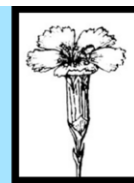


SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Reservoir Three at Barrow Gurney, showing the clear draw-down zone © Helena Crouch

Sunday 16th August 2026, Barrow Tanks (VC6)

Leaders: Neil Burstow & Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

It was warm and dry, but thankfully occasionally cloudy, as fourteen members and guests assembled in the Bristol Water car park. Neil explained that the first reservoir at Barrow Gurney was completed in 1852, the second in 1866. We would be exploring around the third reservoir, north of the A38, which was commissioned in 1882. An extensive survey of the Bristol Water holdings at Barrow Tanks was undertaken by Liz McDonnell and Clive Lovatt in 2017.

We set off alongside a broad overflow ditch where we found wetland plants such as Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Hemlock Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*) and Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*). Wood Small-reed (*Calamagrostis epigejos*) was an unfamiliar grass for some; we also saw similarly statuesque Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). Eventually we made it to the reservoir. Our ambitious plan was to circumnavigate this in a clockwise direction:

unfortunately, the reservoir sits astride the intersect of four monads (1km squares)!

On the path around the reservoir, we found Fern-grass (*Catapodium rigidum*), Slender Sandwort (*Arenaria leptoclados*), Vervain (*Verbena officinalis*), Lesser Hawkbit (*Leontodon saxatilis*) and Rat's-tail Fescue (*Vulpia myuros*) with one glume very much shorter than the other. A single plant of Musk Mallow (*Malva moschata*) provided a bright splash of colour.



Musk Mallow (*Malva moschata*) on the path © Helena Crouch

The outer bank of the reservoir had recently been cut but we found Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Rough Hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), leaves of Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota* subsp. *carota*) and Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*). Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*) was examined, the long perpendicular hairs along the edges of leaves are distinctive. A Clouded Yellow and Common Blue flew past.

At the first opportunity we descended to explore the wide expanse of stonework which was exposed due to the low water level. Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*) was growing in the inflow. Red Goosefoot (*Oxybasis rubra*) and Many-seeded Goosefoot (*Lipandra polysperma*) – both formerly species of *Chenopodium* and new to the monad – were colonising the drawdown zone, together with abundant Redshank (*Persicaria maculosa*) and Marsh Yellow-cress (*Rorippa palustris*). A quick fish in the reservoir yielded Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and Fennel Pondweed (*Stuckenia pectinata*).



Traveller's-joy in flower beside the reservoir © Karen Andrews

Continuing around the reservoir, we passed Traveller's-joy (*Clematis vitalba*) in flower and were pleased to find several dead fruiting plants of Field Pepperwort (*Lepidium campestre*) exactly where Liz and Clive had recorded it in 2017. The fruits of this species are covered with vesicles (blisters), distinguishing it from the very similar Smith's Pepperwort. By now, concentration was waning due to heat and hunger: we headed for the shady woodland where a log pile at the south edge of Common Wood provided perfect lunchtime seating.

Refreshed, we continued clockwise around the reservoir bank and entered Barrow Big Wood. Here we found several Ancient Woodland Indicators, including Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) and Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*). Neil showed us a dead spike of Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*) and we admired some splendid Wych Elms (*Ulmus glabra*).

We emerged from the wood onto a stony slope, where plants were seriously wilted due to the drought. Fronds of Rustyback (*Asplenium ceterach*) were tightly inrolled, the rusty hairs on their undersides giving protection from desiccation. Leaves of Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*) were also crisped. Returning up the grass bank to the reservoir, we found Burnet-saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*) and Dwarf Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*) in flower, the latter new to the monad. We also added Quaking-grass (*Briza media*) and Sweet Vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) to our growing list of grasses. We entered a fourth monad!

On the stonework of the reservoir, a single plant of Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*) was found: this species is Vulnerable on the GB Red List so a Rare Plant Register species. Perhaps our best find was a patch of Round-leaved Mint (*Mentha suaveolens*) on the reservoir bank, new to the hectad and another RPR species. We recorded eleven RPR species during the day and made a total of 358 records.



As we completed our circumnavigation of the reservoir, another Clouded Yellow was spotted. A large patch of Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) was flowering abundantly. It had been a brilliant day; we were grateful to Neil and Bristol Water for allowing us to visit this interesting site.