

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Salford Weir Photo © Karen Andrews

Sunday 1st October 2022, Salford Meeting (VC6)

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Fred Rumsey

Report: Fred Rumsey & Helena Crouch

Despite the forecast for heavy rain, we were blessed with a fine day for our penultimate meeting of the year. Parking proved stressful as the planned parking areas were already filled by water sports enthusiasts. Following dispersal to far-flung roads in the village, the group of nine finally convened. The focus for the day was riverside plants, updating records for several Rare Plant Register (RPR) species. Our route would take us through three monads, heading east along the southern bank of the Avon, but we initially made a short diversion west to some dense nettle patches by the river, to see a speciality of the River Avon, the Nationally Scarce Greater Dodder (*Cuscuta europaea*). The colourful threads of this rootless parasitic plant, with their bobbles of pale-pink flowers, were eventually located, twining untidily over their nettle hosts and other vegetation. This was the only Greater Dodder we saw all day.



Greater Dodder (*Cuscuta europaea*) Photo © Fred Rumsey

Initially progress was slow as we recorded along the riverside, on verges and in gutters of the road. A quick fish in the river across the road from the car park yielded Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and a few metres further along we found our second promised target of the day, Small Teasel (*Dipsacus pilosus*). We discussed the identity of

various planted trees, including an alien Whitebeam: Tim Rich later suggested (from photos) that this could be *Sorbus austriaca*, now increasingly planted as an amenity tree. The edges of the road yielded a plethora of garden escapees, including Atlas Poppy (*Papaver atlanticum*) and a splendid plant of Purple Viper's-bugloss (*Echium plantagineum*), both new to the hectad. Long known as an arable weed in the far Southwest, this species is now turning up increasingly as a casual adventive as it is often included in "wildflower" seed mixes.



Purple Viper's-bugloss (*Echium plantagineum*) Photo © Fred Rumsey

The footpath back to the riverside afforded us a view of the private moorings of Mill Island, where we spotted one of the day's most exciting finds, the huge leaves of Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*). Although recorded recently at several points along the Kennet & Avon Canal in Bath, this species had not been recorded from the River Avon itself since 1998, when it was also seen near Saltford. Beside the weir there were impressive stands of Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*). Yellow Water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*) grew in the river, which otherwise appeared to be disappointingly free of vegetation, perhaps due to the amount of river traffic.

Crossing the entrance to the marina via a footbridge, we entered our third monad as we reached the Saltford Rowing Centre: the starving leader cheekily negotiated the use of their bench for a lunch stop!

The river edge here is flanked by several long floating pontoons, giving easy access to the river. Refreshed, we explored, finding more Spiked Water-milfoil, Ivy-leaved Duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*) and most excitingly, a small patch of Loddon Pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*) in flower.



Steve and Sam studying Loddon Pondweed Photo © Karen Andrews

This Nationally Rare and Vulnerable species has been known from the River Avon at Saltford since 1916 but was a "new" species for several members.



Loddon Pondweed (*Potamogeton nodosus*) showing the distinctive venation of submerged leaves Photo © Fred Rumsey

Between a boat and a wooden mooring, were the distinctive emergent leaves of the Narrow-leaved Water-plantain (*Alisma lanceolatum*), its identification confirmed by close examination of its achenes. On the decaying wood of the moorings was a single plant of Orange Balsam (*Impatiens capensis*) and two plants of Beggarticks (*Bidens frondosa*), an alien which closely resembles the native Trifid Bur-marigold (*B. tripartita*). The diagnostic character separating these two species is the direction of hairs on the achenes: both have backward-pointing barbs on the apical bristles, but hairs on the edges of the achenes are forward-pointing in *B. frondosa* and backward-pointing in *B. tripartita*. This was only the second record for *B. frondosa* beside the River Avon

in Somerset, although it has also been found recently by the Kennet & Avon Canal in Bath.



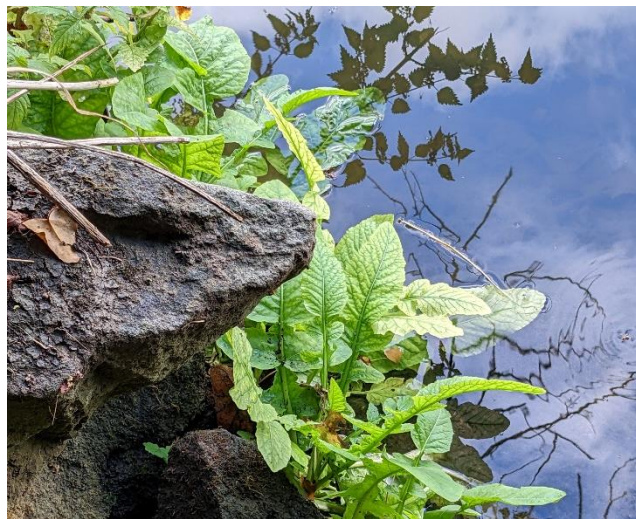
Detail of Beggarticks seed with bristles backward-pointing on the barb and forward-pointing on the body of the achene Photo © Sam Braine

On the riverbank beside the pontoons, we puzzled over a majestic, somewhat fastigiata Poplar. Its leaf petioles were heavily galled by the aphid *Pemphigus spyrothecae*, on the basis of which it had previously been recorded as a “native” Black Poplar (*Populus nigra*) by the leaders; however, the tree is not a typical shape, and its terminal buds were larger than usual for the species leading to much (continuing) debate over its identity!



SRPG members walking away from the contentious poplar Photo © Helena Crouch, with (insert) a spiral gall Photo © Fred Rumsey

Continuing eastwards, we found a small patch of Great Yellow-cress (*Rorippa amphibia*) lodged at the base of the wooded river bank.



Great Yellow-cress in the River Avon Photo © Helena Crouch

We also passed many more groups of Small Teasel, so abundant on the railway bank that the group rapidly became blasé about it.



Small Teasel, with seedheads prettily backlit Photo © Fred Rumsey

Following a brief exploration around a railway arch, where we found Spotted Hawkweed (*Hieracium spilophaeum*) on the stonework and Crosswort (*Cruciata laevipes*) on a bank, we turned back. The remaining stalwarts were treated to ice-creams at a convenient hostelry, before tracking down their disparate vehicles. Although the riverine vegetation was sparse, we did find all suggested targets and made excellent records in the three monads traversed, including updating records for several RPR species. A very enjoyable day was had by all in what ultimately proved to be remarkably good weather.