

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report



Both ends of the rainbow, and a fitting end to the season Photo © Fred Rumsey

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2023, Taunton (VC5)**

**Leader & Report: Simon Leach**

Nine of us gathered in Taunton for an 'Autumn One Day Hunt', one of several flower-hunting challenges set each year by the Wild Flower Society. This one involves finding as many plants in flower as you can on a single day in the last week of October – one of those vaguely pointless exercises that turns out to be quite a lot of fun. In several recent autumns we've taken part in this challenge, walking much the same as our intended route today, with totals generally in the region of 120 to 150 species. Given the (so far) mild autumn we imagined it would be interesting to see how this year's total compared.

So we met, as we usually do, at Silk Mills park-and-ride car park on the western edge of town. It was a brisk chilly day of sunshine and showers. The ground was soggy from recent rain, not least yesterday afternoon's downpour. You probably know the old joke: "How long does it take a group of botanists to get out of a car park?" Well, yes, let's just say that today was no exception. We were determined to be seriously sluggish and spent nearly two hours

exploring the carpark's verges and paving cracks and perimeter banks. We realised that Clive Lovatt would have been delighted by our lack of progress: this was just the sort of place in which you'd catch him dragging his heels. So we dragged ours too. By the end of the first hour, we'd already notched up 50 species in flower, including some real gems like Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acris*), Wall Bedstraw (*Galium parisiense*), Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium pusillum*), Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*), Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*), and Stone-parsley (*Sison amomum*).



The assembled group. Fred, on the right, still doing his warm-up exercises while the rest of us try to ignore him. Photo: © Simon Leach

The second hour, following the law of diminishing returns, produced only a further 20 species, so at this point we finally set off along our intended route, with a nod to the old English Nature offices at Roughmoor, past Roughmoor Pond – where we heard Cetti’s Warbler and saw a patrolling Emperor dragonfly – and into Longrun Meadow. Here, close to the river, we saw flowering White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*), Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and a single plant of Wild Radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum* subsp. *raphanistrum* – or ‘raph raph raph’ for short, meaning that whoever shouts it out can end up sounding like an excitable Jack Russell).

We didn’t find Grass-leaved Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), but our other target for the furthest flood attenuation lagoon, Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*), was still flowering nicely and was much admired. It was probably introduced, maybe in ‘green hay’ or some kind of amenity seed mix brought in when the meadows were being created on ex-arable land back in the late ‘noughties’.



Admiring a fine patch of flowering Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*).  
Photo: © Fred Rumsey

This was when we decided to divert from our usual route into the middle of town. The clocks had gone back in the middle of the night, which shouldn’t have surprised us, but it meant that dusk would be an hour earlier than yesterday. So, we opted for a shorter route, via the footpath by the river, behind the Hospice, then back up onto Silk Mills Road and along the road to Avery’s nursery. It was already 2

o’clock, and we still hadn’t stopped for lunch, and people’s blood sugar levels were beginning to plummet.



The silvery undersides to the leaves of Hoary Cinquefoil give this species both its English and scientific names. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

The path up to the road produced a nice little clump of Sowbread (*Cyclamen hederifolium*) while in the hedges and grass verges bordering Silk Mills Road we saw flowering Cut-leaved Crane’s-bill (*Geranium dissectum*), Herb-Robert (*G. robertianum*), Greater Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*), and Petty Spurge (*Euphorbia peplus*), to go with the *helioscopia* seen earlier, in the park-and-ride.



Enjoying lunch in the garden at Avery’s nursery. Photo: © Simon Leach

Our third hour had produced just 19 new species, so the café at Avery’s nursery would be exactly the sort of break we needed: tea and cakes, but also the prospect of a weed or two to keep us keen. And, sure enough, we were able to add flowering Procumbent Yellow-sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*) and Pale Willowherb (*Epilobium roseum*) to our list. But star of the show – although sadly not flowering –

had to be the Corsican Mint (*Mentha requienii*) which was growing in the gravel beneath the displays of plants for sale in the outside nursery area. This is a 'first' for the Taunton area, although there was some discussion, and good-natured disagreement, about whether it was sufficiently 'in the wild' to count as a record.



Corsican Mint (*Mentha requienii*) at Avery's nursery. A few fruiting calyxes, but not really in flower. Photo: © Fred Rumsey

Back onto Silk Mills Road, and in the short hop back to the park-and-ride we added Cow-parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), Rough Chervil (*Chaerophyllum temulum*), Borage (*Borago officinalis*), Common Mallow (*Malva sylvestris*), Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*) and Dewberry (*Rubus caesius*).

At this point, Ellen and Liz called it a day while the rest of us opted to drive into town and reconvene in Tesco's carpark on Wellington Road. From there, we did a quick circuit: along Castle Street, through Goodlands Gardens, then back to the cars via Wood Street carpark and Tangier Way. We picked up most of the species we were hoping to add to our list, including Flattened Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*) and Oxford Ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*) on Castle Street; and Henbit Dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*) and White Melilot (*Melilotus albus*) in Goodlands Gardens close to where the mill stream flows into the River Tone.

Street weeds on North Street and around Wood Street car park included Thale-cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*), Purple Toadflax (*Linaria purpurea*), 'Teddy bear Grass' (*Polypogon viridis*) and Feverfew

(*Tanacetum parthenium*). On an overgrown bank beside Tangier Way, we had still-flowering Hairy Tare (*Ervilia hirsuta*) and Common Vetch (*Vicia sativa* subsp. *segetalis*), while on the cycle path beside Tesco's carpark we saw Hedgerow Crane's-bill (*Geranium pyrenaicum*) – our fifth *Geranium* of the day – and Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*).

And that, as they say, was that! Our tally for the day was a commendable 133 species in flower. A few of us stretched the rules by seeing what else we could find as we headed home, before the dark finally descended. I added another 11 on a quick dog walk, several of them we really ought to have picked up earlier in the day, like the two common Bellflowers *Campanula portenschlagiana* and *C. poscharskyana*, and Wall-lettuce (*Mycelis muralis*), and Black Horehound (*Ballota nigra*).



Common Vetch (*Vicia sativa*) on an overgrown bank beside Tangier Way. Photo: © Helena Crouch

And how on earth did we manage to NOT see flowering Broad-leaved Willowherb (*Epilobium montanum*)? Or Round-leaved Crane's-bill (*Geranium rotundifolium*)? They're all over the place!

Never mind, there's always next year.