

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



The mature dunes of Burnham & Berrow Golf Course © Helena Crouch

Monday 23rd June 2025, Berrow Dunes (VC6)

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Richard Whyman

Report: Helena Crouch

On a fine but windy evening, ten members met with the Head Greenkeeper, Richard Whyman, for a walk at Burnham & Berrow Golf Course to see some of the rare plants of Berrow Dunes SSSI. Our first Somerset Rare Plant Register (RPR) target was Lizard Orchid (*Himantoglossum hircinum*), a Schedule 8 species, which was having a spectacularly bad year: we only saw one withered plant all evening. Like everywhere, the dunes were parched. We found dry remains of Sand Cat's-tail (*Phleum arenarium*), and fruiting plants of Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), both Near Threatened on the England Red List and thus also RPR species.

On a bare track, we were pleased to find Bulbous Meadow-grass (*Poa bulbosa*) where recorded in 2024. While Richard kindly looked out for golfers, all botanists fell to their knees in search of tiny treasures. We were rewarded with three small crisped clovers: Slender Trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*), Rough Clover (*T. scabrum*) and Suffocated Clover (*T. suffocatum*), which is a RPR species as it is Scarce in GB and Rare in

both VC5 and VC6. Nearby, we also found some dried up Silver Hair-grass (*Aira caryophyllea*) and a lovely patch of Bearded Fescue (*Vulpia ciliata* subsp. *ambigua*), another RPR species.



The Dead Clover Appreciation Society and patient Head Greenkeeper keeping watch © Helena Crouch

Eventually, we headed to the ditch separating the golf course from the reed bed, where plants were conveniently normal-sized and alive. Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*) and Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*) grew at the ditch edge, and we fished out Horned-pondweed (*Zannichellia palustris*).

Excitingly, a Bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris* agg.) was also spotted in the ditch, although the lack of flowers meant that it could not be identified to species. Both *U. vulgaris* and the very similar *U. australis* are RPR species, and whichever it turns out to be, it is new to the hectad and to Berrow Dunes SSSI. Alongside the ditch, the grassland is left unmown all summer (as a rough): here we found Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Marsh Arrowgrass (*Triglochin palustris*), both Near Threatened on the England Red List and thus two more RPR species. The leaves of Marsh Arrowgrass smell of coriander.



Flowers of Marsh Arrowgrass © Fred Rumsey

On the damp side of a raised green, were many patches of Slender Clubrush (*Isolepis cernua*). This species was found on grassland in front of the church in 2008 but has not been seen within the SSSI and golf course since 1945, when a single tuft was found in the (now non-existent) saltmarsh at Berrow by Cecil and Noel Sandwith.

Heading north, we recorded another patch of Bulbous Meadow-grass, in a new monad, and several plants of Common Eyebright (*Euphrasia nemorosa*), yet another RPR species. Eventually we reached another of the targets of the evening, the rare Round-headed Club-rush (*Scirpoides holoschoenus*). The large patch, 4m in diameter, was first recorded here in sand dunes in 1896; it is now surrounded by reeds but continues to thrive. Just north of this we saw another highlight of the evening: hundreds of plants of Marsh

Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*) in flower in the damp rough at the edge of a fairway. This species is Near Threatened on the England Red List, and a RPR species, as is Quaking-grass (*Briza media*) which was growing with it. Even though the plants were particularly short due to the dry season, the relentless wind hampered photographers.



Marsh Helleborine © Helena Crouch

Another particularly special RPR plant of Berrow Dunes is Divided Sedge (*Carex divisa*) which grows in a small slack, its only site in Somerset. We were dismayed to find the slack quite dry and filled with reeds, but thankfully the sedge persists.

By now the light was failing. Some members headed back directly whilst the remaining few meandered generally southwards, continuing to hunt for more species. Just south of the church, we found Compact Brome (*Anisantha madritensis*) apparently in a new monad. This grass, formerly a Red Data Book species, is now considered to be a neophyte so no longer a RPR species. We stopped to admire the crisped remains of a narrow spike of Common Broomrape, identified by Fred as *Orobancha minor* subsp. *minor* var. *compositarum*, which usually grows on Hawk's-beards (*Crepis* spp.). Evening-primroses were in full flower and it was getting late. We had made some excellent new records for RPR species and updated others. Berrow Dunes SSSI is home to over thirty RPR species so definitely warrants regular visits.

We are very grateful to Richard Whyman and his team of greenkeepers for their engagement with SRPG regarding management for rare plants, and to the Course Manager for allowing us to visit annually.