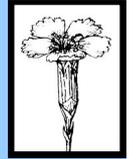


SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



2017 Newsletter

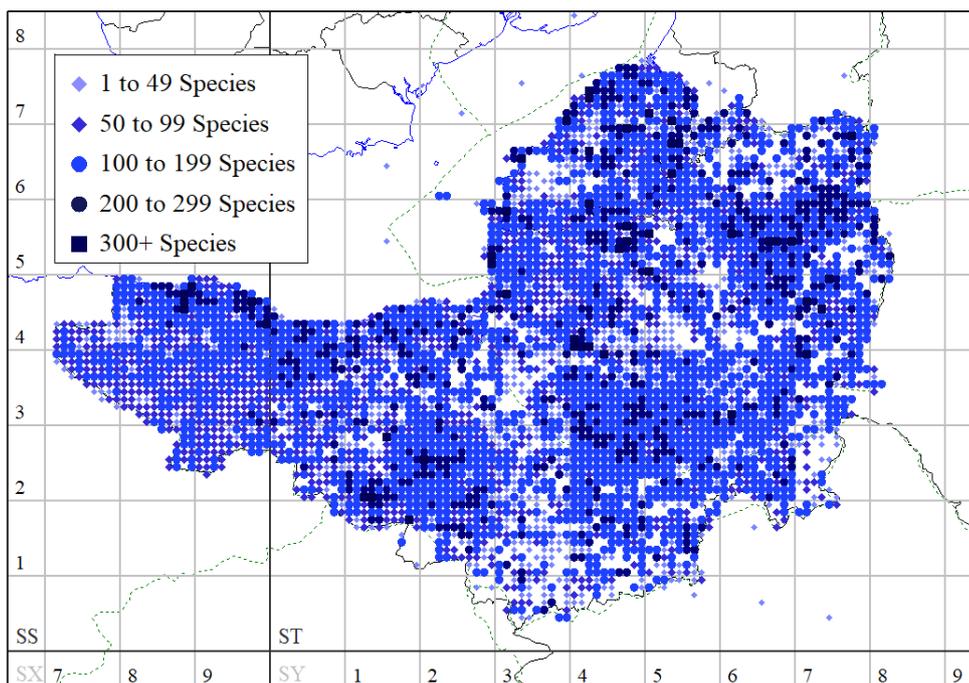
Issue no. 18

Editor Liz McDonnell

Somerset Rare Plants Group was 20 years old this year. We decided to mark this in a number of ways, but our special event was the 20th Anniversary Conference in October, held to celebrate the work of our very successful and enjoyable botanical group. Most of our field meetings over the last few years have been influenced by the needs of BSBI's Atlas 2020 project, recording as many species as possible and trying to get fairly even recording effort over the whole of our large area of VC5 & VC6. In 2017 we made special efforts to record in 'zero monads' as well as recording rare and scarce species in Somerset. In our anniversary year we decided to hold several of our field meetings in botanically rich areas which have a large number of rare and scarce species. Some of these, like Brean Down and Cheddar Gorge are considered botanical 'hotspots' and assumed to be well recorded, but many members especially those who are fairly new, may not have visited these wonderful places to see the special species that are to be found there. New sightings are always welcome from these areas, and true to form, we added many good records for our MapMate database, and of course for Atlas 2020 too, as all of our records are added to the national database.

As in 2016, we started the year by participating in the BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. This is now firmly on our SRPG calendar and is gaining popularity each year. We had three indoor meetings and 12 field meetings, some of them jointly with other groups - Wild Flower Society (WFS) and Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS). We ran two workshops, an early one in April as a follow-up to last year's BSBI workshop on Dandelions (and this again resulted in a large number of *Taraxacum* records for the two VCs) and a Docks and Knotweeds workshop, both of which were well-attended. As well as the efforts of individual botanists, small local groups are becoming well established, especially in VC5 and a huge amount of recording is being undertaken for our database and ongoing Somerset Rare Plants Register. The total number of Somerset records was a staggering 101,000.

VC5 and 6 Total Species per Monad 2000 onwards



The map shown here is updated with all the recording done in 2017. If you compare it to the map in the 2016 Newsletter, you will see the huge effort that SRPG members have put into recording this year. Maps are regularly updated with all the current MapMate records and are available to view on the SRPG website on the 'Recording in Somerset' page. Contact the VC recorders (page 45) if you would like SRPG recording cards to help with recording in Somerset.

Winter Meetings

New Year Plant Hunt

Watchet (VC5)

Sunday 1st January 2017

Report: Liz McDonnell

Taking part in the BSBI New Year Plant Hunt is now firmly on the SRPG calendar each year. Eleven members met at Bishops Lydeard station on a cold wet day to take the West Somerset Railway to Watchet. As the weather was so unpleasant, with wind and driving rain we decided to stay together, rather than split into two groups. We spent a little time around the station and car park finding Pot Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) and Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) in flower. We made our way down to the harbour, finding two forms (large white and smaller lilac-tinged flowers) of *Sutera cordata*, self-sown from plantings by the museum. This is a popular hanging basket plant sold in garden centres as *Bacopa*. We battled on in the rain finding several pavement species including Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pal-lida*) and Sea Mayweed (*Tripleurospermum mari-timum*) but soon took refuge in a pub to have coffee (or something stronger) to warm up. We continued for a while around the streets and peered over the bridge of the Washford River to find clumps of Seaside Daisy (*Erigeron glaucus*) in flower on the walls.

At lunchtime we returned to the station to huddle by the open fire in their café and gift shop to have our sandwiches. We dripped over their



Wet botanists in the tea room at Watchet Railway Station
© Graham Lavender

floor for a while, but decided to call it a day and returned on an earlier train to Bishops Lydeard. On the way back in the train, we counted up the species that we had seen in flower and to our surprise found that we had recorded 65 species. We later learnt from the BSBI website that SRPG had come 5th in this national competition, so we did well for such a bad-weather day.

Annual Members Meeting and AGM

Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay

Saturday 21st January 2017

Report by Liz McDonnell

24 members and guests met on a very cold frosty morning for our usual AGM and annual social event. After coffee and chat, Liz welcomed new members and those who were seldom able to make our meetings and then reported on the current membership and the number of indoor, field and workshop meetings held during 2016. The Treasurer, Clive Lovatt presented the financial accounts. The current membership stands at 97 members (although some of these may have lapsed) and the annual subscription (unchanged for many years) remains at £8 per annum, payable in January. It is now possible to pay directly into SRPG account, but members must let Clive know by email that payment has been made in this way. His email address is at the end of the Newsletter. Helena Crouch gave a progress report on the Somerset Rare Plants Register, informing members that she has almost completed the extinct species accounts, and has now written about 25% of the total. Cath Shellswell has kindly contributed written accounts of some of the arable species on the list. Other members offered to help with this massive task. Chris Loudon gave us progress report on the SRPG website www.somersetrareplantsgroup.org.uk. The site is hosted by the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) as part of its role in helping specialist groups. The use is monitored by Google Analytics, which has a detailed breakdown of how many people use the site, where they are and what device they are using. Chris reported that more people are using smart phones and tablets to view and that we have users of the website in Rome! Recent developments include maps of the number of records and taxa at monad level since 2000 and a link to

our SRPG Facebook Page, which Steve Parker has recently launched. The photo archive is progressing and we are looking at posting copies of talks and presentations and useful help for identification of Somerset plants.

Steve Parker (VC5) and Helena Crouch (VC6) reported on progress with recording in their respective vice-counties. Steve reported that 26,415 records were made in VC5 in 2016. This was less than in 2015, but was a very good recording year, despite Steve being out of action for a few months early in the year. Eight field meetings were held in VC5 and some of those were very well recorded by SRPG members. For instance, at Wind Down on the Quantock Hills, 340 records were made. At Fairfield Estate where we split into two groups, 550 were made. An exceptionally high number of records of 890 was made when we split into four recording groups, indicating that 'meet and scatter' recording days are very productive. Helena showed us the Somerset recording coverage maps (Blue Maps), which indicated where efforts have been concentrated and what an amazing amount of recording we did in 2016. She presented a slideshow of exciting finds in VC6 including *Dryopteris affinis* subsp. *paleaceolobata* at Ebbor Gorge and Italian Toadflax (*Cymbalaria pallida*), both new to Somerset; and two species not seen in Somerset for many years, Copse Bindweed (*Fallopia dumetorum*) at Nailsea, not seen since 1836 and Oak-leaved Goosefoot (*Chenopodium glaucum*) at Pilton, first record for Somerset since 1938.

Clive Lovatt gave a historical miscellany comprising: an exchange of letters between PJM Nethercott and AJ Willis in 1999 in which Nethercott reported overhearing that the Lady Orchid (*Orchis purpurea*) found in Leigh Woods in 1990 had arrived there in a pot; photos of The Reverends RP Murray and EJ Marshall, the authors of the Flora of Somerset (1896) and its supplement (1914); and a showing of the reconstructed grid map used by botanists of the Bristol Naturalists Society to record the local flora by square miles in 1868.

After the bring and share lunch, Graham presented the 'Lavender Challenge', his idea of a friendly competition to encourage the recording of Dandelions in 2017, following the very successful Ta-

raxacum workshop in April 2016, when so many new county records were made. The rules have been formalized and elaborated by Simon Leach, who has loaned a dandelion-decorated pot for the annual prize.

Ro FitzGerald & Jeanne Webb shared their recent experience of recognizing *Ulex x breoganii*, the hybrid between Common Gorse and Western Gorse from the Quantock Hills. Jeanne presented a table of features to help with identification.

Liz McDonnell gave a short presentation on the progress of the Taunton Herbarium Project and reported that the digitisation part of the work has been almost completed and that mounting of specimens and taxonomic reorganisation are planned for 2017. Our annual quiz (devised by Steve) was based on the last 20 years of the SRPG and won by the VC6 team (although that team was much larger than VC5 team, so some suggested the result was not exactly fair!).

Recording in Somerset, News and Updates

Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay

Saturday 25th February 2017

Report: Liz McDonnell

17 members met to hear about progress with recording and other projects in Somerset. After tea & coffee and general chat, new members were warmly welcomed to SRPG. Helena then gave us a talk about the Cheddar Gorge Survey that she had undertaken last year for Natural England. This was an update on the Rare Plant Survey that Liz McDonnell & Ro FitzGerald had done in 1997. Helena added a few extra species to the priority list provided by NE. All the species were mapped at 8-fig grid refs and then plotted on GIS, so that the precise locations could be accurately depicted. Helena reported that Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*) was still plentiful along the cliff edges on both sides of the gorge, as was Slender Bedstraw (*Galium pumilum*), but molecular work was needed to determine its taxonomy and see if it was the same as *G. fleurotii* in France. The Hawkweeds associated with Cheddar Gorge were counted and plotted. Cheddar Hawkweed (*Hieracium stelonepiforme*) could no longer be found at Black Rock and only 59 plants were found in the gorge itself. Tim Rich

had collected seed from this species this year. Schmitt's Hawkweed (*H. schmittii*), Red-tinted Hawkweed (*H. angustisquamum*) and Chalice Hawkweed (*H. cyathis*) were found in low numbers. Limestone Fern (*Gymnocarpium robertianum*) was still plentiful in the gorge – especially on scree slopes. Helena reported that Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*) is Somerset rarest plant, with only one small dwindling patch in a very vulnerable pathside area in Ubley Warren. There are two sites for Angular Solomon's-seal (*Polygonatum odoratum*) in the Cheddar Complex and it was difficult to find last year at Black Rock. Both Orpine (*Sedum telephium*) and Rock Stonecrop (*Sedum forsterianum*) have a scattered distribution in the gorge, Soft-leaved Sedge (*Carex montana*) was refound in its only Cheddar Gorge site and a surprising, but very good find in 2016 was one plant of Lemon-scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*).



Lemon-scented Fern on a slope above Cliff Road, Cheddar Gorge ©Helena Crouch

Liz McDonnell gave a further update on the Taunton Herbarium Project, reporting that the digitisation had finished and that the re-organisation on Stace 3 taxonomy would shortly begin. The team has sought advice from the National Museum of Wales and a visit to that herbarium is planned. The Natural History Museum and the Somerset Heritage Centre have donated some archive-quality papers and card and the team will mount the Dandelions which were collected during the BSBI/SRPG workshop, as they have been determined by John Richards, the *Taraxacum* referee. These will, in due course, be added to the herbarium.

Ian Salmon announced the results of the annual photo competition. There are two categories, 'Plant' and 'Non-Plant' and Helena Crouch was the winner of both. All the winning photographs and the runners-up were included in the 2016 Newsletter and all the entries including the shortlists can be seen on the SRPG website.

Graham Lavender presented his own strategy for recording priorities for the Exmoor area in the 2017 field season. He has compiled a table with coverage from the 1997 *Atlas Flora of Somerset* and printed out the 10km records from the BSBI Distribution Database (DDb), with first and last records. Graham is able to prioritise and target those species which haven't been refound since 2000. He has deleted obvious errors such as Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*). He reported that he was not making sufficient progress by just 'square-bashing', so has concentrated on targeting certain species, including Eyebrights (*Euphrasia* sp.), Few-flowered Spike-rush (*Eleocharis quinqueflora*), Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), Lanceolate Spleenwort (*Asplenium obovatum*) (they found a few sites for this at Halse Combe) and Exmoor Hawkweed (*Hieracium eminentiforme*). Graham and Ian have also worked very hard on hybrids this year, and found the hybrid between Compact Rush and Soft-rush, *Juncus x kern-reichgeltii* on Dunkery Hill.

Val Graham demonstrated his monad recording and species coverage maps, which are based on our Somerset MapMate database. These are updated throughout the recording year to give an up-to-date assessment of recording effort and are available to download from the SRPG website. They are extremely useful for targeting under-recorded areas of the county. Val has the Somerset Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) GIS layer, and this is available on request.

Steve Parker reported on his South Somerset (VC5) Recording Strategy, but first informed the members that Natural England (NE) is no longer financially supporting BSBI and as a result, NE is unable to make use of BSBI data. As all the plant records that we gather in Somerset go to BSBI via the MapMate Hub, it appears that neither he nor other members of NE staff are able to use the information that we gather for important conser-

vation advice. This is a regrettable situation, which we hope is resolved in the near future.

Steve's priority species, which are under-recorded in South Somerset (VC5) are as follows:

Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*)
Fragrant Agrimony (*Agrimonia procera*)
Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*)
Tall Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria bastardii*)
Opposite-leaved Pondweed (*Groenlandia densa*)
Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*)
Hoary Plantain (*Plantago media*)
Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*)
Small Nettle (*Urtica urens*)
Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*)

Helena Crouch's North Somerset (VC6) recording priorities are as follows:

Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*)
Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*)
Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium alternifolium*)
Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*)
Greater Tussock-sedge (*Carex paniculata*)
Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*)
Marsh Horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*)
Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina* subsp. *canina*)
Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*)
Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*)

Winter Tree Identification Workshop

Saturday 18th March 2017

Kingston St Mary Village Hall

Leaders: Steve Parker & Ian Salmon

Nineteen members and friends met at this new (to SRPG) venue at the southern end of the Quantocks. Steve and Ian had prepared abundant samples of deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs and these were laid out on tables along the centre of the hall. Steve gave an introduction to the identification of woody species in winter and suitable books for determining them. He talked about some of the problems of recording trees, especially when assessing their status – planted, introduced, established and regenerating. We were then all given twig samples of the same species (the first was Ash) to systematically work through a Field Studies Council dichotomous key. We had to look carefully at all the characteristics of buds and bark and beginners in the group were introduced to the relevant botanical terminology. We then split into smaller

groups, with the more experienced botanists helping the new members and guests, and used a variety of identification aids to work through different twig species.

In Ian's talk he mainly concentrated on the conifers that are found in woodland plantations in Somerset. Those he particularly covered were the Larches (*Larix spp*), Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*) and Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) because they are often found regenerating in the wild. He acknowledged that the English names were rather confusing and did not help the identification process.

Ian did not spend much time on the Larches but did explain the problem of propagating from seed to produce the hybrid *Larix x marschlinsii* which foresters preferred because it is more productive. This process will often result in seedlings looking like the parents (*L. decidua* and *L. kaempferi*) appearing in plantations as a by-product.

He worked through several samples using section D of *The Vegetative Key to the British Flora* (Poland & Clement) to determine them. Where possible, when decisions points in the key were reached, he tried to show an example of an alternate specimen to assist members to come to a determination.

Lastly, Ian encouraged members to stand back from a plantation and look at the types of tree that form the canopy layer of the woodland before diving in and looking at individual specimens.



