

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report

**Saturday 26th June 2022, Searching for Large Thyme (VC5)**

**Leaders Steve Parker**

**Report: Steve Parker**

Large Thyme (*Thymus pulegioides*) is a relatively uncommon species in Somerset. There have been very few records of this plant in VC5 since 2000. The aim of this meeting was to search for a tetrad where the plant had last been reported in the *Atlas Flora of Somerset*.



Searching for Large Thyme. Photo © Steve Parker

Six members of the group met up at Ham Hill Country Park, our aim was to search suitable habitat in the tetrad. Looking at aerial photographs and the Ordnance Survey map, it appeared that there were only a few locations where the Large Thyme may grow. From the County Park we walked to the first likely area just to the east of Ham Hill fort. Although the geology would have supported nice species-rich, calcareous grassland, the grassland sward was rather species-poor with only small areas supporting

interesting grassland. Moving on to a second location the habitat was similarly species-poor. Sadly, we did not find Large Thyme at either location.

After lunch it was decided to return to the Country Park and record in the quarry and the ramparts of the hill fort. Here the flora is very species-rich. Bee orchids (*Ophrys apifera*) were scattered through areas of disturbed ground, while on the sloping banks within the quarry Rough Clover (*Trifolium scabrum*) was found, this was the first record for this plant since the *Atlas Flora of Somerset*. This small clover is relatively common on the Somerset coast but only occurs at a few locations inland.

Ham Hill is still an active quarry and is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its nationally important geology. In some places the vegetation appeared to have been sprayed with herbicide, presumably this was in preparation for quarry of the Ham Stone. Nonetheless, other parts of the site do support a rich calcareous flora including Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*) and Small Scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*). This rich flora supports a good butterfly population and we saw many Marbled White butterflies feeding on the flowers.



Examining the flora of Ham Hill. Photo © Steve Parker

Making our way back to the cars a large patch of Fragrant Agrimony (*Agrimonia procera*) was seen on the edge of the quarry.



Fragrant Agrimony. Photo © Steve Parker

Despite not finding Large Thyme, this was a good meeting that updated many old records from Ham Hill and was enjoyed by all.

However, there is a postscript to the meeting report. A few days later Fred Rumsey emailed me to say that he had photographed a very tall thistle. The photograph had been sent to Dr Kevin Walker Head of Science at BSBI and Kevin agreed with Fred that the thistle was the hybrid between *Carduus crispus* and *Carduus*

*crispus Carduus x stangii*. A rare hybrid in Somerset and the first record in VC5 since 1969.



*Carduus x stangii*. Photo © Fred Rumsey