



Once again all our advertised meetings were able to take place and those that put the programme together are to be congratulated for the variety and interest created. Some events could have been better attended so do please make an effort to come along next season. Something of interest nearly always turns up, even if it is not the particular plant searched for. That is the fun of botanising!

As ever, we hope you will enjoy reading this Newsletter but again appeal to members to send in short items for inclusion in the next issue. Anything botanical with relation to Somerset will be considered. These can be sent at any time to Caroline Giddens, either by post or e-mail: carol.enhs@virgin.net Together we can make it a worthwhile record of Somerset plants. Thanks are due to all who have contributed to this edition (nine members).

REPORTS OF MEETINGS, 2004.

Saturday, 17 January – Annual Winter Members Meeting.

Our third AGM took place at English Nature offices at Roughmoor. On 17 January 2004. Steve Parker opened the meeting and said that during 2003 the planned work on BSBI Local Change survey had taken place but the meetings had been less well attended than those to monitor Somerset's rare plants and it was evident that members prefer the latter. Liz McDonnell said the Summer programme was in preparation and gave a run-down of some of the planned excursions and requested members to let her have further suggestions ASAP. Further work is required on the BSBI Local Change scheme but it was decided that these should be informal, organised by Paul Green.

The computer programme MapMate is now being used successfully by a number of members, funding for this has been granted by BSBI. Although there are still some problems with transmitting the records between members, most are now able to enter data satisfactorily and over 48,000 records have been processed.

Our Treasurer, Ann Cole, gave a short report on the accounts, which confirmed the balance at 12.12.03 as £368.54.

Tony Smith said the Botanical Section of the Proceedings, Bristol Naturalists Society, had been done for a number of years by Prof. A.J. Willis who was now retiring. He asked for opinions from SRPG on the value of such a report. The overall feeling seemed to be that this should be continued, some thought it would be of greater value if more information were given on plant locations and dates of sightings.

Following the usual pattern, a 'bring and share' buffet was enjoyed as was the fun raffle where we all brought unwanted gifts as prizes (some of which may appear again next year!) Ro Fitzgerald brought a selection of plants from her 'Beggars Roost Nursery' and a number of books for members to buy.

After this, Liz McDonnell and Margaret Earle showed coloured slides of the SRPG trip to Sweden, which took place in 2003. These were of an extremely high quality with close-ups and views of plants in profusion in the meadows. A sobering thought was that this must have been how English meadows once looked. If this was depressing, our spirits were soon raised again by Brian, who had travelled all the way from Northampton. His slides showed some of the plants and their habitats that he has been involved with saving from destruction. While there are people with his energy and dedication around, our flora is not without hope.

We each received a useful gift of a Grid. Ref. Reader, which had been sent to Liz by BRC in Scotland for the use of members. Thus ended a very enjoyable day.

LMcD & CJG

Saturday, 14th February - Invasive Aquatic Plants Workshop.

There should have been more members present at this meeting. However, Steve Parker had a gathering of seven to instruct. We learned that the four most worrying invaders in our waterways are:

1. *Crassula helmsii* (New Zealand Pigmyweed)
2. *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* (Floating Marsh-Pennywort) - which was found for the first time in Somerset last year in the River Tone near Ham.
3. *Myriophorum aquaticum* (Parrot's-feather).
4. *Azolla filiculoides* (Water Fern).

Steve took us through the history of each plant, providing us with some startling facts such as: the *Crassula* can tolerate temperatures from between 30° to - 6° c.; that (in Australia) the *Hydrocotyle* has been found to double its biomass in three days; it is costing £10,000 to clear *Myriophyllum* from one Reservoir alone and *Azolla* is used as compost on paddy fields in China. Now how many of us knew all that?

Live specimens were on display, together with some other less invasive species including *Lemna minuta* (Least Duckweed), *Pistia stratiotes* (Waterlettuce), *Chara vulgaris* agg. (Stonewort), and *Elodia nutallii* (Nuttall's Waterweed). After lunch, some time was spent examining these specimens under the microscope.

Members are requested to report findings of any of the four invasive species to Steve at English Nature, Roughmoor, in the hope that steps may be taken to eradicate them, although it is feared it is already too late in many cases - such as the miles of *Crassula* to be seen at Wimbleball Lake. We are also asked to report to Steve if we see any of these offered for sale at garden centres or aquarists as it may be possible to stop further 'escapes' from these sources.

