

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report



The parched grasslands of Middle Hope SSSI Photo © Karen Andrews

**Saturday 6th August 2022, Middle Hope (VC6)**

**Leaders: Adrian Woodhall & Helena Crouch**

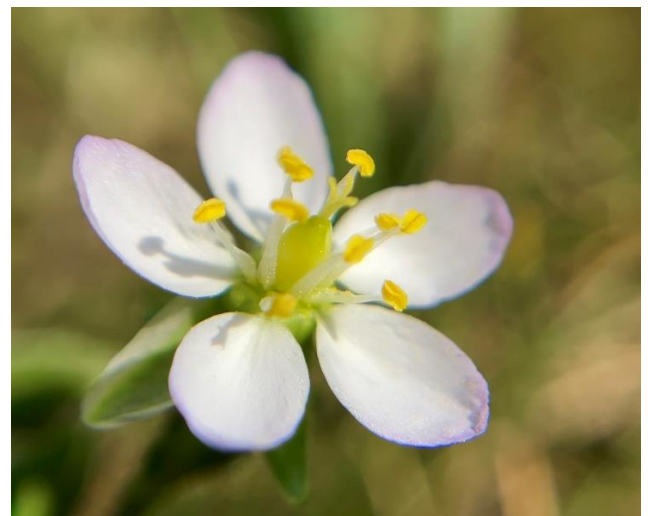
**Report: Helena Crouch**

On a scorching hot day, a large group of seventeen members assembled at Hucker's Bow car park for a day at the seaside. We began with an introduction to saltmarsh plants, beside the estuary of the River Banwell. The glorious carpets of Common Sea-lavender (*Limonium vulgare*) were past their best, but a few plants were still in flower, delighting botanists and attracting a Brown Argus butterfly.



Brown Argus on Common Sea-lavender Photo © Karen Andrews

An exciting discovery was a single clump of Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*) on the path edge, new to the monad. This species is included in the Somerset Rare Plant Register because it is rare in VC5; it is not scarce in VC6 and has been spreading recently at Sand Bay. Other species on the saltmarsh included Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*), Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritima*), Sea Aster (*Tripolium pannonicum*), Sea-milkwort (*Lysimachia maritima*), Greater Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media*) and Purple Glasswort (*Salicornia ramosissima*).



Greater Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media*) Photo © Sam Braine

Leaving the saltmarsh (much of which is now fenced off and not accessible), we ascended the hill to explore the parched grassland. Clutching at straws (literally!) we managed to find Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*) and Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), and shrivelled patches of Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and Wild Thyme (*Thymus drucei*).

We had lunch in the shade of some trees, overlooking the Severn Estuary, beside plants of Slender Thistle (*Carduus tenuiflorus*). It became a Working Lunch, as we compared specimens of Slender Thistle and Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*).



Slender Thistle (Left) with dense clusters of narrow capitula with relatively few long-pointed, outwardly-curved involucre bracts; and Creeping Thistle (Right) with fewer, more ovoid capitula with numerous appressed involucre bracts with small spreading spiny tips Photo © Sam Braine

After lunch, we headed west along Middle Hope, finding Spear Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) and Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*).



Spear Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) Photo © John Roberts

We explored various rock outcrops, recording the crisped remains of Rough Clover (*Trifolium scabrum*), Sea Fern-grass (*Catapodium marinum*), Silver Hair-grass (*Aira caryophylla*), and tiny plants of Western Eyebright (*Euphrasia tetraquetra*).



SRPG members exploring rock outcrops Photo © Karen Andrews

We were relieved to find one of our target plants of the day, Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*), still thriving despite the severe desiccation. First recorded here in 2013, it is not known whether this was a deliberate introduction or a self-sown arrival, spread from the long-established introduction on Sand Point: the former seems more likely.



Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*) Photo © Helena Crouch

Our next target was Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), known in the Kewstoke area since 1856, and on a particular bank at Middle Hope for many years. We were pleased to find 58 plants, some diminutive and most in fruit, but one with a single flower. Henbane is Vulnerable on the GB and England Red Lists and is Scarce in both VC5 and VC6.



Flower of Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*) Photo © Fred Rumsey

Nearby we saw further swathes of Slender Thistle. During the day we had a veritable Thistle Fest, also finding Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), Spear Thistle (*C. vulgare*), Stemless Thistle (*C. acaule*), Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*) and Carlina Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*).

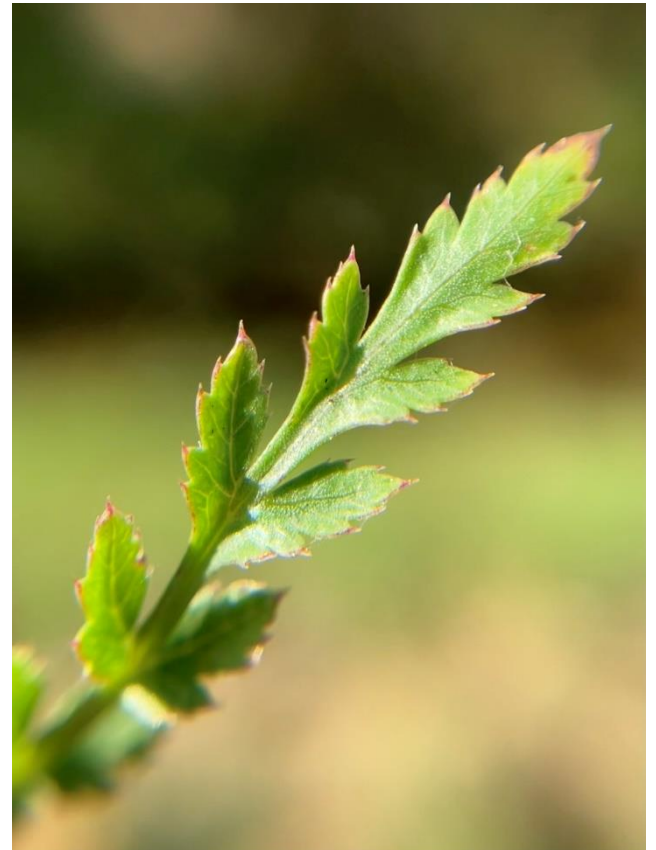


Carlina Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*) Photo @ Fred Rumsey

For a final mission, we headed west along Middle Hope in search of Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes*

*spiralis*): we were rewarded with a single plant in bud, and turned back.

Returning to the car park, we crossed the sluice at the end of the Sand Rhyne and spotted a Club-rush in the ditch. Fred adventurously descended the steep bank to grab a specimen, and made two more good records on the way: Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*) and Corn Parsley (*Sison segetum*). The collected nutlets were duly sliced later and confirmed as Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*).



Leaf of Corn Parsley with forward-curving (antrorse) cartilaginous points  
Photo © Sam Braine

Despite the searing heat, which had reduced many plants (and botanists) to withering scraps, it was a most enjoyable and productive day. We recorded 149 species in our main monad and updated records for several Rare Plant Register species.