

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report

**Sunday 2nd April 2023, Buncombe Wood  
Meeting, Quantock Hills (VC5)**

**Leaders: Steve Parker**

**Report: Josh Butterworth**

On a bright April Sunday, 12 of us ventured into the Quantock Hills to take advantage of the early flowering woodland flora.



The team knee-high in Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) © Steve Parker.

The visit began at Cothelstone Hill car park, where, typically, our group pondered over the car park flora before moving on, which included a potentially planted Wild Service Tree (*Sorbus torminalis*).

Making our way into the woodland, we passed non-native introductions, including lesser periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) and native shrub species Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*). As we looked up, we were dismayed by the winter effect – *no leaves*. Instead, we turned our heads to the ground and with handfuls of leaves Steve pointed out the differences between the auricles of English Oak (*Quercus robur*) and the tapered bases of Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) highlighting the need, due to their

variability, for large samples of 20 or more leaves to acquire some degree of certainty in identification.

At this point, the first target species was found, Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*) also known as Town Hall Clock, derived from the four faces present on its flowers. This formed large carpets under the native Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Oak canopy.

The semi-natural woodland unfortunately did not extend far, shortly progressing east, we entered a large area of conifer plantation. Although not native, the team jumped at the opportunity to brush-up on their conifer identification, where we found the distinctive cones and remnant plugs on the twigs of Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), the sharp, stiff blue needles pegged to the stems of Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) as well as non-native Pine species (*Pinus* sp.) and even deciduous conifers, Larch species (*Larix* sp.).

We eventually emerged from the plantation into a large open area that appeared to have been the focus of an ambitious native tree planting scheme (unfortunately invaded by saplings from the adjacent plantation). Here we found Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Rosebay Willowherb (*Chamerion angustifolium*) as well as grasses such as Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*).

Hunger struck and we decided to find a spot for lunch. We walked further east, bordering a plantation, which transitioned between Beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) and conifers. As we walked a path adjacent to these plantations, we found an early flowering Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), an indicator perhaps of times past when the landscape may have appeared drastically different, covered in semi-natural broadleaved ancient woodland. Eventually, we reached a clearing, an area of

flattened Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) where we stopped for lunch.



Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) flowering along the path bordering an area of plantation woodland © Linda Everton.

After lunch we continued east, further down the sloping woodland, until we reached two strips of semi-natural ancient woodland comprising predominantly Ash and Oak, retained by the Forestry Commission either side of Buncombe Hill Road. On the western side we found species such as Hairy Wood-rush (*Luzula pilosa*), Barren Strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*) and Hart's-tongue Fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium*). On the eastern side of the road, Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) dominated alongside swathes of Dog's-Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*). In amongst these stands of vegetation sedges became more apparent, with Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*), Wood Sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) and Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*).

We began our ascent back towards the car park. However, before exiting the retained woodland, while pondering over the many leaves of Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) covering the ground, Laura Daniells spotted the star of the show, Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*), adjacent to a stand of Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) encroaching from the surrounding plantation. This was a first and excellent record for the site.

As we continued our ascent back towards the cars walking along roadside hedgebanks we found an abundance of another remnant of the historical ancient woodland, Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), lining the feet of the hedgebanks.

Reaching the cars we gathered around a small patch of grassland to reflect on the day's findings, inevitably this patch of grassland was where our final species for the day was found, Pignut (*Conopodium majus*).

Although fewer than historically recorded at this site, a total of 113 species records was not a bad result considering the early timing of the meeting.



Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) forming a 2m x 2m patch east of Buncombe Hill Road © Linda Everton.