



How time flies! This is the sixth annual newsletter we have produced and it seems only a short while since we were considering our first issue.

We thank all who have sent in contributions and reports for this newsletter and again appeal to all members to send in short items for inclusion in the next issue. Anything botanical with relation to Somerset will be considered. Items can be sent at any time to Caroline Giddens, either by post or e-mail: carol.enhs@virgin.net Deadline 20th October, 2006.

REPORTS OF MEETINGS, 2005.

Saturday 8th January A.G.M.

We started our New Year with our Annual Winter Meeting and AGM. As on previous occasions, this took place at English Nature Offices at Roughmoor at 11 am. Eleven members attended and apologies were received from several others. The morning was taken up with a video of the Gardeners World programme in 2004 which dealt with growing wild flowers in gardens and featured our member Lady Ro FitzGerald talking on site about some of the rarities of The Lizard in Cornwall.

This was followed by an excellent buffet lunch provided by members and after lunch the short A.G.M. took place. Steve Parker opened the meeting and advised that he was about to become joint BSBI Recorder for VC5. He said the work on the Somerset Rare Plant Register will occupy our group for several years and more help from members would be appreciated. Any records of Somerset plants will help. It was felt that our membership may have dropped a little over the last 12 months and we should all make an effort to recruit new members. Our Treasurer, Anne Cole was not able to be present but Liz McDonnell said she understood there were a healthy £300+ in the bank.

The remainder of the afternoon was taken up with members slides. Margarete Earle and Liz showed pictures of the group visit to Scotland and Margarete also showed slides taken in the Dolomites where we have a group visit planned for 2006. Brian Laney from Northamptonshire had a selection of plants from the many sites he visited in 2004 and Jean Webb also showed some interesting pictures.

INDOOR MEETINGS:

As stated at the AGM, work on the **Somerset Red Data Book/Rare Plant Register** progresses slowly and more help is required from members. Workshops were held at EN offices on 22nd Jan., 5th March., 29th Oct. and 12th Nov. The work is being divided with various members to be responsible for writing up allocated species.

Steve has conducted two **MapMate** workshops to help overcome problems with entering and extracting data from our computers.

We have again benefited from Liz's expert **tuition and advice** on mounting herbarium specimens and trust our amateur efforts have been of some use.

Visits to the **Somerset County Museum Herbarium** in Taunton have also been interesting and beneficial and we are grateful to the organizers.

Saturday 19th February Weston-super-Mare.

With spectacular views of Wales across the Bristol Channel and to Steep Holm, it felt as though you could walk out to the island on what must have been one of the clearest days I have ever encountered at Weston-super-Mare. A group of five walked along the sea lawns. As we went we found rosettes of *Trifolium suffocatum* (Suffocated Clover) and *Rumex pulcher* (Fiddle Dock). We did find *Stellaria pallida* (Lesser Chickweed) and *Sedum album* (White Stonecrop) flowering. On reaching the area of the lawn where the model railway is and being careful not to be run over by a train we got down on all fours in search of *Poa infirma* (Early Meadow-

grass). It was found last year by the leader new for Somerset. After a long search we did manage to find one plant of the grass standing at a mighty 6mm high. Another specimen was found but even smaller. We were just about to head back to the cars for lunch when a very large example of the grass compared to the other two already seen was found next to the track of the railway, disappearing out of sight each time the train passed over it.

The afternoon was spent at Uphill where we searched for *Hornungia petraea* (Hutchinsia), without success on the steep rocky outcrops. We did see plenty of flowering *Erophila verna* agg. (Whitlowgrass) and the leaves of *Filipendula vulgaris* (Dropwort).

Paul R. Green

Sunday 10th April – Nyland Hill

Several members met at Wedmore for lift sharing to Nyland Hill, a small outlying ‘island’ of carboniferous limestone near the Mendips. It is a steep sided conical hill clothed on the northern side with Ash/Field Maple ancient woodland. The grassland is species-rich as its steepness has prevented agricultural improvement. Fiddle Dock (*Rumex pulcher*) is frequent here and the rosettes were easily identified by the ‘violin-shaped’ basal leaves. On the steep south-facing slope on the bare open areas amongst the rock outcrops, Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*) was abundant, with other small ephemerals such as Common Whitlowgrass (*Erophila verna*), Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*) and Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*). We found several patches of the nationally scarce Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla neumanniana*) on the grassy slopes, which were flowering profusely.

In the wooded part of the hill, Ransoms (*Allium ursinum*) dominated the ground flora but other species of note included Goldilocks (*Ranunculus auricomus*), Enchanter’s Nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*), Nettle-leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*) and Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*). Several specimens of the unusual Earthstar fungi – (*Geastrum ?pectinatum*) were found amongst the litter.

On revisiting Nyland Hill in August, I was delighted to see hundreds of Autumn Lady’s Tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) on the south-facing grassy slopes. The 2005 Red List lists



Autumn Lady’s Tresses
(*Spiranthes spiralis*)

this small orchid as Near Threatened, so Nyland Hill is an important site for this species. I also recorded dozens of Nit-grass (*Gastridium ventricosum*) individuals at its bare, rocky location near the base of the hill.

