



Despite the setback caused by foot and mouth restrictions in the first half of 2001, only three meetings of the Somerset Rare Plants Group were cancelled and one had a change of venue. We have continued to check the sites and status of our rare plants with a view to their conservation. It is hoped to produce a Red Data Book for Somerset in about five years time.

REPORTS OF MEETINGS 2001.

Sunday, 18 February - Stogumber

A bright, frosty day was perfect for the first outdoor meeting of the season. Nine members gathered at a farm near Stogumber having found their way along devious narrow lanes to the meeting place. We were met by Wing Commander Emery, the landowner who kindly allowed our visit to see *Leucojum vernum* L. (Spring Snowflake). The colony, which grows beside the Doniford River in a wooded area, appears to be quite stable with two main groups of flowers plus a small patch which is increasing slowly. It is fortunate that Wing Commander Emery takes an interest in the plant and is keen to preserve it. Nearby species seen were *Adoxa moschatellina* (Moschatel); *Petasites hybridus* (Butterbur); *Orchis mascula* (Early Purple Orchid); *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and the much scarcer *C. alternifolium* (Opposite-leaved and Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrage). It looks as if *Allium ursinum* (Ramsons) will soon be dominant and one hopes this will not have an adverse affect on the other plants. We were all intrigued by the large number of animal tracks in the layer of sandstone silt deposited during winter flooding in the area.... Squirrels?... Stoats?... Mink?...all considered possible but after the meeting I did see an enormous brown rat squashed on the roadside! The large prints of a Heron were also visible.

C.J. Giddens

Saturday 24 February - Working Group

Only five members (and one of them was not well) attended the working group on Saturday 24th February at English Nature offices at Roughmoor. The afternoon was spent writing Kent numbers on a collection of slides which belonged to the late Capt. R.G.B. Roe, the former County Recorder. It at first appeared that our work would be hampered as we had only 1 copy of Kent between us but then a system was established whereby Liz took charge of the book, looking up the required numbers as the others called out the plant names - not always easy as the original pencil writing on the slides had become indistinct in many cases. However, we felt pleased to complete five boxes by the end of the afternoon and volunteers took a number home with them to continue the job.

C.J.G.

Saturday 17 March - Working Group

There was slightly improved attendance with six of us at the second working group at Roughmoor, when we were able to complete the marking up of the slides. The remainder of the time was taken up with discussion on how best to go about the preparation of a Somerset Red Data Book of rare plants. Liz had brought her computer and began entering data against a list of species likely to be included. These will have to meet certain criteria e.g. National or local rarity, special Somerset connections or interest, on Biodiversity Action Plan, etc. Quite a task lies ahead and the difficulty may prove more in what to leave out rather than what to put in - but we have not come to blows - yet! Attendance improved once again with seven present for a **third meeting on 7th April** when the slides were sorted into Kent order and the Red Data Book List continued.

C.J.G.

Sunday 22 April - Sand Bay

Ten stalwart members arrived at Sand Bay near Weston Super Mare, in atrocious weather on Sunday 22 April. This was in place of the planned visits to Crewkerne and Chard and was arranged to allay the frustration felt by some members due to their confinement by F & M restrictions - but more frustration was on the way! It did not stop raining all day, picnic lunches had to be consumed in the cars and sadly, there was no sign of the *Asplenium marinum* (Sea Spleenwort) which Steve had seen here in previous years. The cliffs between the southern car park and Black Rock below Worlebury Hill were examined, maybe we would have found the plant if we had continued further towards Weston, but by now everyone was either cold, wet, tired of walking on slippery pebbles or just wanting their lunch so we returned via the 'sands' (mud) to the Car Park. But before anyone says they are "glad they did not come" they missed seeing a lovely display of *Cochlearia officinalis* (Common Scurvy-grass) on the sea cliffs, plus a pretty clump of cowslips there. A short excursion into the woods produced *Adoxa moschatellina* (Moschatel), hybrid bluebells and *Silene*

x hampeana (Pink Champion). On the woodland edge, White Poplar and Wych Elm were just coming into leaf and *Stellaria pallida* was on sand by the car park.

