

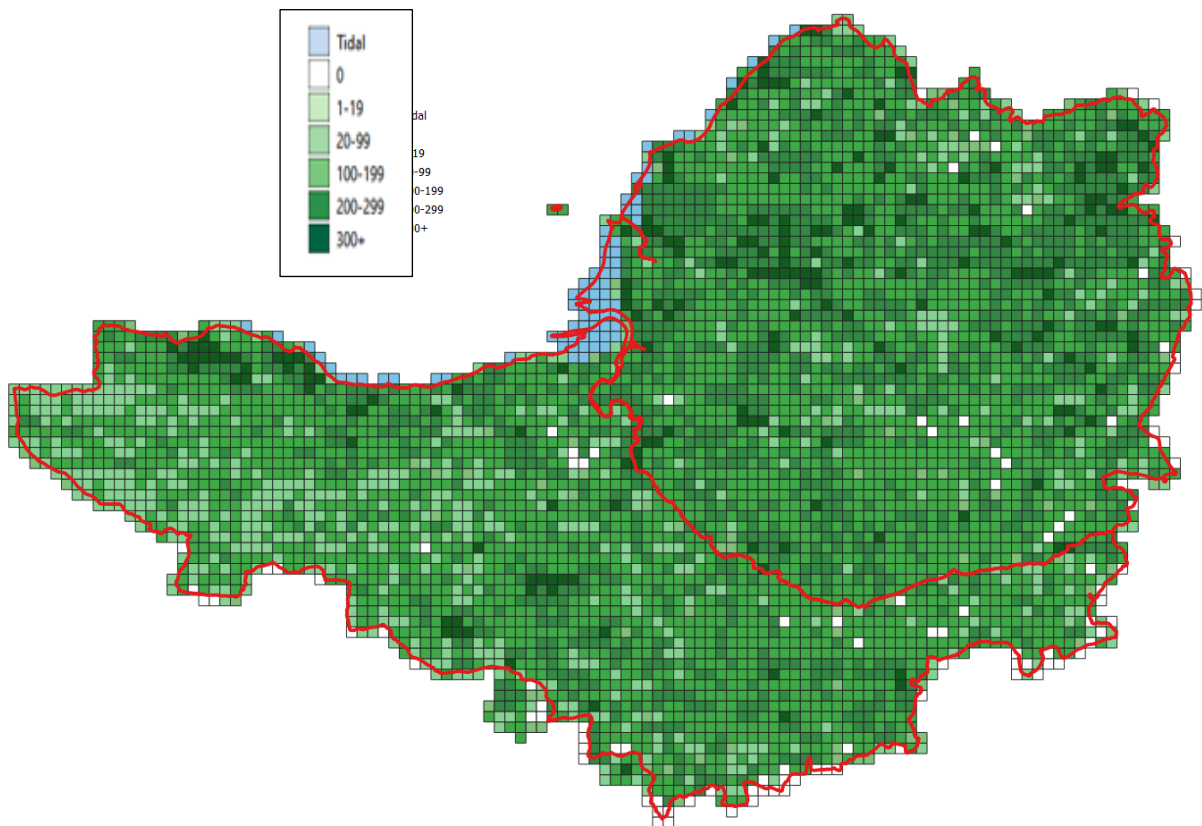
# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



2025 Newsletter

Issue No. 26



SRPG Members and others added a huge total of over 52,500 plant records to the national BSBI database in 2025. The above map shows the count of distinct taxa by monad based on data from 2000 to 2025. Source: BSBI Distribution Database

## Co-Chairs' Review of 2025 Highlights

Somerset Rare Plants Group welcomed several new members during 2025, increasing the group's combined enthusiasm for learning and shared expertise. Meetings continued to provide an excellent opportunity for developing the growing pool of botanical knowledge in Somerset.

A highlight of the spring was a second Vegetative Key Workshop, kindly led by John Poland. This was attended by thirty members and held at Shapwick Cricket Pavilion, which temporarily became a classroom and laboratory. A field-based Grasses Workshop followed in the summer, kindly hosted by 'A Patch Wilder' near Shipham. In the autumn, members had an opportunity to explore the Somerset County Herbarium housed at the Somerset Heritage Centre in Taunton, learning about the varied collections housed there. A small, dedicated team of SRPG members have now been curating and organising the herbarium for over ten years, and adding new specimens to the collection, particularly Dandelions. This is a very important facet and legacy of SRPG's varied activity.

A programme of fifteen field meetings was held during 2025. Meetings were mostly well attended and covered a variety of habitats, including calcareous grassland, heathland, sand-dunes and other coastal habitats, peatland, wet acid woodland, ditches, neutral grassland, village streets and, of course, the Silk Mills Park & Ride car park! Many good records were made during meetings, in addition to their value in

terms of enjoyment and education provided. We are very grateful to all members who dedicated their time to leading walks and writing the meeting reports which make up much of this Newsletter and are also available on the website, showcasing the activity of the Group.

During 2025, over 52,000 records were made in Somerset, mostly but not exclusively by SRPG members. The vice-county recorders for Somerset are very grateful for all the records sent in by members. These are all now incorporated into the Distribution Database of the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI), contributing to our knowledge and understanding of the British and Irish Flora, viewable online to anyone in the world (at varied resolutions depending on level of access) and available at full resolution to conservation agencies. Although we all enjoy recording for fun, it is particularly gratifying if our records can be useful to landowners and contribute to conservation: a sign of the regard in which SRPG is held is the frequency we receive requests for surveys and information.

Many enquiries are made through our website, which is our publicity front to the world. We are hugely grateful to our dedicated webmaster Val Graham for all his work on keeping the website up-to-date and relevant, and also of course to all who contribute articles and photographs used on the website.

For members, perhaps our most valued production is the annual Newsletter. Crafting this publication is a massive task and we are extremely fortunate and grateful to have Karen Andrews as our editor, and also thank all contributors for their reports and articles. Enjoy reading the 2025 Newsletter!

**Helena Crouch & Ellen McDouall**  
**Co-Chairs of Somerset Rare Plants Group**



SRPG members examining ditch vegetation at Shapwick Heath. Photo © Nicky Hodges

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## Part 1: 2025 Meeting Reports

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> December 2024,  
New Year Plant Hunt, Bridgwater (VC6)

Leader & Report: Helena Crouch



SRPG Members at the start of their New Year Plant Hunt in Bridgwater. Photo © Helena Crouch

Eleven excited members met on the Town Bridge to participate in the fourteenth New Year Plant Hunt organised by the BSBI. This four-day survey involves trying to find as many species as possible in flower (showing stamens or stigma) during a three-hour walk. For comparative consistency, we repeated the route taken in 2022 on the VC6 side of the River Parrett.

The sun shone briefly as we recorded our first species by the bridge: Shepherd's-purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), Annual Meadow-grass (*Poa annua*), Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*) and Chickweed (*Stellaria media*). Having recorded eight species by the bridge, we headed for a patch of amenity grassland by Asda. Here we added Daisy (*Bellis perennis*) and Dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp.), Yarrow (*Achillea*

*millefolium*), Red Dead-nettle (*Lamium purpureum*) and Annual Mercury (*Mercurialis annua*), all seen here in 2022.



Annual Mercury (*Mercurialis annua*)  
Photo © Helena Crouch

Continuing north along East Quay we found Common Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*), Hogweed

(*Heracleum sphondylium*) and Common Ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*). By the time we reached the old Black Bridge we had recorded 24 species. We added Smooth Sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*), Smooth Hawk's-beard (*Crepis capillaris*) and Bristly Ox-tongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*). Here, in the gutter, we found a highlight of the day: two plants of Annual Buttonweed (*Cotula australis*) in flower and new to VC6!



Annual Buttonweed (*Cotula australis*) in a gutter.  
Photo © Helena Crouch

We turned east along The Clink, finding our thirtieth species in flower, a rather scrappy Fat-hen (*Chenopodium album*). Some of us crossed the road and were rewarded with Field Pansy (*Viola arvensis*), new to the monad, in a shrubbery by new houses.

At St John the Baptist church, we once again met the vicar, who remembered our visit in 2022 when we added Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) to our list: to our delight, Primroses were flowering in the churchyard again, as were Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*).

Adding a few more street weeds on our way, we reached Eastover Park for lunch, spotting Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) at the entrance, taking our total to 41 species in flower. The benches were wet, but the see-saw and swings weren't, and the aerial runway was fun!

Refreshed, we marched across boring amenity grassland to the pond, where in 2022 we had seen Celandine (*Ficaria verna*) – and there it was, in flower! So was Gorse (*Ulex europaea*), Wall Barley (*Hordeum murinum*) and at the water's edge, a self-sown Great Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*). As we headed towards the industrial estate, we found masses of Wall Bedstraw (*Galium parisiense*) on some paving

alongside a house. No flowers, but a new species for the hectad!

Next, we walked south for 1km along Parrett Way, exploring verges and waste ground in the industrial estate. We found Cut-leaved Dead-nettle (*Lamium hybridum*) and Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium pusillum*), shortly followed by Dove's-foot Crane's-bill (*G. molle*) and Round-leaved Crane's-bill (*G. rotundifolium*). As in 2022, we found masses of Narrow-leaved Ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*) and also Oxford Ragwort (*S. squalidus*). Tufted Vetch (*Vicia cracca*) was a surprise: indeed, it was only seen on one other list from over 2000 surveys!

Approaching the bridge over the Parrett, we found a veritable bonanza of species in flower by the slipway down to the riverside path, including Hoary Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), Field Rose (*Rosa arvensis*), Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), the latter two probably originating from a seed mix. A Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) took our total to 65. With little time left, we marched back along the riverside cycle path, spotting Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*) and finally Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*).



Cow Parsley with a tiny moth. Photo © Helena Crouch

The weather had been kind and we had seen 68 species in flower. Over the four days, this was the twelfth longest list out of 2091 surveys. We celebrated with hot drinks back in the town.

## Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2025, Recording for the Somerset Rare Plants Group, Shapwick Pavilion (VC6)

**Leaders: Steve Parker, Sam Thomas, Helena Crouch, Val Graham & Fred Rumsey**

**Report: Karen Andrews**



SRPG members enjoy catching up with each other after the winter break. Photo © Karen Andrews

Shapwick Pavilion was our venue for a winter meeting dedicated to botanical recording. Twenty-nine attended the event keen to catch up with other members after the winter botanical break.

### **What makes a good record?**

Steve opened the meeting by asking the question: why bother recording? He outlined how useful the information and distribution maps are for the conservation of different habitats. Historical records allow us to track changes through time. The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland's (BSBI) records give us a much clearer picture of what is occurring.

Next, Steve asked: do I record or not? Consider whether a plant has been deliberately, or possibly, planted. Record street trees, etc, but give the status as "planted". Record non-natives escaping into the wild. Don't record garden plants but do record garden weeds. Over 50% of species recorded in the last BSBI Atlas were non-natives.

What information makes a good record? Think what, where, who and when. What is the name of the plant? Give the site name with a precise grid reference. Note the recorder's full name or write Somerset Rare Plants Group if recording as a group (Do not abbreviate to SRPG as this will be meaningless to those outside Somerset).

Note down the date on which you made the record. Other useful information is the name of the determiner, for example an expert like Tim Rich. With group recording, it is best to note the name of the leader or Vice-county Recorder (VCR).

You can make botanical records throughout the year. You don't have to wait for a plant to flower to record it.

Steve gave the example of recording on Steep Holm island, mentioning Peony (*Paeonia*). The peony is a plant of cultural significance and an International Red Book species. It may be an alien species, but it is of interest as an introduced survivor. It was introduced before Victorian times and spread. Whether to record an introduced species becomes a challenge.

What is a good record? You can use a recording card, a notebook, a scrap of paper or even a dictaphone. Steve mentioned a frustrating record that gives a postcode and recorder's name for Thornapple (*Datura stramonium*) but no date. A bad record is incomplete.

Dedicated recording cards are available for VC5 and VC6. They use abbreviated scientific names. Please don't cross out the numbers. For a special find give a little bit more information on the front of the card.

For rare plants you can track records back over 100 years. Use the BSBI database to query records. Steve looked at the map distribution of Mousetail (*Myosurus minimus*). The database shows when first records were made. In this case, the date is 1896 when Murray's Flora was published. Fred recommended referring to old books and herbarium specimens to track a deeper past history.

### **How to use the BSBI app**

Sam Thomas took on the role of the BSBI's England Officer in April 2024. His role is to support England's VCRs and to improve data acquisition. He demonstrated how to use the BSBI's new recording app and encouraged SRPG members to use it.

Sam described three main elements to the BSBI records

1. Recording app – recent and still in development for mobile phone, laptop or desktop computer use.
2. BSBI documentation hub – a huge amount

of information, links and subcategories.

3. Distributional database – where you can interpret and query data.

To get started, you will need a username and a login from the BSBI. There are different levels of access.

Sam proceeded to give a demonstration. Firstly, you need to choose whether you want to complete a full structured survey or something more ad hoc. If there is no internet connection, the data will be stored on your phone and download once you are reconnected. It will still automatically find a grid reference even if you were not connected. The app is flexible so that you can add notebook records when you return home.

A discussion followed about the level of accuracy that GPS apps on mobile phones have reached by comparison with a handheld GPS device. 99% of all recording now uses monads. Each record in the app will have its own grid reference. The app will even notify you if you leave a monad and need to start a new recording list.

The app makes it easier to make multiple records of the same species. You can upload a species photo but also a habitat view. You are not limited on the number of photos that can be added.

You add extra information about your survey by either selecting dropdown menus or using free text boxes.

You can then start adding the species that you want to record. The app is nearly completely up to date with the latest nomenclature (Stace 4 and beyond), but it also has previous. As you start typing a name, it starts narrowing down the right species for you to select. Vernacular names are also available.

Sam was asked how the app dealt with a new escape that is not on the database. He replied that you need to contact Tom and James who are in charge of the BSBI database to get a new name added.

Records go into a silo to be reviewed by VCRs. If a recorder enters a species that is absent from the square, a flag signals that the record could be wrong or new. If a record is incorrect, the VCR can correct it or go back to the original recorder for more information. Herbarium specimen references can also be added later.

## The BSBI Distribution Database

After lunch Helena introduced everyone to the BSBI's Distribution Database, or DDb for short. Records reach the DDb by increasingly varied routes which become more confusing every year. Ideally, records all go to local record centres too, although these still use a taxon list based on Stace 3, as does the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), which can cause problems when syncing records. VC6 and VC5 records go to the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) and Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC).

The program Mapmate, which we have used to input records, is no longer supported, necessitating further change, particularly as distribution maps generated by MapMate are used in species accounts for SRPG's Rare Plant Register (RPR).

Many historical records are not yet captured digitally: it is often best to ask a VCR for historical information. Helena is custodian of Captain Roe's card index and recording cards.

Anyone can access DDb maps, but the level of resolution varies. There are five levels of access:

1. At the top, BSBI's DDb managers
2. VCRs, referees, BSBI staff and emeritus recorders
3. Recorders and researchers who have been granted privileged access
4. All BSBI members
5. Anyone in the world

For a small group of the most vulnerable species (about 70, eg Killarney Fern), only BSBI staff, VCRs and referees can see full details of records.

Distribution maps are generated from live data in the DDb. You can tailor your maps with your own colour scheme. It is possible to list all species for a tetrad (or monad for BSBI members) then show all the species not seen since a chosen date, which helps with targeting recording effort.

