

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Sunday 12th October, Ilminster (VC5)

Leaders: Steve Parker & Fred Rumsey

Report: Steve Parker

Urban botany is not to everyone's taste, but I really enjoy searching the streets for their weeds and garden escapes, you never know what you might find in an urban area. The plan for this meeting was to record within Ilminster town, keeping within the ST3614 monad.

A small group gathered in front the St Mary's Silver Street for our urban safari. However, before we started recording our target monad, Fred Rumsey lead us a short distance to where in 2024, he had found Small-flowered Catchfly (*Silene gallica*). The plant has been recorded on the outskirts of Ilminster in 1992. The current population is restricted to the top of a wall in Silver Street. At the time of our visit there were approximately 60 seedlings.



Small-flowered Catchfly seedlings. © Steve Parker

From here we walked back towards the church. It is sometimes very difficult to decide when a plant has really escaped a garden and can be recorded. This was the case with a Passionflower (*Passiflora caerulea*), which was growing across the pavement and appeared to have self-seeded. Helena Crouch as

diligent as ever was doubtful and resolved the issue by tracing the plants stem back to a hole in the wall to confirm it was rooted in the garden, so was not to be recorded.

Clearly naturalised on walls were the common garden escapes Trailing Bellflower (*Campanula poscharskyana*), Adria Bellflower (*C. portenschlagiana*) and Aubretia (*Aubrieta deltoidei*) together with a range of native ferns including a very healthy-looking Heart's-tongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*).

One of the most frequent escapes was Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), this plant is galled by (*Trioza centanthi*), this gall has spread rapidly in the past decade and is now common almost everywhere the Red Valerian is found. A few hardy species find a home in the pavement; this was true for the now common Cockspur (*Echinochloa crus-galli*) which was growing at the base of the wall in front of St Mary's.

We headed north from Silver Street along North Street. Growing on the wall there was a plant that we could not identify straight away. Looking around the mystery plant was also found in a nearby garden; this must have been the seed source. The plant was determined to be Coastal Daisy-bush (*Olearia solandri*). A garden escape that was new for Somerset, it has been recorded mainly as along the Cornish coast.

As it was close to lunchtime the plan was to walk a little way out of the town. We started up Old Road, now a footpath leading to Beacon Hill. On the side of the path we noticed the cut heads of Cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus* L. var. *cardunculus*), which had been discarded as garden waste, then found two small plants of the Cardoon on the edge of the track. The trackway was lined with old trees including a

magnificent specimen of Field Maple (*Acer campestre*).



A magnificent Field Maple. © Steve Parker

After lunch we made our way back towards the town. We noticed the leaves of Hedge Bedstraw (*Galium album*), a quick search revealed three caterpillars of the Hummingbird Hawk-moth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*).



Hummingbird Hawk-moth © Steve Parker

In a newish housing estate Perennial Coneflower (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), another new escape for Somerset, was growing in the gutter along with Pale Galingale (*Cyperus eragrostis*) which was new to the 10km square. The walls in the older parts of the town

are covered with Mexican Fleabane (*Erigeron karvinskianus*). Adding to our list of new 10km records was Garden Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) which had naturalised on a wall and the remains of Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*) which Fred spotted.



Mexican Fleabane wall. © Steve Parker

We were aiming for the Shudrick Stream, a very small watercourse that runs alongside the Tesco supermarket car park. Here only a few additional native wetland species were added to the list, taking our total for the monad to 203 species, many of which were non-natives that had escaped the gardens. After such good botany we found a café still open for a much-needed coffee and cake.