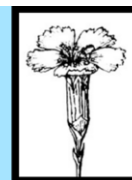


SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Burnham & Berrow Golf Course at sunset © Helena Crouch

Tuesday 26th May 2026, Berrow Dunes (VC6)

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Liam Pigden

Report: Helena Crouch

During an unseasonably warm week, eleven members met with the Courses Manager of Burnham & Berrow Golf Club on a glorious sunny evening for our annual exploration of Berrow Dunes SSSI. Our first target was the Lizard Orchid (*Himantoglossum hircinum*), but sadly we only found five, just beginning to flower, but all short and clearly suffering from the recent dry weather. Thankfully, other species were faring better.

Sand Cat's-tail (*Phleum arenarium*) and Silver Hair-grass (*Aira caryophyllea*) were flowering beside the footpath and Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) bore impressive cylindrical inflorescences: all three are Rare Plant Register (RPR) species. We found a large plant of Bur Chervil (*Anthriscus caucalis*), an unfamiliar umbellifer for many as it is largely a coastal species in Somerset. Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*) were flowering on the dunes north of the footpath.

At the edge of the next fairway, members dropped to their knees to admire the astonishingly green rosettes of Suffocated Clover (*Trifolium suffocatum*), elegantly interspersed with completely dead circles of Bulbous Meadow-grass (*Poa bulbosa*).



Suffocated Clover in flower on the golf course © Liz Downey

Both Suffocated Clover and Bulbous Meadow-grass are RPR species. Suffocated Clover is a winter annual, reaching maturity early in the year to ensure that reproduction occurs before it becomes desiccated. Bulbous Meadow-grass also flowers and seeds early in the year, but the bulb-like basal internodes persist once the plants become desiccated and appear completely dead.



Bulbous Meadow-grass looking spectacularly dead © Helena Crouch

We soon found another rare grass which is one of the characteristic species of Berrow Dunes SSSI, Bearded Fescue (*Vulpia ciliata* subsp. *ambigua*). This species is Nationally Scarce but was clearly having a good year due to the mild winter following a hot dry summer.

When we reached the west edge of the golf course, we headed north alongside a wide ditch. Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*) and Hare's-foot Clover (*T. arvense*) were growing in the rough, with a few plants of Common Eyebright (*Euphrasia nemorosa*). The ditch yielded a Stonewort (*Chara* sp.) and Small Pondweed (*Potamogeton berchtoldii*).

Next we explored an artificial scrape which was created four years previously. Annual grasses had colonised, particularly Sand Cat's-tail and Bearded Fescue. Common Restharrow (*Ononis repens*), now Vulnerable on the GB Red List, was spreading in from the surrounding turf and we recorded several plants

of Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) which is Near Threatened on the England Red List.

Continuing northwards, we checked the patch of Round-headed Club-rush (*Scirpoides holoschoenus*), known here since 1896. The clump was originally described as growing in sand-dunes but now survives in a reed-bed. Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) carpets the ground here: this species is Vulnerable on the GB Red List.

Nearby, Liam showed us a recently restored slack, formerly lost under willows. The banks were already being colonised by many plants of White Champion (*Silene latifolia*). By now the light was failing, as a final rare plant was sought in another slack. Divided Sedge (*Carex divisa*) grows nowhere else in Somerset! We were delighted to find several shoots in flower and many more vegetative clumps of this dainty sedge.



Inflorescence and narrow leaf of Divided Sedge © Helena Crouch

Brown Sedge (*Carex disticha*) also grew in the slack and we found two plants of Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) which is Vulnerable on the GB Red List and thus another RPR species.

Reluctantly, the remaining members headed back to the starting point. We had updated records for twenty Rare Plant Register species and several members had seen plants which were new to them. We are very grateful to the Courses Manager, Liam, for facilitating our annual SRPG meeting at Burnham & Berrow Golf Course.