

SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP

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



Meeting Report



Sunday 6th September 2026, Pill (VC6)

Leader: Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

On a fine day, thirteen members assembled beside the entrance to Pill Harbour for a day on the saltmarsh. Around the meeting place were many plants of Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) and on the pavement we found Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*) in flower. More excitingly, some tiny plants growing on the pavement edge were identified by Kat Newbert as Pink Shepherd's-purse (*Capsella rubella*), confirmed by Tim Rich, the BSBI referee for Brassicaceae. This species appears to be spreading: this was the sixth record for VC6. Eventually we set off along Marine Parade. Peering over the sea wall, we saw several saltmarsh species on mud at the edge of the estuary, including Common Cord-grass (*Spartina anglica*), Annual Sea-blite (*Suaeda maritima*) and patches of Sea-purslane (*Atriplex portulacoides*).

The path continued along the top of a grassed sea wall before entering the large swathes of ungrazed saltmarsh. Most of the area is dominated by a massive sward of Sea Couch (*Elymus athericus*) which, left ungrazed, has outcompeted all other saltmarsh

species. In a small creek, we found Sea Milkwort (*Lysimachia maritima*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) and Greater Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia media*). Entering the next monad, we were drawn to another small creek. Here we saw Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardii*), two clumps of Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*) and several Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*) plants. This species is now Vulnerable on the new GB Red List and thus included in the Somerset Rare Plant Register (RPR).

On mud under the M5 bridge, we searched for Stiff Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia rupestris*) where known for many years, finding over a hundred plants.



Stiff Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia rupestris*) © Helena Crouch

A concrete plinth under the bridge provided a perfect shaded, relatively quiet place for lunch. Refreshed, we set off in search of our second target species, Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*), last recorded just west of the bridge in 2014. Eventually we found 29 plants in flower or fruit, some of them tiny.

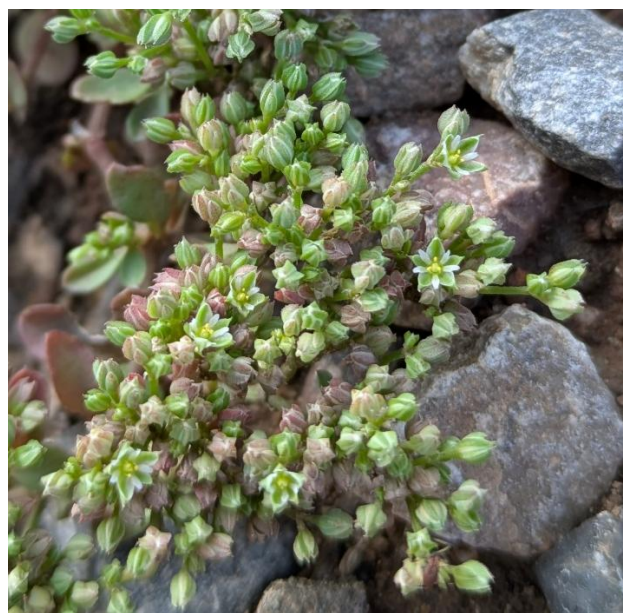


Fruits of slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*) © Liz Downey

The plants were on the track along the sea wall at the back of the saltmarsh, exactly where 21 plants were seen on the SRPG meeting here in 2012. We also found a large shrub of Stinking Tutsan (*Hypericum hircinum*) and many plants of Annual Beard-grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*), both of which we also recorded on that previous meeting.

Reaching an outfall sluice structure, we deviated off the path to explore a recently cleared area alongside a ditch, outside the port boundary fence. Here we found many plants of Upright Spurge (*Euphorbia stricta*), recognised immediately by some as Tintern Spurge, so named because it was first found in 1773 by Tintern Abbey. We added Maize (*Zea mays*), a Tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*) and Black Nightshade (*S. nigrum*) to our list. A single plant of Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*) was found, and

one very large plant of Four-leaved Allseed (*Polycarpon tetraphyllum*), both new to the area.



Four-leaved Allseed (*Polycarpon tetraphyllum*) © Helena Crouch

We recorded Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) and Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*) in the ditch and puzzled over a clump of Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*) with bizarre long cylindrical spikelets.

In an outflow just outside the port fence, an elegant clump of an ornamental grass attracted attention. It was tentatively identified by Kat as a *Lachnagrostis* species and indeed a specimen later keyed out to Blown-grass (*Agrostis avenacea*, or *Lachnagrostis filiformis*), a native of New Zealand with remarkably hairy lemmas. The last record for this species in Britain was in 1989! Returning to the path along the sea wall, we found further plants of this grass. This rare casual was formerly regarded as a wool alien, but the origin of plants beside the dock is unknown.

Returning along the back of the saltmarsh, we found a large patch of Galingale (*Cyperus longus*) extending down both sides of the sea wall, an uncharacteristically dry habitat for this species, always a garden escape in Somerset. Back at the harbour, we checked the slipway for Stiff Saltmarsh-grass, last recorded there in 2012: we found many plants amongst the cobbles. We had thus updated the records for this Nationally Scarce RPR species in two monads: it had been a good day.