C.J.G.

Saturday 2 June - Radstock railway sidings.

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Steve Preddy

Fifteen members came along to this event hosted by the Cam Valley Wildlife Group. The meeting was led by Steve Preddy and Helena Crouch, who explained the recent history of the site - it was abandoned as a working railway only about 30 years ago, and a diverse range of vegetation types has grown up since then, from almost bare ground to secondary woodland. The site has three nationally scarce plants, but is even more important as an invertebrate site, with six Red Data Book bees and fifteen nationally notable bees, wasps, flies and beetles.

The site is very close to Radstock town centre, and so it is prime development land - the plans to regenerate the town centre will involve building on significant parts of the site. Cam Valley Wildlife Group sits on an ecological working party which is looking at how the impact of the developments can be minimised, and is also carrying out conservation management work on site.

The main aim of the day, apart from getting out botanising to a good site for the first time this year, in many cases, was to survey the populations of the nationally scarce species.

Fine-leaved Sandwort (*Minuartia hybrida*) here at its only site in the former county of Avon, was the star of the day. We all got down on our hands and knees, with marker flags, to count the plants which are present in three main areas of the site, all on the former railway trackbed. In the first square, we found 75 plants clustered in an area of no more than a metre square, with a further 42 scattered nearby. In the second area, along a path, we found 21 plants, but none were found in the third area. However, the best news was that four plants were present on one of Cam Valley Wildlife Group's "sandwort scrapes" - areas where the vegetation has been scraped away to expose gravel beneath, to provide habitat for the sandworts. Several of the other scrapes had been colonised by Dandelions but this one was much more successful - indeed, the Fine-leaved Sandwort plants here were the best ones on the site! This scrape is on an area that is not due to be developed, so if this success can be repeated, the future of this species here looks more secure than we had feared.

Bithynian Vetch (*Vicia bithynica*), which grows on the embankment, was the next species surveyed - a small population (less than 100 plants) is still present and as long as scrub encroachment is controlled, seems secure.

Finally, we looked at the riverbank to see a small stand of Monk's-hood (*Aconitum napellus*) - the plants appear to be of the wild form, and as there are very strong populations less than five miles away on the Mells Brooks, there is a good chance that these plants are wild too.

Other uncommon species seen during the day were Spotted Hawkweed (*Hieracium maculatum*) - a common species of post-industrial sites in the Radstock area - Small and Pale Toadflaxes (*Chaenorhinum minus* & *Linaria repens*), Long-stalked Crane's-bill (*Geranium columbinum*) and a wide range of calcicoles including Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*), Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and Woolly Thistle (*Cirsium eriophorum*). There was a wide range of grasses including Fern Grass (*Catapodium rigidum*), Downy Oat-grass (*Helictotrichon pubescens*), Squirrel-tail and Rat's-tail Fescue (*Vulpia bromoides* & *V. myuros*), Flattened Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*) and Narrow-leaved Meadow-grass (*Poa angustifolia*).

Helena Crouch & Steve Preddy

18 to 20 June - THE LIZARD, CORNWALL.

This trip was the Somerset Rare Plants Group first meeting outside of our own area. It was well attended by about a dozen members plus friends. The Lizard has been well known to generations of botanists. The geology and climate combine together to produce a unique range of rare and scarce plants.

Saturday

Meeting at the lighthouse, Ian Bennallick, a local botanist joined our group; his knowledge of the area was invaluable. Slowly walking to the Lizard Point, the area's richness soon became apparent, but the first plants many of us noticed was a mass of the alien species that grow on the steep cliffs around the Point. These included the Purple Dewplant (*Disphyma crassifolium*) and Hottentot-fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*). A few moments later we came across the first speciality of the area with Fringed Rupturewort (*Herniaria ciliolata*) on the footpath. The large number of small but interesting clovers took the group's attention, these included Upright Clover (*Trifolium strictum*), Knotted Clover (*T. striatum*) and a plant confined to this area of Britain - Long-headed Clover (*T. incarnatum* ssp. *molinarii*). Cautiously making our way across the rock ledges below the lighthouse, we found a good population of the nationally scarce Hairy Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus subbiflorus*). Many members were interested in the area's geology, all of us I'm sure were taken with the breathtaking views, some us willing to look in to the Lion's Den, a chasm of over one hundred feet deep.