By this time the sun was shining, so we adjourned to nearby Bradford on Tone, where some recording was done beside the river and around the churchyard. Species seen included *Anemone appenina* (Blue Anemone) in leaf, a broad-leaved snowdrop thought to be *Galanthus ikariae*, *Saxifraga tridactylis* (Fingered Saxifrage), *Symphytum grandiflorum* (Creeping Comfrey) and lots of *Viscum album* (Mistletoe).

It was good to have sunshine and singing birds on our first field trip for 2004.

CJG

Herbarium Techniques Demonstration 20th March, 2004.

This was a repeat of the demonstration that was given last May, showing how to make a plant reference collection. Several members met at Roughmoor for the second indoor working meeting of the year to be shown methods of collecting, pressing, drying and mounting specimens onto herbarium sheets for identification and archiving purposes. The wooden plant presses and straps, special acid-free paper for drying, blotting and mounting, glue and labels were bought especially for the SRPG so that critical species, collected for expert determination, could be professionally preserved.



Ben and Simon mounting herbarium specimens

I demonstrated how important it is to carefully arrange the fresh plants in the drying papers to show the details of the specimens when pressed, turning leaves to show the underside, arranging flowers or

fruit, and placing loose seeds or small fragments in specially folded small packages. Careful labelling was emphasised so that all the recording details accompanied the specimen through the pressing and mounting procedures. I showed different methods of mounting the dried specimens on to special herbarium paper using glue and/or gummed linen tape.

Some members tried out the techniques and mounted several previously collected Somerset specimens on to acid-free mounting paper. The afternoon closed with Ben, Simon Leach's 9 year-old son, proudly mounting a suspected *Limonium britannicum* that Simon had collected at Hope's Nose on the South Devon coast.

Liz McDonnell

Carymoor Environmental Centre Saturday 3rd April, 2004.

The purpose of the visit to Carymoor Environmental Centre near Castle Cary was to hear about the development of a living collection of Somerset Plants.

Angus Davies and Dr Jon Marshall talked about the proposed collection, which they hoped to establish on one of the areas of reclaimed landfill of this large waste disposal site. They are hoping to involve the Somerset Rare Plants Group in the project in view of the expert knowledge that we have amongst our members on Somerset Plants and their distribution.

We were shown the current collection of several species, which were sown from seeds bought from one of the seed houses specialising in native British plants. Angus had planted these in towers of old vehicle tyres as part of the centre's educational programme on biodiversity and sustainability. In spite of one of the sedges labelled *Carex depauperata* (Starved Woodsedge), although the flowering spike was only just emerging, looking suspiciously like *Carex binervis* (Green-ribbed Sedge), most of the plants looked healthy enough. But most of us agreed that the old tyres were very unappealing and did nothing to attract to their 'wildness'. After eating our packed lunches in the centre, we braved the cold winds to compile a species list of plants on the site.

Liz McDonnell

Black Poplar recognition Saturday, 24th April, 2004.

At Roughmoor, Mark Anderson gave an excellent presentation to the group over the history and natural history of the Native Black Poplar (*Populus betulifolia*) across the UK. While discussing the identification of the tree Mark presented us with a range of specimens of not only the true species but also other related species and varieties.

After the indoor session we headed out in a minibus supplied by Mark. A number of sites in the Taunton Dean area were visited, including Trull Green where a row of the trees are easily inspected. On the field trip we were shown the different growth forms of the tree. As well as the true natives, Mark took time to point out some of the non-native poplars that are commonly planted in the area. Our thanks to Mark for an excellent work-shop.

S.Parker



Native Black Poplar (*Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*)

Creech St Michael. Sunday, 9th May 2004

When putting the summer programme together, we thought that the main purpose of this meeting would be to monitor evil aquatic weed in the River Tone as a follow-up to the workshop on 14th Feb. But just a week before, Russell Gomm discovered a new location for *Myosurus minimus* (Mousetail). So part of the day was spent looking for this small plant in a number of gateways and muddy tracks. The population appears well spread out with a small number of plants found in a number of locations. At one location the *Myosurus* grows under a fine example of a native Black poplar. A number of other Black poplars (*Populus nigra* subsp. *betulifolia*) were also seen.

On reaching the Banks of the River Tone we viewed the site of Floating Marsh-Pennywort, *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*. The Environment Agency had the previous year removed 8 tonnes of this very invasive plant. We were all pleased to **NOT** be able to find this invasive alien. None the less, we did find a range of other “wetland” invaders growing along the banks of the River Tone, these included Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) and Indian Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) while growing in the river a number of large stands of Fringed Water-lily (*Nymphoides peltata*) could be seen.

