

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Sunday 7th April 2024 Park Wood, Chaffcombe (VC5)

Leaders: Steve Parker & Simon Leach

Report: Steve Parker

Park Wood, Chaffcombe is a private woodland owned and managed by John and Valerie Godsmark. They have owned this site for over ten years and have carried out significant conservation management, including clearing large stands of Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and the eradication of the invasive Indian Fountain-bamboo (*Yushania anceps*) with considerable success. John and Valerie had arranged car parking on an adjacent forest track. They met the group of nine SRPG members at the entrance to the site. Here they explained the recent history of recording at the site. In 2000 the Green brothers had visited while in 2011 four members of the SRPG had recorded the flora with the wood's owners.

Large standard Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) and very old and large coppiced Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) form the significant woodland cover; under these is a carpet of Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and other scattered woodland species such as Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*). Since the last recording visit the owners have carried out some tree planting including Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*). Valerie is very concerned about the recent colonisation of the wood by the Alder Leaf Beetle (*Agelastica alni*) which is now present in very large numbers. She has been in contact with various conservation organisations and government bodies to ask advice on the impact the insects may have on the ecology on the site but has not had much reassurance so far.

Moving further into the woodland the ground conditions changed under the influence of a small water-course that runs through the site, here the

ground is saturated for much of the year making management difficult. The spikes of Great Horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*) were just pushing through stands of Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) together with Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) in the wettest areas. Surprisingly in these wet areas Herb-paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) has colonised ground that was once covered by the Rhododendron, we counted over one hundred flowering shoots of this ancient woodland indicator species. The wood has a large amount of dead wood which was supporting a wide range of fungal fruiting bodies.



Herb-paris in full flower. © Steve Parker

My memory from the visit of 2011 is of the fantastic display of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) that was present on the hazel trees; I was not disappointed as this parasitic plant is still to be found in the woodland with one large and partly rotting stump covered in it. Other parts of the wood could only be accessed by following in the footsteps of John and Valerie. They lead us to a few small stands of Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*). It was an enjoyable visit helping to update the owners on the plants that they look after in their special site.