SRPG members getting to know the different conifer smells at the Winter Tree Identification Workshop ©Steve Parker

Spring, Summer & Autumn Meetings

Dandelion Workshop

Wedmore (VC6)

Saturday 1st April 2017

Leaders: Jeanne Webb & Simon Leach

Report: Simon Leach

This meeting followed on from last year's successful 4-day BSBI Dandelion workshop based in Taunton. In 2016 we had the BSBI *Taraxacum* referee, John Richards, leading the meeting; in 2017, we had to make do with home-grown expertise, such as it is, plus lots of enthusiasm generated by the previous year's event. The idea behind the Wedmore meeting, attended by about a dozen members most of whom *hadn't* been involved in the BSBI workshop, was to show that dandelions are worth spending a bit of time on, and maybe they're not *quite* as 'difficult' as many of us think. A carefully collected specimen – dried and pressed, and with supporting notes on key features observed while the plant is still fresh – can more often than not be successfully identified using the BSBI Handbook and the available online keys. The latter are especially helpful, enabling even relative novices to assign specimens to their correct 'Sections'. Attempting to identify specimens down to species level is to be encouraged, but it should be noted that records can only be accepted onto MapMate or the BSBI Distribution database (which incorporates the national *Taraxacum* database) once they have been confirmed by the *Taraxacum* referee, currently John Richards.

We met in the Wedmore Scout hut, situated alongside the allotments where Liz has her vegetable patch. The spring weeding had been delayed especially to retain the dandelions for the workshop! An indoor session in the morning included an introductory talk on the delights of dandelions and resources available to assist in their identification. Highlights of the previous year's workshop were summarised, which included many taxa that proved to be county or vice-county 'firsts'. Pressed and mounted voucher



Lots of discussion on the finer points of Dandelions on the allotment at Wedmore © Liz McDonnell

specimens were displayed of many of these species.

Around lunchtime we divided into groups and with a few of the specimens that Jeanne and Simon had brought with them, ran through the *Taraxacum* identification keys. In the afternoon, we went out into the field – to Liz's allotment – to gather our own fresh specimens, which we then attempted to identify back in the hut. These were later pressed and sent off to John Richards: encouragingly, four of our six specimens we had correctly identified, and so we can happily report here that on Liz's allotment her 'plague' of (carefully tended) dandelions includes *Taraxacum pseudohamatum*, *T. pulchrifolium*, *T. subxanthostigma* and *T. trilobatum*; plus a fifth species, possibly *T. laticordatum*, but the material collected wasn't good enough for John to determine. Of the four species recorded, three – all but *T. pseudohamatum* – were new for VC6. Not bad, eh?

Those who attended the workshop gave the impression that they enjoyed the experience, and went away (we hope) with renewed determination not to be defeated by dandelions, and con-

vinced that they are worthy of attention. Anyway, the dandelion field season is relatively short (March to early May), so the spring-time obsession soon passes – although dandelion fanatics can find themselves feeling a little listless in mid-May as they struggle with the thought that they'll have to spend the rest of the year doing 'proper botany'!

Sandford Hill (VC6)

Saturday 8th April 2017

Leaders and report: Liz McDonnell & Helena Crouch

On the warmest day of the year so far, 16 members met to explore Sandford Hill, splitting into two groups to record in different areas. Helena's group headed up through the woods on the north side of the hill, soon finding a good array of ferns, with Bluebells, Wood Anemones and Wood Sorrel all in flower. Eventually we reached a clearing with suitable habitat for our first target plant, Alpine Penny-cress (*Noccaea caerulescens*) and were not disappointed. On gruffy ground surrounding a fenced hollow (a mine entrance currently being excavated by a team of cavers), we found lovely patches of Alpine Penny-cress in flower, and also Sea Campion (*Silene uniflora*).

In Somerset Alpine Penny-cress is restricted to sites of former lead-mining activity on the Mendips; away from the coast, Sea Campion also



Alpine Penny-cress on 'gruffy ground' on Sandford Hill
© Ian Salmon

grows exclusively on such sites. These lead-tolerant "calaminarian grassland" species were thriving, in contrast to the sickly yellow plants of Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) nearby. Spring Sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*) and Glaucous Sedge (*C. flacca*) were in flower here, but more excitingly we found a large patch of Prickly Sedge (*C. muricata* subsp. *pairae*) which is found at some other sites of former lead-mining in Somerset and is Scarce in VC6. This appears to be a new site for this sedge. More patches of Alpine Penny-cress and Sea Campion were found at the next clearing, on spoil heaps around another mine. Beside another more shaded depression, an extremely pubescent plant of Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) was spotted. This was later identified by the referee, Dr John Akeroyd, as *R. acetosa* var. *serpenticola*, a variety restricted to serpentine and other substrates rich in heavy metals. This has also been recorded on piles of slag at Velvet Bottom.

Briefly entering an adjacent monad, we stopped for lunch in the sun and found it impossible to resist recording a few species around us. Back on the footpath, we passed a large patch of Tuberosus Comfrey (*Symphytum tuberosum*) which turned out to be a "smartie" – the first record for the hectad since pre-2000. A stile leading to a large area of gruffy ground proved irresistible: here we found many beautiful plants of Alpine Penny-cress in flower, recording this species in a new monad. Three plants of Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) were discovered in a rake (rocky hollow), the first record for the tetrad since pre-2000. Thin-spiked Wood-sedge (*Carex strigosa*) on a track turned out to be another "smartie" record. The track led us to an area of calcareous grassland with frequent Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*), rosettes of Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and a large patch of Tor-grass (*Brachypodium rupestre*). Towards the quarry we were delighted to find several plants of Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla tabernaemontani*) in flower. This was an unexpected treat: we recorded it in two monads, one apparently a new site for this Nationally Scarce species.

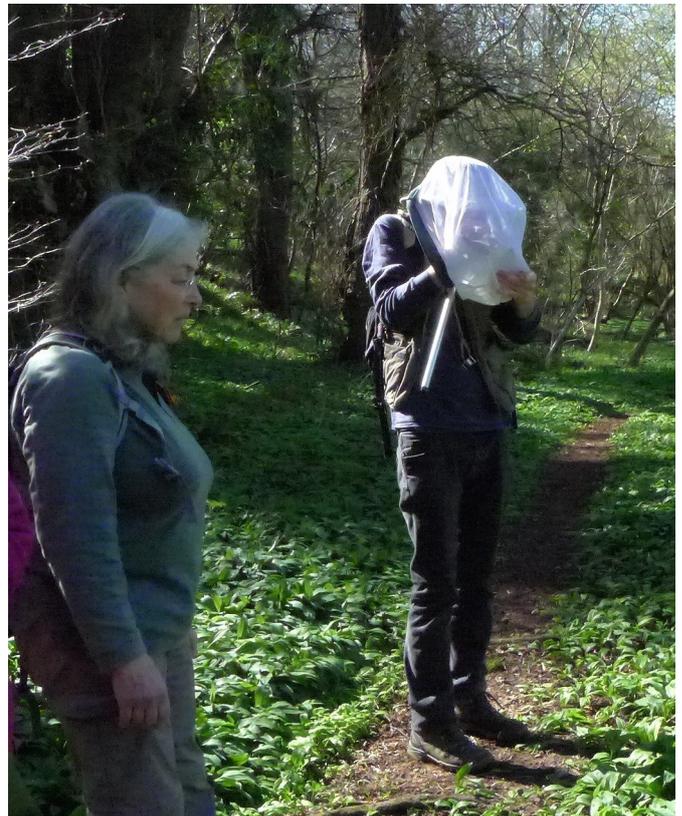
Returning to the footpath running through woodland on the south side of the hill, our next mission was to find Purple Gromwell (*Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum*), which is Nationally Rare.

With the help of detailed former records we located a total of nine vegetative shoots – a tiny population, but at least it is still there. Rather more impressive were two large, pristine Morels (*Morchella esculenta*) beside the path. Our return route took us past impressive lime kilns. Round-leaved Crane’s-bill (*Geranium rotundifolium*) at the edge of the road was only the second post-2000 record for the hectad. Almost back at the cars, a single plant of Small Nettle (*Urtica urens*) was spotted, growing on the pavement at the base of a wall; this turned out to be another “smartie”. It had been an excellent day’s recording.

Meanwhile, Liz’s group of more lowland explorers crossed a tiny ungrazed field where we found small remnants of a calcareous flora amongst the large clumps of tall grasses (mainly Cock’s-foot and False Oat-grass). We found a clump of *Primula x polyantha* - the hybrid between Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) and Cowslip (*Primula veris*). We walked along the footpath that runs just inside the northern edge of Sandford Wood. This is species-rich ancient woodland with many Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*) coppice stools, many of them are massive, with several huge boles. There was soon great excitement on finding the first clump of Herb-paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) not far from the path. Several more patches were found in the woodland and one of these was several metres across, with hundreds of beautifully flowering stems. Other typical woodland plants included Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*), Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), Red Currant (*Ribes*



Herb-paris in Sandford Wood, one of many hundreds of plants ©Graham Lavender



The diligent search for Ramsons Hoverfly larvae in Sandford Wood © Liz McDonnell

rubrum) and an almost continuous cover of Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*). James McGill explained about the Ramsons Hoverfly (*Portevinia maculata*). The larvae of this species develop in the stem bases and bulbs of Ramsons and the adults can often be seen sitting on the leaves. We searched unsuccessfully in several places, probably as the main emergence is in May, so it was a bit early.

We walked through Sandford Wood and crossed into Lyncombe Wood over a low hardly perceptible wood bank. Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) was found under Hazel in two places. As we neared the entrance to the ski centre, we found a small clump of New Zealand Flax (*Phormium tenax*) growing in the woodland. It looked very healthy despite growing in unsuitable conditions of shade and was either planted here, or was a garden throwout. Another non-native plant Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum* subsp. *aestivum*) was found on the side of the woodland access lane. We walked back to Sandford along the green lane between the fields and the houses. Several plants were likely to have spread out from the nearby gardens, namely the white-flowered Intermediate Periwinkle (*Vinca difformis*) ‘Snow Mound’, the dark purple, narrow-

petalled form of Greater Periwinkle (*Vinca major* var. *oxyloba*) and White Comfrey (*Symphytum orientale*). Nearing the end of our walk, a roadside garden bank in Somerville Road was found to be of some interest as it had flowering Spring Sedge (*Carex caryophylla*), despite the sward being tightly mown. It had been an excellent day's recording adding many records to the database and seeing a number of rare plants in the process.

A few days later, on a second visit by Ro and Liz to check up on the New Zealand Flax, they found young stems of Wood Vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*) growing in the lane near the entrance to the ski centre. It had either grown up in the previous few days, or we had all walked past it and not spotted that this was a noteworthy plant (but not quite scarce enough to be included in the Somerset Rare Plant Register).



Wood Vetch with its many pairs of opposite leaflets at the entrance to the ski centre © Liz McDonnell

Swell Wood and West Sedgemoor (VC5) 23rd April 2017

Leaders: Steve Parker & Simon Leach

Report: Simon Leach & Ro FitzGerald

This meeting was planned as a 'quinquennial' monitoring visit to assess the status of Mousetail (*Myosurus minimus*), which had last had a thorough search by the group in April 2012. This curious little buttercup relative, looking like a miniature plantain until one sees the miniscule yellow

petals, is vulnerable in all its remaining UK sites because it is a mud specialist. In European conservation categories of threatened habitats, the flora of 'Mediterranean Vernal Pools' has high priority, because what this romantic-sounding term really means is 'Temporary Puddles', and of course in our times of tidiness and accessibility for leisure walkers, and use of massive heavy machinery by farmers, nothing could be less popular than nice muddy puddles! In the Levels the droves, which used to be churned up when cattle were moved, now too often have ruts and trampled areas filled in with hardcore. Plants depending on winter under shallow water, with speedy germination and growth (on bare mud, so without competition) when Spring dries and warms tracks and gateways, are now progressively more threatened as this habitat becomes rarer. Even when ruts are not filled in, cattle are now put out later in the year, so there is an additional problem when the droves become overgrown by thick grass which easily outcompetes any small annual species.

So there are always anxious feelings when a search is planned for the Mousetail. Mud annuals, like arable weeds, usually have excellently long-lived seedbanks, but unless sites can be monitored every year, absence at a particular visit is difficult to interpret – is the plant really gone, or is it just a bad year? This meeting started with some panic as Steve Parker (who has known this area for years and led the SRPG 2012 meeting) was not able to attend. Of the twelve members who gathered, only Simon Leach and Ro FitzGerald had been present five years earlier, so we felt like a weak team at first. We were lucky though in having Linda Everton and James McGill in the group, both of whom have worked as management volunteers in Swell Wood, so for the morning at least we could make a good job of exploring it. Although this wood is less rich than some others on Somerset limestones, the community does contain Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*). Rather than concentrating entirely on the condition of the habitat, with Atlas 2020 looming we took more of a square-bashing approach, peeping out into adjoining fields and lane sides. In this way we added 10 to ST3624, bringing the square total to over 300, and our

additions included some respectable woodlanders such as Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*), Hairy Wood-rush (*Luzula pilosa*) and Early Dog-violet (*Viola reichenbachiana*). The Paris patch looked healthy with more than 40 stems.

Lunch was eaten hastily, perched on a lane bank, as we wanted to get to the target area of the main drove below us on the moor, but at first the Mousetail hunt looked like being a disaster. Every condition seemed wrong – Somerset was having a notably dry Spring, so disturbed ground near the farm was dusty clods rather than mud, and the drove was covered with coarse grass as well as showing signs of having had winter puddles filled in with wood-waste. We were on the verge of despairing when the first plant was found, and then the ‘get-one’s-eye-in’ miracle did come into effect, and soon everyone was locating a few. Claire Smith, on only her second SRPG outing, proved an excellent spotter! In the end 267 plants were counted, in very difficult conditions as they had managed to germinate and flower while almost buried under encroaching grass. It was thrilling to find this population still capable of such vigour. Although numbers were



One of the tiny plants of Mousetail at West Sedgemoor. Runner-up in the 2017 Photographic Competition - ‘Plant’ category © Simon Leach



SRPG members searching for Mousetail on Swell Drove, West Sedgemoor © Ro FitzGerald

much lower than in 2012, with conditions so poor in 2017 the performance still proves a good seed-bank. We all felt that intervention for better management was going to be essential if this precious population was to have a future. There are complicated problems with access permissions between the multiple owners and agencies connected with this area, but if felt as if a really de-

tailed wider search was becoming an urgent priority.

In this square as well, ST3524, we kept up the square-bashing pressure, adding 15 to bring the already excellent monad total to 320. A good addition was Rootless Duckweed (*Wolffia arrhiza*), and it was pleasing to see Tubular Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*) as this is an England Red List Vulnerable (VU) species.

The trudge back up the hill to the cars is always quite a challenge in this site, when one is tired by the anxieties and elations of a Mousetail hunt, but there is now a bench placed thoughtfully on the last stretch, where one can rest, and admire Thin-spiked Wood-sedge (*Carex strigosa*) without standing up! We could also give time to appreciating Simon’s personal finds, one of which is impressive way beyond the world of galls because it is found on a distinguished Levels plant, Common Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum flavum*), and it seems that *Puccinia recondita* f. sp. *persistens* may be an all-Somerset record for this day!

Brean Down (VC6)

Saturday 6th May 2017

Leaders: David Reid, Liz McDonnell & Helena Crouch

Report: Liz McDonnell & Helena Crouch

This was a joint meeting with Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS) and was very popular. 24 members of both groups met at the Cove Café on an unseasonably cold and windy day with fleeces, woolly hats and gloves. Brean Down is a limestone promontory on the north Somerset coastline and has a large number of rare and scarce plants. It is an SSSI notified for its rare plant assemblage and geological interest. The purpose of the meeting was to show members the rare and scarce plants on this site, to search for some spring ephemerals that had not been recorded recently and to do a little recording in at least one of the under-recorded monads that Brean Down falls into.



A large turn-out of SRPG & SANHS members on a cold windy day at Brean Down. This was the winner of the 2017 Photographic Competition—'Non-plant' category © Cath Shellswell

We began our walk along the gentle incline of the vehicular track that runs diagonally up to the eastern end of the hill, where we saw a few plants of Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) and Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*). At the top of the track we came across the first of the rare Brean Down species. A few plants of Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) were growing in the crevices of open limestone rock outcrops. Its felted basal leaf-sheaths, which separate this rare species from the more common Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), were easy to see at eye-level. Small-flowered Butter-

cup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*) was growing beside the track on the ridge and we found Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*) on west-facing banks in grassland, but failed to find any fruiting spikes of this very early-flowering species. We crawled about on the thin species-rich sward searching for tiny spring ephemerals including Dwarf Mouse-ear (*Cerastium pumilum*) and Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*). We found both of these species in several locations on the warm south-facing slopes amongst the rabbit droppings and on anthills, as well as Little Mouse-ear (*Cerastium semidecandrum*) and Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*). In short turf, tiny plants of Western Eye-bright (*Euphrasia tetraquetra*) were just beginning to flower. One plant of Sea Stork's-bill (*Erodium maritimum*) was found in short turf at the top of steps on the path along the ridge and many patches of Bird's-foot Clover (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*) were beside the path along the ridge. More crawling was to be done in the search for Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) on a tightly-grazed limestone heath area where a few plants of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) are to be found. This minuscule fern (often only centimeters high) is very difficult to spot, but although there were many pairs of eyes scouring the turf, no plants were found. It was last recorded here in 2011. However, we were delighted to find two flowering plants of Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*) at this location. Scattered shoots of Pale St John's-wort (*Hypericum montanum*) were frequently seen amongst the taller scrubby grassland.