Liz McDonnell

Saturday 23rd April - Joint SANHS/SRPG Field Meeting to Lime Ridge Wood, Orchard Wood, Piddle Wood and Young Wood

Early rain no doubt deterred many from attending this joint meeting with members of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society, but by 11 a.m. it had subsided to a fine drizzle. As our small party headed up the track to the northern edge of Lime Ridge Wood the sky cleared for the first time, and for the rest of the day we were bathed in warm sunshine. No doubt those that decided not to join us would have felt cheated by the weather!

The aim of this meeting was to investigate a group of more or less contiguous woodland blocks on the Liassic (somewhat calcareous) northern slopes of the Blackdown Hills. All the woods lie within about 6 km of Taunton town centre, and so are within the 7 km radius covered by the proposed *Taunton Flora*. As such, we decided to concentrate on making species lists for the *Flora*, attempting to record all taxa encountered within each of the six ‘quartads’ (½-km squares) visited: ST/24.19 (SW, SE, NW & NE); ST/25.19 (NW); and ST/24.20 (SE).

We had a productive six hours, with a final tally of more than 170 taxa for the day (including one or two subspecies), and certainly a much improved record of the species present within each ‘quartad’. For some, this level of square-bashing might have seemed like overkill, and this was the first time that several of the group had

recorded in this way. But there is always a certain satisfaction at finding new species (never mind whether the square is large or small – it’s still a new record!), and by recording in ½-km squares we were able to have that satisfaction six times over in a single afternoon! The results speak for themselves:

Quartad	No. of taxa recorded before 23 rd April	Total no. of taxa following visit on 23/4/05
ST/24.19 SW	1	79
ST/24.19 SE	27	98
ST/24.19 NW	1	41
ST/24.19 NE	35	136
ST/25.19 NW	94	130
ST/24.20 SE	48	89

No great rarities - we didn’t visit the *Cephalanthera damasonium* (White Helleborine) and *Platanthera chlorantha* (Greater Butterfly-orchid) sites in nearby Pridley Plantation - but we were pleased to see good quantities of a number of species typically associated in the Taunton area with woods and hedgerows on the Liassic clays, including *Rubia peregrina* (Madder), *Equisetum telmateia* (Great Horsetail), *Iris foetidissima* (Stinking Iris), *Sorbus torminalis* (Wild Service Tree), *Viburnum lantana* (Wayfaring-tree), *Daphne laureola* (Spurge Laurel), *Euphorbia amygdaloides* (Wood Spurge), etc. Less welcome was *Hyacinthoides hispanicus* (Spanish Bluebell), several clumps of which were found growing in a hedgerow within spitting distance of some fine stands of native *H. non-scriptus*, having possibly been dumped here as a garden throw-out. In Lime Ridge Wood, during our lunch stop, we discovered both *Luzula pilosa* (Hairy Woodrush) and the much scarcer *L. forsteri* (Southern Woodrush), while in Young Wood we visited an area of species-rich calcicolous grassland now managed as a butterfly reserve, and saw *Succisa pratensis* (Devil’s-bit Scabious), *Stachys officinalis* (Betony), *Genista tinctoria* (Dyer’s Greenweed), *Sanguisorba minor* (Salad Burnet), *Primula veris x vulgaris* (False Ox-lip), etc. In many cases the most interesting species were ones that would cause most of us to hardly raise an eyebrow; but this is one of the unexpected rewards of such small-scale, intensive recording. Who would have thought, for example, that we would be getting excited about bracken? And

perhaps the rarest plant of the day, the one producing the greatest whoops of joy, was none other than *Vicia cracca* (Tufted Vetch)...

Simon J. Leach

Sunday 8th May – Brean Down

The purpose of this meeting was to map the distribution of rare and scarce plants within the SSSI boundary for use in English Nature’s Site Dossier Project.

Brean Down is well known for its assemblage of rare and scarce species. The new 2005 Vascular Plant Red List gives European threat categories to all the native plants in Britain and this changes the status of several plants found on Brean Down. White Rock-rose (*Helianthemum appeninum*) and Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) are now the only Red Listed plants on Brean Down, with a category of ‘Vulnerable’. Dwarf Mouse-ear (*Cerastium pumilum*), Pale St John’s-wort (*Hypericum montanum*) and Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*) are ‘Near Threatened’ and the other Brean Down specialities such as Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*), Bird’s-foot Clover (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*), Slender Trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*), Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*), Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) and Goldilocks Aster (*Aster linosyris*) are all of ‘Least Concern’, even though some of these may be nationally rare or scarce.

The group split into two, and equipped with maps and coloured crayons, set off to map the rare species (except Goldilocks Aster, which can only be seen from the beach at low tide). The resulting maps showed that most of the rare species are confined to the steep, bare soils of the south-facing slopes, particularly at the western end. This work will feed directly into English Nature’s SSSI Condition Assessment.

