



Here is our seventh annual Newsletter for members which we hope you will enjoy. Reports of outings will bring back memories to those who were able to attend and hopefully encourage more to come along to our meetings in 2007. For those unable to attend we hope the reports will serve to keep you in touch with what is going on within the Somerset Rare Plants Group. Paul and Ian Green have compiled a list of the new records for VC 5 & 6 in 2006 and there are plant notes from other members. We thank everyone who has contributed to this newsletter and invite all members to send in observations/botanical news for consideration for our next issue. Send to Caroline Giddens carol.enhs@virgin.net (postal address in Membership List) by 26th October, 2007.

REPORTS OF MEETINGS, 2006.

Annual Winter Members' Meeting Saturday, 14th January, 2006.

About 20 members attended our Annual Meeting at Roughmoor. Our Chairman, Steve Parker, gave a résumé of events during 2005 and an indication of what was being planned for 2006. He said the number of records entered on MapMate continues to rise and it was hoped that with permission from Paul and Ian Green and the technical support of Tony Price at SERC we would soon be able to include the records from the *Somerset Atlas Flora*. It was also hoped that we would receive a grant from SERC towards a laptop computer but we would probably have to contribute funds: this expenditure was agreed by all present.

There was a wonderful spread for the bring and share lunch and no-one should have gone hungry. The proceeds of the raffle were given to Gill Read who was shortly to embark on a sponsored ride to raise money for the Marie Curie Cancer Trust.

The afternoon was taken up with members slides. Simon Leach gave a talk on progress being made with his Taunton Flora, Liz McDonnell, Margarete Earle, Jeanne Webb and the Devon County Recorder also showed a selection of slides.

Other indoor meetings:

We had two meetings on 28th January and 25th February to work on the Somerset Rare Plants Register which makes slow progress. The proposed MapMate Workshop meeting was cancelled. On Sat. 9th December we had another interesting session at Roughmoor, mounting herbarium specimens.

Postlebury Wood SSSI. Sunday 9th April 2006.

Five of us gathered in Trudoxhill village for a foray into Postlebury Wood, recording over a hundred wall and wayside species before taking to the footpath over the fields. Postlebury Wood, on poorly drained Oxford Clay, is relatively open woodland utilised for hardwood timber extraction and pheasant-rearing. Amongst plants thriving in the acidic conditions we found Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and shared our picnic spot with Hairy Wood-rush (*Luzula pilosa*) and a smattering of hailstones. The local area is something of a 'hotspot' for Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*) and we were not disappointed. Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*), worthy of special mention in the 1997 Flora, is still to be found along the rides. We saw the first shy blooms of Postlebury Primroses (*Primula vulgaris*), and added significantly to the species count of 1991. We rounded off a very successful day with a most delicious tea with scones and cake, at Gill's in Trudoxhill, who would have been leading had she not been recovering from a major operation.

Linda Carter

Langport 23rd April, 2006.

A small turnout for a recording meeting in Langport town and along the River Parrett. A cold winter resulted in relatively few plants being in flower, but we did our best and recorded the range of species frequently found in urban areas of Somerset, the list for

the day included Shepherd's-purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), White Deadnettle (*Lamium album*), Spotted Medick (*Medicago arabica*) Yarrow, (*Achillea millefolium*) and Cut-leaved Cranesbill (*Geranium dissectum*).

Walking along the river bank, we recorded the typical range of plants found associated with slow-flowing nutrient rich water-courses of the Somerset Levels, plants included Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Reedmace (*Typha latifolia*). Returning to Bow Bridge we did find a good specimen of Flattened Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*). This type of basic recording may not be of interest to all members of the SRPG but it does help us keep our records of common plants up to date.

Steve Parker

Churchill Green and Windmill Hill.

Saturday 6th May, 2006.

The purpose of the field meeting was to revisit areas that were recorded in detail during work for the 1km-based Flora of the Bristol Region about 20 years ago.

We started our walk at the Churchill school, through the Churchyard and across the school playing fields to a sunken green lane called Duck Street. Here we recorded woodland flora including Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*) and Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*). Herbicide spraying around the farmyard of Lower Court Farm had reduced the vegetation to shrivelled distorted remnants, but the rest of the lane was rich in verge species. The grassy banks near the school entrance were species-rich and included species such as Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), Narrow-leaved Meadow-grass (*Poa angustifolia*) and Common Vetch (*Vicia sativa* ssp. *segetalis*).

