS92814765), 6 Jun, at base of quarry to left of entrance, GEL, RFitzG & WFS (found by Steven Little), VC5.

**Tanacetum macrophyllum* (Rayed Tansy) – Frome (ST77714786), 28 Jun, on waste ground below boundary wall at S edge of St John's Churchyard, HJC & Val Graham, VC6.

**Trachycarpus fortunei* (Chusan Palm) – Tyntesfield (ST49907164), 14 Dec, 1 young plant in Truckle Wood, presumably bird-sown from plants in the gardens over 400m away, DG, VC6.

**Wolffia columbiana* (Columbian Water-meal) – Rooks Bridge (ST36455216), 14 Oct, a very large population, RVL, VC6.

*X *Triticosecale rimpai* (Triticale) – Hawk Combe (SS8846), 23 Jun, road verges in village, GEL, VC5.

New Vice-County Records

**Agapanthus praecox* (African Lily) – Weston-super-Mare (ST31866190), 30 Oct, 1 plant self-sown in paving by pond in Grove Park, SRPG, VC6.

Carex x boeninghausiana (*C. paniculata x remota*) – Bath (ST75746446), 25 Jul, 1 clump in stonework on N side of Kennet & Avon Canal, AJL, conf. Mike Porter, VC6.

Equisetum variegatum (Variegated Horsetail) – Staple Quarry (ST11324156), 23 Dec 2020, 500-1000 shoots in disused quarry, growing through moss on quarry floor, over area of c.7m x 2.5m in wet broadleaved woodland of mostly *Salix* and *Betula*, James McGill, det. Patrick Acock, VC5.

**Eryngium bourgatii* (Mediterranean Sea-holly) – Hawkcombe View (SS88914661), 7 Jul, on road verge against wall, GEL, VC5.

**Eryngium planum* (Blue Eryngo) – Bath (ST75266586), 16 Jul, 1 plant on paving outside 21 Thomas Street, Kevan Horne, VC6.

**Eucalyptus gunnii* (Cider Gum) – Weston-super-Mare (ST31466193), 30 Oct, 1 sapling on W side of Greenfield Place, self-sown from trees nearby, SRPG, VC6.

Heracleum mantegazzianum x sphondylium – Minehead (SS98534630), 16 Jun, 1 confirmed plant and possibly others on waste/disturbed ground between golf club and Butlins, on narrow strip of land between two ditches, GEL, conf. RVL, VC5.

**Hieracium scotostictum* (Dappled Hawkweed) – Rowden Farm (ST08173806), 29 Aug 2017, a number escaped from garden into lane, GEL & Jeanne Webb, VC5. NB record reported as first for VC5 in 2020 was in fact second.

**Nonea lutea* (Yellow Nonea) – Isle Brewers (ST36472129), 5 Apr, in some quantity over 2 sq m, S. Musgrove, VC5.

**Oxalis tetraphylla* (Four-leaved Pink-sorrel) – Lower Ansford (ST63683315), 2 Sep, several escaping from garden, DCL, VC6.

**Perovskia atriplicifolia* (Russian Sage) – Clevedon, Conygar Quarry (ST4272), 10 Oct, 1 plant in flower on pile of spoil in disused quarry, DH, VC6.

**Sorghum bicolor* (Great Millet) – Sutton Bingham (ST5411), Oct, 1 plant on stonework of causeway across the reservoir, Liz Downey, det. Gordon Hanson, VC5.

Other Interesting Records – Native species

Allium ampeloprasum (Wild Leek) – Nailsea Moor (ST449705), 25 Jul, 1 plant in flower by drove, DH & Bristol Naturalists' Society, VC6. New hectad record for this Nationally Scarce species, although probably alien here as this is now widely grown as Elephant Garlic.

Alopecurus aequalis (Orange Foxtail) – Chew Valley Lake, Herons Green Bay (ST557591), 31 Aug, in a new part of the lake, RJH, VC6. Fifth site for VC6.

Arenaria serpyllifolia subsp. *lloydii* – Wall Common (ST26134530), 4 Jun, on sandy bank at back end of car park, GEL & Linda Everton, det. Geoffrey Halliday, VC5. First record for VC5 and Somerset since mapped in Perring, F.H. & Sell, P.D. (1968) *Critical Supplement to the Atlas of the British Flora*.

