

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



SRPG members studying Round-fruited Rush (*Juncus compressus*) in a yellow field in Pitney. © Helena Crouch

Saturday 8th June 2024, Pitney (VC6)

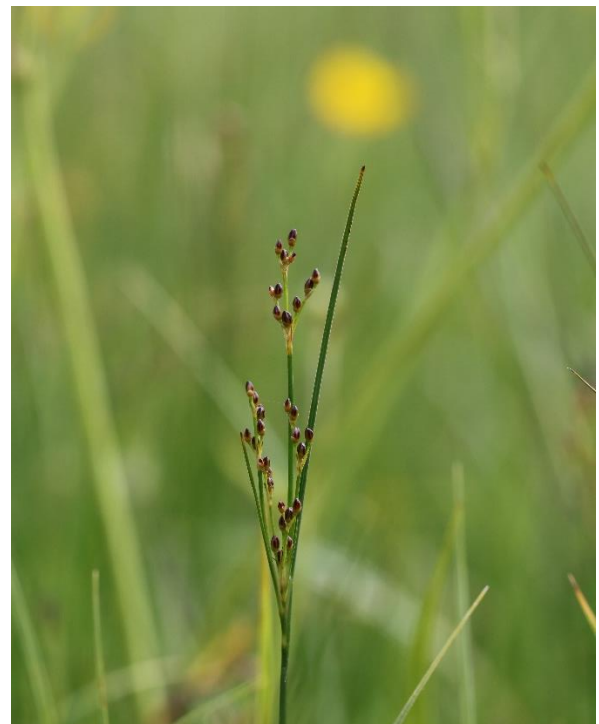
Leaders: John Poingdestre & Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

Twelve members assembled in Pitney for a walk which inadvertently coincided with a village day of events celebrating wildlife. We had been invited to visit a private field about five minutes' walk from the car park – obviously it took us over an hour to get there! Distractions included Giant Scabious (*Cephalaria gigantea*) with large yellow flowers, growing in the road outside a cottage garden, only the third post-2000 record for VC6.

Eventually we reached the promised fields, where we were greeted by two small dogs and two horses. John showed us Round-fruited Rush (*Juncus compressus*) which he had found here in 2021 – it was flowering in several parts of the wet rushy field. This small rush is Vulnerable on both the GB and England Red Lists and thus a Rare Plant Register species. Some time was spent keying out a *Persicaria*: in the horses' field we had seen annual Redshank (*P. maculata*) with cuneate leaves, but the second field had patches of the perennial Amphibious Bistort (*P. amphibia*) with cordate leaves. Several Southern Marsh-orchids

(*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) were flowering in the field.



Round-fruited Rush (*Juncus compressus*). © Fred Rumsey

A thirteenth member joined us as we left the field and set off purposefully towards the church for lunch. On the roadside bank, we saw both Stone Parsley (*Sison*

amomum) and Corn Parsley (*S. segetum*). Arriving at the churchyard, we were reminded that soup, hot drinks, cake and facilities were available in the adjacent village hall – what a civilised meeting! We found Hoary Plantain (*Plantago media*), Bird’s-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Field Woodrush (*Luzula campestris*), Rough Hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*) and Lady’s Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) in the turf of the churchyard, and Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*) by the gateway. Just outside the gate was a large clump of yellow-flowered Stinking Iris (*Iris foetidissima* var. *citrina*).



Yellow Stinking Iris (*Iris foetidissima* var. *citrina*). © Helena Crouch

Turning up Church Hill, we soon found our second target plant of the day. Several patches of tall scrambling Berry Catchfly (*Silene baccifera*) were seen, but alas no flowers. This rare alien was first recorded in hedgerows in Pitney in 1981. Although there are other more historic sites elsewhere in England, in the last 20 years there have been no records anywhere except Pitney.

In the hedgerow we found both White Bryony (*Bryonia dioica*), a member of the Cucurbitaceae, related to cucumbers and melons, and Black Bryony (*Tamus communis*, or perhaps better regarded as *Dioscorea communis*), a member of the Dioscoreaceae, related to yams. Both bryonies are herbaceous twining plants, both are dioecious, yet one is a dicot and one a monocot.

At the north end of Church Hill, we stopped to admire Short-styled Field-rose (*Rosa stylosa*), with a conical hip disc and large uniserrate leaflets which are dark green above and paler and pubescent below.

A few members turned back and those remaining realised that the original plan to record in two monads had been over-ambitious! Instead, we left our target square briefly, setting off briskly with no recording. That didn’t last! A beautiful patch of Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*) was flowering on the north verge of Woodbirds Hill Lane. We found this Vulnerable species again as we ventured through another monad back to our target one, where we found a single plant on a field edge, thereby updating three spots on the map for this species!



Yellow Vetchling on a verge in Pitney. © Helena Crouch

We returned to the village along a green lane, stopping to admire a patch of Purple Gromwell (*Aegonichon purpureocaeruleum*) outside a garden wall: we pondered its status. Passing the churchyard again, we spotted a patch of Long-stalked Crane’s-bill (*Geranium columbinum*) on a grave, which we had missed earlier! Reluctant to stop recording, we took in another loop of the village, paused to talk to a tortoise and its owner, and found some beautiful plants of Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*) in a gateway. Several more garden escapes were added to our list as a happy weary band of botanists eventually returned to the car park, having recorded 248 species in a single monad. It had been a good day!