Towards the western end of the hill, the steep south-facing slopes become bare and rocky and it was here that we found many plants of Basil Thyme (*Clinopodium acinos*), a rare and declining species (Vulnerable - GB & England Red Lists) and more Somerset Hair-grass growing in its favoured niche – the crevices of exposed, sun-baked, rocky outcrops where little else can grow. The dry south-facing slopes are also the preferred habitat of the White Rock-rose (*Helianthemum apenninum*), which was flowering profusely, the white petals and deep yellow anthers nodding vigorously in the windy conditions.

Returning to the ridge, we were thrilled to find three plants of the hybrid Rock-rose, *Helianthemum x sulphureum*, with pale primrose-yellow



White Rock-rose on the steep south-facing rocky slopes of Brean Down. This beautiful photo was used to advertise the SRPG 20th Anniversary Conference in October, and was the winner of the 2017 Photographic Competition—'Plant' category © Cath Shellswell

flowers, intermediate between its parents in both flower colour and preferred habitat. It was last seen on Brean Down in 1997. As the afternoon progressed, the small remaining group returned back along the ridge and made their way down the steps to the café below. We made a brief detour from the steps towards the cliff edge to a disturbed sandy area where there were five plants of Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*) and several clumps of White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*). James McGill pointed out the cryptic caterpillars of the Marrubium Plume Moth (*Wheeleria spilodactylus*) and the larva of a case-bearing moth *Coleophora lineola* that lives in a little tube beneath the leaves of this RPR species.

Chard Reservoir and Chaffcombe Lane— Old railway (VC5)

Sunday 21st May 2017

Leaders: Steve Parker & Ian Salmon

Report: Steve Parker

A small group met up to do a spot of square bashing. We parked in the Chard Reservoir car park and walked quickly to our target square at ST3310. This monad had about 80 post 2000 records and as I had recently searched the shore the reservoir we decided to walk along the old railway line instead. Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is never a good plant to find but there was one plant close to a small cottage. I later discovered that this plant was almost exactly in the same location as one recorded by Paul

Green in 2004.

Just before lunchtime we decided to follow a footpath and leave the old line and walked into a small field. A deep drain had recently been cut across the wettest part of the field and we suspected that the field was in the process of being improved. The higher and as yet untouched part of the field proved to be relatively species-rich with Southern Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) reasonable frequent in the sward. From here we followed the footpath and came across another nice field where a shallow stream on the centre of the field was botanically diverse with Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*) and a small patch of Bristle Clubrush (*Isolepis setacea*). The site also was rich in sedges with Common sedge (*Carex nigra*) and Oval sedge (*Carex leporina*).



The intense blue flowers of Russian Comfrey near Chard reservoir © Helena Crouch

Along a green lane a small patch of Russian comfrey (*Symphytum x uplandicum*) was alive with bumble and honey bees. Our journey continued across improved fields with little or no botanical interest. Approaching a very messy farm yard a large population of Small nettle (*Urtica urens*) was found growing in the muddy farm yard and on a large dung heap. Crossing the A358 we noticed a series of small ponds marked on the map, however when we reached the top of the field leading to the ponds recent deep ploughing and drainage work prevented us making much progress, it was obvious the landowner was trying to carry out more agricultural improvements. Feeling somewhat nonplussed we walked back to the

cars. Yes we had seen some nice bits of grassland but I strongly suspect that future visits will yield a lower number of interesting plants. On the day we collected 225 plant records.

Hambridge & Westport Canal (VC5)

Sunday 4th June 2017

Leaders: John Poingdestre & Simon Leach

Report: Liz McDonnell & Simon Leach

Despite poor weather, enough members met at the Hambridge Village Hall to split into three groups to record in different monads, as despite John's best efforts this is still a very under-recorded area of South Somerset.

In ST4021, one group made its way eastwards along Westmoor Lane towards the Westport Canal where they looked for Tasteless Water-pepper (*Persicaria mitis*). This is listed as Vulnerable on the England and GB Red Lists and is a rare species in Somerset, known from the Westport Canal since 1970, but not recorded there since 2009. They looked along the track beside the canal where the vegetation was not too dense and found what may have been small immature plants, but it was probably too early to confidently separate this species from the very similar (and common) Water-pepper (*P. hydropiper*). They fought through the tall nettle-dominated vegetation to get to the open water of the canal, but the only aquatics found were Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and Nuttall's Waterweed (*Elodea nuttallii*). By this time the



A wet picnic spot at Westmoor Bridge. Runner-up in the 2017 Photographic Competition - 'Non-plant' category © Gill Read

rain was getting more persistent and lunch was taken sitting on sodden grass at Westmoor Bridge.

At this point, some of the group decided to call it a day and went home. The rest carried on into West Moor, but most of Hurst Drove had been recently rotovated and was botanically very dull. However, they did find a very fine patch of Common Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum flavum*) before returning to the village in heavy rain. A grand total of 217 taxa were recorded in the monad, of which at least 60 were 'new'.

Another group explored ST3921, which includes the village of Hambridge itself and, perhaps surprisingly, is not well recorded at all – only six species had been listed for this monad prior to this meeting. Much time was spent searching pavement cracks, front gardens and road verges as well as (the mainly improved) grassland and hedgerows lying between the village and the Westport Canal. Garden escapes included several unusual or infrequently recorded species like Butcher's-broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) and Seaside Daisy (*Erigeron glaucus*). A few patches of more species-rich (semi-improved) grassland held Meadow Barley (*Hordeum secalinum*), Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Hoary Ragwort (*Senecio erucifolius*) and Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*). The Canal itself had little of interest, as far as could be seen, although access to its banks was made difficult by thick hedgerows and head-high nettles. The group had to struggle with impossible fences, being forced off the public footpath and ending up trapped in an orchard from which they escaped by tunneling backwards through an otherwise impenetrable Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) hedge. The only compensation was that one of the group noted, as he tunneled, a lovely leaf-roll gall caused by the gall-midge *Putoniella pruni* – nationally quite a scarce species, but apparently doing well (and maybe spreading) in VC5. Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) (Vulnerable on the England Red List) was spotted on a mown road verge, as well as in the village hall car park, an unexpected late bonus for having endured such a drenching day. In all, 205 taxa were noted in ST3921, a huge improvement on the previous total!



Ragged-robin in damp ground near Westport Canal
© Ian Salmon

The third group surveyed ST4022, a monad with only one species recorded there, according to MapMate! Starting northwards on the west bank of the Westport Canal they were initially attracted to an area of bare ground created by canal dredging. However the area only yielded seedlings of Celery-leaved Buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*) and other relatively common plants. Where the canal flowed into the River Isle large quantities of Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*) were found. After lunch at Midelney Bridge the group moved away from the river and explored Shutters Plantation, but little woodland flora was seen due to the heavy ivy ground cover and the relative lateness of the visit. The return route took them across some damp ground where they found Ragged-robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*) (Near Threatened on the England Red List). A total of 173 taxa were recorded before the day was cut short by heavy rain.

Dolebury Warren (VC6)

Saturday 17th June 2017

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Margaret Webster

Report: Helena Crouch

Nine members met to explore Dolebury Warren on a scorching summer's day. Like so many hill

forts, it sits astride the intersection of four monads: we decided to focus on the southwest monad before lunch. Ascending steps from the car park, a detour was made to explore steep rocky species-rich calcareous grassland with Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*) and a good array of grasses including Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Downy Oat-grass (*Avenula pubescens*), Yellow Oat-grass (*Trisetum flavescens*) and Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*). We later saw Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) and Meadow Oat-grass (*Avenula pratensis*) which were new to some. A few rosettes of perhaps two different hawkweeds (*Hieracium* spp.) will need a return visit, but some pretty, small roses were identified as Short-styled Field-rose (*Rosa stylosa*) by Clive Lovatt, who kindly explained how to recognise this overlooked species. Reaching the ramparts, we found Long-stalked Crane's-bill (*Geranium columbinum*) and Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*G. pusillum*): Clive's masterclass on recognising *G. pusillum* was extended to some interested passers-by!

We also studied the hairs on Thyme stems, hoping to find Large Thyme (*Thymus pulegioides*), but found none. *The Flora of the Bristol Region* states that Slender Bedstraw (*Galium pumilum*) is common in species-rich calcareous grassland on Dolebury Warren, although it is not included in the SSSI Citation for the site. This was our main target for the day and an extensive search of all suitable rock outcrops was made within grid references of previous records; however no convincing specimens were found.



Short-styled Field-rose on Dolebury Hill © Helena Crouch

After lunch in the shade of a large oak tree, we began recording in a second monad, in which 198 species had been seen since 2000. The southeast part of the fort had many of the calcareous grassland species seen earlier including some very small Eyebrights. Specimens were collected here and confirmed by the referee Chris Metherell to be Western Eyebright (*Euphrasia tetraquetra*), last recorded here in 1993.



SRPG members on the steep south-facing species-rich slopes of Dolebury hill fort © Val Graham

East of the fort is an area of heathland. Here we saw abundant Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), including a white-flowered plant and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). A patch of Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*) in flower was a lovely sight and members also found Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*) and Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*). The heathland, however, was depressingly scrubby and overgrown with brambles, and no Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), which had been recorded here previously, could be found. A particularly exciting find in areas of short grassland was English Eyebright (*Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *anglica*), easily recognisable because of its large flowers and amazing long-stalked glands. We found many plants in areas of short grassland on the limestone heath.

Returning to the hill fort, we were more successful with our second target of the day, finding 11 tiny plants of Sea Stork's-bill (*Erodium maritimum*) on the trodden pathway through the ramparts. Sadly we failed to find Knotted Pearlwort (*Sagina nodosa*), but members were pleased to see Hairy Rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*), Silver Hair-

grass (*Aira caryophyllea*) and Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*) among rocks inside the ramparts, as well as four species of wall fern: Wall-rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), Rustyback (*A. ceterach*), Maidenhair Spleenwort (*A. trichomanes*) and Black Spleenwort (*A. adiantum-nigrum*).

Perhaps the best find of the day was made as we returned to the car park: a single large clump of Leers' Sedge (*Carex divulsa* subsp. *leersii*) which is Scarce in VC6, the identification confirmed by the referee, Mike Porter. Altogether, we recorded 138 species in the first monad and 159 in the second, taking the post-2000 total for each to over 230 species.

Exmoor (VC5) Joint WFS & SRPG weekend meeting

Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th June 2017

Leaders: Graham Lavender & Ro FitzGerald

Report: Ro FitzGerald

This weekend was meticulously planned by Graham Lavender, our chief leader, who knows the botany of Exmoor extremely well, both moors and combes, and the very different habitats of the coast. We believed that the contrast between the Bossington shingle ridge and salt marshes of the first day would contrast splendidly with the peaty moorland habitats of the 'Lorna Doone' country near Robber's Bridge. Showing off our plant treasures was extra important, because so many members wanted to attend that we'd had to restrict numbers to 20!

Somerset botany gatherings are currently focused mostly on recording for Atlas 2020, so although these two days were planned to include well-known rarities, such as Babington's Leek (*Allium babingtonii*) and the mysterious colony of Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*) which persists on Exmoor far from its Kerry home, the leaders could not resist 'doing a card' to record everything seen in each 1 kilometre square. No surprises were expected, but it is always wonderful what new pairs of eyes can reveal, and of course the 'visitor syndrome' - resident botanists needing to go extra slowly while explaining the local flora to members from very different counties - can locate overlooked plants. This became clear only a few metres from the car park at Bossington when we stopped to record

Fragrant Evening-primrose (*Oenothera stricta*) established in a pavement crevice. This attractive Chilean species has a well-known naturalised site near Minehead, so although clearly casual here we accepted its presence with pleasure. However, while gathered round this plant, several members speculated about a pretty pink flower growing nearby – was it perhaps a garden-worthy willowherb? Nobody knew, and it was only later that evening after quite a torturous search through books, that it was identified as coming from the genus which had first caught our attention – Rosy Evening-primrose (*Oenothera rosea*), the first species featured in Rosaline Murphy's invaluable new BSBI Handbook! This find means that the WFS visit made South Somerset history, achieving a VC5 county record, and for a plant only very rarely naturalised in Britain.

Even before this thrill became clear, the day was full of good botany. We walked along the famous shingle bar, a bit scorched after the dry spring but with fragments of annual clovers still visible,



Rosy Evening-primrose self-sown outside a cottage on the way to Bossington beach. First VC5 record! © Liz McDonnell

including the curious Subterranean Clover (*Trifolium subterraneum*) burrowing its arrow-like seed heads into the ground, and reached the remaining colony of Babington's Leek with its big clunky bulbil-loaded flower heads (a rarity, but not one for Chelsea Flower Show!). We looked at varied habitats including marshy ground where fresh water and salt meet at a stream outlet, and the gradually-increasing salt marsh behind the shingle bar. This is a lesson in 'managed retreat', with this habitat allowed to form when rising sea levels flooded former pasture here following a major storm which breached the shingle ridge 20 years ago.

After tea and excellent cake in a Bossington tea room, some members still had energy for an exciting rummage through some sandy fields supporting the very threatened neutral/acid arable weed community. Star plants here were the delightful Snapdragon relative Weasel's-snout (*Misopates orontium*) and Tall Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria bastardii*). Here this was living up to its name, billowing up among the crop, though its individual flowers and colour are less striking than many fumitories, being a dim pink and having no dark 'nose' on the upper petal. It's a Western speciality, possibly sometimes overlooked, so finding this vigorous population was a treat.

Sunday started badly, with cloud thick over Exmoor, and doubt as to whether Graham would be able to join us. However members bravely gathered under dripping trees in the deep combe by the Weir Water at Robber's Bridge. Uncertainty ruled for a short time, because without Graham, Liz McDonnell and I, who were far less familiar with the territory, failed to locate the way into the free-to-roam area which was our target. We were muddling about damply, visualising a disgraceful collapse of the meeting, when Graham magically appeared out of the cloud and rescued the morning! In spite of the damp, which gradually relented enough for us to picnic by the stream, we were able to see a wide range of the boggy, peaty plants which made such a contrast to species found on Saturday. The substantial rosettes of the Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*) had finished flowering but were abundant – curiously the far more familiar Common Butterwort (*P. vulgaris*) is absent from Somerset, though we do have the dainty



WFS & SRPG members having lunch amongst the Large-flowered Butterworts by Weir Water, Exmoor © Ian Salmon

Pale Butterwort (*P. lusitanica*) in moorland flushes on Exmoor and the Blackdowns.

Weather made it difficult to make the best of Graham's carefully prepared lesson on the critical details of Spike-rushes (*Eleocharis* spp.) as rain smudged our lenses and our feet sank in mires, but as the day brightened a bit it became easier to enjoy some of the delightful characteristic species of this area such as Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), the curious Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) and an Exmoor speciality Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*), all in full flower, and to appreciate some grassy areas with lovely displays of Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) and Ragged-Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*).

Quite a weary party regained their cars, but members set off for home leaving Somerset enriched by a whole list of good new records, and



Several Large-flowered Butterwort rosettes, amongst hundreds found on the edge of Weir Water © Ian Salmon

the resident botanists well pleased with their sharp-eyed visitors!

Hellenge Hill, Bleadon, near Weston-super-Mare (VC6)

Sunday 8th July 2017

Leaders: Liz McDonnell & Clive Lovatt

Report: Liz McDonnell

14 members and guests met on a hot sunny day to explore the Avon Wildlife Trust nature reserve at Hellenge Hill, a series of semi and unimproved limestone grassland fields at the western end of the Mendips. SRPG first visited this site in June 1999 and as it is the location of several rare and scarce plants, it is a fairly well recorded site. However, the aim of our visit was to search for Honewort (*Trinia glauca*), Basil Thyme (*Clinopodium acinos*) and Smith's Pepperwort (*Lepidium heterophyllum*) and to get accurate grid references for them. There is also a tantalizing 1990 record of Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) on Hellenge Hill. SRPG had failed to find it on previous visits so this was another target species to search for.

Two local volunteers who knew the site well joined us and they warned us about the abundance of adders. From the entrance on Roman Road, we made our way slowly across the top field to the species-rich slopes above the developing woodland in the scrubby valley. Here we found an abundance of the spiny variety of Common Restharrow (*Ononis repens* var. *horrida*) and other frequent associates in calcareous grassland including Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and seed heads of Pale Flax (*Linum bienne*).

We searched for Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*) and Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) in the parched open, thin sward where rock outcrops were visible where they were recorded in 1999, but we were not successful. We made our way back up the slope to the gate into the second field, recording several thistles on the way including Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*) and Woolly Thistle (*Cirsium eriophorum*) with its magnificent 3-dimensional leaf structure and the intricate web of cottony hairs on the involucrel

bracts. Before looking at the species-rich limestone grassland, we walked along the east fence-line and looked into the adjacent pig field with its bare soils and tantalizing community of ruderal species. It was a forest of Weld (*Reseda luteola*) with Musk-mallow (*Malva moschata*), Black Nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*), Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*) and Many-seeded Goosefoot (*Chenopodium polyspermum*) and one plant of Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*). The leaves were too shriveled to see the distinctive white leaf markings, but the sharp-tipped outward-pointing spines of the flowering heads are characteristic of this introduced and naturalized species.



