

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Saturday 18th June 2022, Backwell (VC6)

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Ellen McDouall

Report: Helena Crouch

Nine members met by the church in Backwell to explore two nature reserves owned and managed by the Backwell Environmental Trust, on either side of Cheston Combe. We ascended the hill to Jubilee Stone Wood, where we were welcomed by two BET volunteers, who kindly suggested our best route. A series of glades are maintained as species-rich grassland. We soon found Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), all species typical of calcareous grassland. We also saw a Slow-worm. The Coupe Meadow, by contrast, is an area of limestone heath. Here we were pleased to find both Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), Pill Sedge (*Carex pilulifera*), and Flea Sedge (*C. pulicaris*). At the edge of the grassland, we counted ten plants of Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*).



Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) Photo © Helena Crouch

After lunch on a log, we finally found the Jubilee Stone, a monument erected to celebrate the

Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. Nearby, we visited the remains of the warrener's cottage, which have been excavated by the BET. Several ferns were recorded here: Wall-rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), Maidenhair Spleenwort (*A. trichomanes*) and Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*).

Emerging onto the road, we followed this down the combe and crossed to Badgers Wood, our numbers diminishing to six. Viper's-bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) was noted by two who left early. We explored more species-rich grassland above the disused quarry, accompanied by Marbled Whites.



Marbled White on Common Spotted Orchid Photo © Helena Crouch

Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*) and Common Eyebright (*Euphrasia nemorosa*) were found here, and a small patch of Smooth Tare (*Ervum tetraspermum*), and Quaking-grass (*Briza media*).

Returning to the main path, a signposted "Fern Way" was irresistible! It was indeed pteridophytic, with splendid Soft Shield-ferns (*Polystichum setiferum*) and a few Hard Shield-ferns (*P. aculeatum*), allowing comparison of these two species. One plant proved puzzling, not quite right for either and thus a good candidate for the hybrid. A frond was collected, and our tentative identification was later confirmed by Fred Rumsey as *Polystichum x bicknellii*.

Almost more exciting than the ferns, was the remarkable area of limestone pavement. This was

discovered in 2018 and a large expanse has been exposed by the BET volunteers as a feature of interest for visitors.



Limestone pavement in Badgers Wood Photo © Helena Crouch

As we reached the lower end of the wood, the threatened rain arrived, and we returned swiftly to the church. It had been an interesting day, exploring these two varied and well managed nature reserves.