

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

**Saturday 25th October 2025, WFS Autumn
One-day hunt, Taunton (VC5)**

Leaders: Simon Leach & Steve Parker

Report: Fred Rumsey & Simon Leach

If it's the last weekend in October it has to be the Silk Mills Park & Ride and our annual engagement with a time-honoured Wild Flower Society ritual – the Autumn One-day Hunt: a mission to find as many wild plants in flower as possible on a single day in the last week of October. I'm sure this used to be branded as 'The Last Day Hunt', but in a warming world the end of October often still feels like summer. Although it didn't today as the group of 16 huddled, in their multiplicity of layers, while Simon gave us our briefing.



"Your mission...". © Steve Parker

By revisiting the same route, this now our sixth time, a much better appreciation of change and possible causes of any change can be reached. It also stimulates a competitive urge to try to better previous totals; made easier, of course, by knowing what has been found previously and where.

Traditionally it has taken more than an hour to exhaust the many riches of the carpark. Today was no exception with the usual little treats: the white Changing Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor* subsp. *dubia*), Wall Bedstraw (*Galium parisiense*) and three species of Fleabane (*Erigeron*), including our delightful native Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acris*). The all-important score was 51, an improvement of 1 on 2024.

Exiting past a bank of Bramble that we decided was huge enough to be *Rubus armeniacus*, we made our way past Roughmoor Pond to Longrun Meadow. The grassland was rather bleak and very green, but the species kept accumulating, including a number of grasses, the hybrid Rye-Grass (*Lolium × boucheanum*) and Meadow Foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) amongst them. We quickly paid our respects to one of the site's main claims to botanical fame, Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*) in VC5, still flowering at its only known truly 'wild' site in VC5 (although it's also been recorded as a nursery weed in the paths at Willowbrook Garden Centre, on the road to Wellington). There was also some smutty Water Chickweed (*Stellaria aquatica*) nearby, with the running total now having reached 89! But the star of the show in Longrun, and probably the most photographed plant of the day, was Hybrid Goat's Beard (*Tragopogon × mirabilis*). First found here in May 2019, plants have persisted and spread, even though the books tell us that it's supposed to have low fertility.

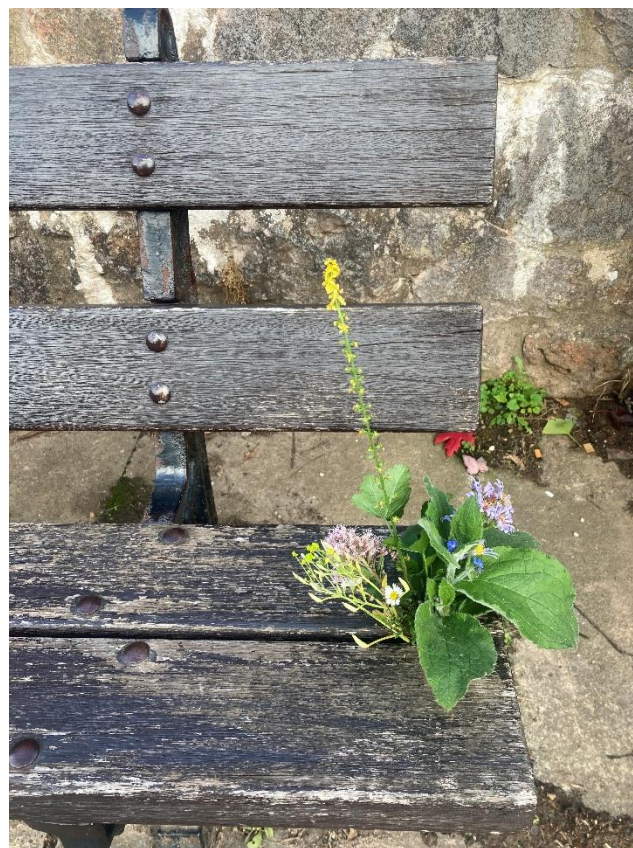
As in previous years lunch was taken at the Weir Café before moving on to the footpath behind Tesco for the usual suite of species we've come to expect here including Stinking Tutsan (*Hypericum hircinum*), Shasta Daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum*), Hedgerow Crane's-bill (*Geranium pyrenaicum*) and Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*). The small white flowers of Traveller's Joy (*Clematis vitalba*) covered the hedging to the carpark. In a small shaded grassy patch between 'Hickleys Healthcare' and the old mill stream Field Woundwort (*Stachys arvensis*) had been seen last year and was re-found, still flowering nicely.



Stachys arvensis © Helena Crouch

On the grassy bank between Castle Street and Tangier car park we paid our respects to abundant Flat-stalked Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*) and, as in 2024, we could also admire Yellow Oat-grass (*Trisetum flavescens*), Hedge Bedstraw (*Galium album*) and Fodder Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *balearicum*). Not flowering, but an exciting find nonetheless, was a dense patch of young Chia (*Salvia hispanica*) plants, only the second record of this species in VC5. Goodlands Gardens once again reliably served up still-flowering White Melilot (*Melilotus albus*), an uncommon plant in VC5, plus

Celery-leaved Buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*) at the water's edge, and on masonry nearby a few plants of Henbit Dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*).



Goodlands Garden - a last week posey. © Fred Rumsey

The old livestock market site was very colourful with Yellow Chamomile (*Cota tinctoria*), Musk-mallow (*Malva moschata*), Tall Melilot (*Melilotus altissimus*), Weld (*Reseda luteola*), Purple Toadflax (*Linaria purpurea*) and Butterfly-bush (*Buddleja davidii*) visible through the wire fencing. After a brief canal-side stretch – with Balkan Spurge (*Euphorbia oblongata*) – we turned up onto Trenchard Way where, conscious of the time, the group split into two teams, one on each side of the road. Echoing last year, we once again saw Perennial Wall-rocket (*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*) to add to the Annual Wall-rocket (*D. muralis*) seen earlier, Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), and the salt-tolerant Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*). On Helena and Fred's (northern) side of the road the open ballast between the road and the railway produced two (not flowering) treasures more typical of the seaside: Sea Stork's-bill (*Erodium maritimum*) – known here since 1992 – and Bird's-foot Clover (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*), a new locality and only the third in

the Taunton area. Maintaining the salt-loving theme, further along Trenchard Way was the (still-flowering) Annual Beard-grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*), now far more frequent as an urban casual than on the coast.

By now much depleted, the group wearily made our way back to the cars, but still keenly trying to add to our total. Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) alongside the footpath by the allotments, and Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) to the north of Roughmoor Pond provided the finishing touches. Our total, gratifyingly, was 166 taxa, the highest 'since records began', and surely a challenge for us to beat in 2026. The previous highest total, recorded in 2024 and 2018 had been 158.