Very sharp-tipped involucre bracts of Milk Thistle on disturbed land at the edge of Lollover Hill © Liz McDonnell

Lunch was taken on the upper slopes with a stunning view of Bridgwater Bay and then the serious job of searching for Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) started. One of our members took us to the area where he had seen it flowering earlier in the year and we crawled about on the tightly-grazed species-rich turf until a few tiny feathery leaves were spotted. We found it in several places on the slope and 8-figure grid references were taken. This is a rare plant on the GB & England Red List (rated LC, Least Concern, because of the large stable populations on the Mendip slopes) and a Somerset Rare Plant Register species. We searched for suitable rocky habitat where Somerset Hair-grass might be found, but the few bare

areas at the bottom of the grassland where limestone rock was visible did not appear to be suitable for this rare grass, so the mystery remains. Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), its less drought-tolerant relative was, however, seen. Its spikes were brown and scarcely emergent because of the recent spell of very hot weather which had made some of the turf distinctly crunchy and which should result in a good show of annuals next year.

We continued down the scrubby parts of the slope and wandered amongst Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) and swathes of Perforate St-John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) to rabbit-grazed lawns of Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*). We looked at the colour variation of the flowers of Field Bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) and during the day recorded five different forms, from pure white, forma (f.) *arvensis* to the various white and pink striped forms, *pentarrhabdotus*, *decarrhabdotus*, *decemvulnerus* and *perroseus*. Simon Leach, as usual, was looking for plant galls and found several. In the village he found *Trioza centranthi* – a leaf roll aphid gall on Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), which was formerly a rare species in UK, but is now spreading. This was the 3rd record for VC6. The most intriguing was a fungal gall on Hawthorn leaves caused by *Gymnosporangium confusum* and is certainly a 1st record for VC6 and possibly for Somerset

At the end of the very hot walk, we ferried members back up to Roman Road to collect cars and then had tea and cake in Liz's camper van.

Stogumber (VC5)

Saturday 22nd July 2017

Leaders: Ro FitzGerald & Graham Lavender

Report: Simon Leach

The aim of this meeting was to explore three under-recorded monads in the vicinity of Stogumber: ST0937 (Stogumber village), ST0837 (Coombe Cross Farm) and ST0836 (between Coombe Cross and Ashbeer). Of these, the least well recorded was, perhaps surprisingly, the monad containing Stogumber itself, so this is where we spent the first half of the day.

We met in the centre of the village, opposite the pub, and began by exploring the churchyard in a

heavy downpour. But the weather soon cheered up, and our investigation of lane banks, hedge-rows and road verges, and a little stream, produced a decent list of native species, embellished with a wide array of garden plants that had escaped the confines of their cottage gardens to colonise old walls and roadside gutters. There was, as always, much discussion as to which species had escaped sufficiently to be recorded as occurring in 'the wild'. Should we strike it off on the card, or leave it as unrecorded until more convincingly wild plants could be found? Such are the dilemmas routinely faced by field botanists in twenty-first century Britain.

Even so, several interesting aliens did make it onto our list: tussocks of New Zealand Wind-grass (*Anemanthele lessoniana*) were well established in a couple of verges, along with more than 20 plants of Pale Galingale (*Cyperus eragrostis*). Both of these were new for hectad ST03, the latter being just the seventh monad record in VC5 since 2010. Another alien, though now so familiar it barely raises an eyebrow, was Water Bent (*Polypogon viridis*). In the last two decades this Mediterranean grass has become one of the most rapidly spreading species in Britain.

Prior to 2017, ST0937 had just eight records comprising two species, Spring Snowflake (*Leucojum vernum*) and Snake's-head Iris (*Hermodactylus tuberosus*), two hybrid willowherbs and one hybrid grass (*Holcus lanatus* x *mollis*), the last of these recorded by Walter Watson in 1918. By the end of 2017 we had gathered records of 245 taxa, of which 175 were recorded on this meeting. (Interestingly, a later visit in October by Graham Lavender and Ian Salmon, turned up a further 65 species – which emphasises the importance of visiting a square more than once and at different times of year.)

We had several gall enthusiasts in our party, and ST0937 produced twelve species including the gall-mite *Aceria erineus* found to be abundant on a churchyard Walnut (*Juglans regia*) and the rust *Puccinia distincta* on Daisy (*Bellis perennis*). This rust is a rapidly spreading alien. It is a native of Australia and New Zealand and was first recorded in Britain in 1997, while the earliest records of it in Somerset were in 2014.

At lunchtime we moved into a neighbouring



SRPG members admiring the crop of arable weeds at Stogumber. Corn Marigold and Corn Chamomile are dominant here, with Corncockle and Cornflower too.
© Ro FitzGerald

monad, ST0837, where we were the guests of Mr and Mrs Sellick at Coombe Cross Farm. Here we were given a guided tour of fields close to the farmhouse where the Sellicks are growing arable 'weeds' as a crop. These include several threatened species such as Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*), Corn Chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*), Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) and Corn Marigold (*Glebionis segetum*). It was a sight to behold, although one which led (yet again) to debates about what to record and what *not* to record! The wild flower crop at Coombe Cross includes perennial species too, like Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Salad Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba*) and Kidney-vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*)



Corncockle grown as part of the arable weed crop at Stogumber © Ian Salmon

– plants typically associated with neutral to alkaline soils and so not ones you would expect to see as natives in the Stogumber area.

We then explored the field immediately east of the farmhouse, on the north side of Coombe Cross Lane. And finally, as a fitting climax to this arable extravaganza, we drove up Silverdown Hill where the Selicks have created another field of arable weeds, this one dominated by an eye-watering display of Corn Chamomile.

A tiring but rewarding day, and (as a footnote) you may be interested to learn that we recorded 23 galls, of which 18 were new to the hectad. One, a gall-midge (*Schizomyia galiorum*) inducing swollen flower-bud galls on Hedge Bedstraw (*Galium album*), is quite a rarity, with just one record from VC5 prior to 2017; but it was obviously a good year for it, as by the end of the summer we had located it in nine monads.

Lollover Hill, Compton Dundon (VC6)

Sunday 6th August 2017

Leaders: John Poingdestre & Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

The top of Lollover Hill is part of the East Polden Grasslands SSSI; Emblett Lane, along the south side, is a Local Wildlife Site. Fourteen members assembled in Dundon to search for Nit-grass (*Gastridium ventricosum*) on Lollover Hill and to see the promised Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*) and Bithynian Vetch (*Vicia bithynica*) in Emblett Lane: they were not disappointed. The track leading up to Lollover Hill proved interesting and species-rich, with several plants of Lesser Centaury (*Centaureum pulchellum*) and two plants of the alien Green Amaranth (*Amaranthus hybridus*) discovered; this area appears to be a “hotspot” for both. Reaching the calcareous grassland on the hill, we immediately found Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Common Restharrow (*Ononis repens*), many plants of Common Eyebright (*Euphrasia nemorosa*) and some flowering Autumn Lady’s-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*). An interesting rose was puzzled over and a specimen collected and examined: it keyed out as *Rosa x dumalis* yet had glandular pedicels. It was dutifully posted to the referee, Roger Maskew, who declared that we were quite right: it didn’t quite fit that hybrid and

could not be named!

Once we reached the south side of the hill, it wasn’t long before Nit-grass was found, thanks to Ro FitzGerald’s experience of its habitat. We recorded hundreds of plants altogether, usually on eroding soil ledges and slippage zones, or along the trodden path, where it thrives in the disturbed baked habitat. We sat beside a large population of this GB Scarce grass for lunch in the sun. Exploring the hillside, Clive Lovatt found some venerable small bushes of Small-flowered Sweet-briar (*Rosa micrantha*). Further west along the slope, Fred Rumsey found Field Garlic (*Allium oleraceum*) amongst scrub. Altogether 27 flowering spikes were counted at what appears to be a new site for this GB Vulnerable species.

Leaving the hill, we headed to Emblett Lane to see Yellow Vetchling and Bithynian Vetch, which were new species to some members. Both were in flower and we made detailed records for nearly 200m along the north verge of the lane, with a few plants of Yellow Vetchling also found on the south side. A large grass by the track was thought to be Black Bent (*Agrostis gigantea*); a specimen was collected and sent to the referee, Tom Cope, who confirmed this. Returning to the village, John Poingdestre showed us a patch of Chinese Mugwort (*Artemisia verlotiorum*) which is a new species for VC6 and Somerset. A large Tree Mallow (*Malva arborea*) was growing by the track and John also showed us Hungarian Mullein (*Verbascum speciosum*) in a derelict farmyard, which had a few records in this area in the Atlas Flora of Somerset; however this is the first post-



Field Garlic, with a combination of flowers and bulbils in each inflorescence. Amongst scrub on the south facing slopes of Lollover Hill. ©Helena Crouch

2000 record.

Back in the village, some members had to leave, but others headed to the churchyard for tea and cakes. Here we added several more species to our list, and admired a splendid clump of Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*) found



Southern Polypody in the churchyard of Compton Dundon church © Ro FitzGerald

earlier by Ro. This turned out to be a new hectad record, which was a fitting end to a great day. We had made detailed records for seven Rare Plant Register species and seen many other interesting or uncommon plants, recording a total of 233 species.

Docks & Knotweeds Workshop
Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay
Saturday 19th August 2017
Leaders: Steve Parker & Liz McDonnell
Report: Liz McDonnell

This was a well-attended workshop, with 23 members attending. We were also joined for a short while by the Hoverfly Group who were meeting next door, when rain prevented them from going out for their own identification session. All the specimens that the leaders and several other members had brought for our day-long identification session were laid out on the central tables. This included most of the common Docks, Sorrels, Bistorts, Persicarias and Knotgrasses, some of which were named and others were for members to determine during the day.

Steve gave a talk on Dock & Knotweed identification and their associated habitats and Liz brought in large models of Dock fruits to demonstrate the

essential features of the fruits which are so important for identification. We each took a sample of Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*) – a species that is fairly common in the ditches of the Somerset Levels, and as a group, worked through the ‘Wild Flower Key’. It was then left to individuals or small groups to work through a variety of keys with a number of different species on the table.

The rain cleared and we were able to sit out in the sun for our lunch, before setting off in a few cars to Godwin’s Peat Works a few miles down the road. This was the site of thousands of plants of Golden Dock (*Rumex maritimus*) and several other Docks, Persicarias & Knotgrass species on the edge of a large peat void. We wandered around the disturbed banks and down to the open water and there was a flurry of excitement when a large population of Orange Foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*) was found on bare peat at the water’s edge. This grass was in prime condition, showing the distinct yellow/orange anthers and was a very good record, as away from the Somerset Levels it is found only at Chew Valley Lake and Wimbleball Lake.



SRPG members working through the Rumex and Polygonum keys at the Docks and Knotweed Workshop, Avalon marshes Centre © Liz McDonnell



Hundreds of plants of Golden Dock around a peat void at Godwin's Peat Factory, Westhay (these were later destroyed by re-landscaping of this area) © Helena Crouch

Cheddar Gorge

Saturday 2nd September 2017

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Libby Houston

Report: Helena Crouch

On a glorious sunny day, fourteen members met in Cheddar for a walk to see many of the Cheddar rarities, especially *Sorbus* species. We had decided to record in the first monad only, as this had fewest recent records and the focus on recording meant that nobody would notice the gradual ascent to the top of the cliffs! As usual, recording began in the car park, with a good crop of Tree Mallows (*Malva arborea*) growing around the entrance. On stone walls alongside the Cheddar Yeo we saw fine plants of Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*) with fresh fronds, and many plants of Stinking Tutsan (*Hypericum hircinum*) which was very malodorous indeed. A Water-speedwell in the river caused much discussion as some members saw the flowers as pink, others as blue! It was confirmed as Blue Water-speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*) from a specimen, with bracts shorter than the pedicels and distinctly suborbicular fruits, although the flower colour remained contentious! Several plants of Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*) were spotted as we left houses behind, ascending through woodland, where Helena pointed out a patch of Lesser Caucasian-stonecrop (*Sedum stoloniferum*) which was new to some members.

Emerging by the top of Jacob's Ladder we found species-rich calcareous grassland, with our first Eyebright (*Euphrasia nemorosa*). Clive Lovatt dis-

covered a small patch of Narrow-leaved Meadow-grass (*Poa angustifolia*), an unfamiliar species for some and new to our records for the gorge. Meanwhile, David Hawkins spotted Keeled Garlic (*Allium carinatum*), first found here in 1975 but not recorded in the hectad since before 2000. We had already made good records before we saw any of the Cheddar rarities!

In grassland near Pulpit Rock, Libby showed members our first rare *Sorbus*: Round-leaved Whitebeam (*S. eminens*), the upper part of the large rotund leaves bearing acuminate teeth. Another *S. eminens* was examined at Pulpit Rock and on the slope below Libby introduced us to two more species: a tall leaning Cheddar Whitebeam (*S. cheddarensis*), confusingly growing from the same spot as a 4-stemmed English Whitebeam (*S. anglica*). Cheddar Whitebeam has eye-shaped leaves and prominent parallel veins on the undersides; it was originally nicknamed 'Pinstripe'. It is Critically Endangered and endemic to Cheddar Gorge. English Whitebeam is more easily recognisable, with distinctly lobed, often undulate leaves. Nearby we saw a single plant of Orpine (*Sedum telephium*), apparently new to this monad. A little further along the cliff edge, we were introduced to Twin Cliffs Whitebeam (*S. eminentoides*), our second species endemic to Cheddar Gorge. This species has broadly elliptic leaves, not quite as round as those of *S. eminens*, with biserrate margins.

Lunch was partaken at a secluded viewpoint above the Rock-sport Spur, with fabulous views across the gorge and beyond. Nearby we saw a single plant of Pale St John's-wort (*Hypericum*



Libby Houston showing Twin Cliffs Whitebeam to SRPG members on the cliffs at Cheddar Gorge © Helena Crouch

montanum). Fortified and revived, we met our fifth *Sorbus* species: an elderly horizontal Grey-leaved Whitebeam (*S. porrigentiformis*). This species has flat, obovate leaves which are glossy green above, with porrect teeth, and large fruits which are wider than long. A Round-leaved Whitebeam was growing from the same rock for comparison! As we left our target monad, we discovered Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) on the well-trodden path: this species is new to Cheddar Gorge.

It was a surprise to some to find areas of heathland overlying the limestone rocks of the gorge. Here we saw beautiful plants of English Eyebright (*Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *anglica*), with its characteristic long glandular hairs and large flowers, which are sometimes a pretty mauve. On rocks back from the cliff edge, we found Slender Bedstraw (*Galium pumilum*) and Rock Stonecrop (*Sedum forsterianum*), but to see Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*) members needed to be a little braver as it typically hugs the very edges of the cliff tops. Several patches were seen, some in fruit. Those who braved the edges saw beautiful patches of Orpine in flower and stunning views of the Horseshoe Bend below. We also found some smart plants of Western Eyebright (*Euphrasia tetraquetra*), with the tightly packed succulent leaves, bearing short glandular hairs, arranged to form a square shoot.



Western Eyebright, showing the very congested branches and glossy leaves, at Cheddar Gorge © Helena Crouch

As a final treat, some of the party descended a short scree slope to see Limestone Fern (*Gymnocarpium robertianum*) which defies its delicate appearance by growing amongst dry



Botany on the edge—SRPG members on the high cliffs at Cheddar © Graham Lavender

open scree. In a sheltered rock crevice we also found the much more delicate Brittle Bladderfern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), a characteristic fern of the Mendips. Retracing our steps, we stopped to search for Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*), which some observant members had spotted on the way up. Six plants were found in flower near Pulpit Rock, although one had been trampled since the morning.

After descending Jacob's Ladder, much-deserved ice creams were enjoyed in a shaded garden, where Liz joined us. Refreshed once more, Libby led a slightly reduced party a little way up the gorge for the grand finale: our sixth rare Whitebeam of the day. Gough's Rock Whitebeam (*S. rupicoloides*) is the rarest of the Cheddar endemics, with only 13 trees recorded, most of them on relatively inaccessible cliffs. Libby obtained permission to take us to see the most accessible tree, arching from the rocks above the caves offices. The obovate leaves, which are dark green above and greenish-white tomentose below, are narrow with acute tips and biserrate teeth. It was an exciting end to a brilliant day.

Yeovil (VC5)

Sunday 17th September 2017

Leaders: Steve Parker & Simon Leach

Report: Simon Leach & Liz McDonnell

This was an end-of-season 'meet and scatter' day, with the aim of covering a number of under-recorded squares in and around Yeovil. We met at the car park in Stars Lane, then split into three sub-groups – one heading north-west into ST5316 and ST5217, another north-east to tackle

parts of ST5717, ST5817 and ST5816, and the third group concentrating on ST5615.

