



REPORTS OF MEETINGS, 2010.

THE AGM**Saturday 16th January 2010**

The Annual Members Meeting and AGM took place at our new venue in the Lifelong Learning Centre at Shapwick. Steve Parker chaired the meeting and welcomed the 18 members present. He gave a résumé of the previous year's excursions and all the walk leaders were thanked for their efforts. Suggestions were invited for this year's summer programme; one event had already been arranged. This was a grass identification day being a joint meeting with the Devonshire Association. The Newsletter was distributed. John Gibson was thanked for giving his microscope to the Society and this would be stored off the premises for the time being until a lockable cupboard was available. It should prove most useful. Anne Cole, Treasurer, confirmed that we have £747 at the bank and the membership currently stands at 57. There were various displays on show including "Flowers of the Cam Valley" from Helena, Whitebeam specimens from Libby and an update of plant recording by 1km squares within Exmoor National Park from Caroline. There were books for sale and the usual raffle. Steve had prepared a quiz for VC5 versus VC6 members and this was enjoyed by all even if it did get a little acrimonious at times! The bring and share lunch was delicious with plenty of food to go round – I have forgotten the name of the confection provided by Liz but its deliciousness is remembered.

After lunch Margaret Webster gave a very interesting presentation on Yellow Horned-poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) at Sand Bay. Since Margaret found thirty-nine rosettes of this species in July 2008 – the first record for VC6 since 1992 – she and Helena have been regularly monitoring the arrival and success of individual plants. The study is not yet

complete, but Margaret presented data which shows that very few plants have survived to maturity and illustrated possible reasons for this. An interesting discussion followed and Steve explained some of the history of the management of Sand Bay. There was also a presentation on Whitebeams from Libby Houston which aroused great interest.

The venue proved very good for our requirements, the rent will be £20 per session; there is room for some improvements to the kitchen and toilet facilities but we feel sure these will be forthcoming.

CJG

WINTER TWIGS WORKSHOP**Saturday 13th February 2010**

This indoor meeting was held at Shapwick Lifelong Learning Centre. Steve Parker led the meeting and brought with him a collection of conifers from the Blackdowns and miscellaneous garden shrubs from Wellington. Members also brought a wide variety of specimens, only some of which were named. We used the identification aids and key from the Field Studies AIDGAP book '*A guide to the identification of deciduous broad-leaved trees and shrubs in winter*' by Andrew May and Jonathan Panter. This proved to be very useful and reliable handbook and many specimens were named by careful following of the dichotomous keys. *The Vegetative Key to the British Flora* by John Poland and Eric Clement was used, amongst other books, for the conifers and non-natives. This remarkable book attempts to provide the reader with the means to correctly identify the great majority of our native plants (and many aliens) to species level solely from vegetation bearing neither flowers nor fruits. This was a useful and enjoyable meeting.

Liz McDonnell

RECORDERS WORKSHOP

Saturday 13th March 2010

This meeting was well attended. Helena handed out a working list of priority species that forms the basis of the Somerset Rare Plants Register. This was a shortened version of the full list, omitting the subspecies, hybrids and extinct species, but adding English names so that it was easier for members to select those species that they would like to adopt for recording, following up old records and searching for during the year. We discussed the information needed for a good record and the thorny issue of naming sites. The Site and Species Recording Forms were explained and examples given for well-entered cards, so that computer entry was made as easy and quick as possible. Encouragement was given to members to record at a high resolution – 6 to 8 figure grid references for rarer species and 4 figures (1km) for all the rest. Tetrad recording was discouraged. The SRPG website was shown and Christine showed us different ways of labelling photos. We all agreed that good photographs were essential for an informative and lively website.

Liz McDonnell

IVY THORN HILL

Sunday 28th March 2010

Despite the cold start to the year and a horrid weather forecast, our first walk was unexpectedly delightful. Ten members bravely turned up to explore Ivy Thorn Hill SSSI, in the Poldens. Walking east from the car park, we recorded challengingly small plants in some super calcareous grassland, including rosettes of Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*) and Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and the tiny cotyledons of Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*). In wooded hollows we found Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) with its distinctive hard shiny white seeds. Ivy Thorn Hill is an old site for Purple Gromwell (*Lithospermum purpureo-caeruleum*) but we (perhaps not surprisingly) did not find that species.

