



With no interruptions this year from foot and mouth, Jubilee celebrations or other serious matters, all fifteen of our advertised meetings, plus the trip to Sweden, were able to go ahead in 2003.

Many of these meetings served a dual purpose in that we were able to do a good bit of recording for the BSBI Local Change Project. These pre-selected tetrads are the watchdog areas whereby an overall check is kept on plant trends in the British Isles. It would be interesting if we could hear, in due course, just what conclusions are reached for Somerset and how we compare with the National situation. Sadly, the death of Pete Selby, the BSBI co-ordinator for the project will no doubt create problems.

We hope you will enjoy reading this Newsletter but feel sure that many more members could send in short items for inclusion in the next issue. Anything botanical with relation to Somerset will be considered. These can be sent at any time to Caroline Giddens, either by post or e-mail: [carol.ensh@virgin.net](mailto:carol.ensh@virgin.net) Thanks are due to all who have contributed to this edition.

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## REPORTS OF MEETINGS, 2003

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### INDOOR MEETINGS

#### **Saturday, 18 January - Winter Meeting & AGM.**

Our second AGM was held at English Nature offices at Roughmoor on 18 January, 2003. It was opened by Steve Parker who said he had now computerised all available records from SRPG meetings (totalling 8956) and said any further records available from members would be appreciated. He showed maps and reports generated by the MapMate programme. The question of where our record cards should eventually be stored was discussed. The County Museum Library at Taunton seemed the most suitable but Paul Green, the County Recorder, said he would like to house them with the collection of botanical records going back 100 years which he maintains for the county. It was suggested that perhaps the originals should go to Taunton with copies to Paul.

Our Treasurer, Ann Cole, said we now had £410.88 in the bank and there were 36 paid-up members. There was now enough money to buy the GPS required by the Group. Our Co-ordinator, Liz McDonnell, said the Summer Programme was under way and appealed for any suggestions of places or plants we should visit to be sent in quickly. The Newsletter was distributed and C. Giddens thanked all walk leaders who had sent in reports quickly and asked for others to follow suit.

About 22 members were present at this meeting which included a bring-and-share lunch and tea, a raffle, a sale of second-hand botanical books and plants and a quiz organised by Simon Leach. This consisted of putting names to plant drawings and then matching them to distribution maps from the New Flora. This had everyone racking their brains, but the eventual winning team was headed by Paul Green.

#### **Saturday 8 February – Working Group**

We were grateful to Pete Selby who came to Roughmoor to meet us and demonstrate the MapMate

computer program, which our Group is now using to record our botanical finds. Pete also gave advice about recording for the BSBI Local Change Project and his sudden death in October came as a great blow. We had planned to invite him to a further meeting this winter to explain the next stage in using MapMate i.e. replicating records and passing them on to other members of the Group. This was not to be, but we are grateful to Pete for having started us off on the right lines. We plan to hold a MapMate Workshop on 6<sup>th</sup> December (see Winter Programme)

C.J.G.

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#### ***Making a plant reference collection & herbarium techniques - Liz McDonnell.***

**Shapwick Village Hall, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2003**

The purpose of this meeting was to pass on plant collecting and preservation techniques that I had learnt on my Millennium Award trip in 2002. I had joined an Earthwatch 'Rare Plants of Kenya' expedition to the Taita Hills in south east Kenya, undertaking botanical surveys, recording and collecting plants for the National Museum in Nairobi. In Kenya our expedition team learnt how to collect and document species in the field, press specimens in a plant press, prepare them for the dryer and then package them up for transportation back to base where they would be taxonomically examined and preserved.

In Somerset we do not need to collect large numbers of plants as our British flora is well known, but there are occasions when it is necessary to collect specimens for expert determination and verification, especially when hybrids and critical species are found. On 4<sup>th</sup> May I demonstrated making good pressed specimens, using a wooden-slatted plant press with webbing straps, drying papers and blotters. I talked about

drying specimens and the use of the deep freeze for herbarium pest control. I explained the need for acid-free mounting papers, tape, glue, and small folded envelopes for holding seeds or small delicate parts of the plant. I brought to the meeting many examples of herbarium specimens annotated with essential information on the label. A method of mounting aquatic plants was shown, using a large shallow tray filled with water into which the water plant was immersed and then 'floated out' onto the herbarium sheet before being pressed in the plant press.

Some of the members present had collected specimens which needed mounting, and it was agreed to hold some winter 'mounting' meetings where we could all assist with making good pressed specimens which would contribute to a local collection of Somerset plants. Several members who missed this technical meeting have requested a repeat demonstration. This is planned for 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2004.