A summary of a few of the highlights will have to suffice. In the most intensively covered squares, total species-counts were dramatically improved. In ST5316, for example, the total was raised from 15 to 170, while in ST5217 it increased from 25 to 161. In ST5717, we found 172 taxa in a square for which just one species had previously been recorded! The overall range of species was typical for an urban area, with decent lists of native taxa being considerably augmented with aliens. Weeds of pavements and mown grass verges featured heavily on many lists, including Love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*), Garden Grape-hyacinth (*Muscari armeniacum*), Sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*), Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*), Water Bent (*Polypogon viridis*) and Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*). This was the first record of Dwarf Mallow in ST51 for more than twenty years. Of even greater interest was the finding of another mallow, Garden Tree-mallow (*Lavatera x clementii*), as a garden throw-out – a 'first' in the wild for this hybrid in VC5. Urban waste ground produced a few interesting species including Shaggy Soldier (*Galinsoga quadriradiata*). A native of Mexico, this annual 'daisy' is occasionally recorded as a casual in Somerset, mainly in urban areas and with a particular concentration around Yeovil.



Dwarf Mallow growing at the edge of mown grassland near the Abbey Barn at Preston Plucknett © Liz McDonnell

In ST5217, the churchyard at Thorn Coffin was found to be moderately species-rich with both Rough and Lesser Hawkbits (*Leontodon hispidus* and *L. saxatile*) and the alien Slender Speedwell (*Veronica filiformis*). Wood Meadow-grass (*Poa nemoralis*) was found growing amongst ivy on the steep shady banks of the lane near the little church and further north, on the damp earthy road edge, there were hundreds of plants of Pale Willowherb (*Epilobium roseum*), a thinly distributed and rather scarce species in VC5.



Giant Hogweed on the banks of the River Yeo, Yeovil, on the Somerset /Dorset border © Ian Salmon

The 'north-eastern' sub-group spent some time exploring the banks of the river Yeo. Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) was found on the bank in all three monads visited, while in the river itself there were several large patches of Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*) – a decidedly local species in VC5, rare in ST51 and not previously recorded from this stretch of the Yeo. In damp grassland they also noted the probably widespread but much under-recorded hybrid thistle *Cirsium x celakovskianum* (*Cirsium arvense* x *C. palustre*).

The third sub-group, concentrating on Constitution Hill (ST5615), recorded a total of 164 species, the highlights including a third Yeovil site for the scarce alien Yellow-flowered Strawberry (*Potentilla indica*), and Yellow Bristle-grass (*Setaria pumila*) found growing in a maize field – another scarce but widely scattered and possibly increasing alien in VC5.

Urban and 'edgeland' botanising has its challenges: dodging dog poo, clambering amongst fly-tipped household goods, and wandering the

streets while trying not to raise the suspicions of those who live there. We peer intently into driveways and front gardens, and while we know our activities are entirely innocuous they must seem strange (even potentially *criminal*?) to passers-by. We're *not* criminals, of course, but our behaviour doesn't do much to counter the impression that we might be! Hardly surprising, then, that there was a quiet sense of relief, as well as achievement, as we sped back towards the A303 in our getaway cars, clutching our booty of lovely plant records.

SRPG 20th Anniversary Conference West Monkton Village Hall, Taunton Sunday 8th October 2017

Report: Steve Parker

Over eighty people attended a conference to celebrate twenty years of botanical activities since the Somerset Rare Plants Group was formed in 1997. The speakers included national expert botanists together with local members of the group.

Stephen Parker gave a short introductory presentation on the history of the SRPG which included some early photographs and record sheets from the field trips. Formed after the publication of the "Atlas Flora of Somerset" the group initially concentrated on recording rare vascular plants in the county. Nowadays the group records all the wild plants of Somerset not just the rarities. Records and field reports are reported in the annual Newsletters, available on the SRPG website.

The first guest speaker was Tim Rich, with a presentation was on "Rare Hawkweeds in the Cheddar Gorge and Exmoor". The British and Irish flora has approximately 1390 native sexual taxa and many more micro-species and apomicts, some of which are endemic to the UK. These include over 325 species of brambles, at least 230 dandelions together with various Whitebeams, Lady's-mantles and Sea-Lavenders. The apomictic species have been variably treated in the UK, with some in the first Red Data book. Tim pointed out the UK designation list includes apomictic IUCN status and Red List status. However very little or no resource is allocated to assessing their status or monitoring them, or indeed their conservation. Very few records are collected for these species, thus the distribution data is incomplete, and therefore many apomictic species may

be slowly slipping away unnoticed.

Cheddar Gorge is well known for iconic species such as Cheddar Pink, Little-Robin, Pale St John's-wort as well as endemic Whitebeams and eleven Hawkweeds. Cheddar Hawkweed (*Hieracium stenolepiforme*) is known from the Gorge and adjacent Black Rock Nature Reserve, but this species appears to be declining. Tim cited the early surveys and the work of Liz McDonnell and Ro FitzGerald and compared the plant data to the recent surveys carried out by Helena Crouch. Reasons for species decline maybe scrub invasion, the introduction of goats and rock cleaning. The talk continued with a review of the hawkweeds and other rare species of Exmoor, however many of these species have few recent records. This is a major challenge to Somerset botanists, one to which we need to rise to.



The SRPG Conference delegates listening to one of the many talks and presentations, at West Monkton Village Hall © Steve Parker

Following Tim's talk, Ro Fitzgerald, gave a slide show on some of the colourful arable plants found on her trips to Turkey. Ro pointed out that many of these species had arrived in Europe with our Neolithic ancestors who brought them as seed contaminants. Nowadays these species are seen as a high priority for conservation. Some local farmers had taken this challenge and were actively growing the plants in the crop margins. Ro's slides showed just how colourful these so called weeds can be. Her travels had shown her how our arable fields would have looked in the not so distant past.

The next speaker was Andy Byfield whose talk covered plant recording from Dorset, referring to

the detailed plant recording of Ronald Good. These excellent records allowed Andy, with David Pearman, to study the loss of species in Dorset over nearly one hundred years. Key factors in the loss of plant diversity included the lack of grazing at many sites resulting in the loss of open habitats. The next example of the need for plant conservation was from Cornwall and the plant communities of the trackways of the Lizard peninsula. Andy discussed the need to manage for low-growing species such as Pygmy Rush (*Juncus pygmaeus*) and Yellow Centaury (*Cicendia filiformis*), sometimes involving the use of large machinery to strip the trackway of vegetation, creating open ground. The final suite of sites discussed focused on major sand dune restoration at Braunton Burrows and Kenfig. This included a major project by Plantlife to restore the habitat for the diminutive Fen Orchid (*Liparis loeselii*). Andy gave some key messages on plant conservation and land management including the need to take action, sometimes through large scale interventions in order to restore important plant populations.

Next Liz McDonnell gave an update on the SRPG's work on the Somerset herbarium which is housed in the Somerset Heritage Centre. Liz used an antique walking stick, with a hooked blade attached, as a visual aid to liven up her talk; we believe that this stick could have been used for fern collecting! The herbarium project was a great example of the ongoing work of the SRPG as well as demonstrating the continuing importance of the storage of specimens in a herbarium.

Over lunch Ian Salmon set running a slide show on his work on Black Poplars in Somerset. This was a great example of some of the many projects that individual members of the SRPG have taken on in the last twenty years. There was also time to inspect the many excellent displays prepared by other SRPG members and a chance to chat to fellow botanists from all over South West England. The friendly atmosphere was very reminiscent of the many indoor meetings held by the SRPG since its founding in 1997.

Simon Leach kicked off the afternoon session with a talk entitled "Baldrick's Rash and the Irresistible Dandelion". Simon explained how he managed to fit in plant recording with his many other hobbies and distractions, including plant

gall recording, dog walking, recording first flowering dates and cricket. His work on the flora of Taunton is on hold while he is recording for Atlas 2020.

Our next Guest speaker was Tim Walters, whose presentation was designed to make us think about the aspects of protecting the flora of the British Isles. His talk had been given at an Oxfordshire Flora Group conference last year, and Liz McDonnell asked Tim if he would be prepared to give such a talk to the Somerset conference. The presentation posed the question "Focusing on British native species: does it make sense?" Tim used examples such as Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*) to illustrate the point that many of our rarest species are far more common in other parts of Europe. The discussion moved on to discuss conservation priorities in UK compared to other islands around the world with a high percentage of endemic species. This was a challenging talk aimed at getting the audience thinking about conservation of our flora.

Helena Crouch gave a fully illustrated talk on the rare plants of Somerset, using MapMate distribution maps of some of the iconic species found in the country, including Cheddar Pink, Alpine Penny-cress and Oak Fern. Monitoring and recording these species is the main focus of the SRPG. The talk included reports on discoveries found by members of SRPG. This talk was a great advert for the work of our very active recording group in Somerset.

The final guest speaker was Peter Marren. The talk detailed Peter's journey around UK seeking out rare plants for his upcoming publication *Chasing the Ghost: My Search for all the Wild*



Cutting the celebration cake (specially made by Gill Read) at the end of the conference © Margaret Webster

Flowers of Britain. On the journey Peter encountered many rare plants as well as meeting up with old friends and acquaintances. The photographs showed Peter and friends in a wide range of habitats, normally lying on his belly paying homage to a rare British species. I am sure the talk reminded everyone in the audience of their own personal joy at seeking out our rare and beautiful flora.

The conference closed with a big thankyou to everyone who was involved with making the day such a great success. It was then time to celebrate and for Liz to cut the very special cake, that had been made by Gill Read, to help celebrate twenty years of the Somerset Rare Plants Group. Feedback from the conference was excellent, with many asking when we will be running another conference!

Botany Articles

The “Friday group” - Recording in South Somerset (VC5) in 2017

Report: Graham Lavender

2017 was the third year of recording by the “Friday Group”, formed to record the areas harder to reach and often overlooked as we rapidly approach the key date of 2020. This year we decided to start by focusing on a very under recorded hectad SS82, which is a fairly remote border area of Exmoor south of Dulverton. A kindly farmer pointed out on our first meeting in March that this area is around a month behind the rest of Somerset and winter would still be with us for some weeks. We did do some recording but rapidly moved on to warmer climes for the following Friday. Capton Cross was much better and we actually had our first ‘front of card’ (infrequently found species) records for 2017, including the aptly named Siberian Bugloss (*Brunnera macrophylla*). Six ‘front of cards’ in all, all of them were non-native, but there’s a certain satisfaction from recording less common species, alien or not.

In mid-April we decided to chance our target hectad again. We did reasonable recording in the woods along the Exe and completed another two

border monads, but winter still had its grip so we went back to Capton Cross. By this time I had a bee in my bonnet; whilst entering records from a previous visit I had noticed old records for Purple Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria purpurea*) for the site and decided we really must find and update these old records.

Capton Cross and the lane leading to it produced nothing but Aller Farm produced the goods. Ro knew the owner and, as we got out of the car, he pointed out what he thought might be our target plant in the lane. It was Purple Ramping-fumitory and found within minutes of arrival. We decided that, after consideration, such an important record should be confirmed and indeed the BSBI referee for Fumitories agreed with our determination. In all we found some 200 plants scattered around the farm in five or six locations. This is probably the only Somerset location for Purple Ramping-fumitory so we were well pleased with the records so early in the season. In all we had 8 ‘front of card’ species, 4 hectad records and a monad total of 258 which is very acceptable for April.

At the end of April it was still winterish but we pushed on with three more border monads. In May it was decided to search for another old rec-



Purple Ramping-fumitory at Aller Farm, the only current site in Somerset for this rare species © Graham Lavender

ord; that of the Mountain Pansy (*Viola lutea*), this time with no happy ending but possible cause for optimism. Although we failed to locate it at its old site of Ditch Farm, the farmer said he saw a couple of flowers the previous year, so it's one we will need to revisit. The estate of Orchard Wyndham was next on the agenda at the kind invitation of the, mostly absentee, owners. The most exciting find was a new site for Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) in a damp area which was probably an old pond. Another monad total of 247 and 6 'front of card' records was a good day's work.

Back to our frontier area and although records were getting better there were few 'front of cards' and few of the old pre-2000 targets that we were after. There was a general impression that much of the habitat, particularly the flushes and mires that supported the old records, had disappeared, presumably drained to improve the farming. One of the bright spots was finding Hawkweeds on both sides of the border lane, which David McCosh, the BSBI Hawkweed referee, kindly confirmed as Grand-toothed Hawkweed (*Hieracium grandidens*). A good record, last seen in this area by Ian Green in 1992.

A June day and we tried to complete the remaining three monads in our border territory. A large grassy slope revealed an extensive collection of Greater Butterfly-orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha*) which even extended into the next monad. English Eyebright (*Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *anglica*) revealed itself for the first time in 2017 and was a hectad record. It's probable that we should have tackled this area later in the year, possibly if we re-record the area post 2020 we will remember this. We had the privilege of Mike Wilcox, BSBI referee, joining us for a Friday recording session. Mike has a special interest in Rushes (*Juncus* spp.) and hybrids in general so it was a most informative day. A new one to us was the hybrid between Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and Marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*) = *Cirsium x celakovskianum* found with both parents. Subsequently we have recorded this a number of times always with both parents present. Another find was the hybrid between Soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) and Compact rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*) = *Juncus x kern-reichgeltii* which seemed easy to identify with Mike's guidance but proved much more of a challenge to find without his



One of several Greater Butterfly-orchids at Chilcott © Graham Lavender

help. Other interesting records on the day included Bulbous rush to subspecies level (*Juncus bulbosus* subsp. *kochii*) and also Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*) which subsequently was found over the following weeks in over ten monads and is probably no longer a candidate for the Rare Plant Register in Somerset.

A change of scenery was needed so off to the Quantocks to clear up, hopefully, the few remaining zero monads. Sheppard's Combe was the first target and gave us Marsh St John's-wort (*Hypericum elodes*) not seen in this hectad since pre-2000. Since we were close to the hectad border we followed the flush and recorded it again in a second Quantock hectad where again records were old. We were also pleased to find fairly frequent Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), another Quantock specialty together with fairly abundant flowering Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*) which, like the Marsh St John's-wort, had not been recorded in the area since pre-2000.

After a day on our border monads, we moved on the next Friday to one of the few coastal monads

still in need of attention; St Audries Bay. The coast at this point was not inspiring and the hinterland appeared to be of modest interest. It was only when about to finish for the day that we decided on one last trip down a footpath which we had, up to that point, decided was unlikely to be of interest. The wooded path opened out to a large arable field where found Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*). We attempted to count the plants, finally settling on a grand total of 2000 — possibly the largest single population in VC5? Amongst the Dwarf Spurge, both Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) and Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*) were also present in large numbers. A wonderful finish to a recording day.

In 2016 we invited Rob Randall, BSBI referee for Brambles to join us for a Friday and we were delighted he could join us for a Friday again in 2017. Our now established practice is to meet up as close to the nexus of four hectads as possible and jump in one car and do a circular tour taking in all four hectads stopping at frequent intervals. This approach gives us the most records and best picture of the bramble distribution for the area in a relatively short space of time. On average we tend to stop some twelve times and get around five records at each stop. We achieved over 60 records in the four hectads including one new Somerset record *Rubus rossensis* and ten hectad records. I think Rob was pleased to find an unnamed Bramble which he also found in 2016 and hopefully may be described and named sometime in the future. Our sincere thanks to Rob for a lot of good bramble records.

August found us starting to think of arable weeds and Seven Ash was an under-recorded area on the road from Minehead to Taunton. The road itself was impossible to botanise on, as there was no verge but footpaths through a maize field realised a few good finds, including Stinking Chamomile (*Anthemis cotula*) later confirmed under the microscope to have tuberculate achenes. Round-leaved Mint (*Mentha suaveolens*) in flower was also a rare find.

Again a change of scenery and one last zero monad on the Quantocks threw up some unexpected results. Weacombe was a hard climb and even before we tackled the more remote part of the monad it was clear there had been some unusual tree planting. Seven new hectad tree records re-

sulted including Japanese Red Cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*) and Coastal Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) not your usual Quantock trees. Marsh St John's-wort was, we thought, probably the find of the day until returning down the Combe where a small flush crossed the path we found Chaffweed (*Centunculus minimus*) in fruit. This was probably the first record since recorded by Paul Green at the same location in 1993. With 19 'front of card' records and 216 total for the monad this was one of the best Quantock sites we have visited.

After the surprise find of Chaffweed it was discovered that a second historic site for it was a little further north at Sheppard's Combe. The added incentive was that Allseed (*Radiola linoides*) had also been found at the same location. We planned this one carefully and set off from Lower Halsway Stables who were kind enough to grant us parking. The Stables had a footpath that



The tiny Chaffweed plant found at Weacombe, on the Quantocks © Graham Lavender

took us almost directly to the site at Sheppard's Combe. However, despite three of us intensively searching, neither Allseed nor Chaffweed could be found. It was hard to decide if the site had changed over the last 10 years but there seemed to be very little of the damp open ground expected for these two taxa. What were present were Round-leaved Sundew in their thousands either side of path and numerous English Eye-brights in the grass edge to the path. Both are rare Quantock plants and, although not the target for the day, were welcome. On the return to Lower Halsway we managed to record a previ-

ously zero monad, again finding Sundews but the biggest surprise came in a quarry on the edge of the path back; Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*) was happily growing in the quarry and is an unusual find for the Quantocks and only the second record for the hectad.