After lunch we walked across an improved field to Windmill Hill, where we were pleasantly surprised to find a rich calcareous flora in good condition – grazed by what appeared to be a traditional beef breed. On the south-facing slopes we recorded Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*), Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) and Small Scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*). The north-facing slopes were dominated by Pignut (*Conopodium majus*). At the field edge we

found several huge specimens of Morel fungi (these were likely to be *Morchella esculenta*).

Most of the species found were common and widespread, but we recorded a high number of species in the three 1km squares that we visited.

Liz McDonnell

Kilmersdon and Cleaves Wood

Wednesday, 7th June, 2006.

In blazing sunshine, six members and one guest met at Kilmersdon to search for Greater Broomrape (*Orobanche rapum-genistae*).



**GREATER
BROOMRAPE**

This splendid species is known from only three sites in vc6 and six in vc5, where it is parasitic on either Gorse or Broom. *Orobanche rapum-genistae* is Nationally Scarce and Near Threatened. Two of the sites in vc6 are in my local recording area, both of them on acidic outcrops within this predominantly limestone area. However, I have only found the species at the Kilmersdon site so far and last year (2005) found no spikes at all.

The walk to the site near Kilmersdon is uphill all the way from the village, so we set off gently because of the heat and stopped several times! Near Walton Farm, we looked at a selection of grasses in the corner of a field, including Black-grass (*Alopecurus myosuroides*). At the next stop, we admired a small patch of Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), then we paused again on the hill which was our goal and found Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) – both rare species around here.

On the south-facing side of the little hill are a few Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) bushes and under one we were delighted to find two

huge spikes of *Orobanche rapum-genistae*, in full flower. It certainly is an impressive plant, with shoots reaching about 75cm in height. We recorded other acid-loving plants, including Trailing St John's-wort (*Hypericum humifusum*), Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) and Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), all of which are local rarities.

After lunch in the shade of a large tree, I decided not to continue the planned circular walk to Babington Wood, chiefly because of the heat. Instead, we returned to the cars and drove to Cleaves Wood, which is an SSSI (and shady!). The wood is large and mostly private, but treasures are to be found in clearings by the footpath. In the lower clearing we found sixteen spikes of Fly Orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*) - and a solitary Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*), with Yellowwort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*), Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), Stemless Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and other species of calcareous grassland. Under trees by the clearing, we counted about 80 flowering spikes of White Helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*), which was a fantastic sight.



**FLY
ORCHID**

Continuing up the path, we passed a clump of Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*), before reaching a large stand of the Nationally Scarce Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem, or Bath Asparagus (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*). In the upper clearing, we found Common Broomrape (*Orobanche minor* var. *minor*),

which allowed a useful comparison with *O. rapum-genistae*.

Helena Crouch

Arable Margins, Blackdown Hills.

Wednesday 14th June 2006.

This meeting, in partnership with RDS (Rural Development Service), was to survey arable field margins on a farm in Countryside Stewardship at Thurlbear on the Blackdown Hills, where Spreading Field Parsley (*Torilis arvensis*) was recently found. The landowner accompanied us to the field which lies east of Thurlbear Wood which had been in arable the previous year, but which now had a tall, thin grass-dominated sward. Here we found thousands of flowering plants of *Torilis arvensis*. In the adjacent fallow field it was more scattered even though there was more open ground. This species is rare in Somerset and found in only a few scattered sites in the county. It is a nationally rare species and is Red Listed as Endangered. Other species of interest included Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*), Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*) Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*) and Great Brome (*Anisantha diandra*). We discussed inconclusively whether a species of grass that was growing abundantly in the first field was Meadow Brome (*Bromus commutatus*) or Smooth Brome (*B. racemosus*). Although it was rather immature, I sent a specimen to Tom Cope at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew suggesting that it resembled *B. racemosus*. His reply included "From what I can see of it I would have named it *B. commutatus*, but as it happens I cannot draw any boundaries between this and *B. racemosus*. As a consequence of the rule of priority the name for the amalgamated taxon is the latter, so in a sense your suggested determination for it was correct." – So we can be excused for being confused by this genus!

Liz McDonnell

Pridley Plantation, Blackdown Hills

Wednesday evening 14th June, 2006

On a dull, humid evening three of us gathered at Pridley Plantation, near Staple Fitzpaine, to search for White Helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*), a species listed as Vulnerable on the 2005 *Red List*, and for that reason on our 'hit list' of species covered by the proposed Somerset Rare Plants Registers.