Liz McDonnell

## **OUTDOOR FIELD MEETINGS 2003.**

### **Local Change Survey – Stockwood, Bristol Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> April. Leader: Ian Green.**

The purpose of the meeting was to record ST66J (one of 17 tetrads that fall within VC 5 and VC6) for the Somerset Rare Plants Group's contribution to BSBI Local Change Survey. For the first field meeting of the year six members, led by Ian Green, met on the outskirts of Bristol to visit as many habitats as possible in tetrad ST66J and record all species found. We started our survey at 'The Coots' an area of open access next to the built up area of Stockwood. We recorded in waste ground, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, scrub and grassland. Despite this area being urban fringe, there were surprisingly few garden throw-outs and escapes. Montbretia (*Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora*), Three-cornered Garlic (*Allium triquetrum*), Hollyberry Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster bullatus*) and Red-osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) were the only ones that we recorded.

After lunch we moved to the south-east part of the tetrad. Ian had noticed the leaves of Bath Asparagus (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*) whilst driving to the meeting place in Charlton Bottom, so we searched for them on foot to make sure that they were within the tetrad. Ian pointed out the character of the bent and down-turned leaves that is so distinctive when the plant is still in its vegetative stage. He explained that this species is often easier to spot at this time of year, as tall hedgerow vegetation frequently hides it later, when it is in flower. Bath Asparagus was also frequent along the bridlepath leading from Charlton Bottom, especially near the footbridge across the stream at ST637685. We recorded a large number of species in the small valley in the south-east corner of the tetrad, where we found reedbed, stream, woodland and marshy grassland habitats. Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and Bog Stitchwort (*Stellaria uliginosa*) were just a few of the plants recorded here.

After our day's recording, we considered ST66J a surprisingly rich tetrad for an urban fringe area, and were delighted with the 192 species recorded on our visit. For the Local Change Survey, each selected tetrad should be visited three times during the year. Pam Millman will continue to record in this tetrad, with assistance from members of the Botanical Section of the Bristol Naturalists Society, and will no doubt by the end of the year, considerably increase the total number of species recorded in ST 66J.

Liz McDonnell

### **Local Change survey – Bruton 26<sup>th</sup> April. Leader: Paul Green**

Eleven of us met at Bruton Station for a walk around Bruton. With a total of 525 species ST63X was the highest scoring tetrad in Somerset when the late Capt. Roe surveyed the county for his flora. The aim of the morning was to see if we could re-find *Polypodium cambricum* (Southern Polypody); we never even saw a *Polypodium* of any kind. We had also hoped to survey *Dianthus armeria* (Deptford Pink) but there was no sign of it on the churchyard wall. There were puzzling rosettes on the wall; once we found one flowering we were all surprised that they turned out to be *Erigeron acer* (Blue Fleabane). The first plant of interest was *Poa angustifolia* (Narrow-leaved Meadow-grass) growing on top of a wall; Liz McDonnell explained how to tell it from other Meadow-grasses. All records of this *Poa* from around the county that I have received as county recorder in the last six years have been made by Liz. Two young plants of *Epilobium roseum* (Pale Willowherb) were found at the base of a high wall where it has been known since before 1896. Unfortunately the *Tulipa sylvestris* (Wild Tulip) had finished flowering; fifteen plants were counted, where it has been known for over eighty years, four had flowered in 2003. There was a little *Chrysosplenium alternifolium* (Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage) flowering on the bank of a ford and further down stream Steve Parker spotted a patch of *Cardamine raphanifolia* (Greater Cuckoo Flower) with its deep pink flowers, the second county record and new for v-c 6.

For the afternoon we moved on to the Local Change tetrad ST63W. During the last Local Change survey in 1987/88 (then called BSBI Monitoring Scheme) only 45 minutes were spent in this square and 123 species were recorded. During the three hours recording the group found 212 species, 24 of these were new for the tetrad since the publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset in 1997. The first species of interest was minute specimens of *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (Adder's-tongue) in a field. Then, to the other extreme, in Godminster Wood we found the largest specimens of the fern I have ever seen; one patch probably had in excess of 500 fronds. The wood had a good ground flora including *Platanthera chlorantha* (Greater Butterfly-orchid), *Primula x polyantha* and *Ranunculus auricomus* (Goldilocks Buttercup). To end the afternoon four of us visited a short stretch of a disused railway. This was super grassland with species including *Sanguisorba minor* ssp. *minor* (Salad Burnet), *Carex hirta* (Hairy Sedge) and *Primula veris* (Cowslips).

**Local Change Survey Greylake, 20<sup>th</sup> May****Leaders: Paul Green & Liz McDonnell.**

Eleven of us braved the blustery weather to survey the Local Change tetrad ST33W and to look at *Salix cinerea* ssp. *cinerea* (Grey Willow). Desmond Meikle soon found the willow on the side of the A372, giving the second tetrad (ST33V) for the county. It was first found in Somerset on Second Drove in 1991; here it proved to be a common tree with the odd *Salix cinerea* ssp. *oleifolia* (Rusty Willow) mixed in and some *Salix triandra* (Almond Willow).