From the eastern end of the hill, we walked down Page's Hill, past Ivy Thorn Manor, recording a number of garden escapes, including splendid clumps of the introduced Italian Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum italicum* subsp. *italicum*) and Great Forget-me-not (*Brunnera macrophylla*). On a bank, we admired a lovely clump of dusky pink violets (*Viola odorata* var. *subcarnea*). During the day we saw four species of violet in flower: Sweet Violet (*V. odorata*), Hairy Violet (*V. hirta*), Common Dog-violet (*V. riviniana*) and Early Dog-violet (*V. reichenbachiana*) and three varieties of Sweet Violet.

Lunch was taken in a sheltered spot on the bank of a track, along which we recorded numerous common species. We were surprised to find a large patch of Small Nettle (*Urtica urens*) in flower in a field: a species rarely seen by most of those present. Ascending the hill, we entered the woodland part of Ivy Thorn Hill SSSI, finding a patch of Creeping Comfrey (*Symphytum grandiflorum*) by the gate. It is interesting to note that this very patch was recorded by Paul Green in 1989. Wood Anemones (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*) reinforced the impression that Spring had finally arrived. Altogether we recorded 132 species in the first 1km square and 124 in the second, which seemed a good total for the time of year.

Helena Crouch

DUNKERY AND HORNER WOOD,

EXMOOR Sunday 11th April 2010

On a bright sunny day SRPG members gathered for a general recording meeting. The cold winter had resulted in a late spring so there was only a small number of plants in flower. Our first target species was Hay-scented Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris aemula*). This was found growing along the edge of the road close to Webbers Post and then later in the day in East Water Valley. The other target species was Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*), the site for this plant has been known for some time. After some searching, a small colony of the Cornish Moneywort was found on the roadside by a small waterfall and

stream. We walked along the valley northwards, Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) and Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) were amongst the few plants that were in good flower. On climbing back to the car park we came across some wood sculptures: here we all became art critics!

Steve Parker

LEIGH WOODS **Sunday 25th April 2010**

Ten members met for an exploration of the northern parts of Leigh Woods, for which we have few records. We set off north, down a delightful rocky valley towards the river. Thin-spiked Wood-sedge (*Carex strigosa*) grows in abundance alongside the path and we were able to compare this with nearby Pendulous Sedge (*C. pendula*) and Wood-sedge (*C. sylvatica*). Amongst a patch of Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) were some slightly glaucous, ridged stems which may have been *J. x diffusus*. A number of woodland ferns were seen, including Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*), Golden-scaled Male-fern (*D. affinis*), Broad Buckler-fern (*D. dilatata*), Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*), Hart's-tongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*) and Hard-fern (*Blechnum spicant*).

This part of Leigh Woods has mixed geology, an acidic element indicated by the presence of *Blechnum spicant* and Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*). Once we reached the towpath, we found a clear zonation. Beside the river were saltmarsh species, including English Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*), Sea Couch (*Elytrigia atherica*) and Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*). The riverbank had acidophilic species, including Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) and Slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*). Alongside the towpath we found dead spikes of Ivy Broomrape (*Orobancha hederarum*), a large patch of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) and, worryingly, a small clump of Few-flowered Garlic (*Allium paradoxum*). This alien onion is easily recognised by its

triquetrous stems and bulbils in the flower head; it has been naturalised around Bath for many years but this was the first record for Leigh Woods.

