

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Lunch on the dunes © Helena Crouch

Sunday 27th April 2025, Berrow Dunes Local Nature Reserve (VC6)

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Barbra Lakin

Report: Helena Crouch

Thirteen members and two Somerset Council Green Estates Rangers met at Berrow Dunes LNR on a fine sunny day. This meeting was not only a good introduction to some sand-dune and coastal plants, but hopefully our records and discussions on the day will help with management, so the warden kindly reserved a sector of the car park for our use. We set off on the path heading north from the car park, almost immediately finding rosettes of Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), a species which is Near Threatened on both the England and GB Red Lists and thus a RPR species. It is not uncommon on dunes at the coast. At the edge of the path, we found a second member of the family Boraginaceae, Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*), with tiny flowers and the pedicel shorter than the calyx in fruit.

Several garden escapes were recorded at this edge of the reserve near the Coast Road. We puzzled over a

clump of large strappy leaves, concluding that they might be Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*): a return visit will be necessary! We found a small clump of Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*), Garden Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*), a large bush of Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) and Fringe cups (*Tellima grandiflora*).

Heading seawards, we reached a large pond, recently cleared and restored, with a brush hedge erected around the perimeter to deter dogs from swimming. The adjacent mature dune grassland included Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and a patch of Cowslips (*Primula veris*). We found clumps of Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) and Sand Sedge (*Carex arenaria*) as we continued to explore the dunes, and Bur Chervil (*Anthriscus caucalis*) which has a largely coastal distribution in Somerset. Sand Cat's-tail (*Phleum arenarium*), another RPR species, Near Threatened on the England Red List, was just coming into flower.

We stopped for lunch beside a large hollow on the dunes, the site of Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina* subsp. *canina*). This pretty violet is Vulnerable on the

England Red List, having declined considerably due to loss of habitat. In Somerset it is now only known at about six sites. We found eight plants in flower.



Heath Dog-violet, with yellow spur and long leaves © Helena Crouch

Over lunch, several members studied some tiny vetches, comparing them with Common Vetch (*Vicia sativa*). The tiny plants were identified as Spring Vetch (*Vicia lathyroides*) due to the downy narrow leaflets, lack of tendrils, simple stipules and solitary flowers. This RPR species is Rare in VC6.

Beside the hollow, we found more Early Forget-me-not and other tiny annuals: Sea Mouse-ear (*Cerastium diffusum*) with four petals and entirely green bracts, and Little Mouse-ear (*Cerastium semidecandrum*) with five petals, shorter than the sepals and bracts with broad silvery margins. Heading to the beach we also found Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*) which has no petals at all.



Tiny flower of the annual Sea Mouse-ear (*Cerastium diffusum*) with four petals © Barbra Lakin

The seaward dunes are dominated by scrub, particularly Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) which is not native to Somerset but was planted for dune stabilisation. This function is also achieved by Sand Sedge and several grasses, including the striking blue-leaved Lyme-grass (*Leymus arenarius*) through which we emerged onto the beach. Sea-spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*) was common along the seaward dune and on the strandline we found a single plant of Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*) and several patches of seedlings of Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali* subsp. *kali*).

We left the beach (without ice-creams), returning through the scrub to the open dunes, finding a large patch of Compact Brome (*Anisantha madritensis*). This annual grass was formerly considered to be native in Somerset and included in the early Red Data Books; however, it is now regarded as a Neophyte.

Our return route took in several more dune slack ponds. The best had Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), both RPR species, growing at the margins, with Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) on one bank and Lesser Bulrush (*Typha angustifolia*) at one end. Submerged in the pond we could see Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and a Stonewort (*Chara* sp.), whilst on the surface were a few patches of Thread-leaved Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus trichophyllus*). We agreed that all attempts should be made to protect this pond from damage by dogs, perhaps by erecting signs designating the larger pond nearer the car park as a dog swimming pond, since that appeared to have less flora of interest. Another slack had dried out completely, shaded by a large willow: restoration of that one seemed impracticable. The next pond we visited was shaded but still held water in which we observed newts swimming: it was suggested that some conservation management of this pond could be beneficial.

Altogether we recorded 190 species in this small Local Nature Reserve, updating records for many Rare Plant Register species. Thank you to all participants and to Barbra, the Green Estate Rangers and the warden for organising and facilitating the meeting.