We stayed within the 1km square ST3932, which is wholly levels. The rhynes were very productive with three *Potamogeton* species, *P. berchtoldii* (Small Pondweed), *P. pectinatus* (Fennel Pondweed) and *P. crispus* (Curled Pondweed). After keying out a small flowered Water-crowfoot we were happy that it was *Ranunculus trichophyllus* (Thread-leaved Water-crowfoot). Also in the rhynes were *Veronica catenata* (Pink Water-speedwell) that was flowering, a little *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* (Frogbit), *Oenanthe fistulosa* (Tubular Water-dropwort) and *Berula erecta* (Lesser Water-parsnip) to name a few species.



**FROGBIT**

Many of the fields had a rich flora and were covered in *Carex disticha* (Brown Sedge) and *Eleocharis palustris* (Common Spike-rush). The droves were also interesting with a patch of *Anisantha diandra* (Great Brome) and a single *Populus x canadensis* 'Serotina' (Black-Italian Poplar) with a clump of mistletoe high in the tree. Where dumping had taken place on the drove, there was *Valerianella carinata* (Keeled-fruited Cornsalad) and *Lactuca serriola* (Prickly Lettuce). One of the hedges had an abundance of *Rhamnus cathartica* (Buckthorn). Another small patch of bushes had a tree of Broad-leaved Osier (the cross between *Salix viminalis* and *S. caprea*), this being the most common hybrid willow in Somerset. Even though only a small area of the tetrad was covered, 151 species were recorded.

Paul Green

**Visit by Kent Field Club 7 – 8 June 2003**

On the Saturday morning members of the Kent Field Club (KFC) joined up with Somerset Rare Plant Group for a weekend of plant recording in Somerset. Walking from the Willow Tea Rooms at Shapwick we walked to Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve. Walking along the old railway line that runs through the reserve we noted a large patch of Narrow-leaved Everlasting-pea (*Lathyrus sylvestris*). Then on to the area of the Sweet Track to look for some of the Fen species that the area is important for, the extensive area of Marsh fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) was admired by the KFC. This plant is has a very limited distribution in Kent, but here on the Somerset Moors, the plant still continues to thrive. Other wetland species seen in this area included Brown sedge (*Carex disticha*), Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*), Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) and the impressive Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*).

From the Sweet Track the party moved to the species rich fen meadows. Here we found Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Blunt-flowered Rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*) and a carpet of sedges including *Carex panicea*, *C. pulicaris* and *C. hostiana*. Crossing the road we moved to Canada Farm meadows. Here the group searched for Frog orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*), one two spikes of this rare plant were located. The group moved from this very species rich area to The Lows, an area that in the past has been heavily scrubbed over, English Nature are now trying to restore this area. Large stands of Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) are a prominent feature of the vegetation here; this plant is uncommon in Somerset but grows only too well on Shapwick Heath. The ditches in this area tend not to be very botanically rich but one plant did catch eye, this was an impressive stand of Whorl-grass (*Catabrosa aquatica*).

Cheddar Gorge was to be the location for the second day of this Joint KFC/SRPG meeting. Meeting halfway up the gorge the Kent members were soon enthusiastically climbing up to a small out-crop with a smallish patch of Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*). Walking along the very busy road (why allow traffic in such a wonderful area?) Our leader Liz MacDonnell demonstrated some of the plants the area is famous for, including the native site for Welsh Poppy (*Meconopsis cambrica*). On reaching the Black Rock area the group went to look for some of the endemic Hieracium species known from here. A few plants of *H. stenolepiforme* were located high on the sheer rock face. Concern was expressed over the amount of scrub that appears to be shading this rare species.

The group climbed the southern side of the Gorge. While having lunch the weather here made its presence known, the heavens opened and we had hard rain for nearly an hour. Undeterred the group pressed on towards Jacob's Ladder, searching for Cut-leaved Selfheal (*Prunella laciniata*), which was found in good numbers together with the hybrid with *P. vulgaris*. The Group ended the day's activities with a cup of tea and cake the Lion Rock Tea Rooms.

Steve Parker

## Simonsbath, Exmoor

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June. Leader: Caroline Giddens**

The weather was warm and fine for our trip to Exmoor. This started at Goat Hill Bridge near Simonsbath and a short excursion into the valley by Acklands Farm Drive was made to record in square SS73J for the Local Change Project.