Previous visits to Pridley Plantation had produced partial counts only – for example, just 3 flowering plants in 2003 and 8 in 2004 – and we decided that a more detailed survey was now necessary. The species is known to occur on either side of the main track at the eastern end of the wood, within two 1-km squares and two ‘quartads’, ST2519 (SE) and ST2619 (SW), and so our search was restricted to this area.

First we worked westwards through the woodland on the south side of the track, finding several individuals along the bank at the woodland’s edge (with Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*) and Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*)) to ‘get our eye in’, then more in deep shade inside the wood. Each group of plants was greeted with shrieks of delight, and within about twenty minutes we had located no fewer than 238 flowering (or ‘grazed off’) spikes.

Then, crossing into woodland on the north side of the track, we walked eastwards, back towards our starting point. *Cephalanthera* proved to be quite widely spread on this side of the track too, and we counted 179 flowering spikes – giving 417 in all, so quite an improvement on the numbers seen on previous visits! Even so, we think our total is an underestimate for two reasons: first, because we quite possibly overlooked some ‘grazed-off’ plants, of which there seemed to be quite a few; second, because much of our search was conducted in poor light conditions – indeed, for the last fifteen minutes or so it was pretty much dark!

A further visit in early June next year, in better conditions, would be desirable. Clearly, the *C. damasonium* population at this site is of considerable importance, being one of the largest (if not *the* largest) in the county, and of particular interest as it is right at the western limit of its range in Britain. Quite why it is not more widely distributed within Pridley Plantation, or found in other woods on the ‘Blackdown Lias’ – Young Wood, Orchard Wood and Thurlbear Wood, to name but three – is a mystery, but thorough searches of these areas could yet turn up further colonies.

Simon J. Leach

Sand Bay sand-dunes

Sunday, 25th June, 2006.

The day was fine and warm, four members and a keen ecology student met at Sand Bay and admired a good plant of Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenacea*) before crossing to the narrow strip of sand dunes. After a large lady had told us "you are going in the wrong direction to see the flowers" we set off to examine the south end of the bay. She was wrong!

We found an interesting dune and high beach flora. The constants of the community: Sand and Sea couch, (*Elytrigia juncea* and *E. atherica*) Lyme-grass (*Leymus arenarius*) and Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima*) were there, but others of more interest too. Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*) was locally frequent in places, and one plant of Grass-leaved Orache (*Atriplex littoralis*) at the far end of the bay, also Fig-leaved Goosefoot (*Chenopodium ficifolium*). Above the high water-mark was plentiful Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*) and occasional Sea-rocket (*Cakile maritima*) and Sea Campion (*Silene uniflora*). Also of interest were plants of Small Nettle (*Urtica urens*), Annual Mercury (*Mercurialis annua*), Tree Mallow (*Lavatera arborea*),



and garden escapes: *Rugosa rubra*, Narrow-leaved Everlasting-pea (*Lathyrus sylvestris*), *Erigeron speciosus*, and Sweet Alison (*Lobularia maritima*). The most exciting find was a robust plant of Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*), last recorded in 1982.

Anne Cole

North Somerset Ditches – Tickenham Moor. Sunday 9th July, 2006.

Nine members and friends met at Tickenham Church and walked across the fields behind Tickenham Court to look at ditches on Tickenham, Nailsea & Kenn Moor SSSI. These were known to be species-rich and the reason why the site had been notified.

Emergent species included Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*), Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*), Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*) and Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*). We recorded three Sweet-grasses, *Glyceria notata*, *G. fluitans* & *G. maxima* and found Whorl-grass (*Catabrosa aquatica*) growing in floating rafts in a cattle watering place at ST 454713. Karen Pollock's long-handled grapnel was useful for pulling pondweeds and other submergents from the water and good finds were Hairlike Pondweed (*Potamogeton trichoides*) in Tickenham Boundary Rhine and Opposite-leaved Pondweed (*Groenlandia densa*) in two places at ST453712. We also recorded Water-violet (*Hottonia palustris*) and Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*).



Non-aquatic species recorded during the day were Black Horehound (*Ballota nigra*) and Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) on a grassy verge at the junction of Washing Pound Lane and Church Lane. After recording in the churchyard at the end of the day after other members had departed, I explored the church which was open to the public and was offered tea & cakes which were very welcome.

Liz McDonnell

The Perch, Cheddar

This SSSI recording meeting on 19th July was called off at short notice due to the very high summer temperatures, as it would have been very uncomfortable in the searing heat on the open south facing slopes of the Mendips. It is hoped to run this field meeting again next year to record the exact locations of the rare and scarce species in the limestone grassland and rock outcrops.

Liz McDonnell

Haddon Hill, Exmoor Sunday 23rd July, 2006.