Plant Atlas 2020 is also available online, with zoomable distribution maps, details of Red Listing, galleries of photos, and information on trends and phenology. For the most up-to-date maps though, go to the DDb. Distribution maps

at monad level can also be seen in the species accounts of the Somerset RPR, on the SRPG website.

Helena finished by reminding us that all BSBI members can apply for enhanced access to DDb records (monad level in Somerset) and those who are active contributors of records can ask for full access.

### How to map records and their use

Val targeted his presentation at GIS beginners rather than at the experienced ecologists in the room. He set out to explain how GIS maps worked in layers. Grid references are in the data behind maps. You can zoom in and zoom out to search for specific items.

GIS has the ability to handle data behind the geography, species, habitats, temperature, soils, etc. There is a wide range of possibilities for presentation – e.g. different scales. You can add pie charts. You can combine different sets of data within a site, vice-county, etc. However, to work the base data must be good.

If there is an issue with site recording, you can make National Trust or SSSI boundaries clearer. You can list multiple layers of data. Some may have some 300 sets. Then, you can turn on or off various layers.

Val demonstrated with a map of water quality. Different colours highlight condition. Red appeared for the Somerset Levels.

It is possible to print the maps out. Or you can get a map as a QR code and give it to someone else.

Val referred to green maps for density of species. He raised the issue of inconsistencies. The ability to line all maps up on the same picture and change the transparency was impressive.

Members then shared their knowledge of maps that others might find useful including:

1. National Library of Scotland – all old OS maps
2. Heritage and tithe maps
3. Somerset Historical Environmental Record Maps
4. Know Your Place
5. BANES Planning Portal – local wildlife sites

### Introduction to Herbaria

Fred gave the final presentation of the day on the role of herbaria and the use of specimens. He began with a brief history of the *hortus siccus* (Latin for dry garden). Dry specimens are important vouchers for records, but novel uses of our dried collections are emerging. There are also threats and opportunities on the horizon. Then, Fred asked how can we contribute specimens?

Luca Ghini (1490-1556) is noted as the creator of the first herbarium and first botanical garden. There are links to Somerset, as William Turner, Dean of Wells, went to Pisa to study with Luca Ghini.

We owe the herbarium specimen sheet to Carl Linnaeus. Before him, specimens were bound together in books

Vicki A. Funk wrote that there *are 100 Uses for an Herbarium: well at Least 72*. Herbaria preserve records. They give us physical proof of identification and confirmation of location. They provide an historical and phenological record. We can assess the rigour of the identification. When taxonomy changes, specimens can be redetermined. The material remains preserved for further analysis and future use. As evidence Fred illustrated an Andrea Cesalpino Herbarium specimen from 1563. This means that we can explore deep botanical history as the specimens are still well preserved. Thus, if we consult an herbarium, we may find records for species that are now extinct. The Sloane collections at the Natural History Museum, the largest pre-Linnean collection, give us first records from a world that was very different. We can ask what have we lost and why? Herbaria may have new discoveries lurking in their cupboards that have been overlooked. It was only realised in 1999 that a specimen of the Greenish Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris diaphana*) collected in the Weald in the 1690s offered evidence for its native status before the Victorian Fern craze.

From a sociological and historical view, we can also see which botanists worked with which other botanists. Specimens can have a life and history of their own. Burnt sheets in the Natural History bear witness to the bombing of the Natural History Museum during World War II.

An herbarium specimen provides material for use, DNA is opening up a whole new field of

research with past specimens. Today's high resolution digital photography can focus down on taxonomic details, making specimens accessible online to all. However, you cannot see what is on the other side. Photos can never replace physical specimens.

Perhaps the most important specimens are Type specimens. These fix the identity of the names of what we are recording. The name is defined by the identity of what is on the sheet. Sometimes we realise that the type material doesn't represent the taxon currently recognised under that name. An example given was of Maidenhair Spleenwort, (*Asplenium trichomanes*) from Linnaeus's herbarium.

Vouchers can also be misleading and may be evidence of fraud. Fred referred to *A Rum Affair – A True Story of Botanical Fraud* by Karl Sabbagh.

One negative aspect of herbaria is that they provide evidence of past excessive collection. One sheet of Least Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum lusitanicum*) contains more specimens than can be found in the wild in Britain 140 years later!

There may be applied uses in phenology. The Early Spider Orchid (*Ophrys sphegodes*) has been overcollected from the same sites over 150 years, but this gives us a rich comparative data set of flowering times at a range of locations. We see that during this time there has been a 3-week shift forwards in flowering time related to temperature change.

We can't think 200 years into the future to see all novel uses. When collecting a sample, we usually look for pristine specimens. To do so means that we may miss out on other information such as insect-plant interaction, herbivore biodiversity and invasive species origins. Damaged plants may provide information on plant pests and diseases. Environmental change is changing views on the use of herbaria. There is now a much broader

use for this large resource – for example chemistry of plants in the face of modern-day pollution.

Worldwide there is a vast active network of 3,567 herbaria with 396 million specimens and 13,717 staff. However, Fred stated that herbaria are themselves an endangered species in Britain. There has been an 80% decline. Outdated figures from 1984 cited 630 housed in institutions with 100 in private hands. 120 were not traced. Some university collections were burnt. More than 50% of listed herbaria may be inactive. There is a lack of dedicated curators. Fewer private herbaria are made today and their eventual preservation is uncertain. Institutions and councils are struggling to fund their collections.

This dire situation could have been the case for the Taunton herbarium with its c. 20k specimens, if it were not for the SRPG's active Monday team. Their focus has to be on Somerset.

You can go online and consult Herbaria@home. Small, under-resourced collections can become visible. The Taunton collections have been photographed for uploading.

Fred appealed for herbaria to be given new life. However, it is important to collect responsibly. He suggested a future practical workshop on how to select and press specimens carefully. It is important to mount so that you can see both leaf surfaces. Follow the code of conduct for responsible collection. Consider whether sampling will wipe the plant out. If in doubt, take lots of photographs.

The recording day at Shapwick gave us all lots of food for thought and inspiration for the start of the new botanical year.

## Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2025, Vegetative Key Workshop, Shapwick Pavilion (VC6)

Leader: John Poland

Report: Helena Crouch



John Poland and busy Vegetative Key Workshop students. Photo © Helena Crouch

On a gloriously sunny day, thirty botanists met indoors for a Vegetative Key Workshop with John Poland, one of the authors of 'The Book'. This was the second workshop John has kindly led for SRPG: as before, we started with coffee and a selection of home-made cakes.

Once all were seated, John invited members to study a single leaf of a flowering plant, with a simple, sometimes lobed margin. He explained that as the leaves arose singly (from a large corm) they must be **alternate**, which took us to Division P in the Vegetative Key. The leaves had no latex, were not spiny, had no stipules and were hairless. Although hairless, there were red **papillae** near the tops of the petioles. This combination of characters led us to Sowbread (*Cyclamen hederifolium*).

Our next specimen was a conifer. Leaves were **adnate** to the twigs, a term used when two different organs are fused together. The scale-like leaves were **imbricate** (overlapping like roof tiles) and **opposite-decussate** (arranged in pairs, each pair at right angles to the next). This took us to DH in the key, where the initial summary description includes two numbered features. John explained that these are features which are unique to a species, thus providing a short-cut to identification. In this case, large bright white patches of **stomata** on

undersides of the leaf led us to Hiba (*Thujaopsis dolobrata*).

Handing out *Geranium* rosettes, John asked whether the leaves were opposite or alternate? The clue here was that all leaves were different sizes, so they must be **alternate** – plants with opposite leaves have pairs of leaves the same size. There are keys to selected groups (usually genera or families) at the back of the book, allowing one to shortcut the main key if the group is known: *Geranium* is one such group.

*Geranium* species have large herbaceous **stipules** at the base of the petioles. These protect the developing leaf and were responsible for the introduction of Bank Holidays! Sir John Lubbock, a banker, philanthropist and polymath proposed the Bank Holidays Act to allow workers an opportunity to study; he wrote many books, including one "On Buds and Stipules".

Breaking the *Geranium* petiole cleanly, we were encouraged to count the **vascular bundles**. John explained that there is a vascular bundle for each lobe (or pinnule) of a leaf. Vascular bundles were much clearer on the leaf scar on a twig of Walnut (*Juglans regia*), where they are arranged in groups which look like a monkey's face!



Leaf scar of Walnut showing groups of vascular bundles.  
Photo © Helena Crouch

Hairs are a feature used throughout the key, so we studied a few different kinds of hair (illustrated at the back of the book). Turkish Sage (*Phlomis russeliana*) has **dendritic hairs**, like small trees. Tree-mallow (*Malva arborea*) has **stellate hairs**, with spreading rays like a starfish. Sometimes **hooked hairs** are not obvious but can be detected by pressing a leaf to a woolly jumper: if there are hooked hairs it will stick!

The morning session finished with specimens of Stinking Iris (*Iris foetidissima*) and the question "Which is the upper surface of the leaf?" This was a trick question of course, as *Iris* has **equitant** leaves. They are folded down the middle and mostly fused, so that both outer sides are actually the underside of the leaf, whilst the upper surface is hidden inside.

After lunch we moved on to look at the compound leaf of Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*). Leaves were 2-6-pinnate, with sheathing bases. There was some discussion about whether leaves were hairy or not: the youngest leaves were hairy, but mature leaves were not. There then followed a long search for **latex**! This is a coloured juice, usually white but sometimes coloured, which is very evident in some genera, for example spurges (*Euphorbia*). It helps to heal wounds and aids in defence. Eventually, by cutting the petiole with scissors,

everyone was reasonably convinced that they could see small white blobs around the cut vascular bundles of their Cow Parsley.



When the petiole of Cow Parsley is sliced cleanly, white latex exudes from around each vascular bundle. This is much easier to see down a microscope than in the field.  
Photo © Helena Crouch

Latex was more evident in Trailing Bellflower (*Campanula poscharskyana*), which we studied next! Bellflower leaves are tipped with a white **hydathode** (a gland which exudes water), have veins which are proud on both sides of the leaf and have **non-septate hairs**. John explained that most families consistently have either septate or non-septate hairs, although Fabaceae all have simple hairs except Spotted Medick (*Medicago arabica*) which has septate hairs. Simple hairs are stronger than septate hairs.

After explaining a few more terms, John handed out specimens of White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*) for participants to key out by themselves. It was surprisingly difficult to decide whether the terminal tooth was **acute** or **obtuse**. Utterly keyed out, we finished with tea and cake. It had been a very useful and instructive day.

Leader & Report: Fred Rumsey



The SRPG co-chairs crest the slope above the site of the lost medieval village of Witcombe. Photo © Fred Rumsey

Despite a late change in car park meeting venue, necessitated by the closure of the original for the ongoing construction of a visitor centre, eleven members successfully gathered and, astonishingly, were even ready to depart ten minutes early. Having met elsewhere on Ham Hill in 2022 (see the Meeting report), it was our intention to concentrate on the ST4816 monad for which we had fewer recent records.

The area bears the obvious scars of nearly two millennia of quarrying and is an SSSI for its geological interest. The Ham stone, only quarried here, is a mellow-coloured limestone sought after for construction, the honey colour the result of oxidation of iron within a matrix derived from corals and clay.

The hill, a glorious viewpoint with expansive vistas to the west and north, is popular with those emptying dogs and the flora has also been impacted by the addition of various garden plants through fly-tipping and their escape from the few habitations. The scrubby woodland on the plateau of the hill is criss-crossed by a multitude of undulating trails and paths.

Following a suggested geological trail we quickly picked our way round to the remains of a limekiln. While of obvious industrial archaeological interest it was disappointingly rather too clean of vegetation, but grassland at the woodland edges nearby gave us about 20 discrete clumps of Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*), which we were also to find again in smaller quantity later. We searched in vain for Common Cudweed (*Filago germanica*) which the group had recorded here in abundance on a visit in 2013. The open gravelly surface of the former car park where it had grown was now a construction site. A return later in the year, the 2013 visit was in August, might prove more successful. The timing of that earlier visit might also explain why Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), which we found to be locally abundant in the woodland, had not previously been recorded.

Skirting the extensive active quarry, hidden from view by dense thickets, we soon reached the southern boundary of the monad close to the edge of the scarp. Approaching it, an area of grassland offered hope of something new and crowning a bare patch we found Bugloss (*Lycopsis arvensis*), its forget-me-not blue flowers just opening.



Bugloss (*Lycopsis arvensis*) an archaeophyte annual of light soils. Photo © Helena Crouch

The decision was made to walk briskly through the adjacent monad to get to a commanding view of the Witcombe valley where lunch might be taken. Rumbling tummies and a dearth of botanical interest facilitated this. Replete, the group made the descent to the site of the lost medieval village of Witcombe to admire a patch of Green Hellebore (*Helleborus viridis* subsp. *occidentalis*) by the trackside – surely a herbal survivor from past cultivation. Irritatingly, this grew just a few metres outside our monad boundary. Working our way back into the square and up the steep valley sides we made for the stepped earthen banks with occasional outcropping rocks high on the slopes. These bare areas were the richest and most interesting botanically, with small annuals like Early forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*) in quantity. Even the Dandelions (*Taraxacum* sect. *Erythrosperma*?) inspired admiration, with Helena taking a specimen to be submitted to the referee.

The uphill struggle was made worthwhile by the discovery of frequent patches of the highly aromatic Large Thyme (*Thymus pulegioides*) on the less vegetated vertical banks. Its rediscovery had been the motivation for the 2022 meeting but that had proven unsuccessful and so this was particularly gratifying. Excitingly, with it in several places were loose tufts of a sedge, identified when flowering last year as *Carex divulsa* subsp. *leersii* – a plant with few Somerset records.



Early forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*). Photo © Fred Rumsey

Gill Read had summited before the rest of the group and was able to demonstrate to us the most impressive (or disheartening if a gardener) stand of Field Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) any of us had ever seen. The fertile stems standing like a dense stubble over the width of the field. The slack-jawed group meanwhile were serenaded by the exultation of skylarks which had chosen to nest amongst this crop.



The fertile stems of Field Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) looking like stubble. Photo © Fred Rumsey

Crossing the road, we made our way through another of the extensive grassland areas, too early for the Orchids and Broomrapes known to be here, to get to the woodlands on the steep north-facing slope. These provided some of the hoped-for common ferns and spring woodland flowers. A particular mission was to re-find Wild Tulip (*Tulipa sylvestris*) seen here in 2019.

At its precise location, a junction of paths just into the woodland, there was sadly no sign of it, but it had been replaced by several plants of a garden *Allium*, possibly *A. nigrum*, whose exact identification was not possible. It later transpired that one of our group, Karen Turvey, had seen the Tulip close to our starting point some years before. Hopefully it still persists.

Having circumnavigated the monad, our weary but happy band managed to pick the appropriate route from a bewildering array of tracks to finally relocate the car park. Tragically (as all too often the case in my experience) the promised ice-cream van was not in evidence at its usual pitch, denying us the chance for an appropriate end-of-meeting celebration.