Autumn now and ideally suitable for arable recording but where to go? A zero monad at Monksilver had some arable fields but the only real excitement was Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) and a little later on a small section of a field with a game cover mix threw up Phacelia (*Phacelia tanacetifolia*) and Flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) recorded as casuals. The surprise came in the evening with an unusual grass that was not instantly recognised although clearly a Brome type. It was later found to be California Brome (*Ceratochloa carinata*) a rare introduction only recorded once in Somerset since 2000.

The weather was starting to very clearly show that winter was on its way and it did seem that few exciting finds were anticipated. However a lake south of Williton, that we had not enjoyed access to, became available due to Graham's technique of knocking on the farmhouse door and asking permission to look at the plants! Ignoring the New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), we found Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*) well established, Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) and more. In fact for the first time this year we actually filled the front of the recording card. The big surprise however was Round-headed Club-rush (*Scirpoides holoschoenus*). Although we had seen it before at Berrow Dunes where it has been known for over a hundred years, this was only second record for Somerset and only fourth for England. Talking to the landowner it was revealed that the specimen was imported from Southern Spain around 2000 to 2005. We recorded this species as planted, but it was still a good record and a good specimen as I hope the photograph will show.

It's now the middle of November and the choice of recording areas is key but get it right and there are still some spectacular plants to find. The Southern side of the Quantocks is a relatively dry warm area and we found ourselves at Cothelstone Park for possibly the last recording session of the year. It was one of those bright sunny autumn days and it was a real pleasure to be out in



Round-headed Club-rush imported from Spain and planted around a pond at Williton ©Graham Lavender

the fields. This was clearly an area of parkland well planted in the past with specimen trees. We managed seven hectad records for the day including Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*) and Lombardy-poplar (*Populus nigra "italica"*) but the find of the day, although to be recorded as "casual" was hundreds of plants of Crimson Clover (*Trifolium incarnatum* subsp. *incarnatum*). The field had recently partly been planted with trees but the remaining large section looked as though it had in the past been the recipient of a game crop mix with the delightful sight of numerous bright crimson heads spread across the field.

I have given the highlights of our meetings, but perhaps this does not fully reflect the ups and downs of botanical recording. For every highlight there are many hours of searching, looking for those special habitats that will reveal the plants on the Red List or Rare Plant Register. It's also worth reflecting on the preparation; time spent checking for old records and planning a day's recording route to cover the most habitats. I for one don't begrudge a minute of it and am already starting to plan for similar in 2018.

My thanks to my fellow botanists on Fridays in 2017, Ian Salmon, Ro FitzGerald and Jeanne Webb

Hawkweeds (*Hieracia*) in South Somerset VC5 for 2017

Report: Graham Lavender

Ian Salmon and I were on our regular Friday recording session at the beginning of June, returning to the car at the end of the day we took a

short break on the road verge and realised we were sitting next to Hawkweeds. The road itself is the border between VC4 and VC5 and very close to the old railway line to East Anstey. In the past we have followed the usual practice of recording 'Hieracium agg.' to note the record but for some reason that eludes me we decided to collect a sample and press it. Having had it confirmed as Grand-toothed (*Hieracium grandidens*) by David McCosh it was even more exciting when Ian found a specimen dating June 3rd 1916 of *Hieracium grandidens* collected by E S Marshall with an almost identical description of location. It's incredible to think that the plant had survived on the road verge in the same location for 101 years and 1 day.

That one find triggered an enthusiasm for Hawkweeds and a desire to identify as many of the undetermined "*Hieracium* agg." records as possible. Time was not on our side as species with 0-1 stem leaves should be collected not later than mid-June, those with 2-8 stem leaves not later than mid-July and others at first flowering (reference J Bevan, December 1997 in *The Plant Crib* by T C G Rich and A C Jermy). The mid-June deadline meant we were only able to collect a single plant with just one stem leaf. Ro FitzGerald found numerous Hawkweeds on a steep bank near Stogumber that were confirmed as Bank Hawkweed (*H. neosparsum*) by David McCosh. A new Somerset record and only a few UK records!



Basal leaf rosette of Bank Hawkweed near Stogumber © Graham Lavender

We had a few weeks to collect the 2-8 stem-leaf Hawkweeds and they proved to be some of the more abundant specimens. Exmoor was a clear

place to start as the 'agg.' density is particularly high in that area. In all 16 specimens were confirmed again by David McCosh including Lortet's Hawkweed (*H. lortetiae*) which I understand is only the third England record. Southern Hawkweed (*H. argillaceum*) in nine monads seems to be a candidate for one of the most prolific Hawkweeds in VC5 and indeed is now categorised as "not scarce" in VC5 and VC6. Sociable Hawkweed (*H. consociatum*) was found in two monads, not a VC5 record as there are two pre-1930 records for it. The last of the summer Hawkweeds was Many-toothed Hawkweed (*H. aviicola*), which was of great interest as it was listed in the SRPG Rare Plant Register as Extinct in Somerset. It was last seen in VC6 in 1916, but it is now present on Exmoor (VC5).

Mid-July was upon us and time to have a break from Hawkweeds as the autumn ones with numerous stem leaves and no rosette leaves were yet to flower. In fact it was August before probably our commonest species Autumn Hawkweed (*H. sabaudum*) started to flower. Two records were made for Umbellate Hawkweed (*H. umbellatum*). In all 12 records of Autumn Hawkweed were made, pipping Southern Hawkweed to the post as our most frequently recorded VC5 Hawkweed in 2017.

The year was not yet over; I collected from a new site a specimen of Exmoor Hawkweed (*H. eminentiforme*) for the SRPG Anniversary Conference for Tim Rich's excellent presentation on Somerset Hawkweeds. One further site for Exmoor Hawkweed was to follow, but the final surprise was made in November. Ian and I found a number of Hawkweeds, some still in flower, near Lydeard St Lawrence. They were very clearly from Section 'Sabauda' with rough hairy stems, multiple cauline leaves and discoloured styles. Autumn Hawkweed was to be expected, but with its very dark hairy phyllaries, the jizz was that of Exmoor Hawkweed, but it was well outside its normal range. At home Under the microscope the phyllaries averaged around 1.9mm wide putting it inside the range for Exmoor Hawkweed and Tim Rich was able to confirm the find and point out that there was in fact a very old record for that area of Exmoor and that it was good to re-find it.

From the map of 'Hieracium agg.' records there are perhaps five or six areas in VC5 where Hawkweeds are particularly abundant, yet few have been recorded to species level. This was a start to what is hoped will be a better understanding of the species distribution of Hawkweeds across VC5.

When Somerset Rare Plants Group met a Beekeeper.

Report: Roy White

What do the SRPG and bee keepers have in common? The answer, of course, is flowers. It doesn't take long however to note a divergence in interest. The SRPG is interested in plants whether or not they are attractive to the bees whilst the bee keeper is only interested in those that the bees find attractive.

The bees themselves have a different view again. They are interested in flowers that provide pollen (the only source of protein for the bees) and in anything that provides sugars, the carbohydrates that provide the bees with energy. The bees also need water, lots of it, and this is invariably to be found on the surface of plants. Sweet substances may or may not be provided by nectar (honeydew, a sweet sticky substance secreted by particular insects is one source not directly provided by plants) and nectar may or may not be provided by flowers. Many plants contain extra-floral nectaries which may be found on leaves, stipules, or stems. So the bee keeper has a rather different view of the plant world than the botanist.

Of great interest to the bee keeper is the foraging behaviour of his or her honey bees. Suffice to say that honey bees will go anywhere within, typically, a radius of 2.5 km from the hive and they are extremely sensitive to the nutritional value of a particular source of food. So they may travel a great distance for high-value sources but only a short distance for poorer returns. Generally, unless the bees are in an area dominated by one productive crop, the honey that they produce will contain nectar (or honeydew, or a combination of the two) from many sources. If the bee keeper is particularly interested in foraging behaviour, and sources of honey, then he or she needs a method of analysing the honey for content, and it is because of the particular interest

of one bee keeper that Liz and James got involved.

In practice the vast majority of honey is derived from plant sources and the bulk of that from flowers. A key feature of flowering plants which are attractive to insects is that the activity of the insect causes pollen to be distributed either within the flower or between flowers, and it is this, frequently selective operation, which causes fertilisation of the plant and the production of seeds. The location and lengths of styles and stamens, and the sexuality of the flowers and plants (male, female, or both), are fundamental to viable reproduction of the species. Interesting examples of the differences of the sexual apparatus of flowers can be found with the thrum-eyed and pin-eyed primrose. Look closely at seemingly identical flowers from any bank of primroses and you will find more-or-less even distribution of the different flowers between the two. The pollen of the two types is morphologically distinctive.

The incidental transfer of pollen by the bee whilst foraging inevitably causes minute quantities of pollen to be transferred to nectar being deposited in the cells of honeycomb, and this eventually ends up in jars of honey. So if the bee keeper can extract and analyse the pollen, he or she has a very good idea of the sources of the honey.



Pollen grain of Great Willowherb © Roy White

By a process of dilution and centrifuging it is possible to extract significant amounts of pollen for examination, and the grains can be compared to a reference database. If there is one word to describe the structure of pollen grains then it would be “fantastic”, with size, shape, external and internal structures all providing clues as to the source of the grain. The problem is the creation of a database, and the provision of tools to interrogate it. The fundamental requirement is that the database consists of the pollen of flowers that grow locally, and that must include flowers of the countryside and of gardens. My own database has been in the making over several years and consists of around 300 species. I can currently identify around 70% of pollens in local honeys but to make further improvement it has become apparent that a concerted effort would be required to achieve a more comprehensive cover of local flowers and I decided therefore to ask for help.

There were three prongs to my approach; firstly to get help from local villagers to report sighting of honey bees on flowers, secondly to forage the flowers of a local garden (the Margery Fish Garden at East Lambrook) on the basis that the garden forms a “hot spot” and hence it is likely that the bees will be especially attracted to it, and thirdly to forage for flowers in key areas within range of my hives chosen for likely diversity of plants.

The first approach certainly attracted the interest of the villagers who were and remain intrigued by what I am attempting. Unfortunately the interest did not result in numerous sightings; I think that the request was too general. I shall try again next year with a more targeted approach.

The second avenue, the gardens of East Lambrook Manor, (courtesy of owners Mike and Gail Werkmeister) was very successful and under the careful eye of Head Gardener Mark around 50 species and sub-species were obtained, many of which were “bee plants”.

The third route, the exploration of more general habitat, required expert support; given that to me Hawksbeard, Hawksbit and Hawkweed are all the same, you will see why. It took some extended effort to establish what botanists, if any, might be prepared to help but with a little bit of

perseverance, and via a most useful “warm up” with John Poingdestre, I alighted on the SRPG and Liz McDonnell. Liz very kindly agreed to help and on the 8th June 2017 Liz arrived with James McGill.

We were supported by fellow bee keeper Rosemary Brooks and two members of the Kingsbury Episcopi Old Gits Club, Maurice Fawcett and David Gray. Maurice and I acted as guides and Rosemary and David were the scribes.

The two areas for exploration were the old railway line to the North of the village, as far as Thorney (by courtesy of Messrs Male of Kingsbury) and Westmoor SSSI via the Westmoor catchwater. The expeditions were a great success, again with around 50 specimens, and, most importantly for me, I gained invaluable insight into plant identification, and in particular the care and circumspection needed to positively identify a plant. It was a brilliant day for myself and my friends and we are grateful to Liz and James for their help and encouragement.

Many of the flowers from which I have extracted pollen have required dissection using a low-



Common Meadow-rue in the ditches near Kingsbury Episcopi © Liz McDonnell

powered microscope. The willingness or otherwise of flowers to flaunt their wares is extraordinary. Some, like the Lily, tell the world “come and get me” whilst others such as Oregano, are coy to the greatest extent. Some flowers such as Butterfly Stonecrop (*Sedum spectabile*) are saturated in nectar but have little available pollen whilst Macedonia Scabious (*Knautia macedonica*) seems to have little of either even when the plant is covered in bees and butterflies. So I think that there is still a lot to learn about plants and their sexuality.

I now look forward to a winter of analysis and interpretation using a compound microscope and my wife's trusty iPad which, I have discovered, takes incredible photographs of pollen grains at up to x1000 magnification. In a year or two I plan to publish an article but in the meantime I can give the following clear and unambiguous advice based upon current knowledge.

- Small headed White Clover (*Trifolium repens*) is still today a very important bee-plant. Encourage spread of its habitat and discourage low topping. This last point is significant in modern orchard management; apple growers tend to trim their orchards like lawns.
- Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is a very important late season bee-plant. This is somewhat unfortunate because there appears to be a persistent drive to get rid of it. So make your choice.
- Plant bee-friendly flowers. There is lots of information on genera and species. But concentrate on flowers in full bloom for the whole of the month of June. There is a well-known “June Gap” in the bee keeping community. Look around you in June and ask yourselves just what are the bees and butterflies feeding on? Last June a number of my colonies (in orchards) were on the point of starvation and emergency feeding was necessary. White Clover would have helped. There were lots of plants but they were decapitated.

So there we are. Thanks to Liz and James for their inspirational help. It was a fun day.

2017 Plant Records

General Plant Records

Report: Helena Crouch

A huge thank you to everyone who made records for vascular plants in Somerset in 2017: altogether we made over **101,000 records**, which is astounding. All our records contribute to the BSBI's Atlas 2020 project. Every record is valuable and there have been many more interesting and significant records than can be listed here. As usual, most new Somerset/Vice-County records in 2017 were for alien species; however there are also native taxa new to each VC. Many significant records were made for Rare Plant Register species, some of which are listed in the third section. All records below are for 2017 unless otherwise stated. Those marked with an asterisk are neophytes (recent introductions). Recorders and referees whose names appear more than once have been abbreviated as follows:

PA	Pat Acock
HJC	Helena Crouch
RFitzG	Ro FitzGerald
CJG	Caroline Giddens
DEG	Dave Green
IPG	Ian Green
RJH	Rupert Higgins
GL	Graham Lavender
SJL	Simon Leach
CML	Clive Lovatt
DJMcC	David McCosh
EJMcD	Liz McDonnell
CM	Chris Metherell
SJP	Stephen Parker
JP	John Poingdestre
RDR	Rob Randall
GHR	Gill Read
TCGR	Tim Rich
APR	Andrew Robinson
FJR	Fred Rumsey
ITS	Ian Salmon
MAW	Margaret Webster
MPW	Michael Wilcox
SANHS	Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society
SRPG	Somerset Rare Plants Group
WFS	Wild Flower Society

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

NEW SOMERSET RECORDS

**Artemisia verlotiorum* (Chinese Mugwort) - Dundon (ST47893230), 6 Aug, a 2m patch on N verge of Emblett Lane, at E end of track near farm, SRPG, VC6.

**Cornus sanguinea* subsp. *australis* (Dogwood) - Cheddar, Strawberry Line (ST4454), 29 Oct, probably originally planted on edge of old railway line, EJMcd & CML, VC6.

Euphrasia arctica x *pseudokernerii* - Bannerdown (ST78956827), 11 Aug, several very tall plants in species-rich turf at SW end of Banner Down, HJC & FJR, det. CM VC6. A previously unknown hybrid, likely to be of restricted distribution as the ranges of the parent species scarcely overlap.



The previously unknown hybrid *Euphrasia arctica* x *pseudokernerii* at Banner Down © Helena Crouch

Euphrasia confusa x *scottica* - Chalk Water (SS81964523), 1 Aug, GL, det. CM; Chalk Water (SS81944482), 4 Aug, GL, conf. CM, VC5.

Euphrasia nemorosa x *pseudokernerii* - Bannerdown (ST78956827), 11 Aug, several very tall plants in species-rich turf at SW end of Banner Down, HJC & FJR, det. CM VC6.

Euphrasia nemorosa x *tetraquetra* - Charterhouse Warren Farm (ST49975526), 8 Aug,

few plants in grassland above small quarry, near bottom of N-facing field N of farm, HJC & MAW, det. CM, VC6.

**Gnaphalium luteoalbum* (Jersey Cudweed) - Weston in Gordano (ST44497424), 12 Aug, 2 small flowering plants and one seedling nearby, between kerb stones on pavement outside cottage garden on N side of the road E of church, CML, VC6.

**Hedera algeriensis* (Algerian Ivy) - Street (ST48623625), 22 Jan, in hedge of playing field, probably planted, EJMcd & CML, VC6.

Hieracium lortetiae (Lortet's Hawkweed) - Cloutsham Farm (SS89184300), 28 Jun, over 100 plants on wall N of farm, GL, det. DJMcC, VC5.

**Hieracium neosparsum* (Bank Hawkweed) - Stogumber (ST09883778), 9 Jun, both sides of road on wall on verge, GL & RFitzG, det. DJMcC, VC5.

**Pleioblastus humilis* - Barrington (ST392172), 13 Apr, one small plant on road verge, N side of lane in MG1 grassland, other non-native plants close by so probably dumped in past, SJP, VC5.

**Salvia hispanica* (Chia) - Chew Valley Lake (ST55445937), 29 Oct, 2 large plants and 4 tiny ones on bank of reservoir at Heron's Green, MAW, det. HJC, VC6.