After lunch we moved inland to Lizard Town, admiring as we walked some of the fine Cornish hedges (stone walls) covered in a range of plants including the very attractive Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius* var. *montanus*). Back at the coast the group did what it does best: search for plants in difficult places, our target the wild *Asparagus officinalis* ssp. *prostratus*. This Red Data Book plant was eventually tracked down growing on an almost inaccessible cliff ledge. Reports reached our ears of Choughs being seen recently in the area, but try as we might, no sign

was seen of these rare birds. The day ended with a compulsory ice-cream.

Sunday

Rose Murphy, the BSBI Recorder for the area joined us for the second full day of the SRPG trip to the Lizard. On our walk from the car park at Kynance Cove the brilliant yellow blossoms of Maritime Broom (*Cytisus scoparius* ssp *maritimus*) were spotted by Rose growing on a small rocky out-crop; we all clambered on this outcrop to admire the plant and other attention-grabbing species. Moving across the famous Cornish Heath we “looked” over the fence of the NNR, closed due to foot and mouth. The best plant of the day was found a few moments later, when Rose’s keen eyes spotted the diminutive Land Quillwort (*Isoetes histrix*) growing in the midst of a large colony of Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) with a single specimen of Thyme Broomrape (*Orobanche alba*) nearby. On hands and knees we found a few plants of Dwarf Rush (*Juncus capitatus*) and Yellow Centaury (*Cicendia filiformis*). Walking to the beach to eat our sandwiches (and another ice-cream) the group sat in the warm sun admiring the views. Returning to the car park we thanked everyone who helped organise the trip and as we set off for home began discussing next years “foreign” field trip - anyone want to see the orchids of Kent?

Steve Parker

Sunday 24 June - Westhay Moor & Street Heath

Leader: Steve Parker

The group visit to the Somerset Moors concentrated on some of the last remaining areas of lowland bog in the county. At Westhay Moor we witnessed the results of the Somerset Wildlife Trust efforts to stabilise the bog. This area has been badly affected by peat extraction over many years, resulting in loss of many plant species. With water levels restored, some plants are starting to make a comeback. Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) together with Sphagnum species carpet the lower parts of the site.

At Street Heath the Somerset Wildlife Trust are leading on a project to help restore another area of bog. At present there is little sign of success, with many of the trees that had been felled still on the ground and the water levels low (to allow management works to be undertaken). In the older part of the Street Heath reserve, over one hundred old peat working pits still support a number of characteristic plants. Here we found Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*) and its hybrid with Greater Pond-sedge (*Carex riparia*) (= *C. x evoluta*) the only known site in Somerset. A small population of Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*) was discovered but a search for Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*) failed to locate any plants. Let us hope that the works at both Westhay and Street Heath are successful as both areas are key sites for many species of interest.

Steve Parker

Saturday 7 July - Berrow Dunes

Leader: Bob Corns

Five members joined the leader for this walk and throughout the day Bob explained the history and management of the Reserve in a most interesting manner. We learned that the Local Nature Reserve was set up in 1992, previously having been ‘run’ rather than ‘managed’ by Sedgemoor District Council. English Nature now funds the management by £7000 a year. This has enabled projects such as the establishment of ponds and control of Sea Buckthorn. The latter plant *Hippophae rhamnoides* is the most serious threat to the site. In 1945, aerial photography showed very little, but it has become a serious problem. Herbicides are not suitable since they kill all broad-leaved plants, but the use of Track Excavators is successful, followed by spraying for the regrowth. The Golf Club has an input here as they prefer a ‘Golf Links’ appearance to their course, rather than scrub areas, so they spray edges to prevent further incursion as well as clearing areas. They are funded to 50% by English Nature for this work.