Arum italicum x maculatum – Thurlbear Wood (ST27312132), 4 Mar, 1 plant growing with *A. maculatum*, close to entrance at N end of wood, SJL, conf. IPG, VC5. Third site for VC5.

Carex x pseudoaxillaris (*C. otrubae x remota*) – Clevedon, Conygar Quarry (ST42087211), 9 Jun, DH, VC6. Second post-2000 record for VC6.

Dryopteris paleaceolobata – Stockhill (ST55685169, ST55695169), 6 plants under trees N of track to turning circle in NE part of wood, 19 Aug 2017, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second record for VC6. Originally recorded as *D. cambrensis*, but re-det. in 2021, conf. Roger Golding. Records reported as second and third in 2020 were thus third and fourth.

Eleocharis uniglumis (Slender Spike-rush) – Walton Moor (ST424726), 31 May, DH, VC6. First record for VC6 since 2009.

Elymus athericus (Sea Couch) – Winscombe (ST42045768), 16 Aug, 1 clump at N edge of car park, EJMCD, VC6. First inland record for Somerset.

Gaudinia fragilis (French Oat-grass) – Porlock (SS88584623), 23 Jun, 1 tufted patch at edge of road/stream by small bridge near watermill, GEL, det. Clive Lovatt, VC5. New hectad record for Nationally Scarce species.

Groenlandia densa (Opposite-leaved Pondweed) – Haskey Moor (ST32702425), 18 Jun, large vigorous colony in rhyne, JP, VC5. Second record for VC5 since AFS for this Vulnerable species.

Hieracium acuminatum (Tall Hawkweed) – Norton Down (ST66165241), 9 Jul, 1 huge plant with 12 flowering shoots on N side of Tunnel Lane, HJC, conf. DJMCC, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

Hieracium eustomon (Bristol Channel Hawkweed) – Culbone Rocks (SS84664852, SS84684853, SS84794853, SS84884854), 2 Jun, over 125 plants on cliffs above shingle, GEL & DG, conf. DJMCC, VC5. First confirmed records at this site since 1908.

Hieracium subamplifolium (Balloon-leaved Hawkweed) – Charlton Mackrell (ST53572910), 23 Jul, dense patch 20m x 5m along lower part of S bank of railway, NFS, conf. DJMCC, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1991.

Hypochaeris radicata subsp. ***ericetorum*** (Cat's-ear) – Minehead Warren (SS98594647, SS99014642), 18 Jun, along the sandy coastal path and on sand adjacent to fairway, GEL, VC5. Second site for VC5 and Somerset.

Limosella aquatica (Mudwort) – Chew Valley Lake (ST559599), 22 Aug, many plants attractively surrounded by *Riccia cavernosa*, in corner of Villice Bay, RJH, VC6. Second record for VC6 since 2000 and a new monad at its only current location in VC6.

Logfia minima (Small Cudweed) – Clevedon, Conygar Quarry (ST42017210), 9 Jun, 2 plants on top level of quarry, DH, VC6. New hectad for this Near Threatened species which is Scarce in VC6.

Medicago polymorpha (Toothed Medick) – Wedmore (ST437481), 30 May, 1 large spreading plant in the car park at the gateway entrance to Worthington Woods Food Forest project, EJMCD, VC6. New hectad for this Nationally Scarce species.

Sagina x micrantha (*S. procumbens* x *subulata*) – Minehead, North Hill (SS90984768), 6 Jun, GEL, RFitzG & WFS, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

Salicornia pusilla (One-flowered Glasswort) – Bossington (SS88854812), 22 Aug, in flower on saltmarsh; Porlock Marsh (SS88764794), 25 Aug, growing with *S. europaea* but slightly higher up slope; Porlock Saltmarsh (SS87674768), 29 Aug, 1 plant at edge of main channel on lower saltmarsh, GEL, VC5. Second, third and fourth sites for VC5 and Somerset.

Salicornia pusilla* x *ramosissima (Hybrid Glasswort) – Porlock Weir (SS86394799), 21 Aug, in boat mooring area in front of Turk Island; Porlock Marsh (SS88434795), 25 Aug, on bare mud adjacent to board walk, with both parents; Porlock Saltmarsh (SS87544779, SS87674770), 29 Aug, on middle to lower saltmarsh and on edge of vast mud flat adjacent to main channel; Porlock Weir (SS86144836), 5 Oct, in centre of saltmarsh, GEL, VC5. Second, third and fourth sites for VC5 and Somerset and first record for original site since AFS.