Many Thanks to Russell Gomm for showing us his local patch.

Steve Parker

Dolebury Warren, Churchill. Saturday, 22nd May, 2004.

Walking up the steep hillside from the car park at Dolebury Warren the flora changes from scrub woodland to a very rich limestone flora. As we emerged from the woodland some fine examples of *Cotoneaster frigidus* (Tree Cotoneaster) were recorded. From here the thin limestone soils have many characteristic species including *Linum catharticum* (Fairy Flax), *Pilosella officinarum* (Mouse-ear-hawkweed), *Lotus corniculatus* (Common Bird's-foot-trefoil), and *Sanguisorba minor* (Salad Burnet).

In the very bare open ground at almost the highest point of the hill-fort, the group spent some time confirming that we had indeed discovered *Cerastium pumilum* (Dwarf Mouse-ear), this found in small numbers. The limestone heath produced a scatter of

low growing *Calluna vulgaris* (Heather) together with other acid loving plants.

On our return trip to the car park the leaves of *Colchicum autumnale* (Meadow Saffron) were clearly visible on the wayside while an excellent specimen of *Cystopteris fragilis* (Brittle Bladder-fern) was seen at the side of the footpath.

The group had visited Dolebury to look for *Koeleria vallesiana* (Somerset Hair-grass); this plant was **not** seen on this visit. On returning home I looked in the Flora of the Bristol Region, this publication remarks that the hybrid *Koeleria vallesiana* x *macrantha* has been recorded from the site. Looking in other publications it is not clear if *Koeleria vallesiana* has ever been recorded for Dolebury Warren. So maybe we were looking for a plant that has not been recorded on the site!

Steve Parker

Lollover Hill, Compton Dundon Saturday 12th June 2004

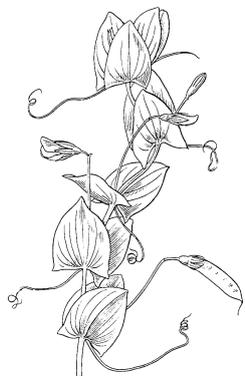
Ten members met at Dundon Church on a warm sunny day and walked from the village up the green lane towards the calcareous grassland of Lollover Hill. The grassy verges on either side of the track were colourful with a wide variety of species. Clumps of Spiked Sedge (*Carex spicata*) were frequent along the edge of the vehicle tracks and Tall Fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) was abundant along the whole length. Paul pointed out several hybrid roses – *Rosa arvensis* x *R. canina* and *Rosa stylosa* x *R. canina* scrambling through the hedges.

Lollover Hill was tightly grazed species-rich grassland with scattered bushes of Hawthorn and Rose. Meadow Oat-grass (*Helictotrichon pratensis*), Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) and Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*) were major components and Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*) was an unusual associate of this calcareous CG2 grassland community. On the very dry bare soils of the steep upper slopes we found the remains of Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*) and noticed under a x10 lens the minute hooked spines on the surface of the dried achenes.

After lunch we descended to the southern boundary where Paul showed us the location of Nit-grass (*Gastridium ventricosum*). This small annual grass was growing on sparsely vegetated and eroding soil at the edge of the path that runs along the southern edge of the site. We estimated several thousands of plants growing along 100m of track. We completed a species recording form, as Nit-grass is one of our priority species.

We returned to the village along a green lane to the south where there was a huge population of Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*) in full growth and flowering profusely. This is a Nationally Scarce species and in Somerset, the Poldens are one of its centres of distribution. A few clumps of Bithynican Vetch (*Vicia bithynica*) were also found in this lane.

As an extra visit of the day, Paul took us to Dundon Hill to try to find the Blue Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis* ssp. *foemina*) so that we could see the difference between this and the blue form of *A. arvensis*



Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*)

ssp. *arvensis*. Despite thorough searching we were unsuccessful, but were pleased to find further populations of Nit-grass, some larger specimens reaching 20 cms tall. Other species included Tree Mallow (*Lavatera arborea*) and Flattened Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*).

Liz McDonnell

Rose Identification Day, Sand Point and Walton Common

Saturday 19th June 2004

The aim of this meeting was to learn the important identification features of Roses and be able to recognise pure and hybrid forms of this difficult group.