Heading southeast along the towpath, we reached the quarries for lunch, opting for Quarry 2 as a picnic spot. Here we found Common Twayblade (*Neottia ovata*) and Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and admired the large Strawberry-tree (*Arbutus unedo*) above us, on the ridge between quarries. We were delighted to find six shoots of Angular Solomon's-seal (*Polygonatum odoratum*) on a ledge near the base of the quarry, just emerging, with Pale St John's-wort (*Hypericum montanum*) alongside; both of these are on our Rare Plant Register list. Next we made a pilgrimage into Quarry 1 to see another rare speciality of the Avon Gorge, Fingered Sedge (*Carex digitata*), absolutely at its best.

Retracing our steps along the towpath, we reached what may be the tiniest 1km square in VC6 (ST5575) since most of it is across (or in) the river! We recorded 42 species, including Wild Service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*), Round-leaved Whitebeam (*Sorbus eminens*), and a sapling of Bay (*Laurus nobilis*). Wood Vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*) grew tantalisingly close (about 2m away!). Although usually found scrambling over other vegetation on woodland edges, here it thrives along the towpath, climbing up the railway wall. A weary group of botanists returned to the car park along the more gentle cycle path, deciding to save Paradise Bottom for another day.

Helena Crouch and Libby Houston

HOLFORD, THE QUANTOCKS **Saturday 8th May, 2010**

Descending carefully into the Holford gorge, the members of the group searched the steep sided sides of the stream bank. Progress was difficult as we picked our way over wet slippery boulders. However, our efforts were soon rewarded with the discovery of sheets of the delicate fronds of Tunbridge Filmy-fern (*Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*). This fern has been known in this location since 1860. It

continues to do well here, the damp conditions along the stream ideally suited to the long-term survival of this delicate plant. Directly under the footbridge that crosses the gorge a search soon found a small colony of the green fuzz that is the gametophyte of the very rare Killarney Fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*). This site was first discovered a few years ago; given the amount of available habitat it would seem likely that this fern is more widespread in the area. In the stream-bed a plant of Common Hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), still persisting in the same location as recorded in 1998 during work on the *Atlas Flora of Somerset*. After lunch the group spent the afternoon carrying out general recoding of Alfoxton Park (ST1441), a rather species poor area of acid grassland and heath.

Steve Parker

NUTSCALE RESERVOIR, EXMOOR Sunday 30th May 2010

The reason for this meeting was to record the population of Lesser Twayblade (*Neottia cordata*) [until recently, *Listera cordata*] on the slopes above Nutscale Reservoir, one of only a handful of sites on Exmoor. Somerset Rare Plants Group had previously recorded it here in 2002 when 'lots' were recorded on these slopes which were clothed with tall 'leggy' Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) with an understorey of sphagnum moss. We met on the hill above the reservoir and before walking down the track we searched for Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) on the tightly grazed grassy mounds of the road verges and car park edges. Caroline Giddens had recorded this here in 2005 and 2008, but despite careful searching, we were not successful. When we reached the reservoir, we fanned out across the heathery slopes, each of us bending low to look for Lesser Twayblade, which is a tiny orchid, typically only about 10cm tall, but often looks much shorter than this when issuing from sphagnum tussocks. It is very hard to spot with its two small opposite leaves and an inflorescence of tiny brown/green flowers, so much concentration was needed when searching. We found some very close to the fence-line and several scattered across the slope. Our

count was 28 in all and it is likely that there were more to be found.

From Nutscale we drove on to Dunkery Hill to look for the Lesser Twayblade at two more of the Exmoor sites. From the roadside car park we separated into two groups. One group walked towards Dunkery Beacon and found several plants under leggy Heather near the footpath. The other group scrambled down the steep slopes into Hanny Combe, but despite prolonged searching with photos of the site in 2002 showing the habitat and location, no plants were recorded here.

Liz McDonnell

SHAPWICK: GRASS WORKSHOP Saturday 12th June 2010

On a beautiful summer's day, more than twenty of us assembled at Shapwick to explore the rudiments (and intricacies) of grass identification. It was good to have such a large turn-out for this joint meeting with the Botany section of the Devonshire Association. The day was ably led by Liz McDonnell who with Gill Read had gathered a wide array of specimens the night before for us to examine.