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## Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025, Berrow Dunes Local Nature Reserve (VC6)

**Leaders: Helena Crouch & Barbra Lakin**

**Report: Helena Crouch**



Lunch on the dunes. Photo © Helena Crouch

Thirteen members and two Somerset Council Green Estates Rangers met at Berrow Dunes LNR on a fine sunny day. This meeting was not only a good introduction to some sand-dune and coastal plants, but hopefully our records and discussions on the day will help with management, so the warden kindly reserved a section of the car park for our use. We set off on the path heading north from the car park, almost immediately finding rosettes of Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), a species which is Near Threatened on both the England and GB Red Lists and thus a RPR species. It is not uncommon on dunes at the coast. At the edge of the path, we found a second member of the family Boraginaceae, Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*), with tiny flowers and the pedicel shorter than the calyx in fruit.

Several garden escapes were recorded at this edge of the reserve near the Coast Road. We puzzled over a clump of large strappy leaves,

concluding that they might be Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*): a return visit will be necessary! We found a small clump of Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*), Garden Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*), a large bush of Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) and Fringecups (*Tellima grandiflora*).

Heading seawards, we reached a large pond, recently cleared and restored, with a brush hedge erected around the perimeter to deter dogs from swimming. The adjacent mature dune grassland included Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and a patch of Cowslips (*Primula veris*). We found clumps of Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) and Sand Sedge (*Carex arenaria*) as we continued to explore the dunes, and Bur Chervil (*Anthriscus caucalis*) which has a largely coastal distribution in Somerset. Sand Cat's-tail (*Phleum arenarium*), another RPR species, Near Threatened on the England Red List, was just coming into flower.

We stopped for lunch beside a large hollow on the dunes, the site of Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina* subsp. *canina*). This pretty violet is Vulnerable on the England Red List, having declined considerably due to loss of habitat. In Somerset it is now only known at about six sites. We found eight plants in flower.



Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina* subsp. *canina*) with yellow spur and long leaves. Photo © Helena Crouch

Over lunch, several members studied some tiny vetches, comparing them with Common Vetch (*Vicia sativa*). The tiny plants were identified as Spring Vetch (*Vicia lathyroides*) due to the downy narrow leaflets, lack of tendrils, simple stipules and solitary flowers. This RPR species is Rare in VC6.

Beside the hollow, we found more Early Forget-me-not and other tiny annuals: Sea Mouse-ear (*Cerastium diffusum*) with four petals and entirely green bracts, and Little Mouse-ear (*Cerastium semidecandrum*) with five petals, shorter than the sepals, and bracts with broad silvery margins. Heading to the beach we also found Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*) which has no petals at all.



Tiny flower of the annual Sea Mouse-ear (*Cerastium diffusum*) with four petals. Photo © Barbra Lakin

The seaward dunes are dominated by scrub, particularly Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) which is not native to Somerset but was planted for dune stabilisation. This function is also achieved by Sand Sedge and several grasses, including the striking blue-leaved Lyme-grass (*Leymus arenarius*) through which we emerged onto the beach. Sea-spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*) was common along the seaward dune and on the strandline we found a single plant of Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*) and several patches of seedlings of Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali* subsp. *kali*).

We left the beach (without ice-creams), returning through the scrub to the open dunes, finding a large patch of Compact Brome (*Anisantha madritensis*). This annual grass was formerly considered to be native in Somerset and included in the early Red Data Books; however, it is now regarded as a Neophyte.

Our return route took in several more dune slack ponds. The best had Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), both RPR species, growing at the margins, with Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) on one bank and Lesser Bulrush (*Typha angustifolia*) at one end. Submerged in the pond we could see Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and a Stonewort (*Chara* sp.), whilst on the surface were a few patches of Thread-leaved Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus trichophyllus*). We agreed that all attempts should be made to protect this pond from damage by dogs, perhaps by erecting signs designating the larger pond nearer the car park as a dog swimming pond, since that appeared to have less flora of interest. Another slack had dried out completely, shaded by a large willow: restoration of that one seemed impracticable. The next pond we visited was shaded but still held water in which we observed newts swimming: it was suggested that some conservation management of this pond could be beneficial.

Altogether we recorded 190 species in this small Local Nature Reserve, updating records for many Rare Plant Register species. Thank you to all participants and to Barbra, the Green Estate Rangers and the warden for organising and facilitating the meeting.

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2025, Purn Hill (VC6)

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Fred Rumsey

Report: Helena Crouch



*Oedemera lurida* on White Rock-rose (*Helianthemum apenninum*). Photo © Fred Rumsey

A select group of six members met on a fine sunny day to explore Purn Hill SSSI, a Carboniferous limestone promontory of Western Mendip. This small reserve is owned and managed by Avon Wildlife Trust; SRPG last visited in 2011. We entered the site from the north, exploring coarse grassland, scrub and woodland before reaching the first patch of species-rich calcareous grassland. Here we admired several large Early-purple Orchids (*Orchis mascula*) growing amongst the leaves of Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*). Six shoots of Pale St John's-wort (*Hypericum montanum*) were spotted: the large ovate leaves have black glands around the papillate margins but no translucent dots. This species is Near Threatened on the GB Red List so a Rare Plant Register (RPR) species.

Reaching the first rock outcrops, we puzzled over bromes. Soft-brome (*Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *hordeaceus*) grew by the path, tall with erect spreading panicles. On the rock outcrops were hundreds of uniformly small plants with stiffly erect, compact panicles and lemmas only 7mm long. Although the awns were not characteristically bent backwards, we were reasonably convinced that these were Least Soft-brome (*Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *ferronii*), first found here in 1983, another RPR species.



Least Soft-brome (*Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *ferronii*).  
Photo © Fred Rumsey

At the base of the rocks, Fred spotted a large flowering plant of Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*), seemingly new to Purn Hill, as was Hoary Ragwort (*Jacobaea erucifolia*). Nearby we found a small shrubby rose with very curved prickles and sweet-scented glands on the undersides of the leaflets, which were rounded at the base. This keyed neatly to Small-flowered Sweet-briar

(*Rosa micrantha*), another Somerset RPR species, and another new record for Purn Hill.

We reached the richest area of west-facing rocks in time for lunch! Here we found White Rock-rose (*Helianthemum apenninum*), Common Rock-rose (*H. nummularium*) and many plants of the hybrid *H. x sulphureum*. The flowers seemed to be particularly attractive to Thick-legged Flower Beetles (*Oedemera nobilis*): Dave Gibbs kindly showed us male and female beetles, and also the closely related *O. lurida*.



Female Thick-legged Flower Beetle on White Rock-rose.  
Photo © Helena Crouch



Male Thick-legged Flower Beetle on Hybrid Rock-rose.  
Photo © Helena Crouch

We had lunch with fabulous views of Brean Down and Steep Holm. On rocks nearby there was a single splendid fresh spike of Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*) with striking cream flowers. Refreshed, we explored the

small area of rock outcrops, finding two other RPR species. Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) was just coming into flower: the distinctive feature is the fibrous leaf sheaths which clothe the base of the plant. Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) was also flowering. In Britain, this species is restricted to a few sites in Western Mendip, the Avon Gorge and South Devon. (For details of its distribution, see the RPR account on the SRPG website). This species is dioecious (separate male and female plants), so it was a surprise that Fred photographed a plant with male and female flowers!

After making detailed records of the distributions of White and Hybrid Rock-rose, Honewort and Somerset Hair-grass, we left the fenced reserve and returned up the adjacent footpath, adding more species to our list. Altogether we recorded 168 species at Purn Hill including ten RPR species.

Four of us (dwindling to two) continued recording within the monad, adding a further 42 species. We were surprised to find a patch of Bermuda-grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) growing through the tarmac of a pavement in a residential road! This species is distinctive vegetatively, having strongly spreading rhizomes, greyish leaves and a ligule comprising a dense row of short hairs. On the opposite side of the road, in the gutter, we found seedlings of Hairy Finger-grass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*). A single plant of Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) was a surprise on a road bank: this is another RPR species, being Near Threatened on the GB and England Red Lists. We found Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*) at the edge of a kerb whilst Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) and Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) were growing on road verges; we were surprised to find a single rosette of Slender Thistle (*Carduus tenuifolius*) on a particularly species-rich verge. Eventually the final two stragglers succumbed to heat exhaustion and retreated to the seaside for an ice-cream!

## Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2025, Grasses Workshop at A Patch Wilder (VC6)

**Leaders: Liz Biron and Ellen McDouall**

**Report: Liz Biron**

This day was designed to teach, and build confidence in, the vegetative identification of grasses. It was run by Liz Biron and Ellen McDouall at A Patch Wilder in the Mendips. Quite a few of the attendees were drawn from SRPG's younger members, no doubt seeking to improve their grass identification skills.

A Patch Wilder is a conservation project on a small Mendip farm aiming to benefit wildlife and connect people with the environment around them. The farm's aims and objectives are habitat management, survey work, education and wellbeing.

May 17th was a scorching day, in a hot, dry season. We had hoped to cover ruderal species on the trackway as well as the permanent grassland, but there was not even a crispy scrap of identifiable grass on the track; but we experienced a good range of species in the fields, all within a few 10s of metres where we parked the cars!

We split into small groups and worked on small areas to get up close and personal with the specific features of each species found.

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## Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2025, Leigh upon Mendip (VC6)

**Leaders: Barbra Lakin & Ellen McDouall**

**Report: Barbra Lakin**

On a lovely sunny morning a group of nine botanists met at a field on Stocks Lane, Leigh upon Mendip to explore the lanes, fields and copses of this area and to visit Tadhil Fields, a Local Wildlife Site (LWS).

Leaving Stocks Lane, passing the drystone wall edging the garden of Pitten House with its Rustyback ferns (*Asplenium ceterach*), we continued along Pitten Street, pausing to admire the truly beautiful mature Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*) in the hedge. Carrying on past the slocker, where Virginia Creeper grows up the fence and until recently, Skunk Cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*) also grew, we walked down the hedge-shaded lane with the company of the small stream and species such as Pendulous Sedge (*Carex pendula*), Red Campion (*Silene dioica*), Male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*) and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*). We followed this route to the junction with Leigh Lane.

From here we walked up Blacker's Lane with its large hedgerow Oak trees (*Quercus robur*) and

Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), then on past the few houses, and stone walls capped with White Stonecrop (*Sedum album*), to the entrance to Tadhil Fields LWS.

Entering the Local Wildlife Site, which initially appears more of a lawn, bordered to the south with a tall hedge and small stream, we strolled past the bramble that has encroached some the slopes down to the stream. Continuing through the field, more varied and interesting species started to emerge, particularly on the slopes, perhaps indicating what other parts of this overgrown site, might have looked like in the past.

Here, amongst the mosaic of drier neutral grassland and wet flushes, we found species such as Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Bog Stitchwort (*Stellaria alsine*), Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Ragged-Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), with Mint beetles, Spearmint

(*Mentha spicata*), likely introduced, and Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*) and Knapweed (*Centurea nigra*).



Tadhill Fields LWS. Photo © Helena Crouch

This was a perfect place to stop for lunch (and snooze of course) before exploring the copse on the other side of stream and the remains of a small steep field that becomes marshy where it meets the stream. In these habitats we found such as species Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*), Moschatel or Townhall Clock (*Adoxa moschatellina*), Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), Wood Sedge (*Carex sylvatica*), Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* subsp. *montanum*), Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*).



Tadhill Fields LWS. Photo © Barbra Lakin

Leaving the LWS, we walked back down the lane and through the field gate into a small pasture where we were greeted by a group of

Shetland sheep in the adjoining field. Walking through the little pasture with masses of Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and on through a gap in the hedge, Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*) was spotted. In the next field, before we emerged back onto Pitten Street, we found more Devil's-bit Scabious, Betony, Common Spotted-orchids and also Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*).

We then followed the footpath into the field to the north, which has a mosaic of tumpy ground and anthills, neutral grassland and patches of calcareous grassland. Here we recorded Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*), Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*) and a tiny patch of Wild Thyme (*Thymus drucei*). Some of the group explored the small copse, which yielded Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*), Moschatel, Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) amongst the old Field Maples (*Acer campestre*), Blackthorns (*Prunus spinosa*) and coppiced Hazels (*Corylus avellana*).

We finished the walk by crossing back onto Stocks Lane to our starting point. Sadly, no ice-cream van had found its way to us, however a beautiful rose in a planted field hedge was identified as Sherard's Downy-rose (*Rosa sherardii*), a joyful end to a lovely day.



Sherard's Downy-rose (*Rosa sherardii*) in a field hedge at Stocks Lane. Photo © Fred Rumsey

## Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> June Lilstock (VC5)

**Leaders: Steve Parker and Ro FitzGerald**

**Report: Steve Parker**

Meeting in the car park close to Ro FitzGerald's house on a lovely sunny day, Ro explained the plan for the day. First to the beach to search for maritime plants, in and around the old harbour, and then after lunch on to a near by arable field that had a range of interesting plants. This was a return trip to Lilstock, the SRPG had visited in 2014 and the area has been well botanised over many years by local botanists. The monad has 250 species recorded, so our chances of making new discoveries was low.



Lilstock Harbour. Photo © Steve Parker

The beach at Lilstock is shingle backed by low cliffs. In the past there was an attempt to build a harbour, today only the remnants of this structure survive, the mouth now blocked by shingle. The base of the old harbour has developed a saltmarsh flora and has a small population of Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*). On the shingle Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) was flowering well, previously the SRPG had recorded these plants as the subspecies *maritimum*, however we could not confirm this on the current meeting.

On leaving the harbour we searched the narrow strip of grassland at the top of the beach; here Bird's-foot Clover (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*) was flowering, this was growing alongside Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*) with scattered plants of Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*) which had just germinated with only the leaves visible. At this point we were at the edge of the monad and so we took the opportunity to see if these

rare species were in the adjacent 1km square, which they were.

After lunch, Ro directed us to a privately owned ex-arable field closer to Lilstock. This large field had once been intensive arable; the landowner was restoring the area; to do this they had obviously sown a "wild flower" seed mix.



Ex-arable field Lilstock. Photo © Steve Parker

Plants found growing here included small populations of Fodder Vetch (*Vicia villosa*), Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) and Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*). In such a situation it is extremely difficult to judge what is sown and what is naturally occurring in the field.

The group walked through the field calling out their findings, small groups discussing the plants, was it a true native or something introduced, maybe even a continental variety? As I say, a difficult problem in what and how to record.

The field had some very common arable "weeds" such as Black-grass (*Alopecurus myosuroides*), Many-seeded Goosefoot (*Lipandra polysperma*) and Scented Mayweed (*Matricaria chamomilla*). Scattered amidst these common plants were some less common arable plants with a small number of flowering Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) and the very beautiful Grass vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*).

A ditch running along the northern boundary of the field was very badly polluted with runoff from the adjacent farmyard. However, the ditch on the eastern boundary did support a few aquatic plants including Horned-pondweed (*Zannichellia palustris*).

We all thanked Ro for her help in leading the group and showing us some interesting species.

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, Berrow Dunes (VC6)**

**Leaders: Helena Crouch & Richard Whyman**

**Report: Helena Crouch**



The mature dunes of Burnham & Berrow Golf Course. Photo © 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. Photo © 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 (*Triglochin palustris*).  
Photo © 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 (*Epipactis palustris*).  
Photo © 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 *Orobanche 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.

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July , Whitstone Post, Exmoor (VC5)**

**Leaders: Steve Parker & Fred Rumsey**

**Report: Steve Parker**

Exmoor is such a wonderful area to botanise, sadly the SRPG visits infrequently because it is a long way from many of our members; we only organise one or two trips a year. On this occasion we had two targets to find, the first Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) has been well recorded, the other Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) which was last recorded in 2007 by John Poingdestre. The weather was good for Exmoor while the meeting point at Whitstone Post car park, provided magnificent views over Porlock Bay to Hurlstone Point.

