

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Ditch-dabbling on Clevedon Moor Photo © Helena Crouch

Saturday 17th September 2022, Clevedon Moor (VC6)

Leaders: Dee Holladay & Pam Millman

Report: Dee Holladay & Helena Crouch

On a sunny September morning, thirteen botanists gathered at Clevedon Craft Centre to investigate the rhynes of Clevedon Moor. We set out along Cook's Lane, a quiet road bordered by our first rhyne of the day. David was immediately in action with his boathook, fishing out Nuttall's Waterweed (*Elodea nuttallii*), Greater Duckweed (*Spirodela polyrhiza*) and some spectacularly swollen Fat Duckweed (*Lemna gibba*), accompanied by the invasive Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*), complete with an Azolla Weevil (*Stenopelmus rufinasus*)! Like its host plant, this weevil is a native of North America.

At the edges of the rhyne, we recorded Fool's-water-cress (*Helosciadium nodiflorum*), later comparing this with Lesser Water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*), with its distinctive ring on the petiole; we also found Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and Marsh

Horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*) and a single flowering plant of Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*), new to the monad. On the bank, several plants of Common Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) had creamy white flowers which, when measured, were found to be consistently shorter than 16mm and thus keyed out as *Symphytum officinale* subsp. *bohemicum*, a taxon only recently recorded in Somerset.



Symphytum officinale subsp. *bohemicum* Photo © Helena Crouch

In a gateway beside Cook's Lane, we were delighted to find a few plants of Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*).



Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*) Photo © Fred Rumsey

Crossing this minor rhyne, we headed south alongside a larger drain (The Yearling Ditch) which links the Land Yeo to the Blind Yeo, ultimately emptying into the Severn Estuary at Clevedon Pill. Despite the fact that dredging had taken place around three weeks previously, lifting out large amounts of vegetation (and snails), we could immediately see Fringed Water-lily (*Nymphoides peltata*) and Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) on the surface.



Fringed Water-lily in the Yearling Ditch Photo © Kurt Vickery

The bank profile of the Yearling Ditch, with several good "drinkers", allowed access to the water's edge in many places. With our various grapnels and hook it was possible to sample the submerged vegetation. Disappointingly, this was mostly Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) or Nuttall's Waterweed, with occasional fruitless Water Starwort (*Callitriche* sp.), although we were pleased to find a patch of

Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*) and examined its flexible hinged petiole.



Pam and others investigating a tray of aquatics Photo © Helena Crouch

Bryologists, David and Fred, showed us the tangled masses of Floating Crystalwort (*Riccia fluitans*), a strange skeletal liverwort found in slow-moving ditches and ponds.

Marginal species included Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Reed Sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*), and Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), with its distinctive fruits. We also saw Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*).



Branched Bur-reed Photo © Kurt Vickery

There was much excitement at seeing a few plants of Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*). We examined long linear floating leaves of this species, and of Unbranched Bur-reed (*Sparganium emersum*), which had been seen here in flower a few weeks previously.

After a sunny lunch taken on a raised bank with a good view of the drain and a Kestrel flying above the field opposite, we retraced our steps and explored the northern part of the square. We recorded Many-seeded Goosefoot (*Lipandra polysperma*) and Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*) at the edge of a maize field.

Crossing the Yearling Ditch (noting roach swimming by the sluice gate), we were delighted to find a veritable forest of Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*) in the Middle Yeo. This rhyne had not been dredged. More action with Boathook and grapnels ensued, yielding two further species of *Potamogeton*: Fennel Pondweed (*P. pectinatus*), with leaf sheaths which open when pulled, and Hairlike Pondweed (*P. trichoides*) with a prominent midrib occupying up to 70% of the width of the leaf. Fringed Water-lily was flowering in this ditch.



Fringed Water-lily (*Nymphoides peltata*) Photo © Helena Crouch

We also saw Water Plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) and David fished out Common Stonewort (*Chara vulgaris*). We were distracted by Sticklebacks and a Whirlygig Gig – a host of shiny little beetles gyrating on the water surface. Meanwhile we were being observed by a herd of young steers, gathered

as close to us as they could be, mercifully on the other side of the rhyne! A deer was also spotted, sprinting across a distant field. We also found huge balls of Floating Crystalwort in this ditch.



Floating Crystalwort (*Riccia fluitans*) Photo © Fred Rumsey

In the field edges, we recorded Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*) and Upright Hedge-parsley (*Torilis japonica*), but the dominant plant was Stone Parsley (*Sison amomum*) which formed a red haze right along the edge of the hayfield.



Stone Parsley (*Sison amomum*) glowing red along the edge of a field on Clevedon Moor Photo © Margaret Webster

The stalwarts carried on along the rhyne and across more hayfields to the eastern edge of the square and then retraced their steps to the café at Clevedon Craft Centre for a convivial cup of tea and delicious cakes!