

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Saturday 18th May 2024, Blackmore Farm, near Crewkerne (VC5)

Leaders: Val Graham and Fred Rumsey

Report: Val Graham

This meeting was the result of a contact from the owners of the farm which is at the head of a valley next to the hamlet of Woolminstone.

Elise, the latest family member to run the farm, explained that the farm includes two blocks of ancient woodland (recognised Local Wildlife Sites) and pasture for sheep and horses. They are also diversifying into providing camping facilities in this notably quiet valley.

The pasture is managed non-intensively and there is no active woodland management. Around 100 years ago, some of the wood was planted with beech. Poplar was also planted on the lowest, wettest area of the wood about 40 years ago.

Twelve members set off with two of the farm's staff to look at the small meadow at the edge of Blackmoor Wood. There was a good variety of species including Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*), Red Campion (*Silene dioica*), Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), and Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*). Some wildflower seed had been sown here, with Black Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Salad Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba*) being noted.

One group followed the circular path up the hill while a second group went the other way following the small stream.

The first group noted the extensive areas of Ransoms (*Allium ursinum*) and Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) which were now mostly at the fruiting stage.

Further up the hill this group found a large clearing of abundant growth, particularly Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), indicating high nutrient levels. Ellen later explained that soils on Greensand are often naturally high in phosphates.

The other group found their part of the wood was dominated by Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*) and was extremely wet and boggy in places. However, they were rewarded with finding several patches of Thin-Spiked Wood-Sedge (*Carex strigosa*). Paul pointed out the distinctive M-shape cross-section of the leaves which were also showing their characteristic brown tips.



Leaf cross-sections of two sedge species showing the strongly angular M-shape of Thin-spiked Wood-sedge compared with Pendulous Sedge
© Sarah Shuttleworth.

This group also crossed a small stream with tufa (precipitated carbonate minerals) coating twigs and stones. This highlights the distinctive geology of the valley with water emerging from the overlying Chalk and flowing over the impervious Greensand. Paul pointed out the distinctive moss *Cratoneuron commutata* (now called *Palustriella commutata*) growing in the shallow water.

Several ancient woodland indicator species were seen including Yellow Archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*), Moschatel or Town Hall Clock (*Adoxa moschatellina*), and Spurge Laurel (*Daphne laureola*).



Yellow Archangel © Nicky Hodges

Towards the top of the wood there was a substantial wood bank, perhaps originally a field boundary, which provided a suitable place for the two groups to have lunch. Midges became evident before long and then the first raindrops encouraged us to make our way back down the hill.

Two areas we particularly wanted to see was a patch of Herb-paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) and an extensive area of the parasitic Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*). Elise led us to the Toothwort at the edge of the wood.

Although it often parasitises the roots of Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) there was only one small such tree present. It was suggested that the large Poplars (*Populus*) nearby may be the hosts in this case. We saw many Toothwort plants, with their distinctive white seed capsules, in quite a small area.



Seed capsules of Toothwort © Tony Steele

Next, we ventured into the undergrowth to find the Herb-paris, but it proved too dense and muddy underfoot to take the whole group there. Fred waded up the stream and returned in triumph a little while later reporting 40 Herb-paris plants and bearing a leaf of Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosa*).

By this time, the weather had worsened considerably and with the forecast predicting continuous rain and thunderstorms we abandoned our plan to look at some of the pastures. It had been an interesting visit and it provided 138 species records for the monad. A considerable improvement as there are currently only four records on the BSBI Distribution Database, and those from 1966.

We wish to thank Elise Gwyn for inviting us to visit the farm. She also invited members to return by arrangement to further explore the area.