

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



SRPG New Year Plant Hunters at Woodhill Bay, Portishead © Nicky Hodges

Sunday 4th January 2026, New Year Plant Hunt, Portishead (VC6)

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Report: Helena Crouch & Nicky Hodges

This year, Somerset Rare Plants Group ambitiously arranged two simultaneous New Year Plant Hunts, at Minehead (VC5) and Portishead (VC6). These were held on the last day of the four-day event organised by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI), now in its fifteenth year. We met knowing the longest list so far was 110 species and with a challenge from the BSBI to help take the total number of species found across Britain and Ireland to over 600.

Thirteen of us gathered on a cold windy day, outside Café Lido. We decided to re-trace the route taken three years previously by Bristol Naturalists' Society, when a total of 68 species were recorded. Starting the clock for our three-hour hunt, we soon found Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Dandelion (*Taraxacum* agg.), Annual Meadow-grass (*Poa annua*), Smooth Sow-thistle

(*Sonchus oleraceus*) and Shepherd's-purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), all in the Top Ten most frequently recorded for the NYPH. On the sea wall, we added two coastal species, Sea Radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum* subsp. *maritimus*) and Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*). By the steps up to Battery Point, we spotted Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) exactly where it was seen three years before.

Battery Point was bleak, but at the east end of the grassland, at the edge of East Wood, we were astonished to find Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) in flower, together with Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*) and a large patch of Red Dead-nettle (*Lamium purpureum*). We had recorded 23 species within sight of the Lido!

Crossing Esplanade Road, we headed up Battery Lane, adding Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Petty Spurge (*Euphorbia peplus*). On walls we found Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*) and Mexican Fleabane (*Erigeron karvinskianus*).



Bramble flowers at the edge of East Wood © Helena Crouch

Continuing along Battery Lane, we came upon dead spikes of Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*), then to our surprise a fresh flowering plant. It was the only one found in 1,985 New Year Plant Hunt surveys this year!



Ivy Broomrape in flower at the edge of Battery Lane © Helena Crouch

From the south end of Battery Lane, we headed east towards the marina, spotting Trailing Bellflower (*Campanula poscharskyana*), Adria Bellflower (*C. portenschlagiana*) and Red Valerian (*Centranthus*

ruber) on walls. On paving we found Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*), with stamens and stigmas but no petals, and on the bank by the marina was a large stand of Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*). By the time we reached the marina for lunch we had seen 45 species in flower. We sat down in sunshine on benches for lunch: the sun went in immediately and it was bitterly cold by the water!

Refreshed, we restarted the clock and resumed the hunt: a tiny Firecrest was spotted in trees. One cold botanist turned back; twelve continued along Harbour Road, although some departed briefly for a hot drink. We were pleased to find both Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium pusillum*) and Dove's-foot Crane's-bill (*G. molle*) on the verge before heading south alongside a rhyne where we finally added Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) to our list.

As a diversion from our planned route, we explored an area cleared of brambles in preparation for construction of the new Portishead railway station. This yielded Weld (*Reseda luteola*), Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), Caper Spurge (*Euphorbia lathyris*), Hoary Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), Tall Melilot (*Melilotus altissimus*) and Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*). Our total was now 62 species in flower.



Caper Spurge in flower, with male flowers consisting of single stamens and female flowers comprising a 3-celled ovary with three bifid stigmas
© Nicky Hodges

Next, we headed through an industrial estate. Mistletoe in trees was tantalisingly close to flowering, but not quite. We only found Oxford Ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*) and a smart Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota* subsp. *carota*). On a traffic island we added Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*). New flowers were thin on the ground as we headed back towards Esplanade Road, but eagle-eyed members spotted Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) and Green Alkanet (*Pentaglottis sempervirens*). We stopped the clock to walk back through Lake Grounds to give ourselves five minutes to search for flowers on the saltmarsh. The sun shone as a single flower of Sea Aster (*Tripolium pannonicum*) was photographed, with mauve ray florets intact, the styles clearly visible. Our final species was Sea Arrow-grass (*Triglochin maritima*) with tall racemes of flowers, the ovaries topped with white papillate stigmas. Ours was the only record for this species in flower in 1,985 New Year Plant Hunt surveys this year!

Sadly, our three hours were up, and we returned to the Café Lido for very welcome hot drinks. We had recorded 73 species in flower which was the fourteenth longest list of the year. Over the four days, more than 25,000 records were made and 663 species were recorded in flower.