Liz McDonnell

Wed. 25th May - Farleigh Hungerford

A group of ten met to have a look around Rowley Copse where we tried counting the *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* (Spiked Star-of - Bethlehem), which were scattered over the copse. Even though there were many leaves there seemed very few flowering spikes, probably less than 100. Two large trees of *Sorbus torminalis* (Wild Service-tree) and a number of young trees were seen, along with

a single plant of *Listera ovata* (Common Twayblade). In the adjoining field- the site of the medieval village of Rowley - *Bromus commutatus* (Meadow Brome) was compared with *Bromus hordeaceus* (Soft-brome).



Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem
(*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*)

After sitting in the sun on the bank of the River Frome having our lunch, we searched the river for *Potamogeton lucens* (Shining Pondweed) near the weir, without success. Hopefully it was just because the water was very dirty that we didn't find the pondweed, it was first found in this site by H.F. Parsons in 1873. The river did have a few specimens of *Schoenoplectus lacustris* (Common Club-rush) and *Alisma plantago-aquatica* (Water-plantain). A single large plant of Giant Hogweed and a few plants of *Dipsacus pilosus* (Small Teasel) grew on the bank of the river. On the side of a stream leading into the River Frome some flowering spikes of *Aconitum napellus* (Monk's-hood) were seen. Luckily for us they were on our side, as if on the opposite bank they would have been in Wiltshire. The fields the group walked through along the River Frome all had a rich flora with species such as *Briza media* (Quaking-grass), *Helictotrichon pubescens* (Downy Oat-grass) and *Cruciata laevipes* (Crosswort).

Paul Green

Saturday 28th May - Rare Orchids and Iron Age Hill Forts

A lay-by by the side of the A303 is probably not the best place to be on one of the busiest days of the year, yet this is where the SRPG members decided to spend a happy hour. We

were looking at one of the most uncommon plants to be found in Somerset, the hybrid orchid *Ophrys apifera x insectifera* (Bee x Fly Orchid). This plant had been discovered a few years before and only now had we as a group gone to find and worship it. The plant was well photographed and admired, while the leader (Steve) was concerned in equal measure for the health and safety of the SRPG members (from the busy road) and for the health and safety of the orchid from trampling under foot. The other vegetation on the road bank was rich with a good selection of limestone species.

Moving on from the road verge we drove to a much quieter area, the ramparts of South Cadbury Iron Age hill fort. Here we recorded a number of species of interest including the large population of *Saxifraga granulata* (Meadow Saxifrage). We had recorded this plant in 2000, and as far as we could tell, the colony was continuing to thrive. The same was true of *Verbascum virgatum* (Twiggy Mullein), the other rarity found here. Having walked on the site we set off to investigate a nearby hill, but sadly intensive agriculture had beaten us, and there was very little of interest left for us to see, still can't complain - we had seen some excellent plants during the day.

Steve Parker

Wednesday evening 1st June - Long Sutton Plantations

The party of eleven gathered on the roadside just south of the railway bridge at Upton where we counted *Vulpia unilateralis* (Mat-grass Fescue) growing on top of a field wall either side of the field gate. On the wall on the south side of the gate we reckoned there were 200 plants and 280 on the part of the wall on the north side of the field gate.

We drove on to Long Sutton Plantations where we walked along the lane to the plantation. The verges of the lane had *Lathyrus aphaca* (Yellow Vetchling) and *Linum bienne* (Pale Flax). Once reaching the plantation the group spread out to count the *Cephalanthera damasonium* (White Helleborine), which were only seen in two spots, eleven specimens being seen in total. The grassy strip below the plantation gave us *Lathyrus nissolia* (Grass Vetchling) and *Lotus glaber* (Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot-trefoil).

Paul Green

Saturday 4th June – Brendon Hills

On 4th June eleven members of the SRPG met at Comberow in the Brendon Hills.

Recording began immediately with the sighting of *Lysichiton americanus* (American Skunk Cabbage, which had naturalised at the water's edge. Other water and bog plants made a tally of 68 species in this first km square. The second square recorded included the area known as "The Incline" which has a 1 in 4 ascent over three-quarters of a mile long. Once the first 15 feet of vertical mudslide was mastered, the rest proved easy going and turned out to be a shady, fern-lined green haven. Recording continued, with rocky slabs on either side and running water beneath and here 70 species were recorded.

The third square, which comprised the woodland known as Eastern Wood and some old pastures gave a larger count of 150. Although no botanical surprises were turned up, it was a very satisfying excursion.

Jeanne Webb

Saturday 11th June – Chewton Wood and Hollow Marsh Meadow

Only three members (Paul, Liz and I) attended this meeting, which was a pity because it was a glorious day, with several exciting finds. We went first to Hollow Marsh Meadow, a damp, neutral, unimproved grassland (and a Somerset Wildlife Trust Reserve). In this 4-acre meadow, we found Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius* var *montanus*), Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria* ssp *tinctoria*), Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*), Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis* ssp *vestita*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) – and many other species. We had our picnic amongst this floriferous splendour.

The herbaceous flowering plants were stunning, but some of the grasses and sedges were at least as exciting! We found a few patches of Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), which I had not seen before, and Downy Oat-grass (*Helictotrichon pubescens*), and we found eight different sedges. These included Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*), Pale Sedge (*Carex pallescens*) and

Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*). We also found both British subspecies of Heath Wood-rush (*Luzula multiflora* ssp *multiflora* and ssp *congesta*).

