

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Bluebells at Ebbor Gorge © Helena Crouch

Saturday 18th April 2026, Ebbor Gorge NNR (VC6)

Leader: Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

Twenty-one members assembled in fine weather for our first VC6 meeting of the season. Ebbor Gorge was notified as an SSSI for various features including the ancient woodland. We set off down the endless steps which descend the steep slope through the woods, soon finding Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatelina*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Wood Melick (*Melica uniflora*), Wood Millet (*Milium effusum*), Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*), Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*), Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), Woodsorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* subsp. *montanum*), Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*) and glorious carpets of Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*): all are Ancient Woodland Indicators.

After passing two damp meadows dominated by tall herbs such as Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*),

we reached the impressive circle of mature Hornbeams (*Carpinus betulus*) ... but alas, the large wicker bear, guardian of the glade, had gone! Some glorious patches of Goldilocks Buttercup were seen here, with flowers bearing five petals instead of the usual misshapen flowers with petals missing.



Flower of Goldilocks Buttercup with perfect petals © Fred Rumsey

We continued downhill, then turned to follow the path uphill to the gorge. A large patch of Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*) was admired on a

rock face at the entrance to the gorge and the more challenging ascent began. A single vegetative plant of Nettle-leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*) was spotted growing on the rocky path. Once everyone had reached the top of the gorge safely, thoughts turned to lunch: we headed to the viewpoint for a much-needed rest.

The calcareous grassland at the viewpoint is badly degraded, but we still found scraps of Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and Salad-burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *sanguisorba*), both Vulnerable on the new GB Red List and also Thyme (*Thymus drucei*), which is Near Threatened, Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*) and Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*). The views were stunning.

Rested and replenished, we continued uphill to the area of limestone heath where extensive scrub clearance has recently been carried out. A target species here was Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina* subsp. *canina*) which is Vulnerable on the GB and England Red Lists having declined dramatically due to habitat loss. Unfortunately the area where it was last seen in 2016 was still subsumed by brambles, but plans were made for further clearance. Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis tetrahit*) and Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) were recorded on cleared areas, and two patches of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) were found. On limestone rock outcrops, glorious patches of Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla verna*) were flowering.



Spring Cinquefoil on rock outcrops above Ebbor Gorge © Helena Crouch

Other species found on the rock outcrops included stunning swathes of Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*),

Thyme-leaved Sandwort (*Arenaria serpyllifolia*), Dove's-foot Crane's-bill (*Geranium molle*), Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) and Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*). Most excitingly, we found splendid plants of Dwarf Mouse-ear (*Cerastium pumilum*) at the edge of the NNR, just in the next monad, and apparently the first record for the National Nature Reserve. In nearby grassland, several splendid flowering plants of Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*) were a delight, and a Bloody-nosed Beetle provided a coleopterological distraction. We also saw an Orange-tip and a Holly Blue. Heading back down the path, we found a patch of Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*).

Numbers were dwindling as several members had to head back, but those remaining made a final deviation from the path to explore the strip of calcareous grassland along the top of the gorge, where formerly there had been a small patch of Cheddar Bedstraw (*Galium fleurotii*, formerly recorded as *G. pumilum*). Tragically none was found. It was last seen here in 2016 but has been searched for several time since then so is probably lost. We did, however, find more plants of Dwarf Mouse-ear. Like other winter annuals, this species is having a good year, probably as a result of the previous scorching summer followed by a wet mild winter.



Dwarf Mouse-ear at Ebbor Gorge © Helena Crouch

It had been a vibrant meeting with a good selection of Spring flowers seen. We recorded 192 species, adding ten to this relatively well-botanised site.