

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

Saturday 17th August 2025, West Moor SSSI (VC5)

Leaders: Steve Parker

Report: Steve Parker

We gathered at the entrance to the church in Kingsbury Episcopi. Before making our way on the West Moor we did a bit of recording in Church Street. By the church gate a Dahlia species was in full bloom, this was clearly not planted, while a little further down the road there were several plants of Least Yellow-sorrel (*Oxalis exilis*) these had seeded itself in the cracks in the pavement. We also came across a single specimen of Hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*), looking around we could see that it was growing in a nearby garden. This proved to be first record for this plant in VC5.

From the village the group made its way on to West Moor SSSI. A site notified for the botanical interest of the ditch network. Our target was to record the Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*). This tall umbellifer is confined to ditches in the Somerset Levels. It was first recorded on West Moor by John Keylock in 1970. There are then records from NCC staff in 1984, presumably as part of the SSSI notification surveys. Captain Roe made records in the in 1987 and 1990. It was recorded by botanists working for English Nature and by SRPG members in 2001. However, the records would suggest that many of the populations on the moor have been lost. The reason for the lost is not clear but I suspect that over-enthusiastic ditch clearance could be to blame.

The summer had been very dry with very low rainfall but many of the ditches had at least some water in them, the characteristic aquatic plants were recorded these included Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*), Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*) and Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*). A grapnel sample

collected several common duckweed species and a few Rootless Duckweed (*Wolffia arrhiza*) plants.

As expected, we found the Greater Water-parsnip in the location it was last seen by John Poingdestre in 2021. The population was very large with hundreds of plants in several ditches. The plant had finished flowering and looked like it would produce lots of viable seed.



Ditch with Greater Water-parsnip. © Steve Parker

After lunch we went in search of a second Greater Water-parsnip population, the SRPG had last recorded this population in September 2001, but despite searching at the location it had not been seen since. It was quite a long walk and of course we made lots of interesting records on the way, including three locations for Bladder-sedge (*Carex vesicaria*).

Sadly, we think that the Great Water-parsnip at the second location has now been lost. There were once at least five populations of this plant on West Moor, now there is only the one. The West Moor site is the only known site now in VC5. We don't know if the land owner is aware of the importance of his ditches, it would only take an over-enthusiastic ditcher for the plant to be lost from South Somerset.