In the afternoon, we explored Chewton Wood. We saw a few patches of Solomon's-seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) and abundant Thin-spiked Wood-sedge (*Carex strigosa*). Along the main ride, we puzzled over a *Potentilla*, which I had found previously and hoped would be Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*) because that has been recorded in the wood by others, but not yet by me! The patch we found, however, did not seem right and we suspected a hybrid, so we collected specimens and I pressed them and sent them to the referee, Dr Brenda Harold. She has confirmed that it is the Hybrid Cinquefoil (*Potentilla x mixta*).

When the current owner bought Chewton Wood in 1997 he created a pond, which is being allowed to develop naturally. Here we found Curled Pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*) and Fennel Pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*) and two Water-crowfoots. Paul bravely waded in for Thread-leaved Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus trichophyllus*), which I think is a new 10km square record.

I was very grateful to have the expertise of Paul and Liz for some quality recording on my home patch and hope they enjoyed the walk as much as I did.

Helena Crouch

Wed. 15th June – Evening meeting to Max Bog, Winscombe

Time did not allow a thorough survey of all the species-rich fields that make up this SSSI, so we concentrated our efforts on the two fen fields, to search for the several rare and scarce species that occur here. We were pleased that the farmer who grazes the bog for the Avon Wildlife Trust joined us to discuss the future management. As usual, a SRPG recording card was compiled for all species, and 8-figure grid references given for some of the rare and scarce ones.

The two small fields that comprise the base-rich fen have rather different communities. Tall rushes - *Juncus conglomeratus*, *J. effusus* and *J. subnodulosus*, with tussocky Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), dominate the western field. Other associates include

Meadow-sweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Broad-leaved Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum latifolium*) and several sedges including Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*) and Long-stalked Sedge (*Carex viridula* ssp. *brachyrhyncha*). Special note was made of the location and population details of Tubular Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*), which in the new Red List 2005 is given a threat category of 'Vulnerable'.

In the eastern field, Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustre*) and Twayblade (*Listera ovata*) were abundant. Other plants of interest here are Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and Dyers Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*). We spent considerable time keying out Narrow-leaved Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza transteinerioides*) and were fairly convinced that 6 spikes were present. Although parts of the site were still undergrazed, we were pleased to see that stockproof fencing had recently been completed in preparation for a more structured grazing regime, which was, in fact, started within two weeks of our visit, when the westerly field was grazed.

Liz McDonnell & Karen Pollock

Sunday 26th June – Sand Bay

Sand Bay is part of the Severn estuary SSSI and is the northernmost sand dune/saltmarsh complex in Somerset. Its considerable ecological interest has been known for many years, however, the distribution and status of rare and scarce species had not been undertaken systematically for some time. To rectify this situation eight members turned up on a beautiful warm and sunny day to walk along the beach and over the dunes (a hard life!) The size of the Sand Bay complex made it sensible to stick to a systematic survey of the northern half of the dune complex and leave a visit to Sand Point and the saltmarsh, as well as the southern section of dunes, for another day.

Rather nice plants started to be discovered almost immediately – next to the famous Sand Point public toilets – one of many sites of architectural merit and cultural importance the group has visited this year. The toilets are built on the site of an old cottage, the memory of this building living on in the form of well-established and rather attractive aliens such as

Euphorbia characias wulfenii (Mediterranean Spurge), *Geranium pencillatum* and *Teucrium chamaedrys* (Wall Germander) – the latter being a very attractive plant which had many members determined to get it into their gardens forthwith. Abandoning furtive searches behind the back of the Gents we made our way onto the dune/saltmarsh interface and recorded 114 more species in ST3365. As well as species which would get the pulse racing on the best of days – such as *Trifolium arvense* (Hare's-foot Clover), *Orobanche hederaceae* (Ivy Broomrape), *Parapholis strigosa* (Hard-grass), *Phleum arenarium* (Sand Cat's-tail) and *Hirschfeldia incana* (Hoary Mustard) – there were some exceptionally good species such as *Honckenya peploides* (Sea Sandwort), *Carex extensa* (Long-bracted Sedge), *Juncus maritimus* (Sea Rush), *Lavatera arborea* (Tree-mallow), *Trifolium scabrum* (Rough Clover) and *Parapholis incurva* (Curved Hard-grass) - one of only two sites in Somerset for this rather bizarre and remarkable nationally scarce grass. All these species had been previously recorded from the site, however particularly pleasing were our sightings of *Althaea officinalis* (Marsh-mallow) and *Carex paniculata* (Great Tussock-sedge) – both new records for this site and both scarce throughout Somerset.

Those who have known this site for some years were of the opinion that not only had its botanical diversity got even better but the extent of the rare and scarce species had largely increased. The overall quality of the dune system (including an area of slack to the north) also appeared to be at a new peak, despite the attempts of *Hippophae rhamnoides* (Sea Buckthorn) to strike a foothold. North Somerset Council have undertaken some management of this noxious shrub and we have recommended they treat the regrowth with chemical controls – nothing should be allowed to spoil this maritime treasure.

