

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Saturday 23rd April 2022, Beginners and Improvers Course, Avalon Marshes

Leader: Steve Parker

Report: Chris Lampshire

It was a grey Saturday morning as I left to for the course, and I felt a twinge of trepidation. Would I be able to identify anything? Would anybody laugh or tut or roll their eyes? Even though I'd had some prior experience, the past two years had restricted movement and time spent outdoors. I felt rusty and second guessing myself trying to identify plants on my own.

I needn't have worried as I pulled up at Avalon Marshes new facilities and met my fellow beginners. We were a mixed bunch of people with varying backgrounds and experience, and we all felt the same. Our tutor for the day, Steve Parker, was very knowledgeable and understanding and he was able to quickly find a level for the group. We were soon passing around specimens of common plants such as Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), Changing Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*) with a bit of Thale Cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*) thrown in for good measure. Everybody was soon delving into Francis Rose's "The Wild Flower Key", getting to grips with the terms, and finding the features using jeweller's loupes. The more experienced members helped the absolute beginners and Cath Mowat from Natural England's field unit was also on hand to help and pass on her knowledge.



After lunch the sun had come out on the Somerset Levels and Steve led us on a walk out on the Shapwick Heath Natural Nature Reserve and shared some of his 30 years of knowledge of the plants, the creatures, and the history of this amazing place. Everybody was feeling a little more confident after the morning session and the "hive brain" motivated people to identify the plants we saw as we walked along.

The sun was still shining when we returned to Avalon Marshes and everybody was keen to do more and attend further SRPG meetings, so I hope to see of a few of you over the summer.



At Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve, enjoying the sun and learning the diverse species. Photos © Steve Parker