

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2024 Ash Priors Common (VC5)**

**Leaders: Simon Leach & Steve Parker**

**Report: Steve Parker**

The Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC) is a way of testing the proficiency of a botanist. They are managed by the BSBI with a small number of organisations running the tests. More and more they are a requirement for people working for consultancies and nature conservation organisations. SRPG cannot run a FISC, but it was thought that we could help our members become more familiar with the field test and help reduce some of the anxiety that many candidates experience before and during the tests. As I have helped run FISC for Natural England, I was able to briefly explain the process and organise the field test element of the process. Simon Leach agreed to act as the Gold Standard surveyor, allowing people to compare their species list against Simon's.

Ash Priors Common is a very well recorded site, with over 330 species recorded since 2000, the vegetation is complex, making the site an excellent location for a FISC field test. SRPG have visited the site at least twice; there are good records from John Poingdestre, Ian and Paul Green, and Simon Leach and me.

After a brief discussion about the FISC process, members paired up (to reduce any possible stress) to spend an hour in the wooded part of the common making a list of the species they could find and, at the same time, Simon surveyed the same area. A small group of us also started recording.



Botanists at work © Steve Parker

At lunch we compared lists and discussed our findings. Then we ran a second recording session on the open grassland of the common, again meeting at the end to compare lists. On the day, as a group, we listed nearly one hundred species on the site.

The acid grassland is very rich and is famed for its impressive display of Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) later in the year. Other species included Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) all of which are Near Threatened the England Red List.

A few non-native species have been recorded on the site over a long time period, for example, Siberian Iris (*Iris sibirica*) was found by Ian Green in 1996 and is still growing well. Astartia (*Astartia major*), was a new plant for the site. This was growing on the roadside and was spotted by Simon. I was pleased to learn that a number of SRPG members have done well in FISCs this year.