Walking back to the car park some members wandered into the saltmarsh and enjoyed some early blooms of *Limonium vulgare* (Common Sea-lavender) amidst the *Spartina x townsendii* (Townsend's Cord-grass) and numerous small birds flushed from the rich pickings of seeds and invertebrates.

Phil Quinn

Wed. 29th June – Langford Heathfield

Langford Heathfield falls within my local flora area, so I was interested to discover what species the SRPG members could find to add to my site list. I had also been told that a strange hybrid orchid had recently been seen on the site! This was an evening meeting and at first I did not think we would get far because as we set off there was a loud crack of thunder, but the rain quickly passed and the evening was pleasant.

We had three target species for the evening, firstly the strange orchid. Despite a long search we failed to find orchids of great interest. So we set off for our second target; *Genista anglica* (Petty Whin) which was located but found in only small numbers. The final species of the evening was *Viola lactea* (Pale Dog-violet). Again the population appeared to be quite small and vulnerable. The SRPG were none the less impressed by the management efforts of the Somerset Wildlife Trust who manage the site. So, although the rare plants on site are currently limited in number we were hopeful that the site would continue to be of botanical interest and support the two national rarities.

Steve Parker

July 8th – 10th Weekend in Kent

It was at the annual midwinter gathering of the SRPG that we agreed as a group that a trip to Kent would give us an opportunity to visit the rare arable weed site shown on the Gardener's World TV programme. So on a bright sunny morning a small, but very select group set off to see what we could find.

On the Friday afternoon we visited Darland Banks in Gillingham, this is an area of chalk grassland on the edge of the Medway towns. The long hot summer had taken a bit of a toll on the generally rich flora; Man Orchid (*Aceras anthropophorum*) was seen but in a somewhat desiccated form. Walking to the end of the site a fine specimen of Red Star-thistle (*Centaurea calcitrapa*) was found, still in good flower. I have known this species in this location for over 20 years, but the Atlas of the Kent Flora states that it has been known here since 1839! Moving to the nearby Medway estuary some of the commoner salt marsh plants were viewed, the extensive stands of Sea-purslane (*Atriplex portulacoides*) and Common Sea-lavender

(*Limonium vulgare*) were in good flower, while a few Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns were to be seen over the island and mudflats. An old tip area turned up a few more interesting species, but the greatest debate on plant identification was over the name of a plum, I am still not sure if any formal species identification was agreed, but quite a few plums were eaten in the process.

The following day the group (5 members of the SRPG) met up again at Dungeness. We were also joined by our guides for the rest of the visit, Doug and Sue, who are old friends of mine from Kent. In my view the large expanse of shingle ridges at Dungeness is one of the strangest places in England and therefore well worth a visit. To gain a good view of the site we climbed the steps of one of the old lighthouses, from here we had excellent views of the largest shingle system in England. The ness formed in a series of shingle ridges, the tops of which support a very rich flora (and fauna). From the top of the lighthouse we also had good views of the nuclear power station, how such a thing got planning permission is quite beyond me. Back on *terra firma* we walked towards the sea. Here, growing in good quantity, were large



Yellow Horned-poppy (*Glaucium flavum*)

patches of Sea pea (*Lathyrus japonicus*) with Bittersweet (*Solanum dulcamara*) and Curled dock (*Rumex crispus* subsp. *littoreus*) with many fine specimens of Sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*).

Returning inland, we noticed large mats of Dodder (*Cuscuta epithimum*) creeping over the other low vegetation. Of particular note was the shy flowering Nottingham catchfly (*Silene nutans*), while the eye and the camera was attracted to the colourful stands

of Yellow Horned-poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) and Vipers Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*). As you move slowly inland you notice a change in the plants, large patches of a prostrate Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* covered in a range of colourful lichens. While a little further on willow woodland had developed.

After lunch we returned to our cars, on the way to the RSPB reserve we made a short stop to view the famous flotsam and jetsam garden that was designed by Derek Jarman. At the nature reserve we took a short walk to the bird hides, outside of the first hide a small but fine specimen of Jersey Cudweed (*Gnaphalium luteoalbum*) was found growing at the edge of the path. Further down the track we admired a stand of Lesser Reedmace (*Typha angustifolia*) growing at the edge of a recently excavated pool. In the hides we had views over the large expanse of water that forms the heart of the internationally important bird reserve.

Sunday morning's excursion was to Ranscombe Farm, just outside of City of Rochester. Plantlife has recently purchased the farm. After a short walk we found a single plant of Meadow Clary (*Salvia pratensis*) growing at the side of the track, a little further, by an old burnt out car, a few plants of Rough Marsh-mallow (*Althaea hirsuta*) was discovered. Emerging in the main field the group were soon excitedly discovering a wide range of rare arable weeds; these included Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) and Broadleaved cudweed (*Filago pyramidata*). I think that all agreed the long trip to Kent was well worth it.