The habitat was that typical of Exmoor with extensive heathland with flowering Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*) and scattered Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*). Sheep grazing had created a grassy mosaic of dry acid grassland and heathland. With Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) and the remnants of Early Hair-grass (*Aira caryophylla*).



Photographing the roadside flora. Photo © Steve Parker

From the meeting point the group walked through the heathland down to New Road, here Hay-scented Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris aemula*) was spotted by Fred Rumsey, alongside this track a series of springs had resulted in some nice species-rich mire communities, which supported Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) and Carnation sedge (*Carex*

*panicea*) with Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*). Careful searching by the group discovered the wonderful tiny blue flowers of Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*) and also Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*).



Exmoor Heathland. Photo © Steve Parker

After lunch we set out to record the Chamomile. The location is well known and there was little difficulty in finding it flowering well at the top of Porlock Hill in a grassy area by a seat; the plant was first recorded in this location by Caroline Giddens of the Exmoor Natural History Society in 1991.

We now made our way back, Fred Rumsey finding and identifying two Eyebrights *Euphrasia confusa* and *E. confusa* x *micrantha* in the short grassland.



Fred Rumsey describing characteristics of Hay-scented Buckler-fern. Photo ©Steve Parker

Our next target was Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*), which was last seen in short grassland, we had a good grid reference made by John Poingdestre in 2007. However, once at the location, it appeared that Gorse had spread and the habitat now looked unsuitable, a search

was made but sadly the Moonwort could not be relocated.

Back at the car park we managed to have ice-creams to celebrate another great day looking at the wonderful flora of Exmoor.

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## Monday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2025, Ashton Court Estate (VC6)

**Leaders: Helena Crouch & Aisa Irvine**

**Report: Helena Crouch**



View across Ashton Court Estate towards Bristol, from the Old Deer Park. Photo © Helena Crouch

On a fine sunny evening, nine members met to explore more of the Ashton Court Estate, following a successful meeting there in 2024. The original intention had been to head straight uphill to the species-rich meadows, however recent drought had left these scorched; instead, we set off towards Clarken Combe.

Ashton Court Estate is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified particularly for its ancient trees and associated saproxylic beetles. The trees are majestic. We passed a fallen trunk of massive proportions, home to an array of ferns and bryophytes. On a bank at the east end of Clarken Combe Wood, Tony showed us a huge swathe of Green Hellebore (*Helleborus viridis* subsp. *occidentalis*) known here for over a century, described by White in his *Flora of Bristol* as abundant.

The large stone-lined cattle pond in Clarken Combe was almost dry, allowing a good study of its flora. It is dominated by Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*), with large patches of Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*). We found three species of rush: Soft-rush (*Juncus effusus*), Sharp-flowered Rush (*J. acutiflorus*) and Toad

Rush (*J. bufonius*). Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) was flowering and Water-mint (*Mentha aquatica*) was detected by its smell before it was seen. Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) and Square-stalked St John's-wort (*Hypericum tetrapterum*) were seen and we spent a while keying out a spectacularly large plant of Marsh Yellow-cress (*Rorippa palustris*).



Studious botanists by the Cattle Pond.  
Photo © Nicky Hodges

Retracing our steps, we entered the Old Deer

Park, finding Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) by the gate. Swathes of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and scattered Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) indicate acidic soils. We found Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*), Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) and a single plant of Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). Further up the slope, around rocky limestone outcrops, we recorded Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*) and Ploughman's Spikenard (*Inula conyzae*). The rosettes of this species resemble those of Foxglove, but the umbel-like inflorescence is distinctive, with many heads of small yellow florets, often tinged with purple. The name derives from the past use of this plant: the aromatic roots were hung in cottages to freshen the air, spikenard being an expensive perfume.

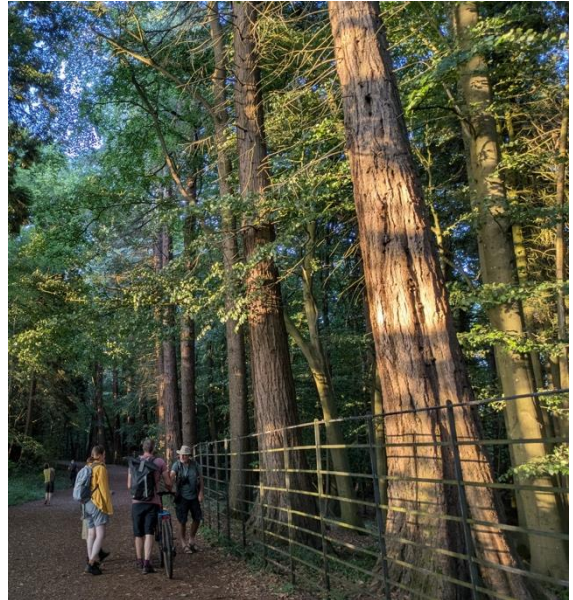


Inflorescence of Ploughman's Spikenard (*Inula conyzae*).  
Photo © Nicky Hodges

Leaving the Deer Park, we emerged onto a broad track. Naturalised shrubs, evidence of the former ornamental planting, included Cherry-laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), Portuguese Laurel (*P. lusitanica*) and Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*). We followed a small path through scrub to reach the meadows.

As expected, the meadows were brown and crisped. We found Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) and Small Cat's-tail (*Phleum bertolonii*). A few remaining Ox-eye Daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) were still flowering. The dead grass shimmered gold in the setting sun and we began to worry about getting back before the car park was locked!

Abandoning the meadows for another year, we headed back to the track, admiring the row of stately Giant Redwoods, or Wellingtonias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), the cones of which are surprisingly small. By now we had left our target square and the route back was downhill all the way: our pace quickened and nobody got locked in!



SRPG members returning along Redwood Avenue.  
Photo © Helena Crouch

Ashton Court is a large estate spanning six monads. There are hundreds of veteran trees to admire, including Sweet Chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*) believed to be over 600 years old and an oak (the Domesday Oak) which was selected as one of the nation's fifty greatest trees.



Members admire a majestic Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*). Photo © Aisa Irvine

There is definitely scope for further visits, perhaps earlier in the year when the meadows are floriferous.

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2025, Shapwick Heath NNR (VC6)

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Val Graham

Report: Val Graham



General view of the Canada Farm peat restoration area showing regrowth of Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) and Purple Moor-Grass (*Molinia caerulea*) with Cottongrass (*Eriophorum*) and the surrounding birch and alder woodland. Photo © Val Graham

The group met on an overcast, humid day at the Avalon Marshes Centre to explore Natural England's Shapwick Heath NNR, a mosaic of wetland habitats north of Shapwick village.

The extensive lakes and reedbeds in the Avalon Marshes, which are so attractive to birds and visitors alike, are the result of a determined effort in the 1990s to re-use this landscape of peat extraction for nature restoration, in particular to encourage the expansion of the very small Bittern population in Somerset. In this aim it has been very successful with Bitterns and many other bird species new to the area making a home here. However, the effects of more intensive mechanised peat-digging, modern drainage, agriculture and eutrophication more generally have had a large impact on the habitats and vegetation of the area, some examples of which we saw during our visit.

We set off south along the road and over the South Drain – one of the key waterways in this area and formerly part of the Glastonbury Canal. Next to it is the line of the Glastonbury-Highbridge railway which now forms the main access to the Shapwick Heath and RSPB Ham Wall reserves.

In the water we saw the white flowers of Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) and bright blue Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*). Near the bank were the purple heads of Marsh Woundwort (*Stachys palustris*).

From here we walked south and turned right onto the track leading to the western area of the NNR known as Canada Farm. This has never been farmed intensively and has preserved areas of heathland and fen on peat soils.

We entered the peat restoration area north of

the track and found five species of rush and a number of sedges: Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*), Common Yellow-sedge (*C. demissa*), Carnation Sedge (*C. panicea*) and Bottle Sedge (*C. rostrata*). The large Great Tussock Sedge (*C. paniculata*) and the elegant Cyperus Sedge (*C. pseudocyperus*) were also present. The lovely Bog Pimpernel (*Lysimachia tenella*) and the round leaves of Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) were creeping under the Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) tussocks, and the scent of Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*) was everywhere.



Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*).  
Photo © Helena Crouch

The peat restoration has created *Sphagnum*-filled hollows which have now dried out due to the drought. In these we found splendid examples of fruiting Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*) and some rather unhappy-looking Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*). Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*) is also doing well in these open areas.

The find of the day, by Helena, was not a plant but a fungus, a beautiful blue *Entoloma*. A photo posted on our WhatsApp Group brought Dave Gibbs rushing to the site. A specimen was initially identified by Dave as *E. jennyae*, a species only previously recorded at a few sites in Ireland, and one site in Cornwall, found in 2023. However a specimen was taken for DNA sequencing, which showed it to be identical to *Entoloma indigoferum*, a rare North American species. Thanks to David Gibbs for identifying it.

After lunch beside the track, we walked back to the road, crossing it to take an attractive path through the woods to join the Sweet Track path. This follows the line of the Neolithic plank walkway found during peat extraction by Ray

Sweet in the 1970s. It has been dated to 3,800 BC.



*Entoloma indigoferum* growing on peat at Canada Farm. Photo © Helena Crouch



Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) with its more upright fertile fronds showing their slightly narrower pinnae.  
Photo © Helena Crouch

Along this track we saw many large plants of Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) and extensive patches of Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*). The former has a short rhizome giving rise to a shuttlecock shape unlike the Marsh Fern fronds

which arise from long, creeping rhizomes. We looked closely at the simple twice-pinnate fronds of the Marsh Fern and its separate fertile fronds with narrower pinnae.

The other star fern was the Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*). We saw several enormous individuals with their characteristic twice-pinnate leaves and withered fertile fronds.



Members admire a magnificent Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*). Photo © Val Graham

A short distance from the northern end of the Sweet Track path we opened a gate into a field dotted with many heads of the fine-leaved

umbellifer Milk Parsley (*Thysselinum palustre*). This a fen species with its stronghold in East Anglia, which is increasing at Shapwick presumably due to the introduction of relatively nutrient-rich water from the South Drain which is pumped in to preserve the Sweet Track.

From here we entered the 'Cottongrass Field' which is also showing signs of increasing nutrients with Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*) spreading from the east and tall fen vegetation along the central ditch. This included more Marsh Fern and fine plants of Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*) in flower. Among the plants we saw many Wasp Spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*) – a relatively new species to Somerset which seems to be thriving here, feeding on grasshoppers and even a dragonfly. In the ditch, which was entirely dry, we saw Marsh Cinquefoil (*Comarum palustre*) and Floating Club-rush (*Eleogiton fluitans*).

After returning to the road, and a discussion about a roadside *Artemisia*, we celebrated our enjoyable day out at the Avalon Marshes café with ice creams all round.

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## Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2025, West Moor SSSI (VC5)

### Leader & Report: Steve Parker



Ditch with Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*). Photo © 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 the first record for this plant in VC5.



Least Yellow-sorrel (*Oxalis exilis*). Photo © Helena Crouch

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 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 loss is not clear, but I suspect that over-enthusiastic ditch clearance could be to blame.



Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*).  
Photo © Fred Rumsey

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 recorded were 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* sp) plants.

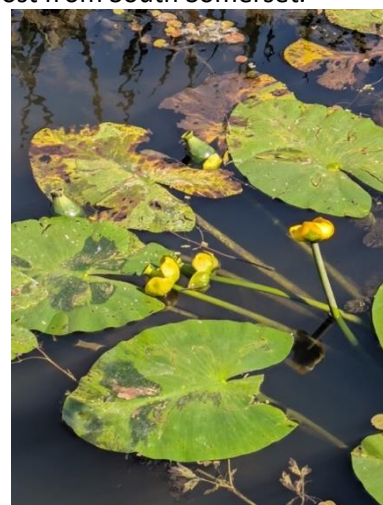
As expected, we found the Greater Water-parsnip in the location it was last seen by John Poingdestre in 2021. The population was very large with hundreds of plants in several ditches. The plant had finished flowering and looked like it would produce lots of viable seed.



Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*).  
Photo © Helena Crouch

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 Greater 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 landowner 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.



Yellow water-lily or Brandy Bottle (*Nuphar lutea*).  
Note the characteristic 'brandy bottles' above.  
Photo © Helena Crouch

**Sunday 24th August 2025, Wellow (VC6)**

**Leaders: Ellen McDouall & Karen Andrews**

**Report: Karen Andrews**



Jane, Alasdair and Ellen in front of the parched grass of Stoney Littleton Long Barrow. Photo © Karen Andrews

By the time our late August Wellow visit came around, the unrelenting extreme heat of 2025's summer left us with a somewhat parched landscape in which to botanise. Would we find anything of interest or suitable for beginner botanists? At least Jane and Alasdair benefited from our undivided attention all day in our little group of four.

At the start, we dutifully observed that age-old botanical tradition of exploring the plants in the car park first. Then, we headed off towards Wellow's main street observing garden escapes on the way. We proceeded down the hill towards Wellow Brook. Here we were disappointed by the dominance of invasive Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

We found more of interest in the slightly more sheltered lane heading back up the hill. We focused on common plants. Ellen did most of the identifying while I hunted for more plants and tried my hand at the BSBI's recording app. While I did not set out to record every plant, it was good to experiment — at least until my phone battery nearly ran out. Reaching high

and scrambling low on the ground, we initiated our beginners in the true botanical experience of receiving puzzled looks and enquiries from passing walkers and cyclists.

Emerging into a field, we came across a Wild Oat. This provided Ellen with the perfect opportunity to explain the key characteristics and terminology of a grass with a large specimen that is more accessible to the beginner.



Spikelet of Wild Oat (*Avena sativa*) with its bent awn, glumes, palea, lemma and rachis. Photo © Karen Andrews

We had lunch and rested in the welcome shade of the field's hedge. Entertainment was provided by over 100 swallows. They swooped up and down in the field in front of us as we watched transfixed by their activity.

After lunch we discovered our best find of the day in the post-harvest stubble of the same field: Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*).



Arable weed Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*).  
Photo © Karen Andrews

We continued to Stoney Littleton Long Barrow. An English Heritage sign informed us that it was built over 5,500 years ago by early Neolithic farmers to bury their dead. It is considered one of Britain's finest examples of a chambered tomb.

My enduring memory of this long barrow, however, will be of Ellen crawling around on all fours playing spot the green plant. Her determination proved successful despite the unpromising parched grass.

Our little group had to split up as Ellen headed off to help Alasdair catch his bus. She promised us the reward of an ice cream if we continued in a loop back to the village. Unfortunately, Jane and I saw yet more unwelcome Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) as we crossed the brook.

2025's extreme summer heat means that no SRPG report is complete without mention of ice creams. The promised kiosk even had its own seating area for us. Suitably refreshed, Jane and I headed back to the car park.

Our final interesting find of the day was another escapee, the Chinese lantern plant (*Physalis alkekengi*). Its bright orange, lantern-shaped seed pods along with red berries on White Bryony (*Bryonia dioica*) signalled that summer was over in August. Autumn had arrived.