We then made our way back to Simonsbath and had lunch in the picnic area beside the car park. This was followed by a short trip into Ashcombe Wood where there are some unusual Victorian introductions including Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra Formosa*) which has become extensively established along an old leat. This is quite spectacular if seen when the bluebells are also in flower – one side of the leat is blue, the other side pink.

Our next stop was by the old quarry beside the road up to Kinsford Gate. This was to visit our old friends – Beech Fern (*Phegopteris connectilis*) which is spreading nicely, and the hybrid Southern Marsh x Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza x hallii*). The quarry is becoming somewhat overgrown with willow and I think some picnickers at the entrance must have been rather surprised when seven people suddenly descended on them and plunged into the undergrowth. Paul Green was able to show us the two sub-species of Tormentil growing side by side: ssp *strictissimi* with deeply cut leaves and the more usual ssp *erecta*.

Further up the hill we came to Comerslade, where a search was made for Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) recorded as ‘abundant’ here in the Somerset Atlas Flora in 1993. We certainly found a good quantity but Paul thought it was less than formerly, possibly due to drying out or undergrazing. It was flowering well. A small amount of Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and extensive patches of both Hare’s-tail and Common Cottongrasses. There were lots of Sedges (and frogs too).



CRANBERRY

From here it was decided to walk on into a valley which brought us back to Square SS73J where a bit more recording was done. Both subspecies of Heath Woodrush (*Luzula multiflora* ssp *multiflora* and ssp *congesta*) were distinguished and a bonus for those who opted for a short-cut back to the cars was Narrow

Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*). Total for the square that day was 83 spp but later on at the end of July the Exmoor Natural History Society spent a (very wet) day there to bring the total up to 166 which is reasonable for an upland tetrad over 1000 ft altitude.

Caroline Giddens

## Bridgwater Bay National Nature Reserve

**21 June 2003. Leader: Steve Parker.**

The purpose of this meeting was to survey the series of small water bodies at Fenning Island. These ‘ponds’ were apparently created for the birds visiting the National Nature reserve. Unable to attend the meeting, Bob Corns my work colleague and Conservation Officer for English Nature lead a small party to search this area. His verbal report to me indicated that the ponds contained very few if any plants of conservation interest!

Steve Parker

## Bickham Wood and Chard

**28<sup>th</sup> June 2003. Leader: Paul Green.**

The aim of the morning was to search Bickham Wood for Beech Fern, the only remaining site for the fern in the county away from Exmoor. T.J. Wallace first found the Beech Fern in 1975 when there was one patch a foot square. There were no more reports until it was re-found in 1989 by my brother Ian; it had increased to three patches, the largest with 52 fronds. This time even though the four of us searched the wood several times we had no luck in locating it. This does not mean the fern is extinct; it probably just needs another search. Bickham Wood is very damp with a very healthy population of Marsh Valerian and many clumps of *Dryopteris carthusiana* (Narrow Buckler-fern). Other species of interest included *Carex laevigata* (Smooth-stalked Sedge), *Anemone nemorosa* (Wood Anemone) and a single flowering plant of *Listera ovata* (Common Twayblade). 74 species were recorded from the wood.

The afternoon was very hot and sunny and spent by Chard Reservoir in the Local Change tetrad ST30J. Here we walked around several flora-rich fields full of colour, but only very common species were seen. The best plant was a single individual of Common Spotted-orchid with just one flower left. It was a delight to be under the shade of the trees around the reservoir with many planted exotic species such as *Pinus radiata* (Monterey Pine), *Cornus sericea* (Red-osier Dogwood) and *Pseudosasa japonica* (Arrow Bamboo). 137 species were recorded.

Paul Green

## Chew Valley Lake

**12 July 2003. Leader: Steve Parker**

This large artificial lake is an important site for many water birds. This meeting was to record the plants of the northeast shore of the lake. We started off from the visitors car park and moved into a area of secondary woodland, here a few spring flowers could be found these included the dead flower heads of Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) with Red Campion (*Silene dioica*) and Wood Dock (*Rumex sanguineus*). Moving from this uninteresting area the next habitat recorded was a rather species poor hay meadow, this runs down

to the edge of the lake which is dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) with some Yellow Flag (*Iris pseudacorus*). The meadow is very grassy with very few herbs, just a few small patches of Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*). Moving round the lake edge a small plant of Mare's Tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*) was found growing in the mud on the waters edge. Further round the lake the edges of the paths had been cut so plant recording was difficult, none-the-less 240 species records were entered onto Mapmate.

Steve Parker

### **Kilkenny Bay, Portishead 3 Aug 2003. Leader: Pam Millman**

This meeting was primarily to search for Marsh Mallow (*Althaea officinalis*), last recorded in 1993 by Mark and Clare Kitchen.

