

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

**Sunday 19th September 2021 at
Combwich**

Leader: Graham Lavender

Report: Graham Lavender



Photo: Graham Lavender

September is one of the more reliable months for outdoor meetings and again the weather didn't fail us. Eight members met outside the pub at Combwich for the final planned meeting of the summer season of 2021. One of the advantages of a late meeting is the opportunity to closely examine the fruiting characteristics of taxa and, indeed, with a slow walk

up the bank of the River Parrett and a circle through the marshes, plenty of opportunities for discussion presented. One of the early interesting finds was when Steve started digging in the village cricket pitch which is immediately adjacent to the coastal path to show us the bulbs of Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*). Soon we were all doing it and it was clear that they were locally abundant in the very short turf. Cricket pitches, as such, are not a noted habitat for this Rare Plant Register plant but it may be worth digging a few more up to prove or disprove that! Less controversial but still challenging were the Oraches. With bracteoles fully developed it was the right time to puzzle over them. Spear-leaved Orache (*Atriplex prostrata*) was fairly easy to find, but a second taxa with very variable size of bracteoles was determined, after careful review, as the hybrid between Spear-Leaved and Long-Stalked Orache (*A. prostrata* x *A. longipes* = *A. x gustafssoniana*). Babington's Orache (*Atriplex glabriuscula*) managed to elude us despite careful searching and previous records at the site.



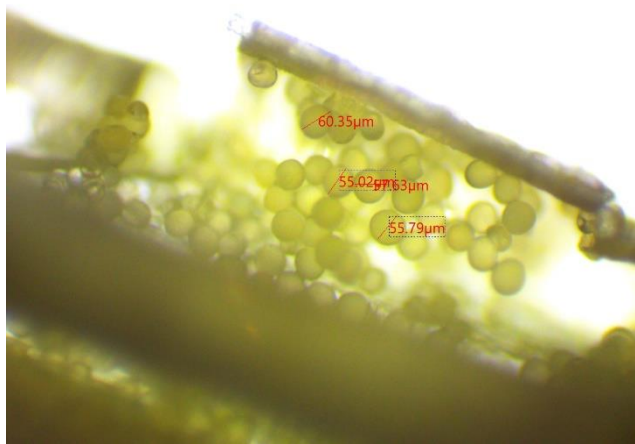
Atriplex x gustafssoniana bracteoles

Photo: Graham Lavender

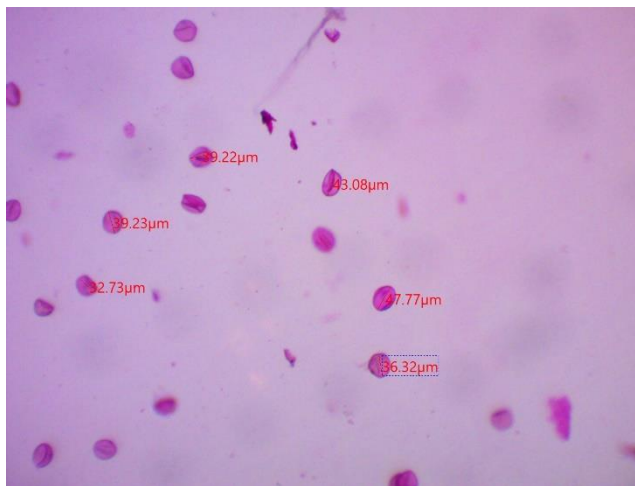
Next a close look at the Saltmarsh-grasses (*Puccinellia*). Most frequent was Common Saltmarsh-grass (*P. maritima*), but on the edge of the coastal path, we found a smaller, more delicate plant that was most likely to be Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass (*P. distans*) but stubbornly did not have the reflexed

lower branches. After a little searching, we did find some with reflexed branches, vouchers were taken, and all had lemmas of around 2mm, clearly separating them from the much larger lemmas on *P. maritima*.

Cord-grasses (*Spartina*) are represented in VC5 by records for both Common Cord-grass (*S. anglica*) and Townsend's Cord-grass, a hybrid with Smooth Cord-grass (*Spartina maritima x alterniflora = S. x townsendii*), the exact distribution of each is unclear. Vouchers from Comwich show normal pollen and are clearly within the size of *S. anglica*. A photo of *S. x townsendii* (from Porlock marshes) shows the much smaller irregular pollen for comparison.



Spartina anglica Photo: Graham Lavender



Spartina x townsendii Photo: Graham Lavender

Steve had arranged for us to enter the Steart marshes, so we left the coastal path for a diversion to the landward side of the sea wall. A herd of cows were doing a magnificent job controlling the vegetation and, as a result, providing ideal conditions for hybrid docks. Clustered Dock (*Rumex*

conglomeratus) and Broad-leaved Dock (*R. obtusifolius*) were present in the field and the slightly scruffy appearance of a hybrid beckoned. *Rumex x abortivus*, the hybrid between the two, was identified from its mix of features from both parents.

A few interesting grasses were noted both in the cow field and the edge of an adjacent arable field. Yellow Bristle-grass (*Setaria pumila*) was scattered, and a few specimens of Canary-grass (*Phalaris canariensis*) were seen.



Setaria pumila Photo: Graham Lavender

In all, three monads were recorded and updated. It is worth noting that the first monad, ST2542, although well recorded in the past, still had an increase in records from 232 to 255 showing that, with good sites, there is always more to find.

Thanks to all participants of the meeting for all contributions.