

# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024, Robber's Bridge (VC5)**

**Leader: Steve Parker**

**Report: Steve Parker**

This meeting was a repeat of an earlier SRPG meeting. Ten members gathered to search for Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*), which has been known from the Weir Water mires, at least since the 1970s. The population of this introduced plant is very large and has been recorded by many botanists over the last twenty years.

Once on site our first problem was finding our way on to the mires along the river. Apparently, the access has changed a little since our last visit and it took several attempts to find our way to the area we needed to search. While wading across the small stream, our first interesting find was of a large stand of Smooth-stalked Sedge (*Carex laevigata*) on the stream bank.



Recording by the stream. © Steve Parker

Following the course of the stream a fine specimen of Narrow Male-fern (*Dryopteris cambrensis*) was spotted under low-growing trees on the stream bank by Helena Crouch and Fred Rumsey. However, access

was blocked and we had to retrace our steps before eventually finding a way on to the mires. Here Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*), Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) and Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) are key elements of the flora.

It took a little time to come across the first colony of the Large-flowered Butterwort. But once found it was obvious that the plant is doing exceedingly well. Our population estimate was between one and two thousand plants; rather disappointingly we could find no flowers, but there was no problem in identifying the plant by its pale green leaves, some of which had caught insects on their surface.



Large-flowered Butterwort. © Steve Parker

This is a wonderful Exmoor habitat rich in other wildlife, the trees covered in lichens. We were also extremely lucky to have excellent views of a resting Heath Fritillary butterfly. Trying not to get too distracted by the other wildlife we continued to record the plants, adding a few small patches of Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*) in the somewhat drier areas of the mire. The stream had stands of Alternate Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum alterniflorum*), a characteristic plant of Exmoor watercourses.



Heath Fritillary. © Steve Parker

Lunch was taken sitting on the side the valley admiring the local scenery. The hillside vegetation was mostly dominated by Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) with acid-loving grasses and scattered trees. Our recording efforts were more or less restricted to the vegetation along the edge of the watercourse.

Finding no easy way to cross the stream we were forced to wade across. Luckily no one slipped on the boulders of the streambed. Once across the water our route took us out of the valley, via a dry track.

Helena had remembered that it was here that Heath Pearlwort (*Sagina subulata*) had been recorded on the SRPG meeting in July 2010 - not an easy plant to find. After a search there came the call of "found it". It was then on hands and knees that an estimate of the plant's population was made. In the end it was discovered in three separate locations.

While searching for the Pearlwort a single specimen of Bird's-foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*) was found. Taking the grid reference, we found it was just outside the monad we had been in for the whole day.

The group made its way along the private track, back to the road where the cars were parked. Across a small field a tree was seen in flower, this was later confirmed by Helena as Tree Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster frigidus*). Helena's follow-up email states "I see there is a long history of it in that area and Graham [Lavender] recorded that very tree in 2022".

It was agreed that the SRPG needs to do more recording trips to Exmoor, it's such a wonderful place.