

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Sunday 29th May , Langford Heathfield (VC5)

Leaders: Linda Everton & Christine Loudon

Report: Christine Loudon

Langford Heathfield is about 80 hectares, one of the Somerset Wildlife Trust's largest reserves. It covers parts of three monads and is mostly woodland, of which significant parts are designated Ancient Woodland. There are also large lowland heath areas, grazed by ponies.

The members who attended the meeting were a good SRPG mix of experts, beginners, and everything in

between. We decided to divide into two mixed recording groups to visit the small clearings and boardwalks that make up the southern part of the reserve. Are you surprised that this took longer than expected? We noted Zigzag Clover (*Trifolium medium*), lots of Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) in open areas with Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsia*) and Common Twayblade (*Neottia ovata*) among the rich flora. Lemon-scented Fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*) was also recorded beside one of the boardwalks through the woodland, which was a new hectad record.

In the largest area of grazed heathland one group stayed to look at unusual heathland species while others went to visit the Ancient Woodland, which had been their recent focus. Though it was late in the year for some typical AW species, they found a lot of Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*) and Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*).

The heathland group had some difficulty with a few orchids which seemed unlike the many Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) which were present. Discussion ended with records of the hybrid between the two spotted orchids (*D. x transiens*), and also the Southern Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*). Other species seen in this area were Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*) and Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*).



Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*) Photo © Christine Loudon



Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*) Photo © Christine Loudon

This grazed heathland is an unusual Somerset habitat and contains species which contribute to Langford Heathfield's SSSI status. One is Petty Whin (*Genista anglica*) which was readily spotted in flower in the grazed compartment north of Carrier's Lane, but not the one to the south where it had been seen some years ago. Later, twenty-one clumps were counted in the central damp part of this northerly compartment, so it is doing well.



Petty Whin (*Genista anglica*) Photo © Christine Loudon

The other important species is the Pale Dog-Violet (*Viola lactea*) This is a great success story. This may well be the only Somerset site for this species now. (Thanks to Graham Lavender for this idea). The species was found, as was its hybrid with the

Common Dog-Violet (*Viola riviniana*) which grows plentifully here. Both species and their hybrids were identified on both sides of Carrier's Lane, one in a grazed area and one in an area which cannot be grazed at the moment, but which gets an autumn cut.

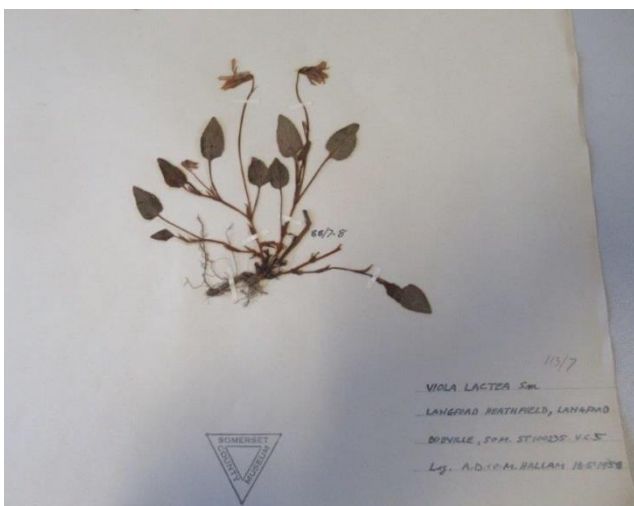
It's great to think that one may be the ancestor of the other, though they weren't found at exactly the same grid ref. A challenge for next year - go back and find one at exactly the same GR as the herbarium specimen!



Pale Dog-violet (*Viola lactea*) Photo © Simon Leach



Pale Dog-violet hybrid with Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana x lactea*). Photo © Fred Rumsey



Viola lactea collected at Langford Heathfield in 1958, Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton. Photo © Graham Lavender

By this time lunch had been taken and the groups reunited, so that everyone got a chance to see the two species of violets and potential hybrids. There were also many other heathland species to catch up on such as the spires of Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) and also Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*) and Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*).

The large number of records in three monads were only part of what made a successful day. The rain held off until some people were starting for home, so those who were keenest got wettest, but hopefully they felt it was all worth it.