After an interesting Severn Estuary viewstop of both bridges and across to Wales on a beautiful sunny morning, the seven members gathered by the shore at Kilkenny Bay with only a short walk to the site at ST437756. Mary had even brought her swimming things though we never did know whether she braved the sea after leaving us!

Several interesting species were found where there is run off at the top of the stony beach from the red sandstone cliff, including Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), Annual Sea-blite (*Sueda maritima*), Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritimum*) and Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*). The single large clump of *Althaea* stood out from all the smaller plants in all its glory, sheltered by a rock but easily visible. This was exciting since Mark had felt it could easily have disappeared from the site in the 10 years since they had seen it. Liz had printed off an excellent aerial map photo from Multimap on the internet at a scale of 1:10000 to attach to our species recording form; a useful program: I tried it for my home area when I got back, and I'm sure we should try to use it next recording season.

As the Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) had been well surveyed towards Ladye Bay and access was very tricky, we decided instead to move on to Walton Common where we carried out a site survey. I was able to show the group my new find this year of Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla neumanniana*). A new tetrad record with over 200 flowering plants in a small area and 100 small rosettes literally growing in the path.

Margarete was pleased to find uncommon fungi including *Boletus luridus* which is mycorrhizal on rockrose.

Pam Millman

### **CLATWORTHY RESERVOIR Saturday 16 August 2003. Leader: Liz McDonnell**

The most exciting botanical find by the Somerset Rare Plants Group last year, was the discovery of Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*) at Clatworthy Reservoir, on the Brendon Hills, West Somerset. Ian Green had noticed the small Yellow-cress plants

growing along the drawdown zone of the reservoir. Tim Rich, author of the BSBI Crucifers book, later confirmed the record, making this not only the first for Somerset, but for England too!



**NORTHERN YELLOW-CRESS**

The purpose of the meeting this year was to revisit the site in order to complete SRPG species and site recording forms for our records of this important Somerset species. We also planned to take photographs of the plants and the habitat, and to take good representative samples for local and national herbaria.

Six members met at the small car park at the southern end of Syndercombe Lane and it was not long after dropping down to the drawdown zone of the reservoir below the car park that we found several diminutive specimens of two different *Rorippa* species. After much debating, consultation with the identification keys and measuring of tiny sepals and pedicels, we decided that we had found both *Rorippa palustris* (Marsh Yellow-cress) and *Rorippa islandica*. On reaching the little stream inlet, 100 metres along the shore where the Northern Yellow-cress was found last year, we found hundreds of mature plants. It was very noticeable that the seedpods of *Rorippa islandica* were hanging to one side of the fruiting stem, which was one of the identification features that Ian had shown us last year. We chose several good specimens and collected them straight into the new plant press.

After taking photos, we did several quadrats in the various zones in which it was growing and then systematically searched about 800 metres of the western shore. Most plants were found in the upper reaches of the draw-down zone, and large fruiting plants were especially plentiful at the top where they were sheltered by overhanging Brambles. The total number of *Rorippa islandica* plants that were recorded in this stretch was approx. 1500.

The intention for the afternoon had also been to do some Local Change recording for ST03A tetrad. This was abandoned in order to spend more time searching further areas of the reservoir for Northern Yellow-cress while the water levels were fairly low following the long hot summer. This was a good working meeting when valuable ecological data on a rare plant was collected.

## WIMBLEBALL RESERVOIR

**Saturday 13 September 2003. Leader: Paul Green**

A small group of six met at Wimbleball Reservoir on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September to survey *Limosella aquatica* (Mudwort). Richard Lansdown, H Sambrook and H.T.H. Holmes first found it on the shore of the reservoir in 2001. This is only the fourth record for Somerset and the first in vice-county five since 1849 when seen by C.C. Babington at Dunster (specimen in BM). The mudwort appeared to have spread from the original area and, although we did not do a systematic count, several thousand plants were probably seen.

The differences between the two subspecies of *Plantago major* (Greater Plantain) were studied. *Ranunculus peltatus* (Pond Water-crowfoot) was seen flowering nicely by a stream leading into the lake and we found a patch of *Juncus x surrejanus* (Jointed x Sharp-flowered Rush) at the top of a steep damp bank. The day was ended by surveying *Alopecurus aequalis* (Orange Foxtail), plentiful in one area growing up through *Crassula helmsii* (New Zealand Pigmyweed). The *Crassula* was first found on the shores in 1995 and now covers large areas. The only good thing about it is that it makes a nice soft cushion to walk over.

Later three of us visited Clatworthy Reservoir. To our horror the *Crassula* has arrived on the shores of this body of water. We will have to wait and see if it will be the death of the *Elatine hexandra* (Six-stamened Waterwort) if it is smothered out. On a good note, we did find *Potamogeton obtusifolius* (Blunt-leaved Pondweed), the fourth record for Somerset.

