

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report



Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*) on the sea wall above the River Parrett near Gaunt's Clyce © Helena Crouch

**Sunday 18th August 2024, Pawlett Hams (VC6)**

**Leaders: John Poingdestre & Helena Crouch**

**Report: Helena Crouch & John Poingdestre**

As a follow-up to last year's meeting at Pawlett Hams, eighteen members gathered to survey the southern edge of this roughly circular peninsular, which is part of the Bridgwater Bay SSSI. We split into two groups and headed down the track towards Gaunt's Clyce: Helena's group marched off to record in the most southerly monad, whilst John's group began recording immediately.

Several patches of Dotted Loosestrife (*Lysimachia punctata*) were growing close to the track indicating their probable origin. The two tall crucifers, Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*) and Bargeman's Cabbage, or Wild Turnip (*B. rapa* subsp. *campestris*) were growing side by side, allowing close comparison. A floating mat of Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) covered several metres of a rhyne. As a distraction, fruiting bodies of the fungus Ergot were found to be infesting the heads of Timothy (*Phleum pratense*).

The saltmarsh, dominated almost completely by Sea Aster (*Tripolium pannonicum*), was relatively narrow and dropped steeply down to the muddy channel. Occasional colonies of Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*), Greater Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media*), Sea Milkwort (*Lysimachia maritima*), Sea Arrow-grass (*Triglochin maritimum*) and Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) added some variety. Just above High Water Mark, a large fruiting plant of Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) was found. This species of estuarine marshes and brackish ditches is Near Threatened on the England Red List, thus a Rare Plant Register (RPR) species.

Heading west the sea wall comprises tightly interlocking stone blocks. Here Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*) has found its niche: a colony continued almost uninterrupted to the edge of the monad and beyond. Occasional dried specimens of English Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia anglica*) were seen, and a fine colony of Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) was bearing swollen fruits. Hard-grass (*Parapholis strigosa*) was found, but not Curved Hard-grass (*P. incurva*), previously reported nearby.

Returning along the landward side of the sea wall, we were disappointed not to find Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*), also previously found here. The present grassland management appears not to favour this species. There was, however, an interesting brackish rhyme containing many plants of Parsley Water-dropwort, with Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), Square-stemmed St John's-wort (*Hypericum tetrapterum*), Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*) and False Fox-sedge (*Carex otrubae*). Also, at the edge of this rhyme, a lucky few glimpsed a Harvest Mouse amongst the tall vegetation!

Meanwhile, eight members had headed southwest and also found an extensive colony of Sea Wormwood, the first plant recorded as we walked through the corner of the next monad to reach our target southern one. Sea Wormwood is a RPR species as it is Near Threatened on the England Red List, so it was good to see so much. Both Stone Parsley (*Sison amomum*) and Corn Parsley (*S. segetum*) were growing on the sea wall. We recorded 79 species in the small slither of that monad we passed through, adding ten species to the records for the square. By the time we reached our target monad it was almost time for lunch!

Replenished, we moved from an ungrazed field and saltmarsh to a heavily grazed area: the contrast was dramatic. Many would think a grazed area would have a depleted flora: botanists know better! On the low bank separating the upper and lower saltmarsh, we found our first Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*): this species was scattered along the bank, and we later found a continuous swathe alongside a small path.



Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) alongside a path. © Helena Crouch

A dried-up pond was a productive deviation. Here we found many plants of Marsh Dock (*Rumex palustris*), Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*), Tufted Forget-me-not (*Myosotis laxa*) and Common Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*).

Returning to the saltmarsh, we found a tiny scrap of Sea Wormwood and much more Sea Barley along the low bank separating upper and lower saltmarsh.



Diligent botanists studying Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) while the Co-chairs of SRPG play on their phones. © Nicky Hodges

Here we found another target of the day: the diminutive and unusual umbellifer, Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*). This RPR species, like Sea Barley, grows on thinly vegetated coastal sites. Both species are Vulnerable on the GB and England Red Lists and Nationally Scarce.



Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*). © Helena Crouch

Having agreed to return by 4pm, we turned back, despite only walking half the coast path in our target monad! A detour along a rhyne gave the opportunity for putting improvised grapnels into operation. Here we found Lesser Water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*), Flowering-rush (*Butomus umbellatus*), Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) and Hairlike Pondweed (*Potamogeton trichoides*).

It had been a good meeting. The Southern Explorers added 52 species to the records for the target square, despite incomplete coverage. Between us, we updated records for several Rare Plant Register species. For the lucky few who saw it though, the Harvest Mouse was perhaps the highlight of the day.