Eight SRPG members plus one visitor gathered at Haddon Hill to examine Bog Bilberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*) which had originally been found by Paul and Ian Green in 1994. Haddon Hill is its most southerly location in the British Isles.

Glorious views and summer sun made a serious study rather more of an outing. Caroline volunteered to record the areas within reach of the car park* and the rest set off to the Bird Pond, recording along the way. The first group of *Vaccinium uliginosum* was found without too much difficulty – easy when you know where it is - and it appeared to be in a healthy condition with a number of juicy berries tempting to the palate but better just photographed. The *Vaccinium* was growing near a patch of Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) in an area which was covered with Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) and some Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*). A second group of plants was found within 50 feet of the first clump. The rhododendron plants which were growing all over the heath had been sprayed at some previous time but, by chance, fortunately this had not killed the *Vaccinium*. The group members spread out in a line and closely examined the rest of the hillside as far as the wood but no more plants were found, the habitat being considerably drier away from Bird Pond.

Recording continued, even through the lunch stop, and a foray into the wood produced a few more ticks on the recording form. The species numbers were low but three separate squares were recorded. The return to the cars proceeded through the area where Checkerberry (*Gaultheria procumbens*) can

be found and it was pleasing to see the unusual berries. Jeanne Webb

*In the event Caroline decided to make her way to Upton Cleave and record in the Exmoor section of Square SS9828 along the old carriage drive. 115 species were noted including Slender Rush (*Juncus tenuis*), Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), Welsh Poppy (*Mecanopsis cambrica*) and Hybrid Woundwort (*Stachys x ambigua*). The area also proved quite good for butterflies, seven species being noted and numerous small frogs were hopping around in the damp places.

Caroline Giddens

Steep Holm 27th July 2006.

This was a joint visit with English Nature staff. Before landing, the 'Bristol Queen' circled the small rocky island giving us a good view of the steep rocky cliffs. With binoculars we scanned the terrain for species of interest. Tree Mallow (*Lavatera arborea*) was abundant all around the island, dominating the upper cliffs. We spotted at least one clump of Golden Samphire (*Inula crithmoides*) near Rudder Rock at the western end and Sea-lavender (later confirmed as *Limonium procerum* ssp. *procerum* by Simon Leach) which was abundant on the south-facing open cliffs.

At the landing beach, several spikes of Wild Leek (*Allium ampeloprasum*) were growing high on the cliffs. Other species recorded here included Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*), Wallflower (*Erysimum cheiri*) and a variety of Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) with large wide rosette leaves. The island is now ungrazed. It is largely covered with dense scrub and Sycamore woodland has developed at the eastern end. Alexanders (*Smyrniololus atrum*) is abundant everywhere. We made lists of all species recorded in the two 1km squares into which the island falls and GPS readings were taken of the rarer species including Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), Hounds-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), Ivy Broomrape (*Orobancha hederaceae*), Caper Spurge (*Euphorbia lathyris*) and Nettle-leaved Goosefoot (*Chenopodium murale*).



Henbane

Sadly, the Wild Peony (*Paeonia mascula*) is wild no more, as all of the plants on the island are enclosed with very ugly metal cages.

Liz McDonnell

Ashton Gate, Bristol Saturday 12th August 2006.

Our meetings usually monitor sites where there have either been records of rare and scarce plants or where they might occur. This meeting was unusual in as much as it visited an industrial/urban site at Ashton Gate in the Cumberland Basin starting at the bottom of Rownham Hill.

We had access to the area owned by Rowland Stone by following a path down to the large area of old railway sidings (the rails having now been pulled up) behind the Megabowl. Here we were waist high in wild flowers including Pale Toadflax (*Linaria repens*), a locally scarce plant. We continued to be amazed at the plants found including a clump of Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) at the Stone area - found growing amongst the very tasty, juicy blackberries we were feasting on. We also spent time in a well-used allotment site where many Bristolians were busy tending their vegetables. We finished with a grand total of 220 for the four hours spent! And we had been on 'brownfield' sites, bringing realisation of the importance of conserving their Biodiversity and of doing all we can to prevent development.

Pam Millman

Quants, Blackdown Hills SWT Reserve Wednesday 23rd August, 2006.

Only three members met on a damp overcast day, and our meeting was curtailed soon after lunch by heavy rain. However, in the short time that we were on the SWT Reserve, we recorded 98 species. The ancient woodland had a varied ground flora including Woodruff (*Galium oderatum*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* ssp. *montanum*) and Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*).