Steve Parker

Wed. 20th July – Cross Plain, Axbidge

Four members met, on a beautiful evening, and climbed up Mendip through the abandoned quarry at Cross. The steep limestone grassland was very dry, but covered with profuse *Helianthemum nummularium* (Common Rock-rose), *Sanguisorba minor* (Salad Burnet), *Filipendula vulgaris* (Dropwort), *Galium verum* (Ladies Bedstraw) and *Linum catharticum* (Fairly Flax). We searched all the limestone outcrops for *Trinia glauca* (Honewort) and *Koeleria vallesiana* (Somerset Hairgrass). No *Trinia* was found but there was widespread *Koeleria*, both *K.*

macrantha (Crested Hairgrass) and about 14 clumps of *vallesiana* growing on large flat rocks at the eastern edge of the site. Some of these were very small but the impression was of an expanding colony.

Anne Cole

Sunday 24th July - Berrow Dunes/Golf course

Several members met on a somewhat wet and windy start to the day, the weather soon improved to be a nice sunny day. A small pond produced *Typha angustifolia* (Lesser Bulrush) and the hybrid *T. x glauca* (*T. latifolia* x *T. angustifolia*). The *Linaria arenaria* (Sand Toadflax) that was found in 2004 was looking good. *Vulpia fasciculata* (Dune fescue) was abundant in places, as was *Festuca rubra* (Red Fescue), these two produced another hybrid for us *X F. hubbardii*. Several other interesting species were also seen including *Juncus acutus* (Sharp Rush), *Vulpia ciliata* subsp *ambigua* (Bearded Fescue) and *Centaureum pulchellum* (Lesser Centaury).

Ian P Green

Saturday 6th August – Ham Hill

Five members met to explore the 400-acre site of Ham Hill Country Park. We were soon looking at *Epilobiums* of which we saw five species plus the hybrid between Broad-leaved and Hoary Willowherb. This was growing next to a very large patch of *Euphorbia cyparissus* (Cypress Spurge) with a scattering of white flowered *Geranium molle* var. *alba* (Dove's-foot Crane's-bill). *Agrimonia procera* (Fragrant Agrimony) was in abundance as was *Scabiosa columbaria* (Small Scabious). While we ate our lunch we looked at a *Bromus*, which turned out to be *B. hordeaceus* ssp. *longipedicellatus*, confirmed by Laurie Spalton, new for VC5. *Campanula rotundifolia* (Harebell) was only seen on one roadside. A single large clump of *Carex muricata* ssp. *lamrocarpa* (Prickly Sedge) was on the side of a path along with *Cirsium eriophorum* (Woolly Thistle). A woody area had many spikes of *Arum maculatum* (Lords-and-Ladies) with orange berries and a clump of three spikes that had yellow berries. On top of the bank around the edge of the working quarry was *Lathyrus nissolia* (Grass Vetchling) with one flower still out.

Paul R. Green

Saturday 3rd September – Catsford Common, Bridgwater Bay.

Thirteen members and friends met on a warm sunny autumn morning. The aim of the meeting was to record all the species in each 1 km square into which Catsford Common falls, and to map the distribution of the rare plants Slender Hare'-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*), Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) and White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*).



White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*)

Catsford Common, like its neighbour Wall Common to the east, is a coastal site comprising maritime grassland, saltmarsh, shingle and muddy shore. The low sea walls provide stone and concrete substrates to add to the variety of habitats and niches for a wide diversity of species. Sea Barley was abundant on the short grazed grassland between the shingle banks and sea wall and its presence could be detected at a distance from the sandy-coloured short spiky seed heads. The Slender Hare's-ear was locally common in taller vegetation especially beside the main track, but because of its slender habit, was difficult to spot and is probably under-recorded here. Several plants of White Horehound were recorded on the shingle bank and beside the sea wall, near small populations of Sea Wormwood (*Seraphidium maritimum*). Yellow Horned-poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) was frequent on the shingle banks and several plants were still in flower.

In the wide borrow-pit ditch to the south of the main track, Fennel Pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*), Horned Pondweed (*Zannichellia palustris*), Spiked Water-

Milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and Ivy-leaved Duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*) were recorded. In another narrow, overgrown ditch, Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*) was detected by its strong aroma. On the way back to the cars, secondary flowering growth of a Yellow-cress was recorded, this was later determined as *Rorippa sylvestris* (Creeping Yellow-cress), an uncommon species in West Somerset.

Liz McDonnell

Sunday 18th September. Devon Whitebeams on Exmoor.

What a disappointment! The weather was fair and I was all set for the check on *Sorbus devoniensis*. I parked by Timberscombe Wood and waited.... I had received three apologies from people who could not come, but we have lots of members.... No one arrived and after a quarter of an hour I thought I had better drive up (and down) the road in case anyone was in the wrong place. Having drawn a blank, I began to do a plant list while waiting. By the time I had covered the road verges it became apparent that everyone had either lost their way, were not interested in Whitebeams or perhaps I had got the day wrong!