Harbinger of autumn: Chinese Lantern Plant (*Physalis alkekengi*). Photo © Karen Andrews



Berries on White Bryony (*Bryonia dioica*).  
Photo © Karen Andrews

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September, Winsford Hill, (VC5)

Leader & Report: Steve Parker



The view from Winsford Hill. Photo © Steve Parker

This was a second trip to Exmoor for the SRPG in 2025, on arrival the weather was awful with heavy rain. However, the rain soon stopped and conditions were fine for the rest of the meeting. There were eight members of the group. The reason for the meeting was to update records for the monad SS8635. The area had been visited by Caroline Giddens with members of the Exmoor Natural History Society in 2006. Graham Lavender had recently recorded some of the more uncommon species. From the area where the cars were parked we recorded in a dry acid grassland with grasses including Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), Silver Hair-grass (*Aira caryophyllea*) and Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*). Herbs included Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) with scattered Gorse bushes with both *Ulex europaeus* and *U. gallii* and their hybrid. Some of the scattered Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) trees supported a fine growth of fruticose lichens (*Usnea* species). The dry

heathland was typical for Exmoor with extensive Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and the occasional Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*). A few small wet areas had Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), with low-growing Water-purslane (*Lythrum portula*) covering the peaty ground.



Heavy going. Photo © Steve Parker

Crossing the road, we headed towards Little Ash Combe. Before getting into the combe proper there was a cry of triumph as the tiny pale blue flowers of Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*) were discovered. This find turned out to be the first record for the monad. We found at least two largish populations. There were scattered plants of Eyebright *Euphrasia confusa* and *E. officinalis* subsp. *anglica*, both identified by Fred Rumsey. At lunchtime, it was hard to find a dry place to sit; we were more or less forced to sit on the side of Little Ash Combe on very wet ground. But at least we had a good view.



Lichen-covered trees. Photo © Steve Parker

The combe proved to be relatively steep-sided, with extensive Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and some bramble (*Rubus* sp.) cover, climbing down the combe was hard work due to the ground being very wet indeed. This mire was somewhat overgrown but did have Carnation sedge (*Carex panicea*) and Star Sedge (*C. echinata*) with some Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*). There were small patches of Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) with Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*) in the wettest parts.

From the mire we returned to the road and botanised along the roadside grassland; here there were a number of more common plants with Daisy (*Bellis perennis*) and the leaves of Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*). It was a good day on Exmoor, the weather turned out fine and we updated many records, including many of the species now in the Red Lists. The total count for the monad is now 155 species.

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2025, Somerset County Herbarium, Somerset Heritage Centre, Norton Fitzwarren (VC5)**

**Co-leaders: Ian Salmon, Simon Leach, Ro FitzGerald & Pat Wolseley**

**Report: Simon Leach**



The cabinets housing the main collection of the vascular plant herbarium. Photo © Simon Leach

Eleven of us, including four herbarium volunteers, gathered for this half-day meeting to explore the Somerset County Herbarium (abbreviated to **TTN** on the world list of herbaria), housed in the natural history store at the Somerset Heritage Centre in Norton Fitzwarren, on the western edge of Taunton.

Over morning tea and biscuits, we had a brief introduction to the herbarium, which had its origins in about 1849, shortly after the foundation of the Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society (SANHS). Until 1958 the collection was entirely owned and managed by SANHS and housed in the museum stores in Taunton Castle. After that, responsibility for running the museum and caring for its collections transferred to the local authority, since 2014 being managed by the South West Heritage Trust in partnership with, and on behalf of, Somerset Council and SANHS.

The Rare Plants Group has been involved in looking after the herbarium since 2015, the little team of volunteers (all SRPG members) being supervised and supported by the Heritage Trust's senior curator – first the geologist Dennis Parsons, then latterly the archaeologist Amal Khreish. The herbarium group was originally Liz McDonnell's idea. She was a great champion of herbaria; and she'd always stressed the importance of significant records, particularly of 'difficult' taxa, being backed up by well-pressed and mounted voucher specimens. These would be, in effect, the physical proof of such records, available for critical examination (and potentially re-determination) by later generations of Somerset botanists and national experts alike.

Over the last 10 years the work of the **TTN** herbarium team has been wide-ranging. Initially, the aim was to produce digital images

of the vascular plant collection – circa 18-20,000 specimens in all – for eventual uploading to the BSBI Herbaria@Home website. But this soon led to a full-blown re-organisation to bring it into line with the [then current] 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Clive Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles*. This means that families, genera and species now follow a taxonomic order (and nomenclature) that present-day botanists will be familiar with. A huge amount of work has been done on databasing the collection, as well as on the care and repair of old and often fragile herbarium sheets. Also, importantly, there has been much recent emphasis on adding new material.

There have been several sizeable donations in the last few years, including several hundred specimens from Taunton School, some personal collections such as those from John Ounsted (mainly from the 1940s) and John Keylock (1970s and 80s), plus significant collections of voucher specimens from both past and current Somerset vice-county recorders, e.g. Captain R.G.B. Roe, Liz McDonnell and Helena Crouch.

Recent donations have also included some important collections of critical or 'difficult' taxa, many of these from SRPG members, e.g. rock sea-lavenders (*Limonium binervosum* agg.), knotgrasses (*Polygonum aviculare* agg.), willows (*Salix* spp.), hawkweeds (*Hieracium* spp.) and dandelions (*Taraxacum* spp.). For some in SRPG the dandelions have been a particular preoccupation, and the collection in **TTN** continues to grow, currently totalling nearly 1000 specimens and more than 180 species.

We learnt that there is much in the herbarium apart from its vascular plant specimens. We were shown botanists' notebooks, papers and drawings, such as the diaries of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century naturalist H. H. Slater, Walter Watson's early 20<sup>th</sup>-century books of colour drawings of bryophytes, fungi and lichens, and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century algologist Isabella Gifford's extraordinary collection of pressed seaweeds, many of them gathered from the shores close to her home in Minehead. We also saw drawers of packets of Somerset lichens collected in the 1970s by the renowned botanist Francis Rose.



Part of Isabella Gifford's mid-19<sup>th</sup> century collection of pressed seaweeds. Photo © Tony Steele.

Back to the vascular plant collection, we examined a rather dismal (French) specimen of Lady's-slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*) which would probably have been much better left in the ground! Of more local interest we looked at a randomly picked folder containing 16 specimens of Lesser Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum minus* agg.), eight of them from Cheddar, the earliest dating from 1824. The list of collectors reads like a roll call of 19<sup>th</sup> century Somerset botanists: Dr Anthony Gapper, T.F. Dymock, Charles Parish, H.F. Parsons, Mary Livett, H.H. Slater, E.J. Hamlin. Working in the herbarium you come across names such as these all the time, and so often the human stories behind the specimens can prove to be just as interesting as the specimens themselves!

We were then shown the only two sheets in **TTN** of one of our local endemics, Somerset Whitebeam (*Sorbus subcuneata*). It turns out that both specimens are of huge interest. The first, collected in 1832 by the aforementioned Dr Gapper, seems to be the oldest known example of the species, being 18 years older than C.C. Babington's 1850 sheet in Cambridge University Herbarium (**CGE**) that had previously been thought by Tim Rich to be the earliest in existence. The second, though, is potentially even more interesting, being collected on the same day (10 June 1914) and by the same

person (E.S. Marshall) – but was it from the same tree? – as the specimen in the Natural History Museum (**BM**) that was later, in 1934, selected as the holotype (i.e. the ‘type specimen’) by A.J. Wilmott when *S. subcuneata* was being named and described.

At the end of our ‘show and tell’ session we admired a box of A4-size specimens that had been put together by Liz McDonnell as a teaching aid when she was running grassland plant-identification workshops for agricultural and conservation advisors in the Rural Development Service and English Nature/Natural England. The specimens themselves have little value as vouchers – there is no information on where or when they were collected – but they demonstrate so well Liz’s artistic and design skills, and her extraordinary attention to detail; these were all aspects of her character that she put to such good use in her work in **TTN**.

What we had seen so far had been brought out to the research room for us. But now, with less than an hour to go, we embarked on a whistle-stop tour of the natural history storeroom. Here we were amazed by the many shelves of stuffed birds, and great ranks of Victorian and Edwardian mahogany display cabinets filled with birds’ eggs and nests, moths, butterflies, dragonflies and beetles, fossils, rocks and minerals. There were ichthyosaurs and ammonites, archaeological artifacts, old manuscripts and journals, and rows and rows of drawers and cupboards and boxes everywhere! And in the midst of all this there was the vascular plant herbarium, for the most part housed in a single row of rather plain wooden double-fronted cabinets inherited some years ago from the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff (**NMW**).

We pulled out some folders and sheets for closer inspection. Steve Parker was keen to see specimens of Peony (*Paeonia mascula*) from Steep Holm – of which there were quite a few – while we also couldn’t resist looking at some Dandelion (*Taraxacum*) sheets, including *T. amicum* and *T. atrocollinum*, two species described as new to science in 2019 for which **TTN** holds numerous vouchers. At which point, sadly, our time was up.



Exploring the nether regions of the natural history store, Steve Parker chatting with Amal Khreisheh.  
Photo © Tony Steele



Looking at specimens of *Taraxacum atrocollinum*.  
Photo © Steve Parker

Thanks to everyone for their contributions to an enjoyable meeting, and to Amal and the rest of the herbarium team for being there on the day and helping to throw a spotlight on some of **TTN**’s hidden treasures. We hope to hold another ‘open morning’ in the New Year for those who had wanted to come along but for one reason or another had been unable to join us.

All above images taken with kind permission of the South West Heritage Trust.

## 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 had 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.



Looking down a drain. Photo © 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 plant's 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 deltoidea*) together with a range of native ferns including a very healthy-looking Hart's-tongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*).

One of the most frequent escapes was Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*). This plant is galled by the psyllid bug *Trioza centranthi*. 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 straightaway. 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 in Britain mainly 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* 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. Photo © 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 (*Macroglossum stellatarum*).  
Photo © Steve Parker



Pale Galingale (*Cyperus eragrostis*). Photo Helena Crouch

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 (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) wall.  
Photo © 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 from gardens. After such good botany we found a café still open for a much-needed coffee and cake.

## Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> 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...". Photo © 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 x 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*) 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 x 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 car park. 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.



Field Woundwort (*Stachys arvensis*).  
Photo © 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 Garden - a last week posy.  
Photo © Fred Rumsey

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*).

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.

## Part 2: Articles

### Dandelion Update 2025

By Simon Leach (SJL) and Jeanne Webb (JW)

With each spring's passing, it's becoming harder to find anything new! Also, for various reasons, JW and Graham Lavender were unable to collect material this year. And, as SJL soon discovered, it's much harder to keep going without the camaraderie (and friendly competitiveness) of fellow 'taraxacophiles'. It turns out that winning the 'Dandelion Cup' when no-one else is challenging for it is not nearly as much fun as failing to win it because others have done better than you!

Which is a roundabout way of saying that, as can be seen from the list of 'notable records' below, it was a fairly modest return from this year's collecting efforts. Records are backed up by specimens and/or photos, all but one being determined or confirmed by the BSBI's national expert/referee for *Taraxacum*, John Richards (AJR). Voucher specimens for six of the ten records detailed here are amongst those being deposited in the reference collection of *Taraxacum* spp held in the Somerset County Herbarium (TTN). You will see that we have included two VC6 records from the Bristol-based naturalist Dylan Peters, and another record, again in VC6, from Lionel Pike, one of the BSBI's VC recorders in South Devon. A sign of the times, perhaps, that in these three cases expert determination relied on digital photos rather than physical vouchers.

In the list below dates refer to 2025 unless otherwise stated. Two species appearing here are new to Somerset as a whole (*T. cornubiense* in VC5 and *T. lunare* in VC6) while there are also 'firsts' at vice-county level for *T. fasciatum* (VC5) and *T. incisum* (VC6). With these additions, the *Taraxacum* flora in Somerset now stands at 180 species, 166 in VC5 and 102 in VC6. For those wanting to find out more, there is [an updated checklist of the county's dandelions, correct as at February 2026](#), available on the SRPG website.

***Taraxacum amicum*** – Bath, W of cemetery (ST741646), 17 Apr, Lionel Pike, det. AJR (from photos); a third record for VC6 following Rob Randall's in 2017 at GB Gruffy nature reserve

(Leach *et al.* 2020, p. 272), and SJL's own record in 2022 from his brother's garden in Ditchat (specimen in TTN).

***Taraxacum cornubiense*** – Taunton, South Road (ST23542371), 1 large plant in raised roadside flower bed, behind low stone retaining wall, 15 Sep 2024, SJL, det./conf. AJR, specimen in TTN; first record for VC5 and Somerset of this section *Naevosa* species which is (as the name implies) largely confined to Cornwall (see map in Richards 2021, p. 77), but with outliers in Devon and Dorset – and now Somerset. It is also reported to occur in at least two, possibly four, localities in Bristol (Peters 2023 and pers. comm.), one of them in 2025 within VC6 (Arnos Vale cemetery); however, none of these records have yet been confirmed by AJR.

***Taraxacum fasciatum*** – Taunton, 15 Trinity Street (ST23482441), 30+ plants adjoining back garden in gravel path leading to top of Gordon Road, 6 Apr, SJL, det. AJR, specimen in TTN; first record for VC5, third for Somerset, the first since 2016 when it was recorded at Sand Bay on the BSBI/SRPG *Taraxacum* Workshop. [Fig. 1]



Fig. 1 *Taraxacum fasciatum*, recorded for the first time in VC5 in 2025, in SJL's back garden – the 37<sup>th</sup> dandelion species to be found there since 2016! Photo © Simon Leach, with permission from South West Heritage Trust/Somerset Council.

***Taraxacum incisum*** – Crickham, Wedmore (ST43634994), in field gateway on Long Hill, 31 Mar 2024, Dylan Peters, conf. AJR (from photos); first record for VC6.

***Taraxacum leptodon*** – Pitminster, Poundisford Lane (ST22241950), several plants on low grassy lane-side bank, 19 Apr, SJL, det. AJR, specimen in **TTN**; second record for VC5 and Somerset, following JW's in 2024 (Leach & Webb 2025, p. 159). A rare alien with very few records in Britain and Ireland (see map in Richards 2021).

***Taraxacum lucidum*** – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST27302105), 1 plant in overgrown scrubby verge of tarmac track, 8 Apr, SJL, det. AJR, specimen in **TTN**; second record for VC5 and Somerset, the first since 2016 when it was recorded on the BSBI/SRPG *Taraxacum* Workshop in semi-shade in one of the broad glades in Thurlbear Wood (Leach *et al.* 2017, p. 212).

***Taraxacum lunare*** – Crickham, Wedmore (ST43634994), 1 large plant in lane bank nr field gateway on Long Hill, 31 Mar 2024, Dylan Peters, det./conf. AJR (from photos); first record for VC6 and Somerset of a species that seems to be a real rarity in SW England (see map in Richards 2021, p. 183).

***Taraxacum mimulum*** – Taunton, on W side of Bridgwater Road, S of Creech Castle (ST24852525), at least 10 plants in grassy road verge, 27 Mar, SJL, det./conf. AJR, specimen in **TTN**; third record for VC5 and Somerset, another rare but distinctive alien with few British and Irish records (see map in Richards 2021, p. 234). [Figs 2 & 3]

***Taraxacum quadrans*** – Taunton, Church Street (ST23542445), in churchyard of Holy Trinity Church, 29 Mar, SJL, conf. AJR, specimen in **TTN**; third record for VC5, fifth for Somerset.

