

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



View east across Hawkridge Reservoir. © Liz Downey

Saturday 7th September 2024, Hawkridge Reservoir (VC5)

Leaders: Steve Parker & Ellen McDouall

Report: Liz Downey

Seven members met at the car park on Lawyer's Hill to record at Hawkridge Reservoir, a 32-acre County Wildlife Site 7 miles west of Bridgwater. The plan was to set off towards the fishing lodge and continue round to the north side of the reservoir via the walkway over the dam. We were welcomed to the site by a raven calling from the trees on the opposite bank and, soon after, the first target species, Round-fruited Rush (*Juncus compressus*), was recorded. This is scarce in VC5 and was identified by the globose, glossy capsules 1½ x as long as the perianth, the lowest bract longer than the inflorescence, and the anthers about as long as the filaments (Streeter, 2009).

Corn Mint (*Mentha arvensis*) and Water Mint (*M. aquatica*) were both found, the flowers being in axillary whorls in the former, and in terminal heads in the latter (Stace, 2019). Furthermore, the hybrid between the two - Whorled Mint (*M. x verticillata*) -

was identified. The mints were teeming with insects, including hornets, a Small Copper and an unusual hoverfly (thought to be *Sericomyia superbians*).

Not unexpectedly, several aquatic plants were found including Common Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*), Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), Fennel pondweed (*Stuckenia pectinata*) and Curled Pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*).



Mentha x verticillata and *Potamogeton crispus*. © Sarah Shuttleworth

The second target species was Orange Foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*), also scarce in VC5, and we were pleased to see this delicate grass, with its bright orange anthers, scattered along the southern edge of the reservoir. Another highlight was seeing Trifid Bur-marigold (*Bidens tripartita*) - identified by the three

terminal barbed spines on the achenes (Streeter, 2009) - throughout the drawdown zone & beyond. In these areas we also recorded Red Goosefoot (*Oxybasis rubra*) interspersed with Many-seeded Goosefoot (*Chenopodium polyspermum*).



Bidens tripartita flowers & achene. © Liz Downey

At this point the leader pointed out that only a few hundred metres of ground had been covered in almost two hours, so we proceeded to the boat ramp in front of the fishing lodge for lunch. There, one member of the group spotted Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*), which we later observed in large numbers on the opposite bank.

After lunch, the group finally made it to the grassland across the dam and began the attempt to re-find Autumn Lady's Tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*). Unfortunately, this proved fruitless, but we were consoled by the sight of a large flock of House Martins feeding near the surface of the water alongside us.



Recording in the drawdown zone. © Sarah Shuttleworth

A variety of speedwells were observed but the favourite was Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*). It was identified by its pink peppermint-striped petals and the pedicels shorter than the bracts (Stace, 2019). We had seen Marsh Yellow-cress (*Rorippa palustris*) but unfortunately, its relative,

Northern Yellow-cress (*R. islandica*), first recorded at this site in 2001, was not re-found.



Kickxia elatine and *Veronica catenata*. © Liz Downey

It wasn't possible to circumvent the reservoir (at least not easily) so we retraced our steps back to the car park, listening to the tenacious calls of the young Great Crested Grebes as we went. Sadly, most of the shoreline had been carpeted with the invasive alien, New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), so boots were cleaned prior to leaving in an effort to prevent it from spreading elsewhere. On the bright side, the weather had remained warm and dry, and we had together recorded 124 species plus several Somerset rarities.

References

- Streeter, D. (2009) *Collins Wildflower Guide*. HarperCollins Publishers, Dublin.
- Stace, C. A. (2019). *New flora of the British Isles. 4th ed.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.