Anyway, I was all set for a day's botanising so, leaving my car at the bottom of the footpath (to point any latecomers in the right direction), and continuing recording, I made my way up to the iron-age hill fort. This hill-fort was discovered by the ENP archaeologist c1999 in the centre of a plantation of larch trees. While clearing trees from the fort, these whitebeams were 'discovered' (although we later learned that they had been known to at least one local inhabitant for at least 40 years). The whole circle of the fort now has a carpet of dominant Great Woodrush (*Luzula sylvatica*). This had recently been strimmed leaving the banks and ditches of the fort clearly visible and quite impressive. At the lower edge of the circle, just outside the ditch are the whitebeams – four main trees, plus numerous suckers and possible seedlings. Having drawn the site map, I took myself back to the road, noting a badger sett, several grey squirrels and a jay on the way. I had recorded 60 spp in SS9541.

After enjoying my picnic lunch, I continued on to the charming hamlet of Bury, complete with its old forge, old schoolhouse

and old packhorse bridge beside a deep ford. Not wishing to become waterlogged, I drove over the bridge, with half an inch to spare each side, and continued up the lane where the whitebeams grow in the hedgerow. Early in the year their white-backed leaves stand out clearly among the surrounding vegetation. Not so in September, after hedge trimming. I drove slowly along intending to stop and do some more recording when I reached the whitebeams. Hundreds of young pheasants were in this area and cackled at me when I passed; they were on the gates, in the fields, atop the banks and all over the lane but I saw no whitebeams. Oh well, I could do the 1 km recording anyway. I drove back down, keeping an eye open for *Sorbus*, new plants and suicidal pheasants. Still no Whitebeam. I knew it was there somewhere, so I turned again and drove back up. It did not help that every other oak had mildew making the leaves look white from a distance. No Whitebeam. 4 pm and time to go home so, retracing my route for the fourth time I headed back and suddenly I saw it. Not a trace of white showing on its green leaves looking very like the surrounding hazel. There were two clumps, one of several bushes and another probably just one or two. Just time to do the species card and what had started as a disappointment had turned into a very satisfactory and happy day. 89 spp were recorded in this square, SS9527.

Caroline Giddens



NEW RECORDS FOR V.C. 5 during 2005.

Cortaderia richardii (Early Pampas-grass) – Pen Wood, ST52140897, 4th February. Single clump self-sown on woodland ride, Paul R. Green, det. Ian P. Green.

Cuscuta campestris (Yellow Dodder) – The Patches, Hatch Beauchamp, ST313197, 18th September, growing on *Guizotia abyssinica* (Niger) in garden where it is thought to have come in with bird seed, Tony Watts. Third county record. The first record was from Windmill Hill, Bristol where it was a parasite on a Christmas cactus, R.J. Higgins.

Eucalyptus gunnii (Cider Gum) – Wellington, ST135195, 31st July, seedling growing as street weed in passageway, Steve Parker. New county record.

Geum macrophyllum (Large-leaved Avens) – Wellington, ST140200, 17th August, weed in garden. Not originally planted, Steve Parker. New county record.

Helleborus argutifolius (Corsican Hellebore) – Witcombe, ST47662149, 5th February, single plant self-sown in pavement crack, Paul R. Green. New county record. There have been three other records during the year: two by Simon Leach and one more by Paul R. Green.

Ipomoea purpurea (Common Morning-glory) – Dunster, SS98994352, 17th September, single self-sown plant in pavement crack, P.R. Green. Second county record. 1st from Bedminster in 1928 by C.I. Sandwith.

Sedum confusum (Lesser Mexican-stonecrop) – Dunster, SS98984338, 17th September, small clump at margin of steep wood above stream, Paul R. Green.

Verbena x hybrida – Dunster, SS990435, 17th September, single self-sown plant with red flowers in pavement crack, Paul R. Green. New county record.

NEW RECORDS FOR V.C. 6 during 2005.

Bassia scoparia (Summer-cypress) August 2005. Established in places along verges and centre of M5 for whole stretch which is in VC 6. Paul R. Green. New county record.

Centaurea x moncktonii (*C. nigra* x *C. jacea*) – Stawell, ST382379, 24th July, several plants in headland around arable field. Sown with grass seed mix. Ian & Paul Green, conf. Eric Clement. New county record.

Dianthus carthusianorum (Carthusian Pink) – Stawell, ST382379, June 2005, two plants in headland around arable field. Sown with grass seed mix. Tony Lewis, det. Eric Clement. New county record. A later visit by Alastair Stevenson turned up eight plants.

Ludwigia peploides (Floating Primrose) – Huntspill, ST294455 & ST302450, August 2005, for half a mile along the Huntspill River and connected pools in small quantity, Nick Stewart. New county record.



OTHER RECORDS OF INTEREST DURING 2005.

Althaea hirsuta (Rough Marsh-mallow) – Copley Wood, ST505308, 15th July, ten plants appeared after timber extraction, Geoff Brunt. First seen at Copley Wood in 1875 by J.G. Baker in a stony pasture. Very scarce when last reported in 1954 by E.F. Payne.