Paul Green

## Local Change Survey: Puxton

**20 September 2003. Leader: Steve Parker.**

Three members met at the side of a busy road to undertake 2 hours plant recording for the BSBI local change. The area was rather uninteresting, but we did manage to record over 140 species of plant. Looking at the local change web site, in the last survey carried out by Capt Roe, 195 species were recorded. The biggest variation in species recorded seems to be a seasonal difference. There were some new species recorded, at one spot we came across a number of alien plants, including Shasta Daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum*) together with Bearded Iris (*Iris germanica*). Another visit will have to be made to the tetrad in the spring of 2004.

Steve Parker

## SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP VISIT TO VÄSTERGÖTLAND 1<sup>st</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> July 2003

Eight Members and friends of Somerset Rare Plants Group accepted the invitation from Anders Bertilsson to explore the botanical delights of Västergötland

earlier this year. Some of us had had the pleasure of meeting Anders and other Swedish botanists last summer when they visited England to spend a week botanising with Gill Read and Ian Green. Three members of our group were already familiar with some of the Swedish flora, as they had participated in the Norrbotten Flora Project, but others had not visited Sweden before.

Some of the plants that we saw during the week were very familiar, but a large number of species that Anders showed us did not occur in Britain, were very rare, or were found only in the north of England or Scotland. The limestone grassland sites such as Nolgården Nas and Varholmen were very impressive, with their colourful masses of *Geranium sanguineum* (Bloody Cranesbill), *Asperula tinctoria* (Dyer's Woodruff), *Anthemis tinctoria* (Yellow Chamomile), *Campanula persicifolia* (Peach-leaved Bellflower) and *Trifolium montanum* (Mountain Clover). I was interested to see that *Convallaria majalis* (Lily-of-the-valley) and *Polygonatum odoratum* (Angular Solomon's-seal) were both abundant in the open grassland here, as in Britain they are both usually woodland plants. A special woodland plant that we taken to see was *Cypripedium calceolus* (Lady's-slipper Orchid), which was surprisingly large, but unfortunately was not in flower. Large seed-heads were developing on most of the plants, but these were difficult to photograph in the dappled light.

We visited several wonderful examples of 'quaking bogs', where the water came perilously near the top of our Wellington boots. The Sphagnum tussocks had abundant *Vaccinium oxycoccus* (Cranberry), *V. uliginosum* (Bog Bilberry), *V. vitis-idaea* (Cowberry) and *Andromeda polifolia* (Bog-rosemary). Many of the sedges were completely new to me, like *Carex pauciflora*, *C. brunnescens*, *C. canescens*, *C. limosa* and *C. chondrorhiza* (String Sedge). I was fascinated to see *Carex lasiocarpa* (Slender Sedge) so abundant here, as it is a rare plant in southern Britain. This species is now confined to only two sites in Somerset, as the suitable habitats are drying out due to commercial peat extraction. SRPG held a field meeting at Street Heath (one of these sites) in 2001 to locate and record the last few remaining plants, where it hybridises with *C. riparia* (*C. x evoluta*). Other common mire plants in Västergötland such as *Carex dioica* (Dioecious Sedge), *Carex diandra* (Lesser Tussock-sedge), and *Eriophorum latifolium* (Broad-leaved Cottongrass) are also extremely rare in Somerset, now found only on one or two sites.

There were many highlights to our botanical excursions with Anders. Each evening when we returned to our accommodation, we compiled the list of plants that we had seen and also chose our individual 'Favourite Plant of the Day'. At the end of our week in Falköping, we each chose our 'Plant of the Week'. These were the following: *Dracocephalum ruyschiana* ('Dragon's-head'), *Melampyrum arvense* (Field Cow-wheat), *Centaurea cyanus* (Cornflower), *Primula farinosa* (Bird's-eye Primrose), *Trifolium montanum* (Mountain Clover), *Chimaphila umbellata* (Umbellate

Wintergreen), *Arnica montana* (Arctic Arnica) and *Linnaea borealis* (Twinlineflower).



**Twinflower:**  
A very beautiful species seen in Sweden and one which we should see in Scotland next year.

I shall not forget the wonderful quaking mires, the native pine forest with the huge mossy glaciated rocks, the vast wet open spaces of the Hornborga Nature Reserve where we saw *Sium latifolia* (Greater Waterparsnip) and the small dull-red waves lapping on the sandy shore of Lake Vättern. I was interested to see *Poa compressa* (Flattened Meadow-grass) as the dominant grass in the limestone grassland, and to hear from Anders that the small glaucous *Poa alpina* was a relict from the last ice age. On our last day we were pleased to find the hybrid between *Gymnadenia conopsea* (Fragrant Orchid) and *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (Common Spotted-orchid) at Varholmen, which we understand to be the first record for Västergötland. But a very special treat was to see the amazing blue haze of thousands of *Centaurea cyanus* (Cornflower) in the cornfields at Borgunda.