Ponds have been excavated since 1992 and there is now a breeding population of Greater Crested Newts. In the 80’s *Typha angustifolia* was present, but it has now gone.

A brief survey of the LNR car park revealed *Oenothera stricta*, *Carex arenaria*, *Erigeron canadensis*, *Carduus nutans*, *Hirschfeldia incana*, *Brassica nigra*, *Silene x hampeana* and *Cynoglossum officinale*. We then walked through the area which has probably been vegetated for 100 years, finding *Melilotus altissima*, *Lycopus europaeus*, *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, *Ononis repens*, *Carex otrubae*, *Valeriana dioica* and much *Rubus caesius*. Walking seawards, we entered the area dominated by *Leymus arenarius*, now spreading to 20m either side of the path. A line of posts allows the sand to accumulate to the landward side. There is the possibility of planting some Lyme grass further to seaward.

Salsola kali, *Elytrigia juncea*, *Euphorbia paralias* and a few clumps of *Ammophila arenaria* were seen. Further on, *Sonchus arvensis*, *Solanum dulcamara*, *Atriplex prostrata*, *A. glabruiscula* and *Raphanus maritimus* were common. We visited a damp area inland to find *Juncus acutus* which is spreading well. First recorded here in 1988, there was still only one clump 5 years ago. *Galium palustre* and *Oenanthe lachenalii* were also present.

The dunes have spread about 8m seaward in 5 years. After about 250m, we took a path through the dunes to an area which had previously been saltmarsh, but is now a flat, sandy area. *Aira caryophyllea* was common with *Phleum arenaria* locally common - a Nationally Scarce spp. *Blackstonia perfoliata*, *Vulpia bromoides* and *Centaureum erythraea* were frequent. Several clumps of *Alnus glutinosa* were growing strongly in the area, an unusual habitat for them. *Cakile maritima* was found on the beach.

Moving inland, we entered the remaining saltmarsh area and found: *Triglochin maritimum*,

Juncus maritimus, *Aster tripolium*, *Angelica sylvestris*, *Juncus maritimus* and *Scirpoides holoschoenus*. On the golf course, a *Phragmites* bed with *Scirpoides holoschoenus* was covering part of a pond-forming marsh. A large stand of *Epipactis palustris* was in full flower. *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* were frequent. *Carex disticha* was found with *C. arenaria*. A quick visit was made to the *Himantoglossum hircinum* site, passing *Trifolium arvensis*. A count of 46 post-flowering heads of the Lizard Orchid was made. A good sign of increase.

On our return to the cars, Bob showed us a series of aerial photographs of the area started in the 1940's. These could be of interest to the RPG if a further visit is made.

Pam Millman

Sun. 22 July - River Avon, Saltford, NE Somerset

Leader: Phil Quinn

The purpose of the meeting was to record Greater Dodder (*Cuscuta europaea*) and Loddon Pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*) along the River Avon. Greater Dodder is a parasite on a range of hosts, but usually found on Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*). It is Nationally Scarce and a rare plant in our area, found only on the banks of the River Avon between Batheaston and Brislington. Loddon Pondweed is RDB Near Threatened. The Bristol Avon is one of only three rivers in Britain where it occurs, the others being the River Stour (Dorset) and River Thames. Eight members and friends met at the riverside car park at the Shallows, Saltford. We particularly welcomed three botanists who had travelled up from Cornwall to join the group for the day. The stretch of the river that we walked was south from the car park as far as opposite Tennant's Wood, then north as far as Saltford Mead. Exploring the river southwards, the group recorded a large clump of Sweet Flag (*Acorus calamus*) only a short distance from the car park (ST687671). This is a rare introduction known from this stretch of the River Avon since at least 1802. The leaves of this plant have a particularly distinctive sweet smell, which enables an easy separation from Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*) when only the leaves are found. We found clumps of this species at two other locations along the river, ST691664 and ST690678.