Budding spike of Chia on bank of Chew Valley Lake, at Heron's Green © Margaret Webster

NEW VICE-COUNTY RECORDS

**Erodium manescavii* (Garden Stork's-bill) – Combwich (ST25674235), 3 Aug, an established clump in verge outside house in School Lane, EJMcd & RFitzG, VC5.

Hieracium aviicola (Many-toothed Hawkweed) – North Quarme (SS91773625), 9 Jul, over 50 plants on sparsely vegetated earthy road bank under trees, GL, det. DJMcC, VC5.

**Jasminum nudiflorum* (Winter Jasmine) - High Littleton, N of (ST64595960), 19 Oct, 1 plant in flower in hedge on E side of A39, just S of cross-roads, no other obviously planted species in hedge and not very near any house, HJC, VC6.

**Oenothera rosea* (Rosy Evening-primrose) – Bossington (SS89684802), 24 Jun, several flowering plants, self-sown with *O. stricta* in tile and stone cracks in doorway of cottage in Bossington Lane, SRPG, VC5.

Pilosella officinarum subsp. *euronota* - Yeovil Cemetery (ST551166), 20 Jun, IPG, VC5. Subsequently recorded in 6 further sites in VC5 in 2017.

Pilosella officinarum subsp. *officinarum* - Weir Water Valley (SS826462), 25 Jun, frequent in short grass by stream, SRPG & WFS, det. Steve Clarkson, VC5.

Rubus rossensis - Chiltons (SS88052790), 28 Jul, GL, ITS & RDR, det. RDR, VC5.

**Vicia tenuifolia* (Fine-leaved Vetch) – Kilton Hill (ST16164286), 27 Oct, in a sown pollinator headland on the edge of an arable field, RFitzG, VC5.

**Vinca difformis* (Intermediate Periwinkle) - Sandford (ST42075930, ST42755952), 8 Apr, established in two places along a green lane, SRPG, VC6.

OTHER INTERESTING RECORDS – Native species

Alopecurus aequalis (Orange Foxtail) - Westhay, Burtle Road (ST42004232, ST42044233, ST42014230), 19 Aug, many clumps on disturbed soil on S side of partially filled peat void, SRPG, VC6. Fourth site for VC6.

Asplenium obovatum (Lanceolate Spleenwort) - Halse Combe (SS88324634), 27 Jan, 32 plants on mid to bottom of S-facing but heavily shaded dry stone wall; Hawkcombe (SS88304602,



Orange Foxtail on the edge of a peat void at Westhay © Fred Rumsey

SS88314603, SS88404617), 4 Feb, 300+ plants on 40ft S-facing section of stone wall and isolated single plants on slope below; Hawkcombe (SS88194598), 7 Feb, 11 plants in wall just below and perhaps 50 yards from large colony in next monad; Halse Combe (SS88284624), 8 Mar, 2 plants on stone wall, a continuation of wall 100m further on from large colony, GL, conf. FJR, VC5. New sites for this fern which is Rare in VC5.

Atriplex longipes (Long-stalked Orache) – Steart (ST27774656), 28 Oct, in saltmarsh dominated by *Phragmites* and Sea Couch, EJMcd & CML, VC5; Towpath N of Leigh Woods (ST54847533), 6 Oct, in upper marsh near river light; Towpath by Leigh Woods (ST55197489), 9 Oct, in mid to upper saltmarsh; Towpath by Leigh Woods (ST56317321), 13 Oct, 1 plant, CML, VC6. First record for VC5 since AFS and second, third and fourth post-2000 records for VC6.

Atriplex x gustaffsoniana (*A. longipes* x *prostrata*) - Bridgwater Bay (ST26254540), 15 Oct, 2 yellowing plants on edge of brackish inlet, EJMcd & CML, VC5; Towpath by Leigh Woods (ST55197489), 9 Oct, in mid to upper saltmarsh,

probably an extensive population, CML; Uphill (ST31405823), 10 Nov, in saltmarsh by marina, EJMCD & CML; Sand Bay (ST32966592), 10 Nov, in saltmarsh just below scrubby cliffs below Sand Point, EJMCD & CML; Weston-super-Mare (ST31535988), 19 Nov, at back of beach immediately S of Marine Parade, where beach is used as a car park, on banked-up sand under a high wall separating a few houses from the beach, CML, VC6. Second record for VC5 and second and subsequent records for VC6.

Carex x pseudoaxillaris (*C. otrubae* x *remota*) - Southwood (ST55743382), 24 Jun, 1 plant with 1m stems and branched lower spikelets on E side of track in dry ditch, JP, det. Mike Porter, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.

Centunculus minimus (Chaffweed) - Weacombe (ST11384045), 18 Aug, c.50 plants where flush crosses path, GL, ITS & RFitzG, VC5. First record for VC5 since AFS.

Dryopteris cambrensis (Narrow Male-fern) - Ashwick (ST63854866), 19 Dec, 3 crowns in Brown's Wood, just S of stream along N edge, HJC & FJR, VC6. Fifth site for VC6.

Equisetum hyemale (Rough Horsetail) - Wincanton (ST70742845), 26 Oct, 11 shoots on N verge of footpath leading along N edge of cemetery, outside a garden fence yet no sign of it in the garden, HJC & FJR, conf. PA, VC6. Second site for



Rough Horsetail at Wincanton - first record for Somerset since 1933 © Helena Crouch

VC6 and first record for VC6 and Somerset since 1933.

Euphrasia arctica x **confusa** - Pitt Plantation (SS84124648), 4 Aug, GL, det. CM; Oare Post (SS83634644), 17 Aug, GL, conf. CM; Long Chains Combe (SS74084223), 22 Aug, GL, conf. CM; GB Gruffy (ST47625628), 31 Jul, few plants in short grass by path in N part of reserve, HJC, conf. CM; Velvet Bottom (ST49525519), 3 Aug, MAW, det. CM, VC6. Third, fourth and fifth sites for VC5 and fourth and fifth sites for VC6.

Euphrasia arctica x **nemorosa** - Smalla Combe (SS84064713), 8 Jul, GL, det. CM, VC5. Fifth site for VC5.

Euphrasia officinalis subsp. **anglica** x **arctica** - Aclands (SS73313976), 18 Jul, Max Brown, HJC & GL, det. CM, VC5. Second site and new hectad for this hybrid in VC5.

Euphrasia officinalis subsp. **anglica** x **confusa** - Aclands (SS74033921), 16 Jul, GL, conf. CM, VC5. First record for Somerset since 1987.

Galium parisiense (Wall Bedstraw) - Taunton, Priorswood Estate (ST24322602), 15 Jul, 12 plants on grassy bank outside Crown Close Units 1-6, SJL, VC5. Third site for VC5.

Groenlandia densa (Opposite-leaved Pondweed) - Muchelney Ham (ST43892312), 14 Apr, 2 plants in recently cleared Horsey Rhyne, with abundant *Potamogeton crispus*, JP, VC5. First post-2000 record for VC5.

Helianthemum x **sulphureum** (*H. apenninum* x *nummularium*) - Sand Point (ST32846593), 15 Jun 2016, 2 plants on steep rocky S-facing cliff, 3-5m up from cliff base, SANHS & WFS, VC6; Brean Down (ST28565897), 6 May, 3 plants in flower on anthills to S of main path along ridge, with *H. apenninum*, SRPG & SANHS, VC6. Fourth site for VC6 (Sand Point) and first post-2000 record for known site (Brean Down).

Hieracium consociatum (Sociable Hawkweed) - Combeshead (SS91063942), 9 Jul, 20+ plants on shady grass verge passing place in narrow country lane; Cutcombe (SS93323980), 9 Jul, 10+ plants on side of road, steep earthy slope with canopy of trees, GL, det. DJMcC, VC5. First records for VC5 since 1908.

Holcus x **hybridus** (*H. lanatus* x *mollis*) - Emborough (ST61905134), 10 Aug, Large patch on W

verge of Old Gore Lane, HJC, det. Tom Cope, VC6. Third record for VC6 and first for VC6 and Somerset since 1925.

Juncus bulbosus subsp. **kochii** (Bulbous Rush) - Dunkery Hill (SS90844222), 30 Jun, GL, ITS & MPW; Elsworthly (SS8141), 9 Oct, GL; Beverton Farm (ST0233), 13 Oct, GL & ITS, all det. MPW, VC5. First records for VC5 since 1956 and first for Somerset since 1975.

Juncus compressus (Round-fruited Rush) – Ford Common (ST30335380), 31 Mar, abundant vegetative plants in cart track in south eastern quadrat of common, EJMcd & CML, VC6. New hectad for species which is Vulnerable on the GB and England Red Lists.

Juncus x kern-reichgeltii (*J. conglomeratus* x *effusus*) - Dunkery Bridge (SS89624066), 30 Jun, GL, ITS & MPW, conf. MPW, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

Lotus tenuis (Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot-trefoil) – Stewley (ST313181), 31 May, 1 large plant on road verge, at junction of Stewley Lane and A358, with *Lathyrus nissolia* and *Lotus corniculatus*, SJL, VC5. First record for VC5 since AFS.



Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot Trefoil on road verge south-east of Taunton © Simon Leach

Orobanche hederæ (Ivy Broomrape) - Quantock Lodge (ST18793760), 8 Jul, over 100 spikes around yew trees, ivy spread over old building stones, RFitzG, VC5. New hectad record for species which is Scarce in VC5.

Pilosella officinarum subsp. **euronota** - Bruton, St Mary's Church (ST684347); Bruton, Cuckoo Hill (ST6936), 22 Jun, HJC, GHR & IPG, det. IPG, VC6. Second and third records for VC6.

Polycarpon tetraphyllum (Four-leaved Allseed) – Weston-super-Mare, Uphill Railway Overbridge (ST32595784), 10 Nov, 2 small clumps of several fruiting plants and one young non-fruiting plant in cracks at edge of pavement on the west side of the A370, where road crosses railway, EJMcd & CML, VC6. Second site for VC6 and first post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.



Four-leaved Allseed from a road verge of A370 at Uphill © Liz McDonnell

Polypodium x mantoniae (*P. interjectum* x *vulgare*) - Croscombe (ST59084403), 17 Mar, few smart patches on S bank of Jack's Lane; Ashwick (ST63704869), 19 Dec, large patch on bank on S side of Blackey Lane, HJC & FJR, conf. FJR, VC6. Fourth and fifth records for VC6.

Polystichum x bicknellii (*P. aculeatum* x *setiferum*) - Lopen (ST424111436), 31 May, a plant along footpath, JP, VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

Potentilla tabernaemontani (Spring Cinquefoil) - Glastonbury (ST50633925), 13 Jan, many plants on N verge of Windmill Hill Road, presumably self-sown from a garden, HJC & FJR, VC6. New hectad for GB Scarce species yet probably a garden escape.

Rorippa islandica (Northern Yellow-cress) – Barrow Gurney (ST54116776), 29 Jun, 1 plant on the drawdown zone of Bristol Water Treatment Works Reservoir 3 (north side of A38), EJMcd & CML, VC6. Fifth record for VC6. Also found by HJC & GHR on the same day at many locations in Asham Quarry (ST7045), and subsequently found at two other reservoirs at Barrow Gurney by EJMcd & CML.

Rorippa x anceps (*R. amphibia* x *sylvestris*) - Claverton (ST79106454), 14 Jul, 1 large plant in

fruit at SW side of River Avon, where tree has fallen into river, at N end of the island E of Claverton Pumping Station. Growing near *Rorippa amphibia*. HJC & DEG, conf. TCGR, VC6. Fourth site for VC6 and first record for VC6 and Somerset since 1920.

Ulex x breoganii (*U. europaeus x gallii*) - Langford Heathfield (ST100234), 30 Dec, 1 large bush, SJP, VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

Vicia parviflora (Slender Tare) - Allerton Moor (ST39195077), 24 Jun, dense clump at side of track, APR, conf. EJMCD, VC6. New hectad for species which is GB Scarce and Vulnerable on the GB & England Red Lists.

Viola x bavarica (*V. reichenbachiana x riviniana*) - Sandford (ST4259), 8 Apr, by path in Sandford Wood, SRPG, VC6. Fifth record for VC6.

Zostera marina (Eelgrass) - Stolford [ST240457], Sept 2013, a few individual plants rooted in the muddy substrate, reported to Natural England, VC5. First record for VC5 and Somerset since 1969, when it was recorded in almost exactly this spot.

OTHER INTERESTING RECORDS – Alien species

**Ailanthus altissima* (Tree of Heaven) - Merriott/Bow Mill area (ST45411321), 21 Aug, suckering over a 20m radius beneath a mature tree in overgrown game-rearing area, JP, VC5. Third record for VC5.

**Allium neapolitanum* (Neapolitan Garlic) - Ford Common (ST30185357), 14 May, small patch by car pull-in, a garden throw-out, EJMCD & CML, VC6. Fifth site for VC6.

**Anthemis austriaca* (Austrian Chamomile) - Bruton (ST6834), 6 Jul, 1 fruiting plant in car park of Hauser & Wirth, probably introduced with seed, EJMCD, VC6. Fifth site for VC6.

**Artemisia biennis* (Slender Mugwort) - South Petherton / Pinsome Hill (ST42671760), 15 Sep, c.14 plants scattered along edge of Maize crop with *Setaria pumila* and *Echinochloa crus-galli*, JP, VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

**Avena barbata* (Slender Oat) - Catcott (ST39883983), 14 Jul, several fruiting plants in gateway in Little Leaze Lane, EJMCD & Anne Dockerty, VC6. Fourth record for VC6 and Somerset.

**Bergenia crassifolia* (Elephant-ears) - Ford Common (ST3053), 3 Sep, 1 clump, a garden throw-out at edge of drove, EJMCD & CML; Abbots Leigh, SW of (ST5372), 29 Sep, David Hawkins, VC6. Fourth and fifth records for VC6.

**Bergenia x schmidtii* (*B. crassifolia x ciliata*) - Cheddar (ST46335366), 2 Sep, small patch by footpath from Lynch Lane to Jacob's Tower, presumably a garden throw-out but now established by path, SRPG; Pensford, High Street (ST62096354), 5 Oct, few plants on bank on W side of road, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second and third records for VC6.

**Campanula rapunculoides* (Creeping Bellflower) - West Lydford (ST56383189), 30 Jun, a colony on the N side of the River Brue, just above the water level, near the footbridge at the W end of churchyard, a probable garden escape which must have washed downstream and become caught in stone and roots beneath the alders, JP, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.

**Chiastophyllum oppositifolium* (Lamb's-tail) - Winford, SW of (ST5364), 20 Sep, 1 plant in wall outside Laburnum Cottage, Parsonage Lane, MAW, VC6. Second site for VC6.

**Cotoneaster lacteus* (Late Cotoneaster) - Hawk Combe (SS88304622), 20 Jan, single 3m shrub between paths, GL, VC5. Fifth site for VC5.

**Cucurbita pepo* (Marrow) - Avill Farm area (SS9743), 8 Oct 2016, in hedgerow by lane, CJG, VC5; Lower Langford (ST46766056), 16 Sep, a large rambling fruiting plant with large marrow, on side of rough track – unlikely to have been planted at this location, but gardens nearby, EJMCD & CML, VC6. Third record for VC5 and first post-2000 records for Somerset.

**Cyclamen repandum* (Spring Sowbread) - Brockley Court churchyard (ST46596695), 17 Apr, one clump established in crevices of tombstone, with *Soleirola soleirolii*, EJMCD & CML, VC6. Fifth record for VC6.

**Digitalis lutea* (Straw Foxglove) - Hengrove Park (ST590683), 22 May, on disturbed soil where path built, origin unknown, RJH, VC6. Third record for VC6.

* ***Echinochloa esculenta*** (White Millet) - Marksbury (ST66696219), 15 Nov, 1 plant in gutter on NE side of lane, outside a garden wall, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second record for VC6 since pre-1987.



White Millet at Marksbury © Fred Rumsey

* ***Echium pininana*** (Giant Viper's-bugloss) – Aller Farm (ST07903972), 21 Apr, 2 self-sown by edge of footpath, GL & RFitzG, VC5; Stock, Churchill (ST45886112), 16 Sep, a huge rosette on spoil heap, EJMcd & CML; Bath (ST74406503), 17 Oct, 3 plants at base of planted street tree on N side of Upper Bristol Road, 17 Oct, HJC & David Leadbetter, VC6. Fifth record for VC5 and third and fourth records for VC6.

* ***Euphorbia dulcis*** (Sweet Spurge) - Cannington/Bradley Green area (ST25283832), 25 Apr, casual on spoil heap by old farm buildings at Ashdown Farm, EJMcd & RFitzG, VC5. Third Record for VC5.

* ***Euphorbia maculata*** (Spotted Spurge) - Bath, Hillier Garden Centre (ST72236328), 28 Jul, 1m x 1m patch growing as a naturalised weed on slate laid over a flower bed to the R of the main entrance to garden centre, DEG, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

* ***Hedera colchica*** (Persian Ivy) - Bath, Gainsborough Gardens Woodlands (ST73246581), 27 Mar, at N end of woodland, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second record for VC6.

