

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report

**Saturday 18th July 2026, Shepton Mallet
Community Woodland (VC6)**

Leader: Val Graham

Report: Val Graham

We started the day with a relaxed coffee and cake at the excellent Woven Café at Rock Farm, Windsor Hill, about 2 km north of Shepton Mallet town centre.

This meeting was organised by Jane Cummings who unfortunately was unable to attend on the day. The previous week we explored the site and were lucky enough to meet the owner of Rock Farm who kindly gave us permission to explore Windsor Hill Quarry before going on to look at the community woodland.

Windsor Hill Quarry is a disused limestone quarry and geological SSSI. Fossils discovered here in the 1930s played an important part in understanding the evolution of mammals from reptiles.

While much of the quarry floor was suffering from the hot, dry weather, we found an enormous stand of Himalayan Knotweed (*Koenigia polystachya*) which was about 10m across and extended from the bottom to the top of the quarry. We noted the long, ovate, slightly cordate leaves which contrasted with the shorter, wider, leaves with truncated bases of Japanese Knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*), which we also found near the edge of the lower quarry.

Around the main track into the quarry there were piles of builders' rubble, left over from the quarry's previous use as a waste tip.

Here we found several large plants of Weld (*Reseda luteola*), as well as Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), Horse Radish (*Armoracia rusticana*), Opium Poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) and Long-headed Poppy (*P. dubium*). We puzzled over a large

composite which we eventually decided was Hawkweed Oxtongue (*Picris hieracioides*). There were also several garden plants: Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), Borage (*Borago officinalis*), Caper Spurge (*Euphorbia lathyris*) and Sun Spurge (*E. helioscopia*).



Examining a waste pile. Photo © Val Graham

Walking out of the quarry, we saw a Gooseberry (*Ribes uva-crispa*) and helped ourselves to Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) which was hanging over the path. We passed the entrance to the older of the two railway tunnels and soon joined the Windsor Hill Greenway emerging from the other tunnel.

A short distance along the cycle path we turned off to follow a path leading down into Shepton Mallet

Community Woodland. This is mainly secondary woodland that has developed since the closure of the quarries and railway line.

For more information on Shepton Mallet Community Woodland and its industrial history please see its informative website SheptonCommunityWoods.org.

On the path into the woods, we noted several ferns growing close together which allowed us to compare them: Male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*), Scaly Male-fern (*D. affinis* agg.), Broad Buckler-fern (*D. dilatata*) and Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*). We also saw Solomon's-seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) here.

In the narrow valley we saw a lime tree which we decided was the common hybrid *Tilia x europaea*. Here a pipe emerges from the hill, to drain Windsor Hill Quarry. In this very dry summer, the area was free of water and made an ideal place for a lunch stop. A stand of Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) confirmed that this area is normally wet.

Passing the steps up the side of the valley (part of the East Mendip Way) we turned left into Ham Wood Quarry.

Our main target in this quarry was Round-leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*), at its only site in Somerset. This plant is more typically found in calcareous sand-dune habitats particularly in South Wales and NW England.

A diligent search ensued, with Nicky Hodges re-finding the wintergreen under coppiced hazel and bramble. We recorded 10 plants, with several showing flower-heads in bud.

With that success, we decided to re-trace our steps. We made a short detour to see the Wood Vetch (*Ervilia sylvatica*) scrambling over the vegetation at the side of the cycle path. There were a few of the lovely pale, purple-striped flowers still visible.

We would like to thank the owner of Rock Farm for facilitating our visit and the Shepton Mallet Community Woodland team for their work to preserve this area of botanical, geological and historical interest.



Round-leaved Wintergreen © Nicky Hodges



Wood Vetch in flower © Nicky Hodges