

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

**Sunday 3rd July 2022 at Simonsbath
(plus additional days 1st and 2nd July)**

Leader: Graham Lavender

Report: Graham Lavender

The SRPG programme listed an Exmoor meeting on the Sunday but given the distance, some of the participants elected to arrive on the Friday and stay in Simonsbath for a couple of nights. Gill Read, Helena Crouch and Fred Rumsey joined me on the Friday at Kitnor Heath to search the old site for Stag's-horn Clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum*), look for Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) at a location first recorded by Captain Roe some forty years ago, and also descend into the Quarme valley and see how the Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*) was doing.

Not the best of starts, the *Lycopodium clavatum* could not be found and given the repeated searches of the site it is at present presumed to be extinct on Kitnor Heath.

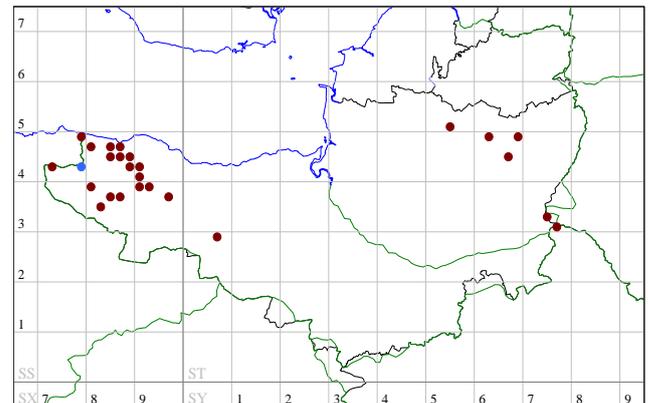


Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) © Fred Rumsey

We had more luck with Cranberry (*V. oxycoccos*), doing well in a slightly sunken boggy area on mounds of sphagnum. It was also delightful to re-find Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*) which is possibly declining on Exmoor.

The other highlight was Narrow Scaly Male-fern (*Dryopteris cambrensis*) which is probably very much under-recorded on Exmoor. The Atlas Flora of Somerset (AFS)¹ has no records for *Dryopteris cambrensis*; the species only being sorted out in the publication on the *Dryopteris affinis* complex by Ken Trewren² in 2014. That may be an oversimplification as many others have contributed to our current knowledge of the *D. affinis* complex, but for me Ken Trewren's work is the clearest guide that has yet been published on this difficult genus. Prior to this, much recording was simply as *D affinis* agg.

Dryopteris cambrensis (Scaly Male-fern)



The distribution Map for *Dryopteris cambrensis* (red post-2000, blue pre-2000) shows the limited recording for the taxon particularly in the south and west of Exmoor.

In the first monad at Kitnor Heath we not only updated old records but added another 41 species to the monad total, a fantastic achievement for a monad that had received considerable attention in the past.

Onwards to the River Quarme and the site of the Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*) which was first recorded by Ian Green in 1994. The site is perhaps a little more overgrown with willows than when I have visited it in the past making determination of numbers difficult, but we recorded 400+ plants and would suggest that numbers, if anything, have increased slightly.



Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*) © Fred Rumsey

On day two we planned a trip to Pinkery Activity Centre to park the cars and walk up to Pinkery pond then onward to Ruckham Combe. The first target was Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) recorded just south and north of Pinkery Farm as it was then, before changing to today's activity centre. Ian Green was again the recorder back in 1994 and his records were sufficiently detailed that we were fairly certain we were able cover the exact locations he had found Moonwort (*Botrychium*), yet our searches yielded nothing. This is disappointing as currently we have only one extant site for Moonwort (*Botrychium*) in VC5 although in fairness it's probable that not all old sites have been surveyed. Continuing on to Pinkery Pond, recording all the way we were very pleased to find Stag's-horn Clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum*) another declining species in VC5 and with the added bonus of strobili present as can be seen from the photograph.



Stag's-horn Clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum*)
© Graham Lavender

Noting how hard the fern is to spot without the strobili (the creeping rhizomes can only just be seen in the picture) it is almost certainly worth checking some of the old "lost" sites again.



Stag's-horn Clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum*)
© Graham Lavender

It is much easier to spot the *Lycopodium* over a barer patch of ground in the second photograph.

At this point, just being on the Rare Plant Register (RPR) for Somerset does not get you a mention; there are so many RPR taxa at Pinkery Pond so here are just a few photographs of the *crème de la crème*.

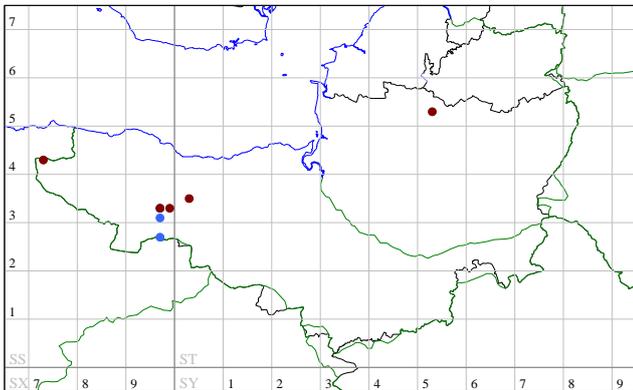


Blunt-fruited Water-starwort (*Callitriche brutia* ssp. *brutia*) © Fred Rumsey

In third place I have chosen this picture of *Callitriche brutia* ssp. *brutia* as a highlight from the pond itself. Selected due to the quality of the picture by Fred, but also due to the rarity of the taxon as can be seen from the distribution map in Somerset.

