

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Sunday 6th October 2024, Wincanton (VC5)

Leaders: Steve Parker & Fred Rumsey

Report: Fred Rumsey & Helena Crouch

Eleven members met in Wincanton, for a day of urban botanising, in a monad which spans the VC5/VC6 boundary. The VC6 portion, where we met, already had 222 species recorded since 2000, whereas there was only one record for the VC5 part: rather than split into two groups, we decided to focus on the VC5 half of the monad.

Leaving the car park, we set off briskly to the vice-county boundary, then slowed to recording pace as we meandered through a maze of alleys and back streets. A damp wall beside a downpipe yielded three species of fern: Hart's-tongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*), Maidenhair Spleenwort (*A. trichomanes* subsp. *quadrivalens*) and Male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*). Wall-rue (*A. ruta-muraria*) and Rustyback (*A. ceterach*) were soon added to the list. We found many cosmopolitan street weeds and wall plants including some of the regular garden escapes which make urban recording so species rich.



Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*) in an alley © Helena Crouch

Towards the end of the alley a tuft of bronze sedge caused some excitement and considerable debate. A self-sown escape from the neighbouring garden, this was an example of one of several Australasian species which are now popular in the horticultural trade. The plant was not flowering. It was originally thought to be Silver-spiked Sedge (*Carex buchananii*), but other very similar species are available now and identification seems to depend upon floral features.



Carex sp. New to VC5 whichever species it is! © Steve Parker

Entering another car park, we explored some wasteland, adding several species to the list, and puzzled over a stunted damaged vegetative plant in the gutter. After lengthy contemplation, the Flora Incognita app suggested Nyger (*Guizotia abyssinica*) and suddenly the identity was obvious! The Vegetative Key was produced and the characters carefully checked. At the edges of the car park, two large patches of Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*) were found, apparently new to the hectad. A small sapling of Cappadocian Maple (*Acer cappadocicum*) was also new to the hectad and only the third record of this species in VC5.

Leaving the car park, members were distracted by an impressive seat created from a carved tree trunk. Along another alley, a grass was spotted high on a wall: a specimen was collected and confirmed as Flattened Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*). This was the first post-2000 record for this species in the hectad! We were briefly lured into VC6 as we descended Tout Hill, as Fred spotted a patch of polypody on the opposite roadside wall. He confirmed that this was Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*), the first record for the hectad since 1952.

identify Cannabis (*Cannabis sativa*) vegetatively, but the flowering Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) was new to some members!

It began to rain as we reached the town centre and found to our delight that a tea shop was still open. The meeting thus ended with convivial refreshment around a large table. We had recorded 218 species in VC5, with eight new to the hectad, and we took the total for the monad to 319 species. Thanks to Steve for leading and to all who took part and contributed to making this a most enjoyable meeting.



A characterful bench is inspected by the group © Steve Parker

We had lunch on a bank in a recreation ground, with expansive views to the south, then made our way inexorably downhill, ending up parallel to the A303, in a new estate which was disappointingly less diverse in its weedy flora. Attempts to locate a footpath to take us to the southernmost fringe of the monad were thwarted. Instead, we crossed the A303 via a road bridge, briefly leaving the target monad, but finding little to add for our efforts. Meanwhile John explored the verge of the busy main road, finding Sea Fern-grass (*Catapodium marinum*) new to the monad. This roadside halophyte has been found at several inland sites in Somerset in the last ten years, thriving in response to the winter salting of our major highways.

Returning uphill along residential roads, one front garden bank was much admired for its profusion on mining bees; we met a knowledgeable householder who appreciated our interest. Elsewhere we found a patch of casual aliens which had clearly arisen from bird seed. Alarming, most of the group could