A rather unusual specimen of Greater Burdock (*Arctium lappa*) was noted near the footbridge by the railway. It had particularly large basal involucre bracts, forming an attractive leafy fringe around each flowering head. Greater Dodder was found at intervals in this area, its stems forming a tangle of pink threads on Nettles by the river. It was fruiting abundantly. Small Teasel (*Dipsacus pilosus*) and Bearded Couch (*Elymus caninus*) were frequent along the footpath, especially in the damp wooded areas. A small sample of a shrub collected in haste on the way back to the car park was discussed at length over lunch. It resembled Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), but had three-lobed serrate leaves with a fine velvety texture.

The identification has still not been established, but the specimen remains in Liz McDonnell's herbarium.

After lunch, the group walked along the lane towards the sewage works, then across flat riverside fields that showed evidence of periodic flooding. Here Pepper Saxifrage (*Silaum silaus*) and Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) were recorded in otherwise rather species-poor grassland. The stretch of river at Saltford Mead was the area where Loddon Pondweed was recorded in abundance during the Saltford Reach Survey in 1998. On this visit it was thought to have disappeared, but after much searching, one small scrap was temporarily extracted from the water for identification by the gallant determination of Tony Atkinson, one of our Cornwall visitors. Another clump was later recorded as a floating raft on the opposite side of the river. The grid references of these two locations are ST695684 and ST695683.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable day at a beautiful location with rare and interesting flora.

Liz McDonnell

Saturday 4 August - Winsford Hill & Kitnor Heath

Leaders: Caroline Giddens & Liz McDonnell.

I think that this will be a day to remember for the six members who gathered at Comers Gate on Winsford Hill, Exmoor. We started in sunshine with a blue sky as we made our way to a parking place near the Punchbowl and began our search for clubmosses. Three species used to grow here: Alpine (last recorded on Exmoor in 1927), Fir (currently known at four Exmoor sites), and Stag's-horn Clubmoss. We were not over optimistic of our chances of finding any of these, but having seen copious specimens in Taunton Herbarium when we visited last year, we felt it was a lead which should be followed up. The amounts collected from the Punchbowl in earlier years no doubt contributed to its demise. There are old accounts of Stag's-horn Clubmoss being used to decorate tables at Victory celebrations in Minehead in 1918. It was also used as a bed for prize marrows at Porlock Flower shows in the 1900's. While 4 of us searched the rim of the Punchbowl, Paul Green and his friend (not brother) Ian from Cornwall descended to the bottom of the valley to look for Beech fern in the Willow carr. They were rewarded with two large clumps which Paul reckoned contained about 2000 fronds, slightly increased since he last saw them in the 1980's. There was no sign of any of the clubmosses.

I have not mentioned that there had been a rapid deterioration in the weather and most of this search took place in torrential rain. One of the walk leaders had to remove most of her clothing on returning to the car and change into dry mackintosh and overtrousers which had been left behind. After lunch in our cars and a quick stop at Winsford - where Paul was able to demonstrate a way to differentiate Intermediate from Common Polypody (the lowest pair of pinnae cross over the stem in Intermediate) and a plant of Corn Mint (*Mentha arvensis*) was found in a rather unusual hedgerow situation, we made our way to Kitnor Heath.

This site for Stag's-horn Clubmoss has been known since 1976 and about 20 plants were found to be flourishing there, two or three bearing spores. This is an average number of plants at this site in an old quarry.

Nearby is a good acid bog with lots of Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*), Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*), Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*) and Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). A little further on, half a dozen very small scraps of Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) were hanging on but no fruit was seen.

By now, it had actually stopped raining, and we walked across the flowering heather (*Calluna*) and dropped down to the ford on the River Quarme at the bottom of the valley. Here there was a difficult wire fence to negotiate and a couple decided to continue their botanising on Kitnor Heath (where they discovered a nice amount of Pale Butterwort). Four of us continued along the River Quarme for about half a mile. Leadership had now passed to Paul Green and it is difficult to describe what followed..... with horror I watched him slowly sink into the mud - up to his ankles - knees - well above his wellies - somehow he got out and the route continued through mud, water, over and under fallen trees. No turning back now and we scrambled through as best we could. Two more patches of Beech Fern and then at last we reached our objective - the high rocky banks where, in 1994, Ian Green had found Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*). The colony proved to be doing well. The rocky river banks conceal another secret, a cave cut into the rock which is believed to have been made as a hide-out by a sheep rustler probably 200 years ago when sheep stealing was a capital offence. Paul crept into its 12 foot length and found it festooned with moss (*Heterocladium heteropterum* var. *heteropterum*).

