

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Sunday 16th April 2023, Nunney Combe Meeting (VC6)

Leaders: Gill Read and Ellen McDouall

Report: Gill Read

On the evening of Saturday 15th April, I had a message from Helena in the A&E Department of Bath Royal Infirmary to say that she had fallen and had broken her arm. This was the evening before the meeting that she was to lead with me as “tail-end Charlie” along the Nunney Brook. Panic set in and I contacted Ellen as I had no paperwork. Ellen happily had already talked to Helena and was ready to help. I was very grateful to Ellen, but was still unhappy about the following day, partly because botanising on the Friday in wind and rain I had managed to lose a hearing aid, meaning I could hear very little. Also, when we had done a recce eight days before, the path was very muddy and slippery, and I was concerned about people falling.

However, Sunday arrived with no rain and eleven people, a lively mix of old friends and new members, turned up well booted to face the mud!

I had decided to record in one square, so it was not a problem getting out of the car park. A short walk brought us to a gate into a large grass field that seemed to yield little but a few dandelions. It took almost an hour to cross that field, looking closely at grasses. Bare patches delayed us further, counting stamens in Cardamines. Two of the six stamens in Wavy Bittercress (*Cardamine flexuosa*) can often be hiding below the other four making it difficult to distinguish it from the sturdier Hairy Bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) with four stamens. Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*) and Red Dead-nettle (*Lamium purpureum*) also enjoyed those bare patches.

At last, to the edge of the brook and mud! Pick-a-back Plant (*Tolmiea menziesii*) was found growing on the bank, a garden escape getting this one of many colloquial names from the habit of producing plantlets out of the top of leaf petioles, giving the look of young plants riding on the back of mature leaves – and contributing to its ability to spread easily. The more traditional plants of Somerset woods, Thin-spiked Wood-sedge (*Carex strigosa*) and Wood-sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) were found next.



Waterside plants including *Carex strigosa*. Photo © Karen Andrews

It took a while to see the clumps of leaves of Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*) which were one of our targets for the day. The fading leaves of Snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*) which confused our search for *Ornithogalum* also tumbled profusely down the cliff side above us, mixed with Wood Anemones (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) which were just showing blue.

Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) and Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*) were good for further discussion. The feathery leaves of Pignut

(*Conopodium majus*) were spotted peeping through the Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), and we were able to brush up on the differences between the just emerging leaves of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*).

We stopped for lunch by the brook sitting on Tuberos Comfrey (*Symphytum tuberosum*) which was growing in profusion, and we were entertained by two Grey Wagtails dipping above the water.

We retraced our steps and found a few new leaves of Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*). This plant in previous years had invaded the brook side but has now almost been eradicated. Two handsome bushes of Japanese Snowball-bush (*Viburnum plicatum*) were almost bursting into flower. Maybe these had been washed downstream from the village or were relics of long lost gardens.

Monk's-hood (*Aconitum napellus*) was to have been our star plant to end the day, but it could not be found. The water had been very high, and it might have been washed away. The last record for that spot was in 2014.



Where the Monkshood wasn't... Photo © Karen Andrews

To our surprise Jim, Helena's husband, had driven Helena with her arm in a sling to meet us. They joined the group as we walked back through the lovely village with a tour around the 14th century castle completing the day.

Congratulations to everyone in negotiating the mud with no falls! And a big thank you to Ellen and John Poingdestre for their support.