Our visit to Västergötland was a very enjoyable botanical excursion. We were made to feel very welcome by all the Swedish botanists that we met during the week. Our special thanks go to Anders Bertilsson for showing us such magnificent habitats and the huge variety of interesting and beautiful plants in the area that he knows so well.

Liz McDonnell

## - SOME PLANT NOTES -

Do please send in your contributions for this column.

### Exciting Somerset Plant Record

In May Liz McDonnell found *Carex filiformis* (Downy-fruited Sedge) near Cheddar. This is a RDB species with a 'Near Threatened' status in Britain. This is the first record for Somerset and South West England, and extends this rare species' range south quite considerably. The main concentrations are around Cheltenham in Gloucestershire, with a few sites in Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Surrey. Liz found it in damp depressions in a neutral grassland hay meadow. It is likely that this species is overlooked and members should keep an eye out for it. The small hairy utricles visible without magnification distinguish it from other British sedges of comparable size.

### New Alien in V.C. 6 North Somerset

On 22 September 2003 at Herriotts Bridge, Chew Valley Lake, I found one plant about 2½ ft tall. I thought it was a strange Chenopodium and sent one branch of it to John Ackeroyd to identify. It turned out to be Marsh-elder (*Iva xanthifolia*). He described it as an unusual and rare find, perhaps from birdseed. Ian Green visited it and confirmed it was a new record for V.C. 6 North Somerset but it was strimmed before Paul got to see it. This plant has become semi-naturalised in E. Sussex and W. Kent.

Alastair Stevenson

### Two Exmoor Ferns

In April 2003 I did a recount of the colony of Lanceolate Spleenwort (*Asplenium obovatum*) found by Paul and Ian Green on an old wall on Porlock Hill in 1999. I was delighted to find numbers appear stable, I counted 112 plants. Not so good news on the 5 small plants of Brittle Bladder Fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) which used to be on the wall of the public toilets at Simonsbath; these seem to have dwindled to one plant.

C.J.G.

### Plantlife County Flowers Vote

By the time you receive this Newsletter the Plantlife vote for a flower to represent each county should be completed. At present Somerset stands to attain either the Cowslip or the Cheddar Pink. If the latter is selected, as seems likely, always remember: SRPG chose it first!

### THISTLE AND RUSH HYBRIDS IN SOMERSET

In July, 2002, in a pasture at Nettlecombe adjacent to the Field Centre, whilst examining a population of *Cirsium arvense* (Creeping Thistle) which were brown, shrivelled and shedding thistledown, our attention was drawn to two sturdy specimens which were in full flower. Most of the plants of *C. palustre* (Marsh Thistle), also present in the field, were quite decayed also. Closer examination determined the two thistles to be the hybrid *C. arvense* x *C. palustre* = *C. x celakovskianum* Knaf which is recorded for Somerset as 'very rare' in the Atlas Flora. It has the lower stem winged and intermediate leaves and corollas. Once observed, this hybrid is easy to distinguish and in early September, 2003, on a Willow Course with BSBI members at Goat Hill Bridge near Simonsbath, it was found to be growing along the track to Pinkery Exploration Centre. It looked very fresh and green alongside both sets of vegetatively-desiccated parents. The second day of the Willow Course provided another record for *C. x celakovskianum*. At Beer Bridge on Sedgemoor, growing along the edge of a rhyne, attention was drawn to the hybrid, the only live thistle among a sea of dead ones – the slightly later flowering time making it easier to identify.

In a similar manner, *Juncus x diffusus* Hoppe, the hybrid between *J. effusus* (Soft Rush) and *J. inflexus*, (Hard Rush) cited in the Atlas Flora as 'extinct in Somerset, last recorded in 1966' has been found flourishing in three stations. The first record was from

the damp limestone grassland above Brakeley Steps, near Selworthy, the lower half of the pasture being full of rushes and sedges of many species. In August, 2002, the hybrid was picked out among the clumps because, with its larger, mostly sterile flowers, it looked a little different from the other rushes. *J. effusus* has a smooth stem and continuous pith, *J. inflexus* has a glaucous, ridged stem with chambered pith; *J. x diffusus* has a non-glaucous, ridged stem with continuous pith. Other sites have been examined where both parents grow in close proximity – usually this means checking every clump - and further examples were recorded at Beer Bridge, and in September, 2003, at Minehead. This last record was in a field adjoining Tesco where hundreds of clumps of *J. inflexus* and a few less of *J. effusus* grow together. The Brakeley Steps hybrid veered rather towards *J. effusus* in appearance, the Tesco hybrid merged well with *J. inflexus* – obviously there is a wide range of intermediate features.