***Taraxacum subexpallidum*** – Shepton Mallet, Bucklers Way (ST608435), grassy verge nr entrance to hospital, 29 Apr, SJL, conf. Jon Holt (from photos); third record for VC6. A widespread species, but 'rarely seen in recent years and has apparently become much scarcer' (Richards 2021, p. 162) and now listed as 'Vulnerable' in the new GB Red List (Stroh *et al.* 2025). Quite frequently seen in parts of VC5, especially in the Taunton area, but rare or under-recorded in VC6. [Fig. 4]



Fig. 2 *Taraxacum mimulum*, a rare species recorded new for the Taunton area in 2025 – just the third record for VC5 and Somerset. Photo © Simon Leach, with permission from South West Heritage Trust/Somerset Council.

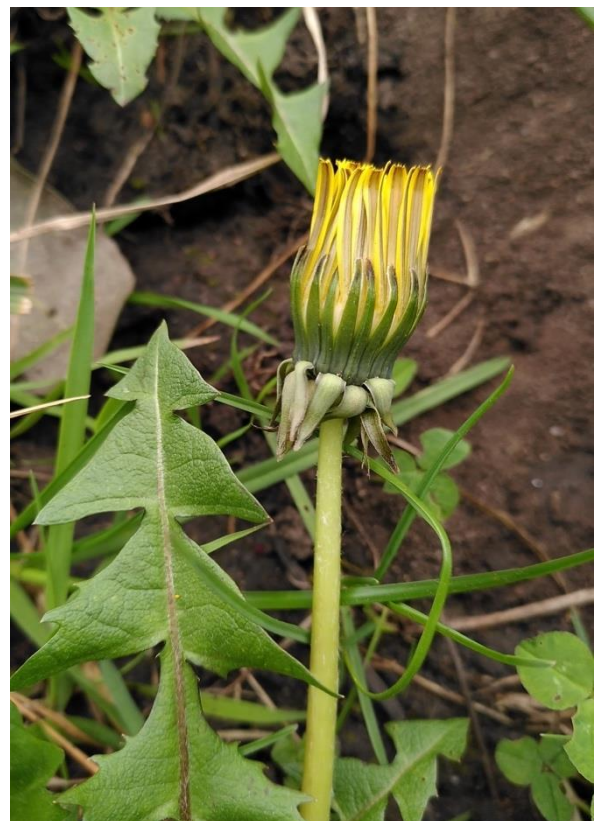


Fig. 3 Close-up of *T. mimulum* in its fresh state: see the distinctive kite- or diamond-shaped terminal lobe to the leaf. Photo © Simon Leach



Fig. 4 Leaves of the *Taraxacum subexpallidum* found outside the hospital in Shepton Mallet: note the expanded spoon-shaped, bluntish ends to the terminal lobes which make this one of the more easily recognized dandelions.  
Photo © Simon Leach

In the herbarium we had a busy year. As volunteers working in **TTN**, last summer we had the opportunity to review the entire *Taraxacum* collection. In all, it now comprises 811 mounted specimens/sheets, 776 from Somerset and just 35 from elsewhere in England. In addition, we have now boxed up, accessioned and databased a further 177 loose/unmounted specimens collected mainly between 2016 and 2025 (e.g. Fig. 5). We had previously reckoned on these specimens being surplus to requirements – being not especially good material, and sometimes hurriedly or poorly pressed examples of species already well represented in the main collection – and so toyed with the idea of disposing of them. But we have now decided that all of these, whatever their condition, are important vouchers for the records they represent, and so warrant being retained as part of the whole collection.

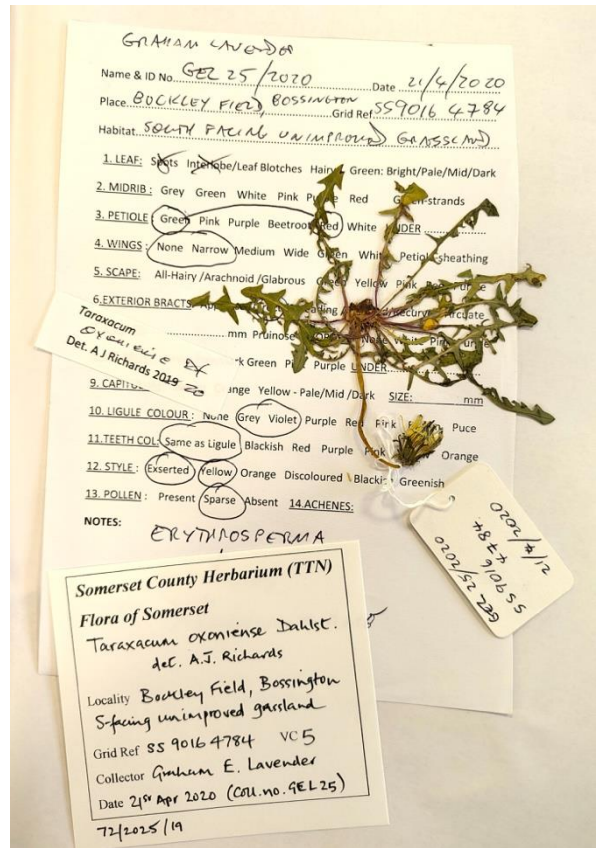


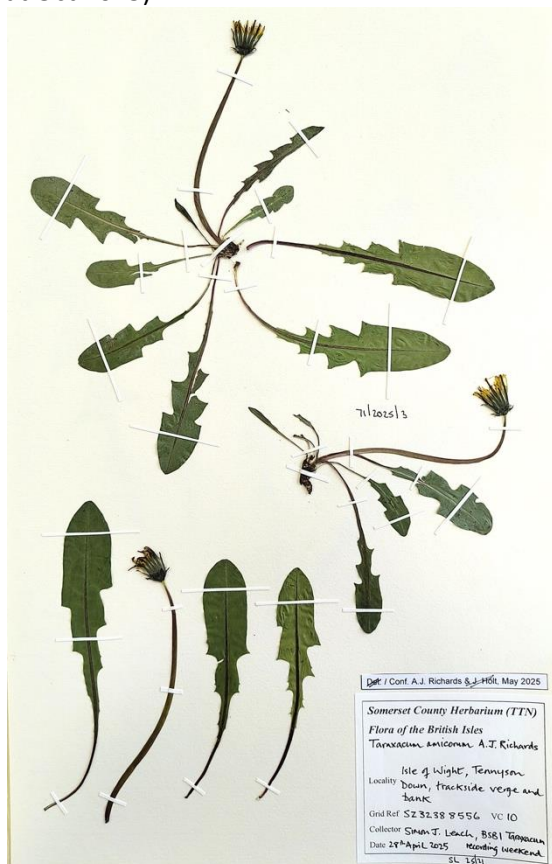
Fig. 5 One of the 'surplus' specimens of *Taraxacum oxoniense*, complete with its collection details, det. slip and herbarium label, now being boxed up and added to the dandelion reference collection in **TTN**.  
Photo © Simon Leach

Our stock-take ascertained that 173 of the 180 *Taraxacum* species recorded in Somerset are represented in the collection by specimens gathered within the county, while two others (*T. procerisquameum* and *T. tamesense*) have examples only from elsewhere in England. That leaves five Somerset species (*T. aurosulum*, *T. lunare*, *T. platyglossum*, *T. tanyphyllum* and *T. cestrense*) for which we have no specimens at all – although there remains some doubt as to the taxonomic validity of *T. cestrense* (see Richards 2021, pp 4 and 97). Conversely, **TTN** holds sheets of seven species – *T. akteum*, *T. anglicum*, *T. chloroticum*, *T. ciliare*, *T. fulvicarpum*, *T. palustre* and *T. pseudoretroflexum* – from elsewhere in Britain and Ireland that have never (yet) been reliably recorded in Somerset (note that the few old records of *T. palustre* from Somerset are regarded as errors).

Thus, doing the maths, we calculate that **TTN** currently holds specimens of 182 *Taraxacum* species. Some of these are much better represented than others, of course. For example, we have an enviable collection of vouchers for *T. amicum* (12 sheets) and *T. atrocollinum* (16 sheets), two section *Celtica* species recently described by Richards (2019)

for which Somerset is a notable stronghold. We also have 15 sheets and four ‘loose’ specimens of *T. britannicum* – a near relative of *T. amicum*, often growing with it and probably its closest ‘lookalike’. But most species are far less well represented than these: there are, for instance, 34 taxa with just a single voucher specimen.

*T. nordstedtii*, with 31 sheets/specimens, and *T. oxoniense*, with 46, are the two species with the largest number of vouchers – but these are potentially valuable given that two recently distinguished ‘lookalikes’ (*T. chlorofrugale* and *T. lambinonii* respectively) also occur in Somerset. As pointed out in last year’s report, the value of keeping pressed vouchers was brought home to us when one old *T. nordstedtii* record had to be amended to *T. chlorofrugale* following AJR’s re-examination of the voucher. It would be interesting to trawl through the older *T. oxoniense* specimens, too, to check for *T. lambinonii*, a species that was only added to the British (and Somerset) list in 2021 (Leach *et al.* 2022) but which has now been recorded at three localities in VC5 as well as in seven other English vice-counties (*Taraxacum* database, as at Oct 2025).



*Taraxacum amicum* discovered on the Isle of Wight during the BSBI *Taraxacum* recording weekend in April. Specimen in TTN. Photo © Simon Leach, with permission of SW Heritage Trust/Somerset Council.

In April SJL once again attended the annual BSBI Dandelion Workshop weekend, this time held on the Isle of Wight (VC10). There were many highlights – not least the extraordinary diversity of section *Erythrosperma* species including real rarities like *T. pseudoproximum*, *T. scanicum* and *T. tortilobum* – but perhaps the biggest surprise was to discover our old friend *T. amicum* at several sites on the island. An easterly outlier and significant extension of range for this otherwise ‘south-western’ species, it is clearly more widespread than we had imagined.

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## Starry Stonecrop – a mini Mendip Mystery

By Fred Rumsey



The mysterious Starry Stonecrop (*Phedimus stellatus*) flowering in the Mendips. Photo © Fred Rumsey

The British flora now numbers more alien and exotic species than those considered native. For many of these their mode of introduction is obvious, as escapes from horticulture, or carried with, or on, items in the horticultural trade. Others have been carried with our crops, or are medicinal plants, many of these introduced, often unwittingly, millennia ago, such that we regard them as highly as natives and class them as Archaeophytes. The criteria employed to decide on native status were laid out by David Webb and have since been refined further in the light of the development of other techniques (Pearman, 2007). A history of cultivation, plausible means of introduction and an extra-British range which makes natural dispersal improbable are all key factors. Another, oft cited, is a late discovery date. This can be crucial, but we must always remember that it is how a species got here, not when, that defines its status. For a small but hotly contested group of species, the evidence for or against native status is equivocal or lacking. Amongst the thousands of species now resident it is not surprising that we can find rare examples whose presence defies simple explanation and which, native or not, warrant our attention and care.

One such, I would contest, is the Starry Stonecrop (*Phedimus stellatus* syn. *Sedum stellatum*), an unlikely Somerset speciality.

Starry Stonecrop is a small succulent annual native to the eastern Mediterranean, eastwards to Greece and Albania and west to the Balearics. Recognised by its comparatively large, spatulate leaves, purplish petals half the length of the sepals and the persistent horned stars of its short upright dead fruiting shoot. Praeger in his monographic study of *Sedum* described it as “of no merit so far as gardeners are concerned” and perhaps unsurprisingly classified it as very rare in cultivation. He did however note that “it has long maintained itself in the gardens of the late Canon Ellacombe, and of Mr. E.A. Bowles”. He also says that it had been sent to Wisley by the French horticulturalist Henry Correvon (1854-1939). Henry Ellacombe (1822-1916) gardened at his home, the vicarage of St. Mary’s, Bitton in Gloucestershire and had a particular interest in *Sedum*. He is commemorated in another species of *Phedimus* [*P. ellacombeanus*], widely grown and also now established in Somerset. Edward Bowles’ (1865-1954) garden was at Myddelton House, Enfield, Middlesex.

As a British plant Starry Stonecrop is first listed by Druce in the *Flora of Berkshire*, where he gives it as “Alien. On walls, as a garden escape near Frilsham, The Grotto, Windsor Park, Marcham”. Wolley-Dod in his *Flora of Sussex* lists the species as recorded from Henfield, listing an 1898 herbarium specimen in the herbarium of T.H[ilton] (1833-1912). This mention is easily overlooked, appearing only in the list of casuals in the introductory text and is not indexed. The Henfield area was home to the eminent botanist William Borrer (1781-1862), whose garden reputedly contained 6,600 taxa at the time of his death. Salmon (1906) says the plant was probably introduced by Borrer and indicates that he saw it here, in 1892, abundant on a bank at Barrow Hill, Henfield.

Although not mentioned by either Murray or Marshall, in his *Bristol Flora*, White says *Sedum stellatum* “extends itself freely where planted near the Channel at Clevedon and Weston-Super-Mare.” Marshall’s failure to include the species is perhaps indicative of the general disregard for adventives at this period. That said, Somerset botanists have been amongst the most receptive to the study of the Alien flora over the years. Even so, the lack of later records suggests the species did not obviously persist

close to the N. Somerset coast, or indeed anywhere else as Clement & Foster, in their catalogue of the *Alien Plants of the British Isles*, concluded that all records of this species predated 1930. However, shortly after this publication in May 1995 Ian Green found a thriving population on a steep, south-facing dry slope, with the odd rock, on the east side of the A371, east of Croscombe. He returned to check on the stonecrop's survival in 2002, and brother Paul visited in July 2004, noting 251 dead plants in fruit, with the rosettes of juveniles also present. Given the uniqueness of this occurrence from a British perspective I was keen to establish whether this population had survived as there seemed not to have been any record post-2004. A quick visit in Sept. 2022 revealed the remains of fruiting plants clustered around Ian's 'odd rocks'. A more detailed investigation was possible in July 2023, when the site was revisited in the company of Helena Crouch. Our count of c.200 plants, made on the small rock outcrops and the steep slope below, suggests there has been some decline in the last 20 years. Scrub encroachment below, and a lush, taller sward across the site, which is ungrazed, is obviously likely to have an impact, if it hasn't already. Summer droughts and the thin soils around the small rock outcrops have allowed the survival of the species through the reduction of competition, but the lack of any management going forwards may result in the loss of this unique population.

Should we care, if the species is a neophyte? Are we certain that it is an alien here? Had the species been found on the south-facing slopes of Cheddar Gorge, Brean Down, or Sand Point – biodiversity hotspots supporting species disjunct from Southern and Central Europe – then perhaps its status may have been more questionable? However, unlike disjunct species such as *Koeleria vallesiana*, *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* or *Galium fleurotii*, its native range is so far distant, close to the Mediterranean coast and riviera, that natural dispersal seems impossible. The number of old historical records, while relatively few, still suggests a horticultural source is possible, even if the species has never been commercially available and has been considered to be very rare in cultivation. It is a mystery as to how the species has got to this site and indeed when, as it may have been present for some considerable time before Ian's diligent square-bashing revealed it. The site is not open access, not

obviously managed and "far from any house". Perhaps the offspring of the Clevedon or Weston-Super-Mare plants known to White may somehow have found their way here, but how? A Croscombe crassulacean conundrum still to be solved.



