

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



A lone botanist amid the vast flat expanse of Pawlett Hams Photo © Helena Crouch

Sunday 16th July 2023, Pawlett Hams (VC6)

Leaders: John Poingdestre and Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

Pawlett Hams is part of the Bridgwater Bay SSSI, a roughly circular peninsula within a loop of the tidal River Parrett. With the threat of strong winds and heavy showers, fourteen members assembled in fine weather at the east end of White House Road, which leads west across Pawlett Hams to the estuary. We set off briskly, slowing to a halt when we reached our first target monad, just where three horses were tethered (or not, in one case!) The wide verges were well-grazed, and not particularly species-rich. We recorded several umbellifers, including Upright Hedge-parsley (*Torilis japonica*), Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*), Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), Hemlock Water-dropwort (*O. crocata*), and Stone Parsley (*Sison amomum*).

Entering a field, we found abundant Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) in seed, and Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*). We explored our first ditch, perpendicular to the road, finding Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) and Tufted Forget-me-not (*Myosotis laxa* subsp. *caespitosa*) at the edge. The dominant emergent was Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), but we also found Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*) and Grey Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*).



Nigel and Val marvel at Reed rhizome length Photo © Helena Crouch

Within the ditch, Nick Stewart showed members Hairlike Pondweed (*Potamogeton trichoides*), Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) and three common duckweeds: Ivy-leaved Duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*), Fat Duckweed (*L. gibba*) and Greater Duckweed (*Spirodela polyrhiza*). We found no Common Duckweed (*L. minor*) all day, but we did record three Schedule 9 species in this first ditch: Nuttall's Waterweed (*Elodea nuttallii*), Curly Waterweed (*Lagarosiphon major*) and the very invasive Water-primrose (*Ludwigia grandiflora* subsp. *hexapetala*), which we removed.

At the southern edge of the field, we were surprised to find Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), the first record for this species on Pawlett Hams since the flora! Beside White House Rhyne (alongside the road) we added another umbellifer to our list: Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*).

The hedgerows alongside the road are dominated by Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), with brambles, attracting many butterflies, particularly Gatekeepers. A highlight of the day was a Wall butterfly.



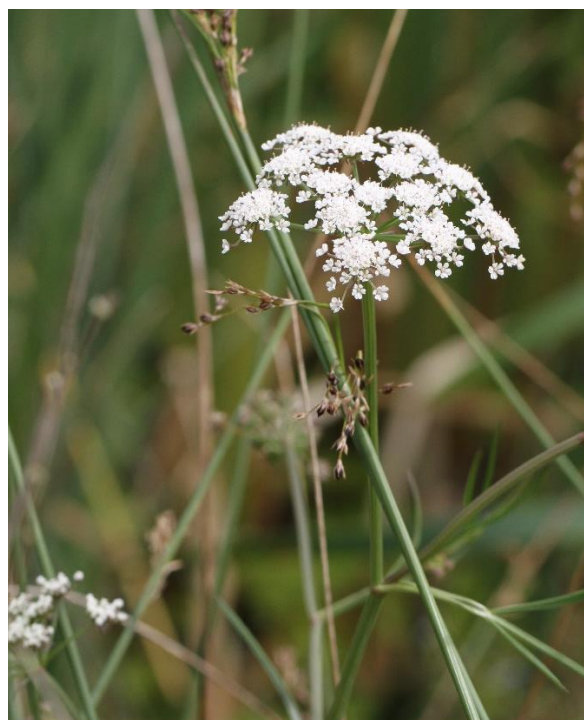
Wall butterfly by White House Road Photo © Helena Crouch

In a broad ditch to the south of the road, we found more umbellifers. John showed us Tubular Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*) which he discovered new to Pawlett Hams in 2014. This species is Vulnerable on the GB and England Red Lists. We examined Lesser Water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*), with a ring on the petiole and flowers at the tops of shoots, and compared it with Fool's Water-cress (*Helosciadium nodosum*), with umbels in the nodes of shoots. Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*) was growing all along an adjacent bank, together with Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*). The rain had held off, skylarks were singing overhead, and we were within a short dash of a mobile bird hide if necessary, so the low banks seemed a perfect place for lunch!



Fruits of Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) and Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*) on a low bank Photos © Liz Downey

Refreshed, we continued along the road, seeing beautiful Flowering-rush (*Butomus umbellatus*) in the ditch south of the road. Further along this ditch, we recorded many flowering plants of Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*), another Rare Plant Register (RPR) species. Beside the ditch were large angular plants of Corn Parsley (*Sison segetum*).



Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) Photo © Fred Rumsey

Combwich looked colourful and bright ahead, but the Quantocks suddenly became dark and disappeared as rain swept towards us! Lesser Bulrush (*Typha angustifolia*) and the common Bulrush (*T. latifolia*) grew together for ease of comparison. We persevered in driving rain, while Nick continued to sample the ditch, finding Fennel Pondweed (*Stuckenia pectinata*).



Attentive audience watching Nick ditch dabbling Photo © Helena Crouch

Now drenched, we reached the end of the road, where amazingly, we were invited for tea in a boat by the owners of White House Farm. Refreshed, and slightly drier, we explored the area of saltmarsh they own, which, unlike adjacent areas, was not yet grazed. Here we recorded Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*), Sea-milkwort (*Lysimachia maritima*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardii*), Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima*), a Glasswort (*Salicornia europaea* agg.), Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*) and Greater Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media*).



Flower of Greater Sea-spurrey with petals exceeding sepals ...



... and seeds with clear winged borders Photos © Liz Downey

Excitingly, we also found several patches of Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*). The annual grass is Vulnerable on the GB and England Red Lists, GB Scarce and a Schedule 41 species: it is thus another RPR species.



Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) Photo © Helena Crouch

On the sea wall above the saltmarsh, we found Fern-grass (*Catapodium rigidum*), many more plants of Corn Parsley, and a splendid Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota* subsp. *carota*).

Leaving White House Farm, we headed south along the England Coast Path, hoping to find Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*) in the field behind the sea wall. Sadly, it eluded us, but we added three more Rare Plant Register (RPR) species to our records. A tiny patch of Common Sea-lavender (*Limonium vulgare*) was new to the monad; this species is Near Threatened on the England Red List. At the estuary edge was a small patch of Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*), with prickly fruiting heads. This is GB Scarce. In a ditch behind the sea wall, Nick found several plants of Marsh Dock (*Rumex palustris*), a RPR species because it is Scarce in VC5.

A weary band of botanists marched the 2km back along the road, in increasingly fine weather. We had recorded around 130 species in each of two monads, including fifteen species of Apiaceae.