We spent a while discussing very large round leaves growing at the side of the track and trying to decide whether they were Sweet Violet or Marsh Violet. As the leaves and petioles were hairless and they appeared to be coming from underground rhizomes rather than from a rootstock, we decided that they were unusually large Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*) leaves. As the rain began, we soldiered on through the reserve to the open grazed area and recorded heathland species including Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*) and Bristle Bent (*Agrostis curtisii*). Returning through the woodland as rain became very heavy we noted several tall faded spikes of Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*).

Liz McDonnell

Huntspill River and River Parrett Sunday 3rd September, 2006.

There was a good turnout of SRPG members for this meeting along the Huntspill River and saltmarsh on the Island saltings alongside the River Parrett.

On the banks of the Huntspill River we recorded Spiny Restharrow (*Ononis spinosa*), False Fox-sedge (*Carex otrubae*), Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*) and Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*). On the water's edge there was a good fringe of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), with a good show of Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*). In the River there were extensive stands of Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*), Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*) and Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myrriophyllum spicatum*). A few plants of Floating Primrose (*Ludwigia peploides*) were seen in the river by Sloway Bridge, this was first recorded last year; the Environment Agency has taken

action to stop this alien plant from spreading but so far they have failed to eradicate it.

After lunch we made our way to the Huntspill sluice, where a number of our target species were found. These included Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) and Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*). On crossing the sluice we recorded on the Island, an extensive area of saltmarsh. This is one of the best examples of this habitat in Somerset. plants of Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritime*), Sea Wormwood (*Seriphidium maritimum*), Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardii*) and Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritimum*) were found in good quantity.

Steve Parker

Lilstock – Arable Fields and Coast. Sunday 10th September, 2006.

The last field meeting of the 2006 summer season was held at Lilstock on 10 September, and was very well attended – the day was lovely, and members must have felt inspired to grab one more outing. We gathered in the beach car park, and spent the morning in an arable field immediately behind the shingle bar, bordered by a rhyne running into the currently EA controlled sluice, and then round the remains of the former harbour.



Wild Celery

There was good news and bad news. Conditions were not ideal for botanising, as this part of the channel coast had really had no measurable rain for some five months, and the land was extremely parched. The arable field has *Miscanthus* which had had some rhizome damage last winter when the sluice overflowed, so did not look inspiring, but it was just possible to confirm a scrap of the

substantial population of Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*) which is known there, by grubbing up some very shrivelled ‘bulbs’. This species can survive serious saline inundations – the ‘bulbs’, essentially swollen stems, keeping viable growing points. The young growth then has a considerable head start on other pioneer species when the salt-soaked ground begins to dry. We also enjoyed plenty of Many-seeded Goosefoot (*Chenopodium polyspermum*), (a characteristic Lilstock weed), and could follow the strong smell of celery into the rhyne in several places. Most of the Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*) seed in the Wakehurst British Seed Bank was collected from this very population.

A rough bank between the east end of the shingle bar, and the (usually dry) channel of the sluice exit, has been known for a population of Slender Hare’s-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*). At the times of recording for the Somerset Atlas and for the 2002 national Atlas, there were rabbit-grazed areas on the bank, with abundant Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*), (another character plant of the Lilstock lias clays), in spring, and the *Bupleurum* and Pale Flax (*Linum bienne*) in late summer. In 2006 it was seen in sad condition, thickly overgrown with various maritime couch grasses and bramble. The pretty Pale Flax was present by paths, but no Slender Hare’s-ear could be found (and other parts of the day proved the group to contain some **very** sharp eyes). Even Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*), usually abundant along the sluice channel, was hidden from us – not by any habitat degradation, but because the night before had seen the highest tide for more than a century, and the cut was full of water! Eventually a few soggy stalks were fished out, to confirm its presence.

At lunchtime, we took to the shade in my garden at Beggars Roost, and then drove up Kilton Hill to look for arable weeds in some setaside bordering Waltham’s Copse. The calcareous clays of Kilton and Lilstock have been arable since medieval times, and probably earlier. In spite of modern intensive methods, these particular fields have regular appearances of Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) and Round-leaved Fluellen (*K. spuria*), Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*), and Stinking Chamomile (*Anthemis*

cotula), seemingly from a historically continuous seedbank. However, a recce done by Liz McDonnell and I, had been rather discouraging for a meeting supposed to be aimed at ‘arables’. The cliff fields, usually excellent, had been ploughed after harvest, but because of the drought, no weeds at all had sprouted. Other hopeful fields had been treated with some reeking herbicide, and were impossible to examine. The two strips of setaside seemed the only hope for at least a glimpse of some target species. In fact, they were a star turn! Something (the Mediterranean summer conditions? the timing of cultivator disturbance?) had made perfect growing for all the above weeds. None of us had ever seen such positive swards of uncommon weeds. *Euphorbia exigua* was particularly attractive in its fresh green, and for members not blasé about *Kickxias*, the sight of their stems trailing almost a metre, *K. spuria* with quite richly coloured, bold, purple and yellow ‘snapdragon’ flowers, *K. elatine* paler and more discreet, was a treat indeed.