Vegetative growth of Starry Stonecrop (*Phedimus stellatus*) at Croscombe. Photo © Fred Rumsey



Side view of Starry Stonecrop (*Phedimus stellatus*) at Croscombe. Photo © Fred Rumsey

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## A Tribute to Margaret A. Webster (1945-2025)

Compiled by Dee Holladay and Helena Crouch



Margaret (foreground) relaxing with her friends Libby Houston, Pam Millman, Liz McDonnell and Clive Lovatt after a day's botanising in Long Ashton. Photo © Dee Holladay

Margaret was a valued friend and mentor to many a budding botanist. She was born in Northern Ireland and grew up at the edge of Bessbrook village, next to open countryside near Newry, gaining a love of the natural world. She attended Art College in Belfast before moving to England to work as an art teacher in Chatham.

Margaret was able to develop her interest in botany when she and Jim moved to Winford: she enrolled on an evening course in botany at the University of Bristol and eventually followed that by gaining a degree. She had a particular interest in the genetics of *Primulas* (sparked by being given a 'mutant' primrose as a child) and

this led to extensive study and finally work on a PhD which she gained at the age of 60! The University of Leeds sponsored her PhD and she continued her research on *Primula* genetics for many years afterwards. She had papers published in the foremost botanical journals and became well known for her work.

Eventually Margaret built up a large collection of *Primulas* which became the Plant Heritage National Collection of *Primula* (British floral variants). My introduction to this was being led around her greenhouses which housed the most extraordinary collection of different variants. It was certainly a full-time job experimenting with creating new varieties and keeping them all fed and watered!

Nevertheless, Margaret found time to botanise with her friends and on her own. She joined the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland in 1989, served on the Botany Section Committee of Bristol Naturalists' Society for several years, and was a long-term member of Somerset Rare Plants Group. Margaret was also a member of Somerset Botany Group, contributing to many of their weekly surveys. She regularly led meetings for SRPG and BNS and also founded and led the Chew Valley U3A Wildflower Group. Margaret was a great teacher and many new botanists found her help invaluable when they were struggling to learn to identify their finds. As David Hawkins commented "The appearance of Margaret's signature flower-patterned hat in a car park or layby before a meeting was always an uplifting sight."

Margaret personally contributed around 35,000 records to the BSBI database which is a phenomenal achievement and a valuable legacy. She was a contributor to many other records made on group meetings. Margaret particularly recorded around her own neighbourhood but also made a detailed study

of the flora of Sand Point and Sand Bay over many years. This led to two papers in BSBI News: one a survey of the fate of Yellow-horned Poppy at Sand Bay, the other reporting a new site for Wild Leek. To her delight, her accompanying photograph was featured on the cover of that issue.

Margaret's contribution to botany was profound and she will be greatly missed by her many friends and colleagues.

### **Margaret's Research**

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Webster, Margaret A. (2014) [A new site for \*Allium ampeloprasum\* var. \*ampeloprasum\* in Britain](#). *BSBI News* 125 pp.27-28 (Also cover photo and on page2)

<https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/Margaret-A-Webster-12493797>



Margaret's *Primula* greenhouse. Photo © Jim Webster

## A Tribute to Pam Millman

By Dee Holladay



Pam at Tyntesfield on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.  
Photo © Libby Houston

Pam loved botanising. She was never happier than when tramping through the local woods and fields recording plants. Over the course of 30 years, she contributed some 11,000 North Somerset plant records to the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and before that many records to Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC). She was involved in surveying many of our local nature reserves and was never shy to badger people to let her have access. Tyntesfield also benefited from her attention: she spent several years doing detailed surveys of every area of the estate. and having discovered Autumn Lady's-tresses there, had an entire group on their knees hunting for it on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday!

Pam was born in Dulwich in 1929 and was evacuated with her sister to Coventry during the latter part of the war. After doing well at school, she started her career as a Chemistry technician but was soon persuaded to take a Biology degree by studying at evening classes (it took 4 years!). This led to a long career as a teacher in Cambridge and Carlisle. She loved the outdoors and was a keen walker and mountaineer. Her interests also included pottery, painting and music. Her friends received treasured little pots as gifts and she was often seen at local Craft Fairs.



Pam demonstrating aquatic plants at an SRPG meeting in 2022. Photo © Helena Crouch

She was a talented teacher and mentor for many of us in Bristol Naturalists' Society (BNS), holding the position of secretary of the Botany section in the early 90s. She was also a valued member of the Somerset Rare Plants Group. For many years she attended BNS and SRPG botany meetings but when going out botanising for long periods became too tiring, we met weekly near our homes to botanise for an hour or so.

We had plenty of adventures wandering along the lanes and across the fields. Once a herd of steers appeared behind us as we gazed into a rhyme on Clevedon Moor, and a lorry driver came to a halt - laughing - behind us in a lane in the village of Kingston Seymour. We were consulting our favourite ID book (Rose) at the time and hadn't heard him drive up! These forays only ceased in 2024 when she became increasingly frail, but even then we would meet at garden centres for a cup of coffee and a browse among the plants.

Pam passed away in December 2025 at the age of 96 after a short stay in hospital and then a nursing home. She was a brilliant mentor and friend to many and I, and so many others, will miss her very much.



Pam's last pots' sale. Photo © Libby Houston

## SRPG Photo competition 2025

By Fred Rumsey



Overall competition winner: © Sarah Shuttleworth – Photographer at Berrow.

All photos were to be taken this year and within the group's recording area, with members allowed to submit electronically up to two images per judged category. There were three categories, which had remained unchanged from last year: Rare Plant Register species, Non Rare Plant Register species and SRPG Meetings.

Entries were requested by the year end, but some leeway was given following a late reminder. In the end, eleven members entered a total of 42 images for this year's photo competition. It was clear that not everyone was completely familiar with the species list of the RPR, where some often-encountered species, mistakenly entered into category 2 were actually category 1 by virtue of the extent of their national decline.

Images were printed at a standard size (7x5"), which unfortunately necessitated the cropping of some entries sent in different aspect ratios. Apologies to those photographers whose original compositions were therefore compromised; attempts were made to crop sympathetically. The resulting prints were mounted on three display boards, one per category, within each of which positions were randomly allocated to try to preclude any bias.

Attendees at the January AGM meeting were then asked to vote on their favourite image per category and their favourite image overall. There were clearly some misunderstandings over how to select the latter, with the stated overall favourite receiving fewer votes than any of the category winners.

The results were:

### Category 1: Rare Plant Register Species

1<sup>st</sup> Fred Rumsey – Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*) at Brean Down;

2<sup>nd</sup> Neil Burstow – Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*);

Joint 3<sup>rd</sup> Pat Steele – Blue Pimpernel (*Lysimachia foemina*) & Sarah Shuttleworth – Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*).

### Category 2: Non Rare Plant Register Species

1<sup>st</sup> Helena Crouch – Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*);

Joint 2<sup>nd</sup>: Neil Burstow – Bush Vetch (*Vicia sepium*) & Pat Steele – Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*)

### Category 3: SRPG Meetings

1<sup>st</sup> Fred Rumsey – Group inspecting *Rosa micrantha* at Purn Hill;

2<sup>nd</sup> Sarah Shuttleworth – Photographer at Berrow;

3<sup>rd</sup> Fred Rumsey – ditch dabblers at West Moor.

Thanks to everyone who submitted entries and to all of those who voted. I know many more of our members take lovely photos and really hope that this coming year we will get greater participation. To this end I'd welcome suggestions for revised categories, and thoughts on what would make entry easier, or more appealing.

## The Winning Photos

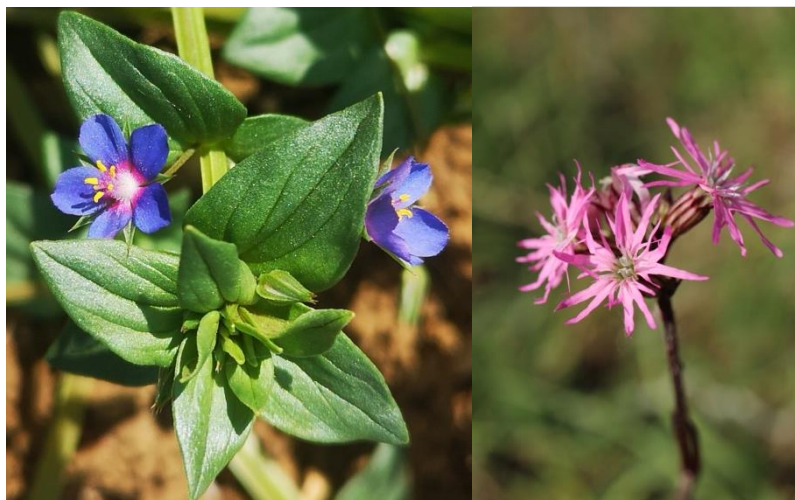
### Category 1: Rare Plant Register Species



1<sup>st</sup> © Fred Rumsey – Dwarf Sedge (*Carex humilis*) at Brean Down



2<sup>nd</sup> © Neil Burstow – Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*)



Joint 3<sup>rd</sup> © Pat Steele – Blue Pimpernel (*Lysimachia foemina*) & © Sarah Shuttleworth – Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*).

Category 2: Non Rare Plant Register Species



1<sup>st</sup> © Helena Crouch – Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*)



Joint 2<sup>nd</sup> : © Neil Burstow – Bush Vetch (*Vicia sepium*) & © Pat Steele – Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*)

Category 3: SRPG Meetings



1<sup>st</sup> © Fred Rumsey – Group inspecting *Rosa micrantha* at Purn Hill

(For 2<sup>nd</sup> place see overall winner)



3<sup>rd</sup> © Fred Rumsey – ditch dabblers at West Moor.

## Plant Records for 2025

### Compiled by Helena Crouch

During 2025, over 52,500 records were made for vascular plants in Somerset. Thank you very much to everyone who sent in records. All records, even for common species, are valuable, indeed it is important that we monitor changes in distributions of all species in Somerset. This annual list of plant records shows only the new additions to the county or to either vice-county, and selected other significant records; it does not really do justice to the huge contribution of our many recorders. *Taraxacum* species new to Somerset or to VC5 or VC6 are listed in a separate note. All records below are for 2025 unless otherwise stated. Those marked with an asterisk are neophytes (recent introductions). Recorders whose names appear more than once have been abbreviated as follows:

AM	Anna Mullett
BB	Brian Burrow
DEG	Dave Green
DH	David Hawkins
DP	Dave Pole
FJR	Fred Rumsey
GEL	Graham Lavender
GHR	Gill Read
HJC	Helena Crouch
IPG	Ian Green
JPP	John Poland
LE	Linda Everton
PRG	Paul Green
RFitzG	Ro FitzGerald
RJH	Rupert Higgins
SJL	Simon Leach
SJP	Stephen Parker
SP	Sharon Pilkington
SRPG	Somerset Rare Plants Group

Where reference is made to the *The Atlas Flora of Somerset* (Green, P.R., Green, I.P. & Crouch, G.A., 1997; Wayford and Yeovil: privately published) this is denoted as AFS.

## NEW SOMERSET RECORDS

\**Acer rubrum* (Red Maple) – Yarnfield Common Wood (ST785389), 5 Sep, several seedlings on track, self-sown from planted trees, HJC, GHR & FJR, VC6.

\**Akebia quinata* (Five-leaf Akebia) – Dundry (ST55596680), 11 Jun, several plants naturalised in paddock, DH, VC6.

\**Althaea cannabina* (Palm-leaf Marsh-mallow) – Frome (ST78224766), 31 Jul, 2 plants on pavement on N side of Portway, HJC, VC6.

\**Andryala integrifolia* (Common Andryala) – Monkton Heathfield, Monkton Elm Garden Centre (ST26302748), 5 Sep, weed in a pot containing a small *Cupressus sempervirens*, Steven Little, Sheila Wynn & Judith Cox, VC5. First record for Britain, but in a pot.

\**Arachis hypogaea* (Peanut) – Taunton (ST23562348), 5 Sep, one vegetative plant in kerbside, on W side of Calway Road, SJL, VC5.



Peanut (*Arachis hypogaea*) in a Taunton gutter.  
Photo © Simon Leach

\**Cotinus coggygria* (Smoke-tree) – Dundry (ST562666), 15 Jun, DH, VC6.

\**Crocus tommasinianus* x *vernus* – Huish, Yeovil (ST552161), 22 Feb, lots growing with both parents on grass area between A30 and pathway to Huish Car Park, IPG, VC5.

\**Dahlia* x *hortensis* (Dahlia) – Kingsbury Episcopi (ST439210), 17 Aug, 1 plant growing as a street weed, SJP & SRPG, VC5.

\**Euonymus fortunei* (Fortune's Spindle) – Portbury (ST49747515), 16 Mar, 1 small self-sown plant on bank above stream, S side of Caswell Lane, HJC & Bristol Naturalists' Society, VC6.

\**Felicia amelloides* (Blue Marguerite) – Norton Fitzwarren (ST19292620), 16 May, 1 plant scrambling on bank, close to garden but probably not planted, SJP, LE & AM, VC5.

\**Hieracium fictum* (Lacerate-leaved Hawkweed) – Bath, Twerton (ST72426475), 13 May 2023, 16 plants on stone wall of churchyard, HJC & Jim Crouch, det. BB, VC6.

\**Hyssopus officinalis* (Hyssop) – Kingsbury Episcopi (ST4356221043), 17 Aug, 1 plant in pavement, very close to plants in garden, SJP & SRPG, VC5.

\**Lupinus polyphyllus* (Garden Lupin) – Dundry (ST54836673), 15 Jun, DH, VC6.

\**Melica altissima* 'Atropurpurea' (Dark Purple Siberian Melic) – Yeovil (ST55221632), 18 Aug, self-sown by a wall in Sidney Gardens, IPG, det. PRG, VC5.

\**Narcissus papyraceus* (Paper-white Daffodil) – Minehead (SS96484652), 18 Mar, 4 plants on verge of Whitecross Lane, opposite road name sign, GEL, VC5.

\**Nepeta racemosa* (Eastern Cat-mint) – Bath, River Avon towpath (ST7464), 23 Aug, on river side of towpath opposite Pegasus Leat, escape, DP, VC6.

\**Oenothera lindheimeri* (White Gaura) – Bossington (SS89634804), 18 Oct, self-sown on roadside, JPP, VC5.

\**Olearia solandri* (Coastal Daisy-bush) – Ilminster (ST36071467), 12 Oct, 1 plant growing from wall of house, SJP & SRPG, VC5.



Coastal Daisy-bush (*Olearia solandri*) growing from a house wall in Ilminster. Photo © Helena Crouch

\**Rudbeckia fulgida* (Perennial Coneflower) – Ilminster (ST36211472), 12 Oct, SJP & SRPG, VC5.

\**Scilla sardensis* (Lesser Glory-of-the-snow) – Yeovil (ST55121642), 28 Feb, 1 self-sown at base of wall on pavement, PRG, VC5.

\**Sedum lydium* (Least Stonecrop) – Yeovil (ST54681609), 28 Mar, several patches on edge of grass by car park for Oaklands Primary School, IPG, det. FJR, VC5.

\**Sorbus fayana* (Fay's Whitebeam) – Burrington Combe (ST4767058749), 24 Jul 2003, limestone rocks, top of first slab above lower car park, T.C.G. Rich & M. Chester, VC6. Described as a new species based on this record (holotype specimen in **NMW**), see: Rich, T.C.G. & Houston, L. (2025). New names in British *Sorbus* (Rosaceae). *British & Irish Botany* 7(1): 30-36.