Scutellaria minor (Lesser Skullcap) – Street Heath (ST46423939), 20 Jul, many plants along path beside ditch at E end of clearing, HJC & Somerset Botany Group, VC6. First record for the Peat Moors since 1822.

Silene noctiflora (Night-flowering Catchfly) – Langport, Newtown (ST423276), 12 Jun, 2 plants appeared in a garden, John Bebbington, VC6. First record for this Vulnerable species in VC6 and Somerset since 1991.

Silene vulgaris* x *uniflora (Hybrid Campion) – Charterhouse, Blackmoor Reserve (ST50665603), 8 Jul, few plants on N-facing side of slag heap by flues, amongst *S. uniflora*, with *S. vulgaris* nearby, HJC & MAW; (ST50705601, ST50705603), 14 Jul, few plants on S edge and N edge of slag heap near flues with both parents, HJC & FJR, VC6. First records for VC6 and Somerset since 1993.

Thymus pulegioides (Large Thyme) – Cucklington (ST75532788), 26 May, few plants on closely grazed W-facing slope; Crewkerne Station (ST44060824), 13 Sep, dry S-facing slope; Milbourne Port (ST66371906), 23 Oct, a few plants on N end of Vartenham Hill, JP, VC5. Second, third and fourth records for VC5 since AFS.

Thysselinum palustre (Milk-parsley) – Walton Moor (ST43797314, ST43867312), 22 Jul, 1 flowering plant and a few non-flowering plants nearby, in mostly Molinia-dominated fen, Iain Diack, VC6. First record for Gordano

Valley NNR, found by NE staff in Sept 2020, identification confirmed in 2021.

Urtica dioica subsp. ***galeopsifolia*** (Stingless Nettle) – Poundisford (ST21852089), 18 Jun, beside public footpath and M5, in planted damp woodland, a few plants adjoining dense stands of normal *Urtica dioica*, SJL, VC5. Fourth record for VC5 and first since AFS.

Viola* x *bavarica (*V. reichenbachiana* x *riviniana*) – Allerford Plantation (SS90394730), 9 Apr, with both parents on 30m bank of violets alongside stream, GEL; Quants (ST18911769), 18 Apr, at woodland edge with both parents seen nearby, SRPG, det. GEL; Horridge Wood (SS9046), 26 Apr, GEL, VC5. Third, fourth and fifth records for VC5.

Other Interesting Records – Alien species

****Bidens frondosa*** (Beggarticks) – Bath, Widcombe (ST75666433), 26 Jul, many plants along stonework of Kennet & Avon Canal, HJC & AJL, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset.

****Cardamine occulta*** – Whitchurch, Whitehall Garden Centre (ST614664), 20 May 2020, few in flower in pots of *Clematis*; Bath, Hillier Garden Centre (ST72256332), 13 Oct, few in pots of conifers, HJC, VC6. Fourth and fifth records for VC6 and Somerset.

****Chenopodium giganteum*** (Tree Spinach) – Taunton (ST23042499), 26 Sep, 1 plant in road gutter, on W side of St Augustine Street, SJL, VC5. Second record for VC5.

****Euphorbia corallioides*** (Coral Spurge) – Minehead, Seaward Way (SS98384520), 9 Jan, many plants looking long-established along 8m of bramble hedge running to N side of two adjoining field gates, RFitzG, VC5. Second record for VC5.

****Galactites tomentosus*** (Mediterranean Thistle) – Porlock (SS8846), 12 Jan, on verge of Villes Lane; Porlock (SS8847), 19 Feb, c. 20 plants as weed at edge of Furzeland Road, GEL, VC5. Fourth and fifth records for VC5.