From the car park at the north end of Sand Bay, our meeting leader Rob Randall took us a short distance up the footpath to the open grassland on the Sand Point headland to see one of the uncommon species to be found on calcareous soils. Small-leaved Sweet-briar (*Rosa agrestis*) is a rare species in our region, with only a few currently known sites. Several multi-stemmed bushes were found in scattered scrub on south-facing slopes. Rob pointed out the cuneate-based leaflets, which are clothed with hairs and sweet-smelling glands beneath. The flower stalks and developing fruits were gland-free, one of the features which separates this species from Small-flowered Sweet-briar (*R. micrantha*) which grows in similar habitats. Dog-rose (*Rosa canina*) was also in this scrubby area, with its long arching branches scrambling amongst Hawthorn and Brambles. *R. canina* is very variable with an almost continuous range of variation. We saw specimens that had characteristics of both *R. canina* and *R. agrestis*.

After an early lunch at Sand Point, we drove to Walton Common, between Clevedon and Portishead, to see *Rosa agrestis* and *Rosa micrantha*, similar species that are both present here. We rubbed the under surface of the *R. micrantha* leaves to release the sweet apple scent and observed the red-tipped glands on flowering stalks and fruits which are such distinct identification features of this species. Much discussion took place about the scrub encroachment and general habitat condition on this ungrazed site. Perforate St John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) was abundant here. One bush of Short-styled Field Rose (*Rosa stylosa*) was found in a shady lane leading down to the sea. The dark green leaflets with sharply pointed tips and uniserrate margins are easily recognisable together with the thick conical disk on the top of the fruit.

Added botanical interest on this meeting was Compact Brome (*Anisantha madritensis*) frequent as a pavement weed where we parked our cars at the north-east end of Clevedon and large clumps of White Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata*) in a hedgebank in Walton-in-Gordano. Crossing the northern end of Back Hill on the way back to the cars, we came across unusual species-rich fields where Bog

Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Common Spotted Orchid (*Dactyloriza fuchsii*), Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*) and Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) were recorded, amongst many others. Further visits are required to check out the identification of other orchid species and an *Isolepis* sp. in a damp corner of the field

Liz McDonnell

Disused Quarry near Nunney Thursday evening, 24th June, 2004.

Two members braved the high winds and managed to avoid the Festival traffic to explore the quarries.

The long, dry, hot spell had parched the quarries and Tuesday's rain was not in time to revive the plants, so many looked sad. However, New Zealand Willow-herb (*Epilobium brunnescens*) was found, but not in quantity as last year. Garden Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) did not seem to mind the drought and was flowering well.

At the top of Cloford Quarry, Pearly Everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*) was still thriving and was in bud. Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*) were popping up everywhere and there were some good patches of Pyramidal Orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) of a very deep hue.

We could find no sign of Basil Thyme (*Clinopodium acinos*) which was disappointing; probably a victim of the dry spell.

Gill Read

SRPG trip to Scotland

Saturday 26th June to Friday 2nd July 2004

Ian Green, who now lives in Scotland, invited members to spend a week botanising in Morayshire. He arranged for some members to stay in accommodation near his house in Spey Bay and for others to sleep on his cottage floor or camp in the garden. Ian had planned a very varied week for us, visiting lots of different habitats and meeting local botanists as well. We visited bogs to see plants that were familiar to those who had visited Sweden last year - Bog Sedge (*Carex limosa*), Few-flowered Sedge (*Carex pauciflora*), Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*) and Interrupted Clubmoss (*Lycopodium annotinum*). We found little gems like Small Cranberry (*Vaccinium microcarpum*) straggling over sphagnum hummocks and Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*), that was so abundant in nearby damp verges and tracks that it was difficult not to step on it. We walked along the banks of the mighty Findhorn river, with the oystercatchers screaming over the sound of the roaring water, to see Green-flowered Hawkweed (*Hieracium chlorantha*), Viviparous Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca vivipera*) and Wood Fescue (*Festuca altissima*). The Findhorn dunes revealed Purple Milk-vetch (*Astragalus danicus*), a few microscopic Small Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum azoricum*) and Dune Fescue (*Vulpia fasciculata*), which Ian had recently found as a first record for Scotland! On the bleak coast at Burghead, in view of a massive, ugly feed mill, Ian showed us Oyster Plant (*Mertensia maritima*) which spread its branches across the shingle to make beautiful blue/grey carpets on the shore. Our visit to the Cairngorms was a wet one, but we trudged up in the rain to the tarns beneath Cairn Lochan passing alpine specialities including Trailing

Azalea (*Loiseleuria procumbens*), Northern Bilberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*), Alpine Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum alpinum*), Dwarf Cornel (*Cornus suecica*) and Three-leaved Rush (*Juncus trifidus*). While most of us returned in the relentless rain to the café and gift shop of the visitor centre, a few hardy members of the group continued up to the Great Slab to see rock-ledge community plants. Brook Saxifrage (*Saxifraga rivularis*), Alpine Speedwell (*Veronica alpina*) and Mountain Sorrel (*Oxyria digyna*) were some of the species they recorded. We enjoyed our rich botanical excursions and thank Ian for his excellent organisation and hospitality.