\**Spiraea japonica* (Japanese Spiraea) – Timsbury (ST66625866), 13 Aug, several seedlings on kerbside edge of pavement in St Mary's Close, self-sown from nearby garden, HJC & Cam Valley Wildlife Group, VC6.

\**Tulipa saxatilis* (Cretan Tulip) – Yeovil (ST53821457), 15 Apr, several plants by path between houses, IPG, VC5.

## NEW VICE-COUNTY RECORDS

\**Avena strigosa* (Bristle Oat) – Bossington (SS89444790), 14 Jul, small patch at edge of field, GEL, VC5.

\**Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *longipedicellatus* – Kilmington (ST7636), 14 Jun, in crop margin, SP, VC6.

\**Datura ferox* (Longspine Thorn-apple) – Lilstock (ST16784501), 25 Sep, appeared in garden after building work and application of compost, RFitzG, det. FJR, VC5.

\**Hieracium lanatum* Hort. – Chilcompton (ST64955137), 22 Jun, many plants on wall of car park of The Redan pub and 27 plants on pavement down the street, HJC, VC6. (This name is applied in horticulture to this taxon, but taxonomy of these Woolly Hawkweeds is a mess!)



Woolly Hawkweed ("*Hieracium lanatum*" of horticulture) in Chilcompton. Photo © Helena Crouch

\**Lonicera involucrata* (Californian Honeysuckle) – Edford (ST66844884), 2 Apr, suckering patch 1m x 1m beside old track, near canal bridge, HJC & DEG, VC6.

\**Nemesia denticulata* (Toothed Aloha) – Taunton (ST24062382), 30 May, several plants in kerbside, Dunkleys Way, Hillyfields, escaped from nearby tiny front garden, SJL, conf. FJR from photos, VC5.

\**Persicaria glabra* (Denseflower Knotweed) – Stogumber (ST09743738), 2 Aug, growing between tarmac and garden wall although plant not visible in garden or any adjacent gardens, RFitzG, det. John Akeroyd, VC5.

\**Polystichum polyblepharon* (Japanese Shield-fern) – South Petherton (ST42971767), 26 Apr, 1 plant above bank of North Mills Brook, close to Barcroft lane, FJR, VC5.

*Rumex x pseudopulcher* (*R. crispus x pulcher*) – Pitney (ST44432913), 2 Jul, 1 largish plant with both parents on a vegetable plot at Glebe Organic Farm, FJR, VC6.



*Rumex x pseudopulcher* on a vegetable plot in Pitney.  
Photo © Fred Rumsey

\**Salvia hispanica* (Chia) – Yeovil (ST55071643), 6 Sep, garden weed, IPG, VC5.

\**Saxifraga 'Arendsii'* (Rockery Saxifrage) – Dundry (ST55006660), 15 Jun, naturalised in hedge bank, DH, VC6. [Maybe formerly mis-recorded in Somerset as *S. hypnoides*].

\**Teucrium hircanicum* (Caucasian Germander) – Muchelney (ST428249), 30 Jun, 1 plant by kerb

stone by triangle area of grass in front of church, IPG & PRG, det. HJC, VC5.

\**Viburnum x bodnantense* (*V. farreri x grandiflorum*) – Bossington (SS89234712), 30 Dec, hedge bank, GEL, VC5.

#### OTHER INTERESTING RECORDS – Native taxa

*Apium graveolens* (Wild Celery) – Bossington (SS89584805), 6 Jun, on bank by footpath not far from stream, GEL, VC5. New hectad record for GB Vulnerable species.

*Cakile maritima* (Sea Rocket) – Porlock Weir (SS86534782), 10 Feb, on shingle behind first house on right approaching Porlock Weir, GEL, VC5. New hectad record for RPR species.

*Carex divulsa* subsp. *leersii* (Many-leaved Sedge) – Whitcombe (ST48701616), 13 Apr, scattered plants along steep terraced banks high on valley side, seen here in fruit in 2024, FJR & SRPG, VC5. New hectad record for RPR species.

*Carex x boeninghausiana* (*C. paniculata x remota*) – Frome, SE of (ST80514659), Jul, one clump with both parents in hedgerow near wood, on private land N of A362, Ann Fells, conf. Mike Porter, VC6. Second record for VC6 and third for Somerset.

*Elymus x drucei* (*E. repens x athericus*) – Pill Foreshore Nature Reserve, 19 Jul 2023, SP, VC6. Third record for VC6.

*Erysimum cheiranthoides* (Treacle Mustard) – Farleigh Hungerford (ST80135755), 8 Oct, 1 plant in flower on S edge of A366 opposite castle, HJC & DEG, VC6. New hectad record for GB Vulnerable species.

*Euphrasia arctica* (Arctic Eyebright) – Hutton Hill (ST35825856), 4 Jul, DH, VC6. New hectad record for RPR species.

*Filipendula vulgaris* (Dropwort) – Ford Farm, slopes NW of (ST36163934), 7 Aug, small non-flowering patch on scrubby slope, APR, VC6. New hectad record for RPR species.

*Galium parisiense* (Wall Bedstraw) – Portishead (ST463755), 25 Feb, DH; Long Ashton (ST53786991), 30 Jul, DH, VC6. New hectad records for RPR species.

*Hieracium consociatum* (Sociable Hawkweed) – Pen Hill, Stourhead Estate (ST74753398), 27 Jun, many plants on road bank on SW side of lane, just E of hairpin bend, HJC & GHR, det. BB, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1997.

***Himantoglossum hircinum*** (Lizard Orchid) – Brent Knoll (ST33495120), 20 May, 1 plant in Ball Copse Field, Ged Keele, VC6. New hectad record for Nationally Scarce species.

***Isolepis cernua*** (Slender Clubrush) – Berrow Dunes (ST29395174), 23 Jun, many plants at edge of raised green on golf course, HJC & SRPG, VC6. Fifth site for VC6.

***Lamium amplexicaule*** (Henbit Dead-nettle) – Wellington (ST13541965), 9 May, street weed, SJP, VC5. New hectad record for RPR species.

***Lysimachia foemina*** (Blue Pimpernel) – Shepton Mallet (ST61944417), 27 Jun, one plant in flower in a garden border, Ian Metcalf, conf. HJC, VC6. New hectad record for Nationally Scarce species which is Vulnerable on the GB Red List.

***Polygonum rurivagum*** (Cornfield Knotgrass) – Perry Green (ST27463818), 1 Jul, field corners and margins, Hannah Gibbons, VC5. New hectad record for RPR species.

***Potamogeton perfoliatus*** (Perfoliate Pondweed) – Gold Corner (ST36554306), 1 Aug 2024, in edge of Huntspill River near strips of marginal reedswamp just W of Gold Corner, David Holyoak, VC6. First record for this RPR species in this hectad since 1915.

***Serratula tinctoria*** (Saw-wort) – Brean Down (ST28565919), 6 Mar, few plants on N-facing slope below track, HJC & FJR, VC6. New hectad record for GB Vulnerable species.



Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*) on the north side of Brean Down. Photo © Helena Crouch

***Salix x calodendron*** (Holme Willow) – Long Ashton (ST536697), 30 Jul, 2 individuals, DH, VC6. Fourth record for VC6 and fifth for Somerset.

***Urtica dioica*** subsp. ***inermis*** (Stingless Nettle) – Simonsbath (SS76533930), 4 Jul, large stand beside path in Lime Combe, just S of bridge over River Exe, HJC & FJR; Clatworthy (ST03103089), 6 Sep, IPG, VC5. New hectad records for RPR taxon.

#### OTHER INTERESTING RECORDS – Alien taxa

\****Abutilon theophrasti*** (Velvetleaf) – Butleigh Wootton (ST49363413), 28 Aug, 1 plant in bud in fallow field, Pat Steele, VC6. Third post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.



Velvetleaf (*Abutilon theophrasti*) found by Pat Steele near Butleigh Wootton. Photo © Helena Crouch

\****Amaranthus albus*** (White Pigweed) – Ilminster (ST36331462), 12 Oct, street weed at base of wall, SJP & SRPG, VC5. First record for VC5 since 2001.

\****Crocus tommasinianus* x *vernus*** – Yeovil, The Park (ST554161), 1 Mar, one under shrubs, PRG, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

\****Cyrtomium clivicola*** (a Holly Fern) – South Petherton (ST43081669), 21 May, 1 large plant down road drain by layby, FJR, VC5. Second record for *Cyrtomium fortune* agg. in VC5, but most records for *C. fortune* are for var. *clivicola* (= *Cyrtomium clivicola*).

\**Cuscuta campestris* (Yellow Dodder) – Bedminster Down (ST57897017), 22 Aug, parasitic on *Convolvulus arvensis*, associated with bird seed aliens, RJH, VC6. Fifth record for VC6.

\**Cynara cardunculus* var. *cardunculus* (Cardoon) – Ilminster (ST36101482), 12 Oct, 2 plants beside track, SJP & SRPG, VC5. Fifth record for the species in VC5.

\**Erucastrum gallicum* (Hairy Rocket) – Lilstock (ST16764500), 1 Oct, bird-seed alien, RFitzG, VC5. Third record for VC5 and first for Somerset since AFS.

\**Eryngium bourgatii* (Mediterranean Sea-holly) – Shepton Mallet (ST62604282), 19 Dec, 2 plants self-sown on pavement, N side of Henley Rise, HJC & GHR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and third for Somerset.

\**Eryngium giganteum* (Tall Eryngo) – Paulton (ST64645637), 20 May, 3 plants on pavement S side of Farrington Road, HJC; Chilcompton (ST64875183), 22 Jun, 2 plants at edge of The Street, HJC & Peter Watson, VC6. Second and third records for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Eryngium planum* (Blue Eryngo) – Frome (ST77764869), 5 Jun, 1 plant, roadside/gutter weed in Welshmill Road, DEG, VC6. Fourth record for VC6 and fifth for Somerset.

\**Euphorbia dulcis* (Sweet Spurge) – Chewton Keynsham (ST65626699), 24 Apr, 1 plant at edge of Chewton Road, HJC & FJR, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.

\**Laphangium luteoalbum* (Jersey Cudweed) – Sutton Bingham Reservoir (ST54681040), 25 Sep, on silt/ sand of drawdown zone, Pete Akers, VC5; Herons Green, Chew Valley Lake (ST55435930), 2 Nov, 1 plant on exposed silt just S of inflow to lake, RJH, VC6. Second record for VC5 and second for VC6.

\**Leonurus cardiaca* (Motherwort) – Bath, Twerton (ST72346473), 19 Jul, 1 plant growing out of the wall of St Michael's Church, Mike Williams, VC6. First record for VC6 since AFS.

\**Lonicera henryi* (Henry's Honeysuckle) – Wilstock and Stockmoor Country Park (ST297352), 18 Aug, SJP, Barbra Lakin & Lydia Winthorpe, VC5; Bossington (SS89674802), 18 Oct, JPP, VC5; Frome (ST79564916), 6 Jun, large sprawling patch beside Coalway Lane, behind gardens, HJC & GHR, VC6. Third and fourth records for VC5 and third for VC6.

\**Mentha requienii* (Corsican Mint) – Rode (ST80535395), 19 Feb, 28 small patches along E edge of Nutts Lane where water runs alongside garden wall, extending for 11m, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second record for VC6.

\**Mentha x villosonevata* (Sharp-toothed Mint) – Bedminster Down (ST57897017), 22 Aug, RJH, VC6. Third record for VC6 and first since 1967.

\**Onoclea sensibilis* (Sensitive Fern) – Chilcompton (ST64845184), 5 Oct, growing on public footpath between two gardens, Emma Britton, VC6. Second record for VC6 and third for Somerset.

\**Polystichum polyblepharon* (Japanese Shield-fern) – Portishead (ST44737610), 12 Mar, 6 plants near side of The Zigzag path through woodland, DH, det. HJC, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Salvia hispanica* (Chia) – Taunton (ST22392458), 25 Oct, many plants on bank by car park, SJP & SRPG, det. HJC, VC5. Second record for VC5.

\**Scilla forbesii* (Glory-of-the-snow) – Woolavington (ST346428), 21 Mar, small patch beside Middle Moor Drove, Andrew Robinson, VC6. Fifth record for VC6.

\**Scilla luciliae* (Boissier's Glory-of-the-snow) – Chipley (ST11512388), 28 Mar, 1 plant in Young Oaks woodland, SJP, LE, AM & Chris Loudon, VC5. Second record for VC5.

\**Sedum kimmachii* (Lesser Mexican-stonecrop) – Lower Rudge (ST82795167), 23 May, small patch on outside of wall overgrown with brambles, W side of Rudge Lane, HJC & GHR, VC6. Third record for VC6.

\**Sorghum bicolor* (Great Millet) – Bath, River Avon towpath (ST7365), 2 Nov, between Dredge Bridge and Windsor Bridge, DP. Fifth record for VC6.

\**Symphytum caucasicum* (Caucasian Comfrey) – Bruton (ST67983474), 3 May, by Coombe Brook millpond, FJR, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.

\**Veronica crista-galli* (Crested Speedwell) – Yeovil (ST55141664), 21 Mar, lots along edge of fence on rough ground along east of cemetery, IPG, VC5. Second site for VC5.

## **SRPG Membership and Contacts**

Somerset Rare Plants Group annual subscription is £10. Payment can be made directly into the SRPG account as a one-off transfer or by standing order. Please contact Ellen McDouall (see email below) for account details.

Members attend meetings at their own risk. Field meeting leaders carry a list of emergency phone numbers. Please contact Ellen McDouall if you have not completed a membership form, so that she has the telephone numbers of those to contact in case of illness or accident.

### **Committee Members (as at end of 2025)**

Chairs: Helena Crouch & Ellen McDouall

Email: [helenacrouch@sky.com](mailto:helenacrouch@sky.com) / [mcdouallem@gmail.com](mailto:mcdouallem@gmail.com)

**Membership Secretary:** Ellen McDouall

Email: [mcdouallem@gmail.com](mailto:mcdouallem@gmail.com)

**Treasurer:** Anna Mullett

Email: [annamullett@btinternet.com](mailto:annamullett@btinternet.com)

**Newsletter Editor:** Karen Andrews

Email: [BotanyKaren@gmail.com](mailto:BotanyKaren@gmail.com)

**Website Manager:** Val Graham

Email: [grahamval57@gmail.com](mailto:grahamval57@gmail.com)

**Rare Plants Register Editor:** Helena Crouch

Email: [helenacrouch@sky.com](mailto:helenacrouch@sky.com)

**Photo Competition Organiser:** Fred Rumsey

Email: [rumsey2021@outlook.com](mailto:rumsey2021@outlook.com)

**Joint Vice-county recorder for South Somerset (VC5):** Steve Parker

Email: [stephenjparker1710@gmail.com](mailto:stephenjparker1710@gmail.com)

**Joint Vice-county Recorder for South Somerset (VC5):** Simon Leach

Email: [simonleach@phonecoop.coop](mailto:simonleach@phonecoop.coop)

**Vice-county Recorder for North Somerset (VC6):** Helena Crouch

Email: [helenacrouch@sky.com](mailto:helenacrouch@sky.com)

**New Members' Representatives:**

Liz Biron: [liz.biron99@gmail.com](mailto:liz.biron99@gmail.com)

Daniela Dietrich: [ella.dietrich@gmail.com](mailto:ella.dietrich@gmail.com)

Aisa Irvine: [aisa.irvine@outlook.com](mailto:aisa.irvine@outlook.com)