

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Botanising to the edge of the saltmarsh at Clevedon Pill © Helena Crouch

Saturday 4th July 2026, Clevedon Saltmarsh (VC6)

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Dee Holladay

Report: Dee Holladay & Helena Crouch

On a sunny but very breezy day twelve members gathered by the cemetery in West End, Clevedon for a day of coastal botany with a focus on saltmarshes. After a briefing we set off along the footpath, finding plenty of Sea Radish (*Raphanus raphanistrum* subsp. *maritimus*), a patch of Black Horehound (*Ballota nigra*) and the large leaves of Horse-Radish (*Armoracia rusticana*). A discussion ensued about what appeared to be Dogwood, but examination of the leaf structure (no fibres when torn) showed that it was in fact Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), new to the hectad! On the opposite verge, we recorded many plants of Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*), which is Near Threatened on the England Red List. The remains of two straggling plants of White Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata*) were found in the boat park: this species was first recorded at Clevedon Pill by John Martin 20 years previously and has been seen there on two (now three) subsequent SRPG meetings.

Descending the exceptionally windy slipway to the saltmarsh, we passed Rock Samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) and the seedheads of Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) growing on the rock face. We braved the strong south-westerly and were rewarded by extensive drifts of Sea Lavender (*Limonium vulgare*) in flower.



Sea Milkwort (*Lysimachia maritima*) © Helena Crouch

We immediately found several species characteristic of saltmarsh, including prettily flowering Sea Milkwort (formerly *Glaux maritima*, now *Lysimachia maritima*), Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Greater Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media*), Hard-grass (*Parapholis strigosa*) and English Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*). Further out on the saltmarsh we found Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) in flower and smaller amounts of Sea Arrow-grass (*Triglochin maritima*), with distinctively aromatic leaves.

Along the banks of the pill were many plants of Sea Aster (*Tripsolium pannonicum*), most not yet flowering. The flower heads are usually illustrated with mauve 'petals' (really ligules), but these are often absent, the capitula having only yellow disc flowers. Lower down the banks of the creek and out at the seaward edge of the saltmarsh, we saw Common Cord-grass (*Spartina anglica*). Helena explained the origin of this species as an example of recent speciation: it arose following hybridisation between native Small Cord-grass (*S. maritima*) and the American species, Smooth Cord-grass (*S. alterniflora*), believed to have been introduced in ships' ballast. Chromosome doubling in the hybrid resulted in this very successful fertile allopolyploid which was then planted around the coast to control erosion and now dominates the pioneer zone of Somerset saltmarshes. The annual Glassworts (*Salicornia europaea* agg.), capable of tolerating daily inundation by seawater, also grow in the pioneer zone. We saw many little succulent plants, but it was not possible to determine the species yet as there were no flowers. We discussed the harvesting of this plant for sale and Helena couldn't resist a taste!

After briefly returning to the footpath, we next explored an area of more mature saltmarsh. The upper region is dominated by Sea Couch-grass (*Elymus athericus*), although much of it is possibly the hybrid with Common Couch. An extensive reedbed (*Phragmites australis*) dominates the back of the saltmarsh. At the edge of the reedbed we found Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*), now Vulnerable on the GB Red List, and Hemlock Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*). Exploring the saltmarsh, trying to avoid the many small runnels hidden under the grass (and sometimes failing!), we found Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus*

gerardi), more Sea Milkwort and many plants of Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*). This species is included in the Somerset Rare Plant Register (RPR) because it is Rare in VC5: it is found extensively in VC6.



