

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Saturday 26th October 2024, Autumn One Day Hunt, Taunton (VC5)

Leaders: Simon Leach & Steve Parker

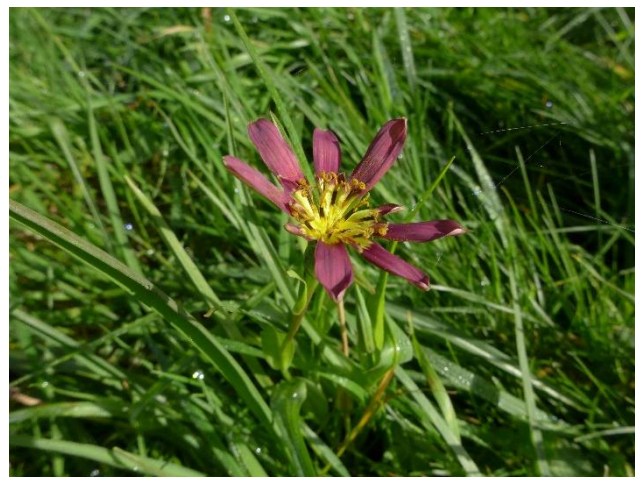
Report: Simon Leach

Foggy first thing, but by the time fifteen of us had gathered at Silk Mills park-and-ride car park the sun was breaking through; the beginning of a glorious almost-balmy day of unbroken sunshine. Perfect for this 'final fling' of a meeting where we would once again join in with the Wild Flower Society's 'Autumn One Day Hunt' – a quest to see how many plants can still be found *in flower* on a single day in the last week of October.

Just a bit of fun really, but this would be the fifth time we've held such a meeting in Taunton, and it would be interesting to compare this year's total with those of previous years having followed the same route on each occasion. A few of the regulars could probably have done it blindfolded!

Amazingly, getting out of the car park only took an hour this year. Within its confines we quickly notched up 50 still-flowering species including some much-admired Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acris*), plus Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), Wall bedstraw (*Galium parisiense*) and Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*).

Into Longrun Meadow, and we soon added Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*), but not much else until we were delighted to see what, for many, would be the plant of the day, a still-flowering Hybrid Goat's-beard (*Tragopogon x mirabilis*).



Hybrid Goat's-beard at Longrun Meadow © Helena Crouch

Crossing back onto the north side of the river, we followed the path to French Weir Park, spotting Nipplewort (*Lapsana communis*), Enchanter's-nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*) and Wood False-brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*) as we went. By lunchtime we had reached The Weir café (and our total had reached 90 species) where some of us stopped for a coffee in the sunshine, while others ate packed lunches on the riverside wall where they found it impossible to ignore the Pellitory-of-the-Wall (*Parietaria judaica*) and Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*). Make that 92, and counting...

At this point, a couple of people called it a day, while another unexpectedly arrived. On we went, along the footpath at the back of Tesco's which, as always, produced a good crop of new species, including Stinking Tutsan (*Hypericum hircinum*), Shasta Daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum*), and, just like last year, Hedgerow Crane's-bill (*Geranium pyrenaicum*) and Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*). And, again like last year, on the grassy bank between Castle Street and Tangier car park we added the (now abundant) Flat-stalked Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*), along with still-flowering Yellow Oat-

grass (*Trisetum flavescens*), Hedge Bedstraw (*Galium album*) and Fodder Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* ssp. *balearicum*).

Then into Goodlands Gardens where we expected to find, and did, White Melilot (*Melilotus albus*), but here there were also a few surprises, notably two grasses: Yellow Bristle-grass (*Setaria pumila*) and Hairy Finger-grass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*) – the latter being only the second record for the Taunton area! Also, by the river we saw Hemp-agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*) and Hemlock Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), while a little farther on, between Morrison's and Firepool, there was Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*) and Stone-parsley (*Sison amomum*).



Yellow Bristle-grass © Helena Crouch

A quick dash around the edge of the old livestock market site produced Yellow Chamomile (*Cota tinctoria*), Common Mallow (*Malva sylvestris*) (about time too!) and Tall Melilot (*Melilotus altissimus*), plus *Rumex x pratensis*, the hybrid between Broad-leaved (*R. obtusifolius*) and Curled (*R. crispus*) Docks.

By the time we'd walked a short stretch of the canal, then up onto Trenchard Way, it was already 3 pm and time was running out. And, heaven forbid, we'd lost Fred, who had continued going straight ahead when the rest of us had turned left, but who was rewarded

handsomely by finding Fortune's Holly-fern (*Cyrtomium fortunei*), a 'first' for the Taunton area. But ferns don't flower so sadly, on a day like today, we weren't that impressed!

With Fred back on track, though, the verges of Trenchard Way once again delivered, with Perennial Wall-rocket (*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*) to add to the Annual Wall-rocket (*D. muralis*) seen earlier, closely followed by Spear-leaved Willowherb (*Epilobium lanceolatum*) (a real rarity in the Taunton area), Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), Fat-hen (*Chenopodium album*), Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) and Hoary Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*). And finally, another contender for 'find of the day', a kerbside grass that was later confirmed as Japanese Millet (*Echinochloa esculenta*), a first record for the Taunton area and only the second for the vice-county.



Japanese Millet © Helena Crouch

We mopped up a few more species on our way back to the cars, including a couple of brambles (*Rubus ulmifolius* and *R. caesius*) to add to the 'Himalayan Giant' (*R. armeniacus*) we'd spotted earlier in the day.

Our total, after several recounts, was 158 taxa. A good number and the same as our previous highest, in 2018 – the year we found Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) beside the Chip Lane roundabout.

These late-season meetings always seem to turn up something.