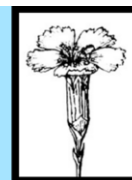


# SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



## Meeting Report



SRPG members finding rare plants on the rocks at the top of The Perch SSSI © Helena Crouch

**Sunday 31st May 2026, The Perch SSSI (VC6)**

**Leader: Helena Crouch & Barbra Lakin**

**Report: Helena Crouch**

The weather was glorious as eighteen members assembled in the car park at Callow Rock with kind permission of Somerset Wildlife Trust. Our missions were to update records for The Perch SSSI, particularly the part owned by Somerset Council, and also to update records for Rare Plant Register (RPR) species. We walked to the SSSI boundary before we started recording.

First we explored the woodland, an enclosed part of which is leased to Somerset Mammal Group. We recorded Male Fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*), Hart's-tongue Fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium*), Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) and Hard Shield-fern (*P. aculeatum*) which was new to the monad. A single clump of a fine-leaved sedge was identified for us by Fred as Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*), more commonly found in grassland; this was also new to the monad and indeed to the SSSI. It is an RPR species, being Near Threatened on the GB and England Red Lists. Leaving the enclosure, we continued along the footpath

finding a single non-flowering plant of Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*), the first record for The Perch since 1989.

We deviated from our planned route to explore the sun-drenched ledge around the top of the disused quarry, part of which is outside the SSSI. We soon found Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Common Eyebright (*Euphrasia nemorosa*) and Salad-burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *sanguisorba*), all now RPR species. We also found Common Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and six flowering Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*). While some members explored further along the wide ledge above the quarry, others settled for lunch, accompanied by three Hummingbird Hawkmoths. Meanwhile Libby studied a whitebeam at the quarry edge. After careful scrutiny, she identified the single small tree as probably identical to Fay's Whitebeam (*Sorbus fayana*) which grows in Burrington Combe. This will need confirmation.

Two members departed after lunch, but sixteen continued along the path and were soon rewarded with three beautiful flowering Greater Butterfly-orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha*). For some, this was

their first encounter with this stunning orchid, and it was the first record for The Perch SSSI since 2009.



Flower of Greater Butterfly-orchid at The Perch © Helena Crouch

Whilst some of us were distracted by small grey caterpillars, Fred found a single fruiting spike of Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio*), last seen at The Perch in 1974! Both these orchids are RPR species. The diverting little caterpillars were feeding on Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*), but when disturbed they dropped to the ground in tight little spirals. They were later identified as the larvae of the Goldenrod Strider (*Pachyprotasis simulans*).

As we left the woodland we found Slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), all indicative of more acidic soils. Three members turned back; thirteen began the grand ascent. The grassland into which we emerged (Unit 2 of the SSSI) was dominated by Bracken and Wood Small-reed (*Calamagrostis epigejos*). This tall rhizomatous grass has become invasive on Mendip, probably as a result of under-grazing and nitrogen deposition. A large patch of Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*) was growing on the path leading uphill and also a single plant of Long-stalked Crane's-bill (*Geranium columbinum*): both are RPR species. At the top of this unit of the SSSI we found an encouraging area of thin soils with abundant Long-stalked Crane's-bill, Dove's-foot Crane's-bill (*Geranium molle*), Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), Thyme-leaved Sandwort

(*Arenaria serpyllifolia*) and Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*).



Long-stalked Crane's-bill © Fred Rumsey

Continuing uphill into Unit 4 of the SSSI, the grassland changed dramatically to a short species-rich sward. A single patch of Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis* subsp. *vestita*) was discovered on the path, with Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) growing nearby: both are RPR species.



The delicate lilac flowers of Heath Speedwell © Barbra Lakin

Members were lured ever upwards by the promise of rock outcrops; once we reached the first small quarry Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*) was soon spotted, perfectly in flower. We counted eleven shoots with glorious clove-scented open flowers. Silver Hair-grass (*Aira caryophyllea*) grew with it, and a smart Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*) was admired on rocks. Kidney-vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) was flowering in nearby grassland and patches of Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla verna*) were found.

As a finale, we reached Unit 3 of the SSSI and another former small quarry where Cheddar Pink has been known since 1985. It has been suggested that the late discovery of Cheddar Pink at The Perch indicates that it was an introduction, but it may have colonised these small quarried areas naturally.



Cheddar Pink flowering at The Perch © Helena Crouch

We counted about twenty patches of Cheddar Pink on the rocks and also found Cheddar Bedstraw (*Galium fleurotii*) here, just coming into flower. This species is now Endangered on the new GB Red List. Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*) was abundant in fruit, whilst Thyme (*Thymus drucei*) was just beginning to flower. Small plants of Dwarf Mouse-ear (*Cerastium pumilum*) were scattered on the rocks. This Nationally Scarce species is Near Threatened on the GB Red List. Tiny compact Eyebrights were identified as Western Eyebright (*Euphrasia*

*tetraquetra*), with flowers at around node 5 and short glandular hairs on upper leaves.

The views were spectacular: it was a perfect spot for a rest and snack, after which nine members headed back to their cars. The remaining four continued recording, exploring some fantastic grassland at the top of Unit 1, owned by Somerset Council. We discussed the management of some small areas of scree and found many further patches of Cheddar Bedstraw on a steep west-facing slope.



Cheddar Bedstraw © Helena Crouch

There was still much to see, and we had only explored the upper monad of the SSSI. We recorded 198 species, including 32 Rare Plant Register species.