

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Sunday 31st October 2021, Taunton (VC5)

Leader & Report: Simon Leach

This was, in essence, a re-run of a late-October field meeting held in 2018. The aim, as last time, was to see how many wild plants we could find still flowering in a single day during the last week of October. In the interests of science, our route would be more or less the same as in 2018, starting at Silk Mills Park and Ride and heading into town across Longrun Meadow, through Goodlands gardens and along the river and canal to Firepool/Obridge, then up onto Trenchard Way and back via Chip Lane, Staplegrove Road and the path out to Roughmoor that runs along beside Turner's Allotments and Frieze Hill community orchard.

Our party was a depleted one. At least three late cancellations, one due to Covid, meant there were just four of us, three of whom had also been present the last time we did this walk. The day went much as planned, the weather was blustery with the odd shower but was otherwise sunny; and it felt at times like we were watching a blockbuster movie that some of us had seen three years earlier. We even found we knew a few of the lines, with new finds coming to mind shortly before we found them!

Like last time, we lingered for at least an hour in the car park—you wouldn't expect anything less, would you?—and there were rich pickings to be had, including Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*), Wall Bedstraw (*Galium parisiense*), Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium pusillum*) and Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*)—the last of these in exactly the same spot where Graham found it in 2018.

A strip of former arable to the north of Roughmoor pond produced Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) and Thyme-leaved Speedwell (*Veronica serpyllifolia*). There was also much still-flowering Prickly Ox-tongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), plus both Creeping (*Cirsium arvense*) and Spear Thistles (*C. vulgare*). In rough grassland around the pond

there was Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), and the dregs of some just-about-still-flowering Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*).

Into Longrun Meadow, and we made a beeline for Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*) which was flowering well and seems to be increasing in the westernmost flood-retention basin — an unlikely habitat for it. There was also some flowering Lady's-bedstraw (*Galium verum*) and, on the bank along the southern boundary of the basin we noted several patches of Grass-leaved Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) still with one or two flowers showing.

The rest of Longrun didn't produce a great deal, although we were impressed by the abundance of flower-heads on both Red and White Clovers (*Trifolium pratense* and *T. repens*), plus we found a few plants of still-flowering Lesser Trefoil (*T. dubium*).

We spotted Russian-vine (*Fallopia baldschuanica*), Traveller's-joy (*Clematis vitalba*) and Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) on our way out of Longrun, before making good use of Tesco's 'facilities', before heading across to French Weir Park where we were bemused by a not-quite-flowering broad-leaved grass. We posted it on WhatsApp while we stopped for a bite of lunch, and the consensus seemed to be that it was some kind of *Sorghum* — 'first', apparently, for hectad ST22 whichever species it turned out to be.

At Goodlands Gardens, as last time, we spotted White Melilot (*Melilotus albus*) and Henbit Dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*), while Balkan Spurge (*Euphorbia oblongata*) was still to be seen on waste ground by the canal close to the new Covid vaccination centre at Firepool Weir.

Trenchard Way, in the vicinity of the railway station, had been subject to some 'tidying up' of its verges since 2018, and the new multi-storey car park has resulted in the destruction of one particularly species-rich grassy bank. Even so, there were plenty

of plants to be had here, including Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*), Hoary Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), more Small-flowered Crane's-bill, and a few high-and-dry plants of Water Chickweed (*Stellaria aquatica*, but still known to most of us as *Myosoton*).

On verges around the Chip Lane/Staplegrove roundabout we searched unsuccessfully for Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*), which actually hasn't been seen since it was discovered here during our equivalent meeting in 2018. But on the roundabout itself we saw flowering Viper's-bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) which is seemingly a new record for the monad/tetrad. From there, the path back to the Park and Ride was uneventful, apart from some well-naturalised Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) close to what used to be Old Harry's reclamation yard.

We had fewer pairs of eyes this time, but still managed a creditable 134 species in flower during the day. Add in a few extras found after the meeting had officially closed—like the Adria Bellflower (*Campanula portenschlagiana*), Trailing bellflower (*C. poscharskyana*) and Fool's-parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*) lighting up the pavements and walls in my street—and the grand total of 141 compared favourably with the 158 seen in 2018. Once again, the urban heat bubble, an Indian summer and a complete lack of October frosts had combined to guarantee us another good haul.