



Meeting Report

20th June 2021 Clean Moor (VC5)

Leader: Cath Mowat

Report: Cath Mowat

Bogs don't appear to attract many people, but Clean Moor had fans, and Linda, Graham, Helena, Mike, Christine, and I met up on the Sunday enthused for a day out – it was a novelty meeting each other, coming out as we were out of the rule-of-six lockdown. It was necessary to have a small group, however, as the site we were visiting was particularly fragile and vulnerable to footfall.

Clean Moor is a small site near Milverton, in effect a clearing in a wet woodland, kept open by the loyal Milverton Conservation Volunteers, without whom the site would be lost to alder trees and Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia purpurea*) as it is too wet to graze. The site is very special for its unusual hydrology. It is one of only two sites in Somerset where a mire is fed by lime-rich waters – usually mires are acid. The relatively high pH gives rise to a particular suite of higher plants and mosses, known in the UK's National Vegetation Classification system as M13 *Schoenus nigricans* – *Juncus subnodulosus* mire. True to the M13 NVC community, there was indeed lots of Black Bog-rush and Blunt-flowered Rush on the mire, but we saw a lot of other things besides.

The slightly drier parts of the mire comprise M24 *Molinia caerulea* – *Cirsium dissectum* fen, characterised by lots of Blunt-flowered Rush.



Hemp agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*) and Blunt-Flowered Rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*) are characteristic of the slightly drier, raised side of the mire. Photos by author except as noted



Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*)

We had barely stepped out of the trees and on to the mire when we noticed our first Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*), prominent (in an experienced botanist's eye that is – they were not yet in flower) by its grey colour, then another and another, and we soon discovered that they were scattered through the site, and difficult to avoid walking on.

Orchids were one of the themes for the day. Helena and Graham soon spotted a rare Narrow-Leaved Marsh Orchid and had a prolonged discussion in apparent Latin as to what its current name should be, settling on *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* subsp. *schoenophila*¹, given that they were growing with the Black Bog-rush (previously assigned to *D. traunsteinerioides*). After that we found patches of Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata* subsp. *ericetorum*) and a scattering of Southern Marsh-orchids (*D. praetermissa*), and then, overtopping these in size and splendour in its hybrid vigour, a single plant of *D. x grandis*, the hybrid of Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), also present on the site, and Southern Marsh-orchid.

Most plants on the mire were not as colourful as the orchids. Sedges and cotton-grasses are characteristic mire plants and didn't disappoint us. The bright green Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*), identified through the trigonous tips to its leaves, was frequent through the site, together with the slivery-leaved Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*) and lower numbers of Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*). Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) piggy-backed on tussocks of Purple Moor-grass to avoid the alkaline waters, and round the edges the sedges were more typical of the neighbouring woodland – Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*), Wood Sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) and Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*). The rarities comprised three strict calcicoles: a few plants of Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) and five flowering plants of Broad-leaved Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum latifolium*). Also, where water seeped out of the ground onto the site, we found a single tuft of Few-flowered Spike-rush (*Eleocharis quinqueflora*).



Hybrid vigour showing in this *Dactylorhiza x grandis*



Fragrant orchid (*Gymnadenia densiflora*) with Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) behind Photo H. Crouch

¹ See bit.ly/3b51Lag for some useful background. The article cited, by Bateman and Denholm, is available to BSBI members via the BSBI website.



Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) on the site, taken the previous month



The bright green leaves and long down-turned bracts of the Long-stalked Yellow-sedge (*Carex lepidocarpa*) are just visible among the leaves of Purple Moor-grass and Carnation Sedge

There was beauty in detail. Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*) had been in flower the previous month, but its small, bright green, heart-shaped leaves were visible everywhere, together with patches of the silvery spiky leaves of Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*). Looking carefully among Purple Moor-grass hummocks near the spring, perched above and away from the lime-rich water that would harm them, were the tiny, bright red leaves of Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*).

After spending several hours admiring the variety and interest in such a small site, we left feeling blessed knowing that there are such secret and wonderful places in our county.



The spring as it appeared in May 2021 (apologies for the not-level photo!) The stonewort *Chara vulgaris* encrusted with lime, was in the water, together with other algae.