Liz McDonnell

Arable Weeds at Corston Fields Farm Sunday, 11th July, 2004.

Eight dedicated botanists drove through torrential downpours under ominous skies to meet at this large arable farm just west of Bath. The weather improved almost exactly at the designated meeting time of 11 am and remained good for the rest of the day. The farm is noted for rare arable weeds and has been subject to a long-term study by Avon Wildlife Trust who have worked with the farmer to get it into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The farmer, Mr Gerald Addicott greeted the SRPG and welcomed them to his land and explained how the farm works with conservation as a key consideration. Over the past five years several kilometres of field margins have been managed for the benefit of the rare weeds (and rare birds) and each year new species are added to the site list; this year was no exception.

The highlight of the site, and one of its most conspicuous weeds is Spreading Hedge-parsley (*Torilis arvensis*). This plant is recorded from nowhere else in the Bristol region and is found in abundance in the north of the farm; this year it was also noted by the group in two fields where it had previously not been recorded. Elsewhere in the north of the farm, where the fields are on a brashy Lias ridge, Broad-leaved Spurge (*Euphorbia platyphyllos*) and Dwarf Spurge (*E. exigua*) were locally abundant as were Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kixia spuria*) and Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*). The promised sighting of Cornfield Knotgrass (*Polygonum rurivagum*) could not be found however; this plant can be very difficult to differentiate from thin greyish specimens of Common Knotgrass (*P. aviculare*) and may simply have been overlooked as it is only ever recorded from this site in very low numbers.

In the afternoon most of the group looked at fields in the south of the farm where two scarce arable weed species were recorded on the farm for the first time: Venus's looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*) and Cut-leaved Dead-nettle (*Lamium hybridum*). Venus's looking-glass was present in localised abundance (c135 plants) in one discrete part of a field margin, whilst Cut-leaved Dead-nettle was locally abundant along another margin as well as in the trample zone of a public footpath which crossed an otherwise sterile cornfield.



Common Fumitory (*Fumaria officinalis*)

As well as the county rarities listed above, many other arable weeds were admired by the group. It was agreed by all that arable weeds are very much undervalued, even by serious botanists, and further SRPG arable days would be very welcome.

Phil Quinn

Wellington monument and Castle fields Sunday, 25th July, 2004.

Eight members searched for moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) at the base of the monument, where this was reported 20 years ago. However, the pressures of mowing, dogs, and people, seem to have made this survival unlikely and we were a bit late in the season.

This amenity grassland and woodland had an interesting mix of plants on a patchy mosaic of soils, mostly unimproved neutral grassland but with areas of greater alkalinity and acidity giving rise to some surprising plant associations.

This pattern was repeated in the Castle fields with Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*) growing next to Quaking-grass (*Briza media*). The two steeply sloping fields were a wonderful floriferous mix. Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratense*), Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), in profusion. There was a good mix of sedges including Flea (*C. pulicaris*), and Pale (*C. pallescens*) and a good patch of Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*) in the damper areas. The small woodland had several fine trees mostly oak, beech, and sweet chestnut with some Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) in the understory.

Ann Cole

Lesser Marshwort in ponds on Mendip Sunday 8th August 2004

The aim of this meeting was to see if Lesser Marshwort (*Apium inundatum*) was still present in two of the locations on the Mendips that were mentioned in the Atlas of the Somerset Flora. *Apium inundatum* is a small umbellifer which can grow as an aquatic in permanent shallow water, or on the damp muddy edges of ponds, lakes and reservoirs. In Somerset it is a very rare species, recorded from a few sites on the Mendips and Blackdown Hills.

Seven members met near Tynings Farm and walked up the footpath and across the south-eastern

corner of Blackdown, the largest area of lowland heath on Mendip. The pond lies at the junction of the heathland and the conifer plantation of Rowberrow Warren at ST467571. A small patch, about 40 x 40cms, of flowering *Apium inundatum* was found floating at the edge of the pond amongst Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Floating club-rush (*Eleogiton fluitans*), Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and the aquatic form of Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*). A few meters north of the pond, we found a further three small non-flowering plants on damp mud beside the track.