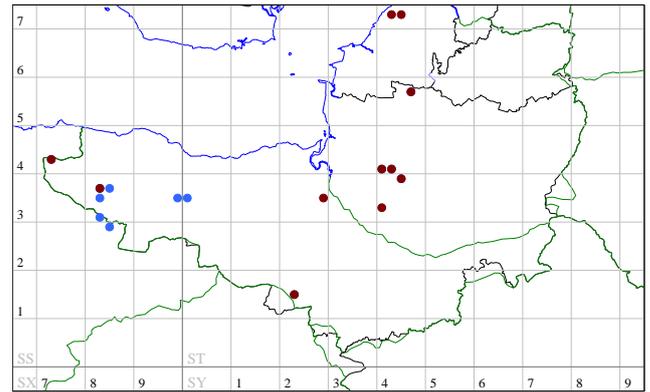
Interesting to note the blue dots from pre-2000 records and wonder if in fact the sites have been checked post-2000?

Callitriche brutia subsp. *brutia* (Pedunculate Water-starwort)



In second place I have chosen Floating Club-rush (*Eleogiton fluitans*) again the quality of the photograph weighed heavily on the choice but also it's worth noting that it might be under-recorded and worth visiting some of the old "blue-pre-2000" sites in VC5.

Eleogiton fluitans (Floating Club-rush)



Floating Club-rush (*Eleogiton fluitans*) © Fred Rumsey

If anyone is without database access and wants coordinates of these or indeed any other records to target, please contact Steve Parker, Simon Leach, or me for VC5.

First prize from Pinkery Pond, at least in my book, goes to Least Bur-reed (*Sparganium natans*) at its only extant site in Somerset. The history of this plant at Pinkery is possibly incomplete. Pinkery Pond was built around 1830 and it does not appear as a record for Pinkery in Murray's Flora of Somerset³ published in 1896 except for a few records on the peat moors. A similar picture is painted by Captain Roe in The Flora of Somerset⁴ 1981. MapMate has an anonymous record in 1985 for *Sparganium natans* at Pinkery Pond so my brief search has not identified the first recorder.



Least Bur-reed (*Sparganium natans*) © Fred Rumsey

Yet again, thanks to Fred for this wonderful photograph and if you are wondering why nearly all the photos are by Fred, well he was the one who went waist-deep into the pond to take them so apart from excellent photos it was felt he deserved recognition for going the extra mile. It was nearly the end of the second day, but Helena and Fred decided to make the supreme effort of enduring further uphill travel through waist-high *Molinia* to reach Ruckham Combe while Gill and I called time. Helena and Fred were rewarded with Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) at its old site in Ruckham, but I am told in much reduced numbers. Indeed, currently I believe of the four extant sites in VC5 two only have a single spike, this being one of them.



Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) © Fred Rumsey

The official SRPG meeting finally arrived on the Sunday with arrival of Steve Parker and Maria Slade for a day's recording at Simonsbath. Meeting at Ashcombe Car Park the six of us decided to record the two monads upstream of Simonsbath. Before we set off there was time to enjoy the Brittle Bladder

Fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) on the wall adjacent to the men's loos.



Brittle Bladder Fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) © Graham Lavender

Ian Green recorded it here in 1995 but I'm not sure if that was the first record, but very pleasing to find it still in evidence.

Across the river and upstream are some very species-rich boggy areas particularly rich in sedges. Totting up figures we increased the records for the first monad, which includes Simonsbath, to a phenomenal 294 taxa and the second monad from 140 records to 203.

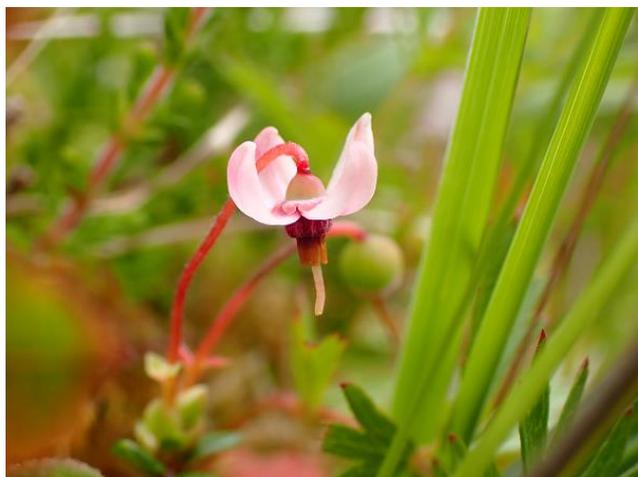
For the grand finale of the meeting, we had a peek in a third monad upstream which has recently been found to have *Huperzia* in it as a result of a search of old Exmoor National Park records.



Huperzia selago © Fred Rumsey

I know that I have already included a picture of *Huperzia* at Ruckham, but you really cannot have too many pictures of *Huperzia*!

The final find of the day just down the flush with the *Huperzia* was a new site for Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*). Given the increased altitude from the find on Kitnor Heath it was not surprising to find it still in flower justifying another photograph.



Vaccinium oxycoccos © Fred Rumsey

Just one more photograph, simply cannot resist the photograph Fred took of the hybrid between Southern Marsh-orchid and Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza x hallii*).



Dactylorhiza x hallii © Fred Rumsey.

My final act is to thanks Gill, Maria, Helena, Fred, and Steve for the most wonderful of meetings and

note that in total we made 842 records of which a very good percentage were on the rare plant register.

1. The Atlas Flora of Somerset (Paul Green, Ian P. Green, and Geraldine A. Crouch 1997)
2. Some Taxa within the *Dryopteris affinis* Complex (Ken Trewren 2014)
3. Flora of Somerset (R.P. Murray 1896)
4. The Flora of Somerset (Capt. R. G. B. Roe 1981)