Antennaria dioica (Mountain Everlasting) – Ubley Warren, ST503553, 5th June, one clump, about 60 x 30 cms in short grass, Linda Carter. The last reported record for the county is from Goblin Combe in 1926 by Miss H.M. Dixon. Always a rare plant in Somerset with just seven records for the county. The only site from the Cheddar area was first recorded on 15th June 1922 by E.J. Hamlin: a tiny patch with one stem in flower on a rocky slope near the upper end of the gorge. Five plants and flourishing, 27th June 1925, Dr W. Watson.

Bromus hordeaceus ssp. *longipedicellatus* – Ham Hill, ST47671716, 6th August, clump on side of path, Paul R. Green, conf. Laurie Spalton. Second record for VC5 and third county record.

Bupleurum rotundifolium (Thorow-wax) – Cocklake, ST4349, 18th April, appeared spontaneously in flower bed, Liz McDonnell. First county record since 1970 when seen by John Keylock at Crewkerne.

Paul R. Green

Orchis morio (Green-winged Orchid) – Porlock Marsh SS8847, 14th May. After extensive searching, local botanist Chris Gladman found and photographed two flowering plants. He also found an uncommon pale pink colour form of *O. mascula* (Early Purple-orchid) here.

Oxalis tetraphylla (Four-leaved Pink-sorrel)- Nettlecombe Court, ST0537. This weed, first recorded at Nettlecombe in 1973 still survives in the herb garden.

Silene conica (Sand Catchfly) – Minehead Golf Links SS9845, 15 May. Although no plants were seen by the footpath this year, Val Anderson made a count of 970 in two main patches on the Golf Course.

CJG

HAS A NATIVE SPECIES BEEN WIPED OUT from Somerset by conservation work?

Vaccinium uliginosum – Bog Bilberry was first found in Somerset in 1994 by Ian Green when on Haddon Hill he thought he had found a strange willow that wouldn't key out. Desmond Meikle soon put him right and a specimen was also sent to Norman Robson who agreed that it was Bog Bilberry. The nearest site is nearly 400km away in northern England. A cage was erected to protect the patch as it was being well nibbled by ponies and deer. It flourished with the protection of the cage and flowered well in 1995. That same year a fire scorched the hillside, denuding it of vegetation, in fact blacking one of the stakes securing the cage. The last reported sighting I have of it is from 2002. In 2005 several people searched for it. Rhododendrons have been a problem for some time in the area and spraying took place during the winter of 2004/5. Several Rhododendrons made their home very close to the Bog Bilberry. Did the spray also take out the Bog Bilberry, as there are large bare areas around each dead Rhododendron? However you look at it, if the Rhododendrons had been left they would have out-grown the Bog Bilberry and destroyed it.

Paul R. Green

(A further search in the area has revealed what appear to be the posts that supported the wire cage in 1995. The centre of this area is completely filled with Bog Myrtle – so this may be the culprit. Higher up the hill is a plant, growing with *Empetrum nigrum* which has yet to be identified. It may prove to be a new patch of Bog Bilberry. This needs further investigation and SRPG hope to visit in 2006 to clear up the mystery.)

MYSTERY PLANT IDENTIFIED...

Last year, 24th April 2004, a SRPG meeting on the identification of Black Poplars included a visit to Sandhill Park near Bishops Lydeard where there were some good examples. Returning through the wood we saw an oak tree and in its forks, well above the ground, there was a leafy, shrubby plant growing. It was impossible to reach it and various guesses were made as to its identification.

Recently, whilst in the area with a young agile friend, we stopped at the same tree and with great difficulty he shinned up the bare trunk and retrieved a piece. It turned out to be *Gaultheria shallon* – a rare introduction, and one which is increasing in the county – but not often as an epiphyte!

Jeanne Webb

MAPMATE

Will those using the MapMate computer programme please note that some guide lines for data entry are being developed. Please contact Steve Parker for details.

DOLOMITES 1st – 8th JULY, 2006.

Several members have already booked this SRPG botanical trip, to see the mountain flowers of the Italian Dolomites, led by Margarete Earle. The holiday will be based at Selva, and if you do not want to book the package featured by Crystal or Thompson travel companies, Margarete has lots of information on alternative arrangements – B & B., self-catering, flights, buses, internet, etc. Contact Margarete on 01934 742496.

DATES FOR THE 2006 DIARY

Saturday 14th January 11 am.

Annual Winter members meeting.
Come to meet other members, bring Food for a bring and share lunch, show slides and photos.

English Nature offices, Roughmoor, Taunton. ST209253.

Saturday 28th January 10 am.

Rare Plant Register workshop.
English Nature offices, Taunton.

Saturday 11th February 10 am.

MapMate Workshop.
English Nature offices, Taunton.

Saturday 25th February 10 am.

Rare Plant Register workshop.
English Nature offices, Taunton.

Wednesday 8th March 10 am.

A visit to the herbarium at Taunton Castle Museum.

The 2006 Field Meeting programme will be sent to members in the new year.



Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*)

Subscription Reminder....

Our annual subscription is £5. This may be paid at the Winter Members Meeting on 14th January, but if you are unable to attend please send to our Treasurer, Anne Cole, Manor Cottage, Rodney Stoke BS27 3UN.

Newsletter issued by Somerset Rare Plants Group December 2005

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