The second site of the day was Brimble Pit Pool, ST408508, a dew pond formed by run-off from the road which runs between Priddy and Westbury-sub-Mendip. We had access to a survey undertaken in 1993, which recorded *Apium inundatum* as abundant, and although no open water was present on our visit, we found thousands of plants growing on damp mud across the whole area of the 'pool'. Its associates here included Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), Water Purslane (*Lythrum portula*), Tufted Forget-me-not (*Myosotis laxa* ssp *cespitosa*) and Water Plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) amongst many. It was encouraging to find that this rare plant was still abundant at this site, but it was puzzling that no flowers or fruits were found.

Liz McDonnell

Greater Water Parsnip on North Moor Saturday 21st August, 2004.

The aim of the meeting was to search for Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*) on North Moor, where it had been reported in the past from the area around Lyng Bridge ST 332300. Several members met in East Lyng and walked down Lyng Drove, looking in the rhines on either side of the track. Many of the banks were inaccessible due to bramble thickets and tall herbage along-side the open water, but some good aquatic plant communities were seen. Nuttall's Waterweed (*Elodea nuttallii*), Frogbit (*Hydrochaeris morsus-ranae*) and Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) were abundant. Rootless Duckweed (*Wolffia arrhiza*) was found from its distinctive gritty feel amongst other duckweeds, which included *Lemna minor*, *L. trisulca*, *L. minuta* and *Spirodela polyrhiza*.

We searched the ditches along Bankland Drove as far as Slade's Drove and found large patches Greater Bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*) in several ditches along the north side of the drove, but no *Sium latifolium*. At Bankland Bridge, we stopped to admire and photograph a fine specimen of Native Black Poplar (*Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*), with its wide spreading crown and bossed bark. Several more Black Poplar trees were recorded on Bankland Drove.

After our limited, but unsuccessful search for *Sium* on North Moor, we drove to Southlake Moor for a brief visit to point out this rare species to members who were not familiar with it.

Liz McDonnell

Glasswort Identification at Portishead Sunday, 12th September, 2004.

A group of eleven joined Keith Ferguson the BSBI referee for Glassworts (*Salicornia*). The aim of the meeting was to survey Glaucous Glasswort (*S. obscura*) and to see what other species of glassworts were growing in the salt marsh between Portishead Dock and The Royal Portbury Dock. The salt marsh turned out to be very disappointing with no sign of *S. obscura* and very few specimens of glassworts being found at all. Only two species were seen Common Glasswort (*S. europaea*) and Purple Glasswort (*S. ramosissima*).

The sea bank along the back of the salt marsh had Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) and Spiny Restharrow (*Ononis spinosa*). The surface of a rhyne was covered in Least Duckweed (*Lemna minuta*) and Fat Duckweed (*L. gibba*). The waste ground we had to walk over to reach the salt marsh was very interesting with a pink patch of Crown Vetch (*Securigera varia*) the white of White Melilot (*Melilotus albus*) and a scattering of yellow of Perennial Wall-rocket (*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*).

Paul Green

Whitebeam Collection and Brittle Bladder Fern on Exmoor Saturday, 18th September, 2004.

The meeting was attended by nine members of SRPG. There were also three invited guests for the morning session to see the Exmoor Natural History Society's collection of *Sorbi* (Whitebeams etc.) at Luckbarrow, West Luccombe.

On arrival at Luckbarrow we were met by Malcolm Scott who founded the tree collection and he gave a short talk about Whitebeams in general, explaining that just three fertile species originally had a major part in producing the many apomictic hybrids which set seed without fertilisation (microspecies). These three were Common Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*), Wild Service Tree (*S. torminalis*) and Rowan (*S. aucuparia*). About 17 microspecies are now recognised in the British Isles, (there are probably more to be found) and of these seven occur on Exmoor.

We were then taken around the collection of trees which includes all the native species. Many were in fruit – some bright red, some orange and some brownish. The brown, edible fruits of the Devon Whitebeam were once sold in Barnstaple pannier market as 'French Hales.'

As we had received a message that one member was still travelling on the motorway to the meeting, we decided to have lunch at Luckbarrow to give her a chance to catch up, but it was necessary to move on before she arrived.

The afternoon was spent checking most of the Exmoor sites for Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) in case any should prove to be *C. diaphana* which has recently been recorded from Devon and Cornwall. The first stop was Exford churchyard – and who should roll up but our missing member! The next site was at Simonsbath Car Park, followed by Driver Bridge and finally down to Cornham Ford for two sites by the river Barle.

Specimens were collected from each site by Dr Fred Rumsey from British Museum for examination under an electron microscope but they are all expected to be *C. fragilis*.