Altogether, it was a happy and productive late outing – nothing sensationally rare, but a very precious and subtle (and brilliantly spotted) new square record was made. Lesser Centaury (*Centaureium pulchellum*), in among the *Kickxias* – who ever would have thought it!

Ro FitzGerald



Visit to the Somerset County Museum Herbarium, Taunton.

Wednesday 27th September, 2006.

Several members met for a pre-arranged visit to see the collection of pressed dried specimens belonging to Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society which is housed and curated by Somerset Museums Services in the Castle Museum,

Taunton. We were welcomed by the museum staff and shown the vascular plant database of all the specimens in the collection. We entered information from several herbarium sheets on to our MapMate database of Somerset records particularly sheets of *Juncus* and *Carex*.

There is plenty of future work here for us; it is fascinating to handle sheets bearing voucher specimens of plants first recorded long ago in Somerset, some of which are now considered extinct. Fascinating too, to see the work of former botanists who may otherwise be known to us as just names in local floras.

Bridgwater Docks

Sunday 19th November, 2006.

On a bright sunny Sunday morning members of the SRPG met for a morning botany trip around Bridgwater Docks and parts of the Bridgwater town centre. Heading towards the old canal basin we collected a good range of native and alien plants. Of note we recorded Cockspur (*Echinochloa crus-galli*) growing as a pavement weed close to the feed mill. While on the dock edge we found Gipsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*). In some rough grassland a single specimen of Green Bristlegrass (*Setaria viridis*) was seen and quickly identified. On reaching the River Parrett a selection of salt-marsh plants were found growing along the muddy banks. Here Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*) was still in flower with a single plant of Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*). Extensive stands of *Phragmites* line the river on both banks. Walking through King's Square towards the modern town centre, Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*), Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*) and Wall-rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*) were found growing on the brick walls. We finished our walk at St Mary's church with its exceedingly elegant stone spire. One member, on finding a small pink *Geranium* flower, soon identified the plant as Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*G. pusillum*), while in another part of the graveyard a large patch of *Cyclamen hederifolium* was admired by all.

Stephen Parker

Somerset rare Plants Group DOLOMITES WEEK. 1-8 July 2006



This was the most ambitious week away to date for the SRPG being led by one of our members. Margarete Earle put much time and effort into organising the programme although she was most modest about it, saying that we also gave her a holiday in an area she loves!

The group of eleven stayed in Selva, a delightful small town close to the Sella Pass. The valley held three small towns and each had several gondolas supplying alpine areas on both sides. The bus routes were also most useful in the valley. We were able to save all our energies for walking along the paths finding such an interesting flora.

On our first morning we walked up the Vallunga valley and into the Puez-Odles National Park, below towering cliffs and pinnacles seeing many locals out for their Sunday walk.

On Monday, we took a bus down the valley to Ortesei and the gondola to Alpe di siusi spending several hours in the meadows without any further climbing with many new species. There were large numbers of the Vanilla orchid amongst the brilliant *Veronica fruticans* and *Myosotis alpestre*.

On Tuesday we went up the valley to the Porzoi Pass from where we followed a contouring path with wonderful views of the Sella massif and Sassolungo. Specialities found included *Saxifraga sedoides*, and two Gentian species. The Alpenrose was prolific.

Wednesday found us at Ortesei again for the Seceda lift in two parts taking us to 2518m. Here we were in mist but by the time we had drunk a coffee it lifted and we spent a wonderful day contouring just below the ridge on Alpe de Cisles finally descending by another lift at Col Raiser. The highlight involved a short descent on a via ferrata. This was first explored by Mark who then enticed others to risk a steep descent holding very firmly on to a cable attached to the rock face! A Mountain Wildlife Ranger was rather

concerned at seeing a group of largely grey-haired folk attempting this. Well worthwhile as we found *Androsace* and a rare poppy *Papaver rhaetica*.