We returned via a sheep track up the side of the valley which, although near vertical, was a 'doddle' compared to what we had just experienced!

Caroline Giddens

Sunday 26 August - River Cary & Somerton Moor

Leader: Steve Parker.

This meeting was aimed at recording Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*) a BAP/Nationally Scarce plant, at a known location by Pitney Steart bridge on the River Cary. *Sium* has been known at this location since 1896 (*Atlas Flora of Somerset*, record). A single specimen was recorded, located approximately 1m east of the bridge on the south bank of the river, under the shade of a hawthorn bush. The plant was not flowering. A search of the river both up and down stream for 100m and along adjacent ditches failed to locate any additional specimens.

Other species of interest included Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) found along drove sides. In one stretch of recently cleaned ditch a good population of Greater Bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*) plants were flowering.

Steve Parker

Saturday 8th September - Ladye Bay, Clevedon.

Leader: Steve Parker

Meeting at Ladye Bay near Clevedon, the SRPG searched the rocky coast to determine the population of Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) a Locally Scarce plant, along this stretch of the Severn estuary. The recent *Flora of the Bristol Region* (2000) quotes White in 1912 indicating the plant to have declined south of Portishead during the early 1900s. A total of between 200 and 300 plants were recorded mostly by the SRPG members. This strongly indicates that in this section of the estuary there is little or no need for concern over this species.

Other interesting species included a small population of Small Teasel (*Dipsacus pilosus*) which was found in secondary woodland close to the footpath to the bay.

Gordano Valley NNR

The annual monitoring of Brown Galingale (*Cyperus fuscus*) undertaken by members of the SRPG at Gordano Valley NNR this year proved even more difficult than normal. A total of five plants were located, the recording made more difficult by the lush growth of rush and grasses alongside the ditch which obscured the small plants. On speaking to the grazier it became apparent that this is because he had sold some of his horses and the field and hence the ditch had not been poached as much as normal. If this undergrazing were allowed to continue, the future of this species at this location would clearly be under threat.

Other species of interest included a colony of Lesser Water Plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*) together with a very good population of Fen Pondweed (*Potamogeton coloratus*).

Steve Parker

Sun. 16 September - Westport Canal & Westmoor

Leader: Ian Green

Thirteen members explored the banks of the canal where Tasteless Water-pepper (*Persicaria laxiflora*) was found to be very plentiful, growing with Water-pepper (*P. hydropiper*) and Redshank (*P. maculosa*).

In the afternoon the group went to Westmoor to survey Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*). Only seven specimens could be found on one rhyne bank, previously recorded from four localities. The disturbed banks of Pitt Drove produced lots of Treacle Mustard (*Erysimum cheiranthoides*). Almond Willow (*Salix triandra*) was seen by Pitt Bridge where Ian Green showed one of its so-called distinguishing features; if the bark is peeled back on young shoots,

one should get a faint to strong smell of rose-water. The very much over-looked Fen Nettle (*Urtica galeopsifolia*) with narrower stingless leaves of damp/wet habitats was very plentiful along the canal banks as well as on Westmoor.

Ian Green

Saturday 29 September - Clatworthy Reservoir

Leader: Ian Green

Fourteen members met on a beautiful sunny day to explore the muddy/stony shoreline of the reservoir. The Six-stamened Waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*) and Orange Foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*) were both found to be doing very well. The hybrid between Orange and Marsh Foxtail (*A. x haussknechtianus*) was seen; this hybrid and the *Elatine* were both new species for Somerset in 2000 when they were found by I.P.Green. By the path around the reservoir, two dead specimens of Greater Broomrape (*Orobanche rapum-genistae*) were seen, probably spikes remaining from the previous year. Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Corn Mint (*M. arvensis*) the hybrid between these two Whorled Mint (*M. x verticillata*), Musk (*Mimulus moschatus*) and Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) were among the many other species seen. The highlight though was the discovery of Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*) that was plentiful on the bare muddy banks of the reservoir. This was a new species for England as well as for Somerset, confirmed by Tim Rich.