* ***Helleborus argutifolius*** (Corsican Hellebore) - Winford (ST5464), 27 Sep, pavement weed in Lye Mead, MAW & CML, det. CML, VC6. Second record for VC6.

* ***Kniphofia uvaria*** (Red-hot-poker) – Keinton Mandeville (ST5430), 22 Jun, in disused quarry which is about to be built on, with many other garden escapes, JP; Burnham-on-Sea (ST30755053), 20 Jul, on edge of rhyne, APR; Pathe Bridge (ST381303), 30 Oct, 1 plant in Environment Agency car park, SJP, VC6. First records for VC6 and Somerset since AFS.

* ***Leucojum aestivum*** subsp. ***aestivum*** (Summer Snowflake) – Sandford (ST43315935), 18 Apr, several established clumps by the tarmac access track in Lyncombe Wood, the more unusual form of Summer Snowflake, EJMcd & RFitzG, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

* ***Lysichiton americanus*** (American Skunk-cabbage) – Leigh upon Mendip, Pitten Street (ST68144721), 19 Apr, 11 plants alongside stream, under trees on W side of lane, just N of road junction, Rose Martin; (ST68144729), 20 Apr, 1 plant in flower in ditch on E side of lane, N of green box, HJC; (ST68154733), 23 Apr, 1 vegetative plant in damp fenced area on E side of lane, downstream from single plant in ditch, HJC & Jim Crouch, VC6. Second site for VC6.

* ***Malva x clementii*** (Garden Tree-mallow) – Yeovil/Preston (ST53921603), 17 Sep, 1 shrub flowering/fruitletting, a garden throw-out on stream side near houses, EJMcd & CML, VC5. Third record for VC5.

* ***Oxalis debilis*** (Large-flowered Pink-sorrel) – Filwood Park (ST5969), 30 May, RJH, VC6. Second record for VC6.

* ***Oxalis tetraphylla*** (Four-leaved Pink-sorrel) – Bossington (SS8947), 23 Jul 2016, Sea Lane near turning to Porlock, an escape or weed from cottage garden, CJG, VC5. Third site for VC5 and Somerset.

* ***Philadelphus 'Virginalis Group'*** (Hairy Mock-orange) – Kingsbury Episcopi (ST43202266), 8 Jun, 1 multi-stemmed bush established on N side of disused railway line, EJMcd, VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

* ***Physalis alkekengi*** (Japanese-lantern) – Higher Holton (ST68872708), 22 May, several shoots along verge of lane, HJC & FJR; Chelvey Treatment Works (ST4767), 22 Jun, RJH, VC6. First post-2000 records for VC6.

***Portulaca oleracea** (Common Purslane) - Cannington (ST26134033), 5 Nov 2016, c.10 spreading plants in hardcore, EJMCD & RFitzG, det. RFitzG, VC5. Second record for VC5 and first for Somerset since 1978.

***Potentilla recta** (Sulphur Cinquefoil) - Yatton (ST43786522), 28 Aug, 2 fruiting stems in cricket club car park, EJMCD & CML, VC6. Second post-2000 record for VC6.

***Rubus cockburnianus** (White-stemmed Bramble) – Lower Failand (ST51647329), 22 Apr, large clump on W verge of Oxhouse Lane, HJC, MAW & Jean Oliver, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset.

***Salpichroa origanifolia** (Cock's-eggs) – Haselbury Plucknett (ST47111093), 10 May, small clump in churchyard, in shade amongst *Parietaria* against western perimeter wall, JP, VC5. Third record for VC5 and Somerset.

***Salvia pratensis** (Meadow Clary) - Hawk Combe (SS88344587), 15 Sep 2016, 1 large patch on side of path past Glen Lodge, perhaps a garden escape, GL, VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

***Salvia verticillata** (Whorled Clary) - Lovington (ST59683130), 3 Jul, a huge colony in flower on S-facing railway embankment, appearing thoroughly naturalised, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1967.

***Sasaella ramosa** (Hairy Bamboo) - Bath, Gainsborough Gardens Woodlands (ST732657), 27 Mar, abundant in woodland, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

***Scutellaria altissima** (Somerset Skullcap) - Bath, Locksbrook Cemetery (ST73216528), 27 Mar, 1 clump under trees immediately N of chapel, no other plants seen in cemetery so origin unknown, HJC & DEG; Claverton (ST79066420), 14 Jul, 1 plant on stonework of canal, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second and third sites for VC6 and Somerset.

***Sedum hispanicum** (Spanish Stonecrop) - Kingsbury Episcopi (ST434421370), 8 Jun, several plants in established patch in gateway of house in Thorney Road. Has been there for several years and was not planted by the current owner, EJMCD, det. Ray Stephenson, VC5. Third record for VC5 and Somerset.

***Sedum stoloniferum** (Lesser Caucasian-stonecrop) – Yeovil (ST54941452), 7 Sep, large patch rooted on roadside bank, probably thrown out over fence, JP, VC5. Third record for VC5.

***Sedum sexangulare** (Tasteless Stonecrop) - Smallcombe Cemetery (ST7664), 4 May 2015, on 4 graves in cemetery, RDR; Glastonbury (ST50673935), 13 Jan, on gravel outside electricity sub-station and on pavement at corner of Chinnock Road and Old Wells Road, HJC & FJR, VC6. First records for VC6 since pre-2000.



Tasteless Stonecrop at Glastonbury ©Helena Crouch

***Selaginella kraussiana** (Krauss's Clubmoss) - Dunster (SS99084369), 7 Jul, 7 x 1m patch in grass by wall, Jeanne Webb & RFitzG, VC5; Lower Failand churchyard (ST51467353), 22 Apr, small patch 1m x 1.5m at base of grass bank on shaded N side of church, HJC & MAW, VC6. Fifth site for VC5 and third site for VC6.

***Sorbaria sorbifolia** (Sorbaria) - Doultling, Farm Road (ST64674256), 12 Oct, several suckering plants on verge outside garden wall, HJC & GHR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

***Sorbus decipiens** (Sharp-toothed Whitebeam) – Leigh Woods (ST56217379), 18 May, a young plant 30cm high, bird-sown under railings by towpath, presumably from plants in Great Quarry opposite, TCGR & Libby Houston, VC6. Third record for VC6, but status of first unknown, and second was for a planted tree, so may be first record for this species naturalised in VC6.

***Sorghum bicolor** (Great Millet) - Cheddar Reservoir (ST43895427), 17 Oct, on the stone banks of the reservoir, RJH, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

**Trifolium incarnatum* subsp. *incarnatum* (Crimson Clover) – Keeper’s Quarry Plantation, Dinnington (ST40511206), 4 May, in sown game cover crop, JP; Washford Cross (ST05274070), 23 May, 3 flowering spikes at edge of cut ley, Naomi Cudmore, det. RFitzG; Stoneage Barton Farm (ST17653112), 10 Nov, 100 plants in flower in old game cover field, GL & ITS, VC5. Second, third and fourth records for VC5.



Crimson Clover in old game cover field at Stoneage Barton Farm © Graham Lavender

**Trigonella foenum-graecum* (Fenugreek) - Porlock Marsh (SS8847), 8 May 2016, small patch, Alastair Stevenson, VC5. Fourth site for VC5 and Somerset.

**Weigela florida* (Weigelia) - Bath, Gainsborough Gardens Woodlands (ST73256569), 27 Mar, 1 plant on E edge of woodland, beside road, HJC & DEG, VC6. Third record for VC6.

Dandelions in Somerset – another batch of first vice-county/county records

Report: Simon Leach, Jeanne Webb, Graham Lavender & Rob Randall

Listed below, in alphabetical order, are Dandelion species for which first county and/or vice-county records were made in 2017, plus notes

on two taxa for which material was originally collected in April 2016. All records are based on material collected by us and examined and determined/confirmed by the national referee for *Taraxacum*, John Richards (AJR); voucher specimens for most are being added to the reference collection in the SANHS herbarium held at the Somerset Heritage Centre (TTN). Dates refer to 2017 unless otherwise stated. Collectors are as follows: GL, Graham Lavender; SJL, Simon Leach; EJMCD, Liz McDonnell; RDR, Rob Randall; JW, Jeanne Webb; SRPG, Somerset Rare Plants Group.

The list includes 27 species new to VC5 and six new to VC6; of these, 24 were also ‘firsts’ for the county as a whole. As at 20 January 2018, the *Taraxacum* flora of Somerset stands at 141 species, 117 in VC5 and 90 in VC6. A fuller account is being published elsewhere (Leach & Richards 2018, in press).

Taraxacum adiantifrons – Golsoncott (ST02863940), 22 Mar, on roadside grassy bank, JW, conf. AJR, TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum aequisectum – Blue Anchor (ST01554359), 12 Apr, on rough ground, JW, det. AJR, TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum atrocollinum – Staple Hill, Higher Buckland (ST247157), 15 Apr 2016, on broad grassy lane verge, Les Tucker, det. AJR [and a year later, 13 Apr, at same locality, SJL, conf. AJR, TTN]. Staple Hill (ST24681597), 17 Apr 2016, dry grassy bank on W. side of entrance to Forestry Commission car park, BSBI/SRPG Dandelion Workshop, det. AJR, TTN. Prior’s Park (ST22511645), 13 Apr, on grassy verge of forest track, abundant, SJL, conf. AJR, TTN. Britty Common (ST26141553), 15 May, on edge of woodland ride and forest track, SJL, conf. AJR, TTN. Monksilver (ST07563745), 13 Mar, on bank beside village hall car park, JW, det. AJR, TTN. First records for VC5 and Somerset. An as yet undescribed species within *Taraxacum* sect. *Celtica*, probably a British endemic with a mainly western distribution. The working name of *T. atrocollinum* means ‘dandelion of the dark hill’, in recognition of its first being found and recognised as a distinct taxon at sites in the Blackdown Hills. We

suspect it will prove to be more widely distributed in Somerset than these records suggest.

Taraxacum celticum – Dunster (SS97744277), 27 Apr, in wood-border with abundant dandelions, JW, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset. A British endemic with a predominantly western distribution, particularly frequent in Wales.



Taraxacum celticum at Dunster. Jeanne Webb's watercolour of this British endemic © Jeanne Webb

Taraxacum chrysochaenum – Doniford, Watchet (ST08854269), 20 Apr, on waste ground, JW, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum exacutum – road to Watchet (ST05294296), 6 Apr, in grassy border to roadside wasteland, JW, conf. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum exsertiforme – Bilbrook Lane (ST03614120), 1 Apr, in field border, JW, conf. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5, second for Somerset.

Taraxacum fusciflorum – Bilbrook Lane (ST03614120), 31 Mar, field gateway in grass and rubble, JW, conf. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum hepaticum – Taunton (ST22602417), 31 Mar, road verge under trees opposite Temple Methodist Church, by side entrance to Vivary Park, SJL, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset. [Plus two further records, elsewhere in Taunton, 4 Apr and 20 Apr, both SJL, det. AJR, **TTN**.]

Taraxacum huelphersianum – Dunster (SS97744277), 27 Apr, in grassy wasteland, JW, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum incisum – Monksilver, Combe Lane (ST07983700), 3 Apr, in grass verge, JW, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum interveniens – Taunton, Bindon Road (ST20752591), 9 Mar, in mown grass verge, SJL, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5, third for Somerset. [Plus a second record, on another mown road verge, at Holway Hill, Taunton (ST24502357), 18 Mar, SJL, det. AJR, **TTN**.]

Taraxacum intumescens – Monksilver, Combe Lane (ST07983700), 3 Apr, in grass verge, JW, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5, second for Somerset.

Taraxacum lancidens – Willett Hill (ST09883395), 13 Mar, in woodland, JW, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum landmarkii – Bilbrook Lane (ST07324160), 1 Apr, grassy area nr stream, JW, conf. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum latissimum – Hawkcombe (SS87754571), 28 Mar, on edge of bridleway, GL, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5, second for Somerset.

Taraxacum lepidum – Lynch Bridge (SS90064761), 19 Mar, on road verge, GL, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum litorale – Taunton, Sherford Road (ST22482326), 1 May, two plants on road verge and in flower border, SJL, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset. The first confirmed British record for this highly distinctive but rare and threatened species of wet grassland in north-east Europe (Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland). The few previous claims to *T. litorale* being a British species (e.g. Richards 1972) were based on specimens now recognised as belonging to *T. anglicum*. Sherford Road serves as an access route to a large edge-of

-town mixed arable/livestock farm which, particularly around harvest times, employs casual workers, many of them from Eastern Europe. A business buying and selling new and used agricultural machinery, including trade with mainland Europe, is also based there. Could *T. litorale* have arrived on the clothing, or footwear, of an agricultural worker, or in the tyre treads of a farm vehicle?



Herbarium sheet of *Taraxacum litorale* from Sherford Road, Taunton. The first confirmed British record. © Simon Leach

Taraxacum macrolobum – Bossington (SS89034693), 25 Mar, on road verge, GL, det. AJR, TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum margettsii – Staple Hill (ST24661597), 17 Apr 2016, damp grassland in Forestry Commission car park, BSBI/SRPG Dandelion Workshop, det. AJR from cultivated material, TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset. Plants were provisionally identified as *T. margettsii* in the field, and subsequently conf. AJR after exam-

ining specimens grown in cultivation by Tim Webb from root fragments collected 17 Apr 2016, harvested and pressed by JW, 2 Apr 2017. A scarce British endemic with a concentration of records in W. Cornwall (Lizard peninsula) and a thin scatter elsewhere.

Taraxacum multicolorans – Thurlbear (ST26572055), 5 Apr, abundant in sloping field next to woodland, in semi-improved grassland, SJL, det. AJR, TTN; first record for VC5, fifth for Somerset.

Taraxacum pachylobum – Taunton, Bindon Road (ST20752590), 9 Mar, in mown grass verge on edge of trading estate, SJL, det. AJR, TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset, fourth for England, sixth for Britain.

Taraxacum pallidipes – Bath, Royal Avenue (ST746651), 10 Apr, RDR, det. AJR; first record for VC6, fifth for Somerset.

Taraxacum pannucium – Williton, Aller Farm (ST07813959), 26 Apr, in cobbles in farmyard at edge of scrub, JW, det. AJR, TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum parnassicum – Watchet, Cleeve Hill SSSI (ST05194287), 22 Mar, in short calcareous grassland, JW, conf. AJR, TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum planum – Robbers Bridge (SS82284646), 28 Mar, on road verge, GL, conf. AJR, TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum pulchrifolium – Wedmore (ST44014784), 1 Apr and 9 Apr, in allotments, EJMCD & SRPG, conf. AJR, TTN; first records for VC6, fourth or fifth for Somerset.

Taraxacum richardsianum – Charmy Down (ST755706 & ST758706), 6 May, and Black Down, Rowberrow Warren (ST468571), 13 May, both records RDR, det. AJR; first records for VC6 and Somerset.

Taraxacum sinuatum – Bilbrook Lane (ST07324160), 31 Mar, roadside bank, JW, conf. AJR, TTN; an atypical plant with quite sharply-pointed leaf lobes. Taunton (ST23522441), 17 Apr, front garden of 15 Trinity Street in tarmac, SJL, det. AJR, TTN; a more typical plant with mainly blunt-tipped leaf lobes. First and second records for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum subericinum – Old Cleeve (ST041064178), 6 Mar, garden weed, JW, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset, and the first for Britain outside its stronghold in N. Devon (VC4). It is unclear whether *T. subericinum* is native or alien in Britain: its occurrences in N. Devon are chiefly in hedge-banks where it has every appearance of being a native, although it has a markedly eastern distribution in mainland Europe (Rich & Richards 2011).

Taraxacum subhuelphersianum – Kelston (ST702670), 29 Apr, RDR, det. AJR; first record for VC6 and Somerset.

Taraxacum sublongisquamum – Taunton (ST23492439), 30 Mar, in seldom-cut lawn in back garden of 15 Trinity Street, SJL, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum subxanthostigma – Wedmore (ST44014784), 1 Apr, in allotment, EJMCD & SRPG, det. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC6, second for Somerset.

Taraxacum trilobatum – Wedmore (ST44014784), 1 Apr, in allotment, EJMCD & SRPG, conf. AJR, **TTN**; first record for VC6, fourth for Somerset.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to John Richards for examining and determining our 2017 collections. These included some indeterminable or otherwise trying specimens, mainly of plants collected too early or late in the season, or too hurriedly gathered and poorly pressed; but, fortunately, between us we had more than enough decent specimens and unusual taxa to keep him interested! Thanks also to Tim Webb for his cultivation of the Dandelion that proved to be *Taraxacum margettsii*.

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SRPG Membership and Contacts

Somerset Rare Plants Group annual subscription is currently £8, payable in January of each year. Payment can be made by cheque or direct into SRPG account. Contact the Treasurer Clive Lovatt (see below) for payment details.

Members attend meetings at their own risk. Field meeting leaders carry a list of emergency phone numbers so please contact Liz McDonnell if you have not completed a membership form, so that she has the telephone numbers of those to contact in case of illness or accident.

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