On Thursday we took the Ciampinoi gondola from Selva. The Guide Book told us that the all-round viewpoint from the top was the best in the valley – stunning mountains. We followed the path to the Sella Pass seeing large numbers of the yellow poppy we had enthused over yesterday. One rocky area kept us busy identifying the many Saxifrages. An area of cast Dolomite gave us a more wooded habitat for a while. This was the only day it rained on us; even then it only started as we approached the Sella Pass café so no problem!

Now, what choices to take for Friday? People more or less did their own thing. Most used lift passes again for walks and seemed to converge later at the ruined Castle Wolkenstein built into the rockface down in the valley. We had been told that the elusive endemic known as the Devil's Claw, *Physoplexis comosa* was to be found there. This is a Rampion relative; difficult to photograph as the best clumps were way up on the rockface, but we were all so pleased that Margarete had found her 'special' for the area.

We were so lucky with the weather; blue skies most of the time with pleasant temperatures. This also meant that the butterfly enthusiasts were well satisfied. Many thanks Margarete for thinking up such a lovely holiday for us all.

Pam Millman

Unfortunately, there is not space to include a complete list of all the plants seen during the week in the Dolomites, but one can be supplied via email to carol.enhs@virgin.net or if you send a SAE to Caroline Giddens.



**Branched
Bur-reed**

NEW SOMERSET PLANT RECORDS

The list below, compiled by Paul and Ian Green, contains the new county and vice-county records made during 2006.

Anemanthele lessoniana (New Zealand Windgrass)

Ston Easton, ST62153 67, Helena Crouch & Judy Moss, 23rd October. East verge of lane heading SW from A37, just before junction with track between cottages, one plant. New for vice-county 6.

Brachyglottis 'Sunshine' (Shrub Ragwort)

Carhampton, ST0042, Caroline Giddens, 11th June. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Cardamine corymbosa (New Zealand Bitter-cress)

Golden Acres Nursery, Yeovil, ST526160, Paul Green, 16th March, weed in nursery. New for vice-county 5.

Choisya ternata (Mexican Orange)

Carhampton, ST0042, Caroline Giddens, 11th June, spreading along wild hedge from garden. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Cotoneaster dielsianus (Diels' Cotoneaster)

West Park, Minehead, SS96154617, Alastair Stevenson, 1st October, self-sown on wall. Det. J. Fryer. New for vice-county 5.

Cotoneaster mairei (Maire's Cotoneaster)

West Lynch, SS90124766, Alastair Stevenson, 1st October, self-sown in pavement cracks. Det. J. Fryer. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Cotoneaster sternianus (Stern's Cotoneaster)

Porlock Weir, SS86464801, Alastair Stevenson, 1st October, two bushes self-sown on shingle. Det. J. Fryer. New for vice-county 5.

Festuca glauca sens. str.

Shoreditch, ST2422, Simon Leach, 11th May, single tussock growing on edge of tarmac on roadside of B3170 by gateway/driveway. Vice-county 5, new County record.

Galanthus elwesii var. *monostictus* (*G. caucasicus*)

Tyntesfield National Trust ST5071, Pam Millman, 6th March, amongst grass near stables. New for vice-county 6.

Impatiens waleriana

The Avenue, Minehead, SS96984626, Alastair Stevenson, 30th September, one plant self-sown in pavement crack. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Liquidamber styraciflua

Dunster Hawn, SS997454, Alastair Stevenson, 24th September, one seedling. Det. D. Meikle. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Lonicera tatarica (Tartarian Honeysuckle)

Roughmoor. ST22052497, Simon Leach, 8th May, single large bush in rough scrubby ground adjoining river. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Lychnis chalconica (Maltese-cross)

Taunton, ST2125, Steve Parker, 19th June, a few plants in the Frieze orchard beside the allotments. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Nolana acuminata

Minehead, SS96814622, Alastair Stevenson, 29th July, one plant self-sown in pavement. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Olearia paniculata (Akiraho)

The Parks, Minehead, SS96154628, Alastair Stevenson, 23rd September, self-sown in pavement. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Pennisetum villosum

Doone Way, Alcombe, SS978449, Alastair Stevenson, 26th August, several plants self-sown in gutter. Det. Alan Leslie. Vice-county 5, new county record.

Phormium cookianum (Lesser New Zealand Flax)

Haydon Drove, Haydon, ST571487, Ian Green, 19th March, lots of plants on heaps of soil on side of drove. Vice-county 6, new county record.

Pteris multifida (Ribbon Fern)

Bath, ST752646, Helena Crouch, det. Dr Fred Rumsey, 24th October. Basement in Pierrepoint Street (between Mosque and the Wife of Bath restaurant). 4 plants growing from walls of

derelict looking basement. Vice-county 6, new county record.