Ian Green

Sunday 14 October - Heale Ladder & Leighton Hanging, Asham Wood.

Leaders: Paul Green & Libby Houston.

The first delight for the nine members who attended this meeting was Imperforate St. John's-wort (*Hypericum maculatum*) and its hybrid with Perforate St. John's-wort (*H. perforatum*) = (*H. desetangsii*) growing on the edge of the area normally used for motorbike scrambling. Also here was plenty of Fragrant Agrimony (*Agrimonia procera*) with a little Agrimony (*A. eupatoria*) mixed in. The racetrack, which hadn't been used this year, had Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kixia elatine*). A steep slope with rock outcrops had an abundance of Wild Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*), a little Crosswort (*Cruciata laevipes*) and Slender Sandwort (*Arenaria serpyllifolia* ssp. *leptoclados*). At the rock face we found a large colony of Southern Polypody* (*Polypodium cambricum*) and some Maiden-hair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes* ssp. *quadrialeans*).

Here we found what we had come to search for: *Sorbus porrigentiformis* the Whitebeam first found by P.J.M. Nethercott in 1958 when he saw two trees, but these had since disappeared, possibly due to quarrying. (His record was from the west part of the wood that falls in ST64). It was also found in the 1980's at Heale Ladder, recorder unknown. We found three trees scattered along the rock face of Heale Ladder with many Common Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*). While

most of us ate our lunch at the top of the rocks, Libby disappeared over the top on a rope to check for any further specimens. A specimen of a rose was sent for identification but came back as *Rosa canina*.

Walking north along the west-facing slope of the wood there were large stands of Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*) lots of Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*) but surprisingly no Soft Shield-fern (*P. setiferum*). A damp area next to the stream produced Thin-spiked Wood-sedge (*Carex strigosa*). At the entrance to the disused quarry we had Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acer*) and Large Thyme (*Thymus pulegioides*). Turning around and taking the public path through the bottom of Leighton Hanging there was Slender Rush* (*Juncus tenuis*) and Wood Small-reed (*Calamagrostis epigejos*) while the path up the slope past Heale Ladder gave us Small Teasel (*Dipsacus pilosus*) and Bushy Mint* (*Mentha x gracilis*).

* = New for ST74.

Paul Green

UKBotany - an internet resource for botanists

Britain's botanists now have their very own internet discussion group. UKBotany, run by Bristol botanist Steve Preddy, was set up in November 2000 to plug an obvious gap in the range of wildlife-related e-groups - groups already existed for moths, butterflies, dragonflies, beetles, birds and fungi but there was no active group devoted to the discussion of wild plants.

The group exists to enable discussions about any topics relating to plants growing in the wild in Britain and Ireland - not just the flowering plants, but all higher and lower plants. Topics could include: identification, distribution, requests for info e.g. "where can I see...?" or "what can I see in...?", taxonomy, escapes & introductions, vegetation/habitats, plant/animal interactions.

Communication using the egroup is very easy - anyone can send a message to a central email address, and this message is then forwarded on to all other members of the egroup without having to do anything else. Although Yahoo, the company that runs the service, is a commercial venture, the groups they host are not - they are simply set up and joined by people with a common interest. It doesn't cost anything to use the service; Egroups.com make their money by appending discreet adverts onto some messages.

The group already has 150 members from across Britain and the discussion topics so far have been very varied. One particularly useful feature of the egroup is that it allows you to upload files to a central vault on the internet - several members have taken advantage of this to upload digitised photographs of mystery plants to seek advice on their identification.

If you are interested in joining UKBotany, all you need to do is send a blank email to:

UKBotany-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

or, if you'd like to know more, email Steve Preddy.
His address is Steve.Preddy@blueyonder.co.uk