Some recording was done at Cornham Ford by Caroline while the energetic members searched for the ferns and happily our latecomer was able to return via Luckbarrow to see the Whitebeams. I hope others enjoyed the day as much as I did.

Caroline Giddens

Bristol Whitebeams in Avon Gorge. Saturday, 2nd October, 2004.

Leaders: Tim Rich & Libby Houston

Seven SRPG members and six various BSBI botanists and researchers joined us at the North Road entrance to Leigh Woods to receive instructions for the great Bristol Whitebeam (*Sorbus bristoliensis*) count. After Martha Maria Atwood's original 1852 specimen from the tree at Stokeleigh Camp viewpoint, recorded numbers appear very low until Bob Russell, first NCC warden of Leigh Woods, plotted 145 trees on the Reserve alone (Russell 1979). More recently P.J.M. Nethercott (1998) suggested total numbers of around 100, "mainly on the Leigh Woods side". Our current ambition is to plot the whole population using GPS, and measure their sizes. Some trees in odd groups had already been recorded during the autumn; the purpose of this meeting was systematically to cover as much of the easier ground as possible.

Tim had prepared simple survey forms to record height, girth, presence of fruit and brief recognition notes for each tree, besides GPS readings. He had also divided the Gorge into areas of roughly similar size but different degrees of difficulty and, mostly in teams of two, we set out accordingly. The five teams allocated sections of the Reserve had copies of Bob Russell's 1979 map as a very useful guideline. One team went north of the Reserve to Lily Point, between Quarries 1 and 2. The quarries themselves and cliffs were excluded for obvious reasons (I've been taking them on in my own time) but plateau and gentler slopes were extensive enough not to be exhausted. Mark and Clare Kitchen crossed back to Clifton to record in their own vice-county (V-c 34). One team came back with data from 18 trees; none came back empty-handed.

We were originally worried that 2 October would be too late for accurate identification. However, I had noticed this spring that *S. bristoliensis* came into leaf at least a week later than *S. aria*; this was consistent throughout the V-c 34 population at least. Sure enough, there seems a similar difference in timing of leaf-fall. There was no problem at the time of the meeting; indeed, there are still enough leaves to identify at least some *S. bristoliensis* trees four weeks and gale-force winds later.

Fifty-eight trees altogether were recorded that day. Tim compiled the data with those of another 61 gathered otherwise, including records from quarries and towpath, and sent out an interim report with provisional map to all participants within a fortnight, discussing both GPS accuracy and the trees' comparative height and girth. At 28.10.2004 records now stand at 214 trees. A further day or two of useful

hunting may still be possible, after which the year's results should give a pretty accurate idea of and about the total population. We hope to write up the results for *Watsonia*.

The survey day was patently useful and the clarity of its recording system an inspiration. As we were working in minimal teams and met up again only in (metaphorically) ragged or staggered fashion at the end, this report gives me a chance to say many thanks – I hope it was as interesting and refreshing a day for everybody as it was for me – and especially to Tim for all the organization.

Libby Houston

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INDOORS AGAIN.....

How fortunate we are in the professional instruction we receive in SRPG. Those members able to attend the meetings at Roughmoor on **30th October and 13th November** were able to put into practice skills passed on to us by Liz. Under her tuition our unskilled labour was put to use in mounting herbarium specimens collected by our Group. Thus we all benefit: we gain expertise, the Group gets a herbarium and Liz has a little help with her workload.

- PLANT NOTES -

BROWN GALINGALE (*Cyperus fuscus*)

Bob Corms, Conservation Officer English Nature, visited the Brown Galingale (*Cyperus fuscus*) in the Gordano Valley during late September 2004. Despite an hour-long search he saw no *Cyperus* plants on this visit. He did think that the sites management was fine and there is no need to think that the plant is extinct! It does have a good seed bank and has been known to have very poor years. One possible explanation of its failure to appear this year was the weather condition during the summer. Bob and I have discussed establishing another colony within the Gordano Valley, does anyone have any views on the establishment of a second site?

Steve Parker

GREATER WATER-PARSNIP (*Sium latifolium*)

Greater Water-parsnip *Sium latifolium* had yet another poor year on Southlake Moor. Only one plant appeared at the main site, the ditch by Burrow Mump. Other populations across the moor did remain stable at around 6–7 plants. The decline of this plant in Somerset is very puzzling; in other parts of the country it seems to be doing okay. The Environment Agency are funding work on the plant nationally, it is hoped that once the national picture of *Sium* is established a

more in-depth research project can help with its long-term conservation. If you have any recent records of Sium from Somerset I would be very pleased to receive them.