Rubus avaloniensis (Bramble sp.)

Beside track, Little Headon, Jeanne Webb. Vice-county 5, new county record. **The only native species on the list for 2006.**

Veronica austriaca (Large Speedwell)

Tunley, ST697595, Cam Valley Wildlife Group/Helena Crouch, 07th June. Edge of lay-by at junction of Tunley Road and lane to SE. One patch. Possibly planted. Vice-county 6, new county record.

OTHER PLANT NOTES, 2006.



SEA HOLLY (*Eryngium maritimum*)

During our meeting at Sand Bay in June, we found one plant of Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*) as well as numerous Sand Bay specialities. It was an exciting find, but none of us realised at the time just how amazing our discovery was! Only later, when I was looking at the distributions of the various species we had seen, did I realise how significant this record was – and immediately regretted our failure to record its exact location. I returned five days later, when luckily we were able to re-find the solitary plant and make a more careful record.

In the ten years before Captain Roe's Flora was published in 1981, Sea Holly was only recorded four times in Somerset. It was last recorded in Somerset in 1982, at Berrow Dunes. Our plant was thus the first for 24 years and is arguably the rarest plant in Somerset!

Helena Crouch

BLUEBERRY (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)

Whilst looking at the Bog Bilberry on Hadden Hill, Jeanne and Tim Webb noticed some nearby spikes of another plant which could perhaps have been a Cotoneaster. A small piece was collected and taken to Desmond Meikle who after a further visit, confirmed it most surprisingly as *Vaccinium corymbosum*! This plant has previously been found bird-sown in Hampshire and Dorset. It was certainly new for Exmoor and possibly for Somerset.

A 'New Species' for VC 6!

A few weeks ago I spent three days enjoying myself covering some of the amazing range of work in the Somerset Arts Week, visiting artists' studios and often their homes given over to the exhibitions. On leaving one at Wembdon I noticed a tall plant in flower in a stream near an interesting Millennium bridge. Yes, the flower reminded me of Frogbit; of course it had to be Arrowhead which I had not seen for some time. However the leaves were definitely not right!

Back home, Blamey and Fitter gave me Broad-leaved Arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*) - Rose does not even mention it! Next step was the Atlas Flora - only on the CD so this was getting exciting. Only a very few dots and these well away from our area. Fair enough it did mention that it was originally planted but records show it has spread since 1997.

I then phoned Liz who suggested I contact another member who might be able to visit the site. I feel we have to be anonymous from now on! This member would try to do so and report back.

The report back had me alternating between frustration, annoyance at not having found an exciting new site and sheer amusement. (yes, I could not stop laughing for sometime!) Apparently a third party contacted, incidentally working in Conservation, admitted to having planted it from his garden pond as it looked rather nice! Long live *Sagittaria latifolia*, and keep an eye on it!

Pam Millman



This year 2006 has been a good recording year with a good number of records being entered on to the Mapmate recording system. Both Vice County 5 and 6 have well over 1600 species recorded for each area. The total number of records is over 150,000 plant records. Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) is the most frequently recorded species, it has been recorded from 60 10KM squares in VC5 and VC6. Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and (*Rubus fruticosus*) are also extensively recorded.

The number of people actively using the Mapmate system has remained fairly constant. Most recorders now have mastered basic use of Mapmate, but there are still some persistent problems that are encountered when using the system. The most frequent concerns are over Replication. The importance of backing up the database was made very clear to me during this summer, the hard drive on my computer died, but due to a back up on the Mapmate server I was able to recover all of the SRPG and my own records. The SRPG has a new laptop computer, with this I plan to help people with their Mapmate problems. If you want help just give me a call.

Steve Parker



**REPORT OF
RECORDING EFFORT
AND USE OF
MAPMATE**

Subscription reminder.....

Our annual subscription is still £5. This may be paid at the Annual Members Meeting on Saturday, 13th January, 2007 but if you are unable to attend, please send to our Treasurer, Anne Cole, Manor Cottage, Rodney Stoke BS27 3UN.

**DURING NEXT YEAR (2007) SRPG
WILL BE CELEBRATING ITS TENTH
ANNIVERSARY**

**Newsletter issued by Somerset Rare Plants
Group December 2006.**

Contacts: Liz McDonnell 01934 712649

lizmcdonnell@btopenworld.com

and Steve Parker 01823 666006

sd.parker26@virgin.net