From these two examples it seems likely that more hybrids are waiting to be found; a time-consuming but rewarding pursuit.

Jeanne Webb



**BEECH FERN  
OBITUARY**

**JOHN FREDERIC MAXWELL (1926 – 2003)**

John was born on the 16 May 1926 in Cam, Gloucestershire. He was the first born and only son, brother to three sisters, Margaret, Janet and Anne. He was delivered by his grandmother who was a district nurse and who ran part of her home as a nursing home.

At the age of 15 John started as an apprentice to an engineering firm by the name of R.A. Lister at Dursley, not far from Cam. To get to and from work he passed Diana Tocknell's house. Perhaps he went quite slowly as he passed there, as they were old friends even though they probably did not know it. When John was five months old Diana was born. Di wouldn't stop crying on the day of her birth so the district nurse, John's Gran, put Di in bed with John and not a sound was heard from them. Perhaps this was the start of a wonderful relationship for they were married in

February 1949 at Upper Cam Church where Di worshipped and sang in the choir.

Later they moved to Cirencester into a caravan on the site where they were having a house built. John was working as an agricultural mechanic for Aubry Reese. Pauline and David were born there, but David sadly died at the age of three. By the time Stephen was born they had moved to Alcombe in Minehead with John working at Gliddens in Williton as a service engineer. The following year when Michael was born, the family had moved to Bridgwater where John and Di lived until the end of their lives. John worked for Kelland's Plant in Bridgwater as a service manager until early retirement.

John had a fascination with nature, architecture, archaeology and engineering, passing on his infectious enthusiasm whenever he could.

We first met John and Di on a meeting with the Mid-Somerset Naturalist Society at Langford Heathfield Nature Reserve in August 1984. By March the following year a bond had formed between us. They started taking us to see many of the Somerset Rarer Plants, the first being Bristol Rock-cress at Cannington on 23 March where it was still in tight bud. Even though they were forty years our senior, our friendship was so great they were like second parents to us. We were always meeting up to go and see a plant or do some recording. Often meeting at a pub for lunch, they would frequently bring along a bag of specimens for us to have a look at while waiting for our meal. We attended botanical trips together all over the country from Somerset to Sussex and even up to Scotland.

John lost his wife Di on the 29 June 1999 to lung cancer, the same disease that struck down John. They had shared a wonderful devotion to each other and were constantly together. It was on the 15<sup>th</sup> October, Di's birthday that John died and they were reunited.

PAUL AND IAN GREEN

**SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP**

Contacts: Liz McDonnell 07774 609410  
Steve Parker 01823 283211 (day) or 01823 666006  
Copy for next Newsletter: C. Giddens 01643 707624  
e-mail [carol.enhs@virgin.net](mailto:carol.enhs@virgin.net) By 31<sup>st</sup> October please.



**SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP**

**WINTER/SPRING PROGRAMME 2003/04**

The following meetings have been organised for the SRPG:



**Saturday 6 December 2003. 11.00 English Nature Office, Roughmoor.  
Mapmate Workshop & Records Day.**

This meeting will give members a chance to look at the records the group has made over the last 4-5 years. There will be a workshop on use of Mapmate and other computer systems.

**Saturday 17 January 2004 12.00 English Nature Office, Roughmoor.  
AGM & Winter Meeting.**

Using our tried and tested format, our AGM will be followed by shared lunch. With slides, etc.

**Saturday 14 February 2004 11.00 English Nature Office, Roughmoor.  
Aquatic Alien Workshop.**

Not creatures from outer space! These nasty critters are possibly a bigger threat to life on earth (or at least our native wild plants).

**Saturday 20 March 2004 11.00 English Nature Office, Roughmoor.  
Herbarium Workshop.**

A repeat (by popular demand) of Liz's presentation on how to prepare herbarium specimens. Followed by a chance to get some 'hands on' experience.

**Saturday 24 April 2004 Venue to be advised  
Native Black Poplar & The Flora of Taunton**

Field Meeting with identification workshop on *Populus nigra* subsp *betulifolia*. Together with a chance to help record for the proposed Flora of Taunton.

Contact Steve Parker for further details of any of the above events.

**Phone** 01823 666006 eve OR 01823 250861 day  
**e-mail** [sd.parkers26@virgin.net](mailto:sd.parkers26@virgin.net)

**A Reminder**

Ian Green has volunteered to lead a weeklong field meeting in Morayshire from Sat 26<sup>th</sup> June to 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2004. Please contact him as soon as possible if you are interested in attending.