

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report



Those still standing at the end of the day... Photo © Simon Leach

**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2023, Weacombe, nr West Quantoxhead (VC5)**

**Leader: Steve Parker**

**Report: Simon Leach**

What a day! Hill fog in the morning, burning off to a sunny and scorching afternoon. And what a turn-out! A total of 19 members and friends, including two special visitors from further afield: Olga Krylova, VC Recorder from neighbouring Gloucestershire, and Pete Stroh, BSBI England Officer and lead editor of the recently published 2-volume *Plant Atlas 2020*.

The object of this meeting was to compile a list of plants growing in Weacombe Combe, a deep, steep-sided valley on the western edge of the Quantock Hills, as well as investigating a tiny, much shallower and apparently unnamed combe a little to the south. Our route would conveniently keep us within a single monad, ST1140, although by the end of the day, with

all the ups and downs, it felt as if this was possibly one of the larger monads in the county!

We descended into the combe from the National Trust car park at Staple Plain, ignoring everything as best we could until Steve told us we had entered our target square. After that, things slowed down as we began recording – our progress hampered partly due to the list-keeper having forgotten his reading glasses.

Anyway, as the names were called out we instigated a rule that each species should be called in both English and 'Latin', so that those of us preferring one language had the opportunity to brush up on the other, as it were. And then we discovered that for some species Daniela could give us the names in German, while Olga was able to provide the Russian! So, when someone shouted "*Rumex acetosa*" someone else would rightly call out "Common Sorrel", but then Olga would chip in with "Schavel", and Daniela with "Sauerampfer". Anyone passing us



on the path must have wondered what the hell was going on...

On the way down we spotted quite a few of the widespread/common heathland species that are listed as 'Near Threatened' on the England Red List: Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), and Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*), to name but four.

Once in the bottom of the combe, we started to see many more 'Near Threatened' taxa in and around the little seepages and 'pocket mires' beside the path and close to the stream. These included Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), Bog Pimpernel (*Lysimachia tenella*), and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*). The mires were tiny – hence 'pocket mires' – but were packed with good species. Alongside the stream we saw Smooth-stalked Sedge (*Carex laevigata*), a 'first' for the monad, while we also located two tiny patches of Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*) – a very scarce species in Somerset.



Leaves of Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*).  
Photo © Simon Leach

Walking downstream, we slowly added to our list, including *Dryopteris paleaceolobata* which was shown to us by Helena and Fred – a new monad for this taxon within the 'affinis complex', which is now turning up quite frequently in the extreme west of the county. Another case of how, when people learn

how to tell something from its near-lookalikes, it starts to pop up all over the place!

Much of the woodland in Weacombe Combe is planted, and we recorded several conifer species, including Giant Fir (*Abies grandis*), Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Corsican Pine (*Pinus nigra*), and a stand of Japanese Red-cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*).



Helena with a fine specimen of *Dryopteris paleaceolobata*. Photo © Simon Leach

Near houses on the edge of the hamlet of Weacombe we added a few unexpected plants such as Sowbread (*Cyclamen hederifolium*) and Druce's Crane's-bill (*Geranium x oxonianum*).

On we climbed, across into the 'unnamed combe', which lacked a stream and was really just a v-shaped notch in the side of the hill. The footpath was in the bottom of the notch, and was damp in places, with a few tiny seepages here and there, and a muddy puddle or two towards the bottom of the slope. Here we were delighted to see Ivy-leaved Crowfoot (*Ranunculus hederaceus*), new for the monad and another scarce species in Somerset. About half way up the combe we found more path-side *Sibthorpia*, and then came the find of the day when Olga spotted a single tiny plant of Chaffweed (*Lysimachia minima*). Diligent searching produced two more plants nearby, a fitting climax to a thoroughly good day. We stopped for a well-earned breather at the top of the combe, taking in the fine view to the west, towards Minehead, North Hill and Exmoor.



On top of the world. Photo © Simon Leach

Then there was the small matter of getting back to where we started, which involved another descent into the depths of Weacombe Combe, and then a steep climb back up to Staple Plain.

Our total was 183 species, of which about 25 were new for the monad. Not bad for the biggest 1-km square in Somerset!