Steve Parker

SAND TOADFLAX (*Linaria arenaria*)

In July, just as I was about to go on holiday I was informed that Sand Toadflax *Linaria arenaria* had been recorded at Berrow Dunes LNR. As yet I have not followed up this record but have put it on Mapmate. As there was a fire in the reedbed on Berrow in September, I think it would be good to have a field trip to Berrow Dunes in 2005 to see how the Somerset Rush *Juncus subulatus* is doing and check out the Sand Toadflax record.

Steve Parker

CHAMOMILE (*Chamaemelum nobile*)

On reading that Chamomile had become scarce in some areas of England, I thought I would have a look to see if I could refind a patch last seen in 1991 on Porlock Toll Road. I was very pleased to find that the two small clumps previously seen had greatly increased in quantity and there is now an area about 30 feet square on a grassy road verge. Our other Exmoor patch also did well in 2004 but it is just over the Somerset border in Devon, beside Badgworthy Water. Parts of that patch are regularly cut by someone presumably to make Chamomile tea.

Caroline Giddens

FRENCH SPEEDWELL (*Veronica acinifolia*)

In April 2004, I noticed several flowering plants of French Speedwell scattered amongst beds of bulbs at Broadleigh Gardens, Bishop's Hull. This was the third Somerset record. The New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora has it recorded from only eight 10 km squares.

Paul R.Green

EARLY MEADOW-GRASS (*Poa infirma*)

I found less than 20 plants of this grass scattered on the corner of the sea lawn at Weston-Super-Mare on 9th March, 2004. A specimen was confirmed by Dr T.A. Cope.

Paul R. Green

TARAXACUM

Everyone knows what a dandelion looks like – but how do you tell them apart? The study of this genus, although complex is very rewarding. With most plants when you are searching for a species name and using a key there are sometimes three or four choices to make. However, with dandelions there are approximately 235 different species which are divided into nine sections. In most parts of the British Isles one is only likely to encounter 100 different ones, so this reduces the field a little. I am learning by identifying the dandelions near my home and village and special areas where there is a unique flora, such as Dunster Beach. I hope eventually to be able to recognise species from all over the county and am keeping my eyes open for different ones as I travel about with the Rare Plants Group.

It is difficult to identify dandelions unless they are growing – they wilt easily and lose colour and form so have to be pressed in the field. Incredibly, there is even one that has spotted leaves and if it rains the spots wash off! They are the most plastic of all plants and it is only possible to identify material accurately for a short period, i.e. when they are in bud and early flower. Those that are out of season, juvenile, shaded, drought-stressed, trodden or mown exhibit strange qualities which confuse an already complex position. Experience tells what to collect and also what not to collect.

The interesting ones are the little ones, usually with red achenes and these belong to the group Erythrosperma. There are some rare Scottish montane ones and some Irish ones which inhabit turloughs (one called *T. webbii*!!) but you can be certain that wherever you go, a dandelion awaits identification.

Jeanne Webb

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS REGISTER

One of the original aims of the Somerset Rare Plants Group was to produce a 'Red Data Book' for Somerset. We have been working towards this by recording the rare and special plants of our county for several years and have amassed a large amount of valuable information on location, habitat, population, associated species and much more. It has been decided to start compiling a **Rare Plants Register** for South Somerset (Vice-county 5) and then follow this with one for the northern part of our area. Much work will be needed to bring together information from Mapmate, national datasets and V-c records. Members are invited to our first RPR workshop when we will assign tasks for all those who would like to contribute. For details of our first meeting see below.

FORTHCOMING INDOOR MEETINGS:

Saturday 11th December 10am. Rare Plant Register Workshop, Roughmoor Bishops Hull, Taunton.

Saturday 8th January 2005 11am. Members Winter Meeting. AGM, food (bring buffet items), slides, raffle & book sale. Roughmoor

Saturday 5th February 10am. Mapmate workshop. Roughmoor.

Saturday 5th March 10am. Workshop. RPR work, mounting specimens, followed by members slide show.

The 2005 Field Meetings programme will follow in the new year. In the meantime, I hope many members will attend our interesting indoor meetings over the next few months.

Subscription reminder

The SRPG annual subscription is £5. Please send a cheque payable to the Somerset Rare Plants Group to Anne Cole, Manor Cottage, Rodney Stoke BS27 3UN, or give cash or cheque to Anne at the winter meeting on January 8th.