

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Sunday 16th May 2021 at Adcombe Wood/Woodram Copse

Leader: Simon Leach

Report: Fred Rumsey

The third of the SRPG's post lockdown meetings saw a select band of five brave the soft Blackdowns' rain to concentrate on recording in two of the four monads which span this interesting ancient woodland complex with some calcareous grasslands. All of the area visited lay within a Woodland Trust reserve, and mostly all within an SSSI - the exception being an area of calcareous grassland from which scattered conifers had been removed and which was being ably grazed by a small group of inquisitive Shetland ponies. We started here and it rapidly belied its lack of designation with Linda finding the first of a good crop of Adder's-tongue Fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) in good quality grassland. The *Ophioglossum* had not previously been recorded from the site, ST2217, or indeed the tetrad and was for some the highlight of the day. It was also nice to find



One of several impressive False Oxlip (*Primula x polyantha*) clumps. Photo: FJR

Zigzag Clover (*Trifolium medium*) close by too – definitely an axiophyte (aka squeak inducer in the neighbouring VC). Here too there was a colourful scattering of Early Purple-orchids (*Orchis mascula*) through a mixture of Primulas, some of which were themselves mixtures: the False Oxlip (*Primula x polyantha*) also being new to the monad.

Other novelties for the monad included Bog Stitchwort (*Stellaria alsine*) in wetter trickles near the base of the slope.

Entering the woodland John P. soon diverged from the path, apparently drawn magnetically to a very fine stand of Herb-Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*), although, looking at the picture, perhaps it should be renamed *hexafolia*?



Can you beat Paris in springtime? Photo: FJR

Close to this was a particularly pretty form of Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*), identified later by Martin Rickard as being of the 'Lineare' group. He commented "A nice thing! Its greatest affinity would be with 'Chardstock' which I found at Chardstock, only a few miles south of where you were... [itself] very similar to the old Victorian cultivar 'Hirondelle'."



Polystichum setiferum 'Lineare Group' – similar delicately divided plants were seen in two places in the wood. Photo: FJR

A particular target for the group was a small, steep glade, not only sought for its merits as a picnic spot with vistas, but because here had been recorded *Gentianella amarella* subsp. *anglica* and Slender Bedstraw (*Galium pumilum* s. str.) in its only known Somerset site¹. Sadly, both appear to have long gone; the area of high-quality low, open calcareous turf extends only a few feet either side of the main animal track running up the glade's centre. The glade has, however, remained open enough to still support another county rarity, Heath False-Brome (*Brachypodium pinnatum* s. str.), continuing to grow where it was first recorded in the last century by Paul and Ian for the Atlas Flora Project.



View from the glade. Photo: FJR

¹ The taxonomy and status of Slender Bedstraw in Britain has long been argued. Recent molecular studies have shown that the plant on the Mendip limestones is conspecific with the French *G. fleurotii* and it is clearly native. *Galium pumilum* in its strict sense is a declining plant of southern chalk and limestones which, although now restricted to high quality sites, may be a neophyte.

Even for those of us not overtaken by Dandelion mania it was still nice to be gently introduced throughout the day to a few species of particular local significance by Simon, including *T. atrocollinum*, which translates as 'Dandelion of the Dark Hill' – in celebration of it having first been found, and recognised as a new species, in the Blackdown Hills.



Simon demonstrating the features of *Taraxacum atrocollinum*, a recently described species that was first collected (by Les Tucker) during the BSBI Dandelion Workshop in 2016. Photo: FJR

Especially pleasing was to have him show us *Taraxacum amicorum* – the 'Dandelion of Friends' – so named by John Richards as a nod to our own friendly botanical group, and in recognition of the fact that the BSBI Dandelion Workshop in 2016 had been held at the Meeting House of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Taunton. It appears to be a real Somerset speciality. Linda, having been shown this species

a few weeks earlier at Ruggin SWT Reserve, recognised it immediately. Its distinctive leaves, Simon assured us, would make very fine bookmarks.



Taraxacum amicum, with its large elongate end-lobes to the leaves. Photo: FJR

Working our way through the woodland at higher level we tried hard not to overlook the trees for the wood – the site has a very impressive array of native species, some of which eluded us, e.g., Wild Service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*), but we added others including English Elm (*Ulmus procera*) and Midland Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*), as well as some often under-recorded conifers such as Western Red-cedar (*Thuja plicata*) with its distinctive pineapple aroma. The *Crataegus* was also a new monad-and-tetrad record – only the second record for hectad ST21 and the first since 2000.



Midland Hawthorn (*Crataegus laevigata*) – just a single specimen was seen, it stood out as being particularly floriferous. Photo: FJR

It would have been easy to miss the Mistletoe (*Viscum album*), which one rarely sees in dense woodland canopies, although its host here, Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), frequently supports it in hedgerows.

Our descent through the wood was enlivened by Simon's attempts to persuade the sceptical that the sedge on the paths was Thin-spiked Wood-sedge (*Carex strigosa*) and not just Wood-sedge (*C. sylvatica*), or young Pendulous Sedge (*C. pendula*). He eventually wore us down, abetted by some more compellingly broad-leaved material. This too was a new monad record.

By our reckoning we saw just three England Red List NT species – Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) and Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), but the abundance of Sanicle, in particular, was worth noting. Several other 'nice' woodland plants were good to find, including Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*) and Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), although neither were new for the site. In total we recorded circa 195 taxa, of which about 20 were new to the relevant monad/tetrad, or new for the site.



Photo: FJR

It was a very enjoyable return to field botany as a social activity for most of us, but the merits of having smaller groupings for recording were noted. Our thanks to Simon for all of his efforts... if only he could have controlled the rain.