****Geranium palmatum*** (Canary Island Crane's-bill) – Pitminster (ST22141933), 6 Jul, 1 plant self-sown in a drain, near 2 planted ones, SJL, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

****Hieracium scotostictum*** (Dappled Hawkweed) – Norton Sub Hamdon, Higher Street (ST46741571), 17 Jul, at base of garden wall, NFS, conf. DJMcC, VC5; Glastonbury, The Roman Way (ST489379), 10 May,

several plants on garden wall on N side of road; Somerton, Pestors Lane (ST49212831), 20 May, good colony on garden wall on N side of road; Wells, Bath Road (ST55694623), 18 Jul, 4 plants on garden steps; West Lydford (ST56653148), 23 Jul, 2 clumps at base of garden wall on E side of main street, NFS, conf. DJMcC, VC6. Third record for VC5 and second and subsequent records for VC6.

****Lathyrus grandiflorus*** (Two-flowered Everlasting-pea) – Pitminster (ST22161936), 18 Jun, 2 plants, at least, clambering over lane-side hedgerow, escaped from adjoining garden, SJL, VC5. Third site for VC5 and fourth for Somerset.

****Lepidium virginicum*** (Least Pepperwort) – Yeovil (ST555160), 15 Jun, 1 plant growing in pavement crack in Princes Street, IPG; Bath (ST750652), 7 Aug, in stonework by doorstep in Fountain Buildings, Rob Randall, VC6. Second record for VC5 and first record for VC6 since 1938.

****Malva alcea*** (Greater Musk-mallow) – Castle Cary (ST63763296), 2 Sep, 1 or 2 below garden steps on bank in Tuckers Lane, DCL, VC6. Second record for VC6 and third for Somerset.

****Malva setigera*** (Rough Marsh-mallow) – Rodney Stoke NNR (ST49745049), 26 Jun, 50+ plants flowering at top of field just below scrub edge with Rock-rose, Georgina Shuckburgh & Andrew Robinson, VC6. First record for the Mendips and a new hectad record for Schedule 8 species.



Malva setigera at Rodney Stoke NNR. Photo: © Helena Crouch

****Mentha x smithiana*** (Tall Mint) – Taunton (ST246257), 2 Sep, 1 big patch about 1m across, on bank of River Tone, with *Stachys palustris*, *Phalaris arundinacea* and *Mentha*

aquatica, SJL, conf. IPG, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset since AFS.

**Nonea lutea* (Yellow Nonea) – Holcombe (ST67054937), 17 Apr, large population extending 2m along a footpath and another single plant 20m further along, Dave Green, VC6. Second record for VC6 and third for Somerset.



Nonea lutea at Holcombe. Photo: © Helena Crouch

**Physalis alkekengi* (Japanese-lantern) – Porlock (SS89154693), 28 Nov, on disturbed verge, escaped from adjacent garden, GEL, VC5. Fourth site for VC5.

**Salvia hispanica* (Chia) – Chew Valley Lake (ST572615), 27 Oct, 4 plants by fence of picnic area, where people feed the birds, MAW, VC6. Third site for VC6 and Somerset.

**Sisymbrium strictissimum* (Perennial Rocket) – Stockwood Open Space (ST627693), 17 Jun, a discreet clump by the path, RJH, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

**Sorghum bicolor* (Great Millet) – Copleham Cross (SS92693411), 23 Oct, in game cover area, unclear if planted or remnant from previous years, GEL, VC5; Taunton (ST22092465), 31 Oct, 3 plants on side of foot bridge, SRPG, det. SJP, VC5; Taunton (ST23452447), 2 Nov, 1 plant in pavement crack in Queen Street, SJL, VC5; Nailsea, (ST466703), 24 Oct 2019, on verge of Whitesfield Road separated by roads from houses, Dee Holladay & Pam Millman, VC6. Second, third and fourth records for VC5 and third record for VC6.

**Trifolium resupinatum* (Reversed Clover) – Pitney (ST44442909), 5 Jul, small amount amongst vegetable rows of organic farm, JP, VC6. Second record for VC6 since 1956.

**Vaccaria hispanica* (Cowherb) – Coxley Wick (ST530441), 2 Jul, on soil heaps deposited in a field by Mill Lane, PAS, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1980.

SRPG Membership and Contacts

Somerset Rare Plants Group annual subscription is currently £8, payable in January of each year. (It will increase to £10 in January 2023). Payment can be made directly into the SRPG account as one-off transfers or by standing order. Please contact Ellen McDouall (see email below) for account details.

Members attend meetings at their own risk. Field meeting leaders carry a list of emergency phone numbers. 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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