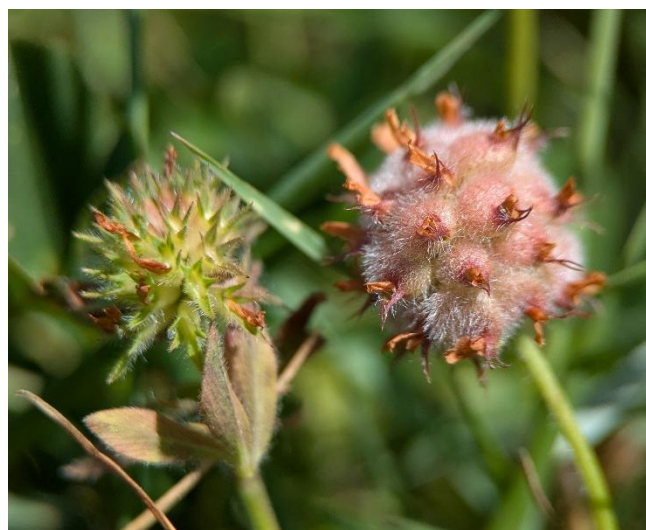
The single male spike, contiguous female spikes and long bracts of Long-bracted Sedge © Liz Downey

Before leaving the saltmarsh, we studied a patch of Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*). The long sessile pointed spikelets are indicative of this species, rather than Inland Club-rush (*B. laticarpus*), however, to be absolutely certain, it is necessary to examine a transverse section of the nutlets.

At the base of the sea wall, we admired several tall flowering Tree-mallows (*Malva arborea*), then ascended the bank to return to the footpath, continuing towards the sluice gates, with brief diversions to view False Fox-sedge (*Carex otrubae*) and Hairy Sedge (*C. hirta*). The outfall sluice allows water to flow out of the Blind Yeo drainage channel which is the main drainage route from the Clevedon Levels. The next section of footpath was flanked by Crack Willow (*Salix x fragilis*) maintained as a hedge beside the golf course. Here we found three more species of the Apiaceae (carrot family): Stone Parsley

(*Sison amomum*), Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), and Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*). We entered a new monad, spotting Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) and Duke of Argyll's Teaplat (*Lycium barbarum*), the fruits of which are known as Goji berries and sold as a health food, and all attention turned to lunch!

Reaching the stony beach, we found a few tree trunks conveniently left by the tide and stopped for a well-earned picnic with a great view of the Bristol Channel. After lunch the focus was our two promised target plants: Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*) and Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*). We soon found a delightful patch of Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*), with its delicate pink flower heads and large pinkish inflated fruits, looking like polystyrene strawberries. This is another RPR species, being Vulnerable on the England Red List and Endangered on the GB Red List. Following a small path through grassland, behind the narrow strip of saltmarsh, we came upon a large number of plants of Sea Clover, mostly in fruit. The ovoid inflorescences are distinctively subtended by a pair of leaves. The calyces of this species become very stiff after flowering, so that the fruiting heads resemble little hedgehogs. Sea Clover is another RPR species, Vulnerable on the GB Red List and Nationally Scarce.



The fruiting heads of Sea Clover (Left), with a pair of leaves subtending the inflorescence, and Strawberry Clover (Right) © Helena Crouch

Beside the small path, we also found our first plants of Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus tenuis*). This is another RPR species because it is Rare in VC5; in VC6 it is only found at the coast, in south Bristol and around Somerton, so was a new species for some

members. Apart from the narrow leaflets, this species is distinguished from Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*L. corniculatus*) by the convergent upper calyx teeth.



Strongly convergent upper calyx teeth of Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus tenuis*) © Liz Downey

Entering a third monad, there was plenty of opportunity to practise identifying the saltmarsh plants we had already seen. but we were able to add two more RPR species. Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*) was found here on the SRPG meeting in 2011: there had been no subsequent records, so we were delighted to confirm that it was still present.

Finally, the promised Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*) came into view, many small shoots among the grasses but splendid larger plants alongside the path. Beyond, we could see further extensive beautiful patches of Sea Lavender, but all decided it was prudent to turn back. Returning along the footpath above the saltmarsh, we noted a large clump of Garden Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*) growing alongside the reedbed, first recorded here in 2011.

Most of the party repaired to the Salhouse Pub via the woodland path around Church Hill, Helena and John diverting briefly to investigate two tall yellow inflorescences growing in the church car park, later identified as Hungarian Mullein (*Verbascum speciosum*). Reunited, a happy band of botanists enjoyed a welcome long drink at a shady table with views of the seafront. It had been a good day.