In the morning Liz explained the basic vegetative structures – culms and tillers, rhizomes and stolons, nodes and internodes – and persuaded us of the importance of knowing our leaf-sheaths, whether 'open' or 'closed', overlapping or tubular, hairy or glabrous, etc. These characters, along with the colour of the basal leaf-sheaths and the size, shape and hairiness of the leaf-blades, can be really important in distinguishing between species when – as is so often the case – they can only be found in a vegetative (i.e. non-flowering) state.

Having got to grips with the vegetative parts of grasses, Liz then introduced us to their complex floral structures, using for this purpose her giant model of an *Arrhenatherum* floret that looked as if it had probably been pinched from the 'Dr. Who' props department. Here Liz was able to demonstrate the basic structure of a spikelet – comprising pedicel, rachilla, upper and lower glumes and one or more florets – and then the intricate and fiddly inner workings of each floret, comprising lemma, palea, lodicules, stamens and stigma.

We were also shown a variety of identification aids – traditional dichotomous keys, multi-access keys, colour-guides and Floras (and even punched-cards!) – and then used these to try to make sense of the grasses gathered on the tables in front of us. For many of us this was an unrivalled opportunity to examine grasses at close quarters, and with fellow-botanists on hand to help us identify them correctly. It was fun, too, to have the time to look intently at grasses we thought we knew well, like the common-or-garden False-oat (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), and to discover again a beauty in their floral structures that most of the time we forget to notice.

In the afternoon we walked round part of Shapwick NNR, spotting grasses as we went – and we saw a lot else besides, including Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) and some fine stands of Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*). We were also lucky enough to witness a pair of mating Scarlet Tigers (*Callimorpha dominula*), a very local moth in Somerset that has a particularly striking plumage of dark chocolate forewings blotched with cream, and hindwings of scarlet and black. Fortunately, given the topic of the day, the moths were clinging to a grass stem – but did anyone notice what species it was? (I certainly didn't.)

Simon Leach

BLEADON AND HELLENGE HILL Sunday 11th July 2010

The purpose of this meeting was to record in an area for which the SRPG had few records and to search for Knapweed Broomrape (*Orobancha elatior*) at its only known site in Somerset and which had been not been recorded since it was first found in 1989. We met at Bleadon Church and after recording in the churchyard, made our way on to South Hill to try to find Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*), which had reputedly been found there, but for which we had no records. Unfortunately we could not find it in any of the suitable rocky habitats. One plant of Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) was found whilst searching the short grazed species-rich sward of the south-facing slopes of South Hill, where Pale Flax (*Linum bienne*) and Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) were frequent. Several members clambered over a fence to gain access to the top of the disused Bleadon

quarry, where a scree-like surface yielded plants such as Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acer*), Rustyback (*Asplenium ceterach*) and Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*). Walking further eastwards along South Hill, we found Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*), Small-flowered Sweet-briar (*Rosa micrantha*), Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*) and three plants of Milk Thistle (*Silybum marinum*). After crossing the minor road we made our way up a small track at the bottom of which were a few plants of Small-flowered Evening-primrose (*Oenothera cambrica*).

Further up the hill to the north-east we searched for the Knapweed Broomrape. We had a sketch map from when I had recorded it in 1989 and much to my amazement, we found it in almost exactly the same location. Two plants were found, one of which had been broken off by one of the many donkeys which were grazing in this field. Despite the small population here, it was very satisfying to record this very rare Somerset plant at its only location in the county.

Liz McDonnell

ROBBERS' BRIDGE, EXMOOR Sunday 18th July 2010

On a very blustery day a large group of members turned up for a day recording Exmoor close to the Devon border; we were also joined by Ian Green returned from Scotland for a short visit to Somerset. It was soon decided that the location selected was too exposed to carry out much work in the wet and windy conditions. However, we quickly walked (for botanists) to the gates of Yenworthy Lodge to look for Prickly Heath (*Gaultheria mucronata*). This was soon found growing in a linear row running parallel to the track to the farm, the plant is well naturalised and has been known here for almost 30 years.

On returning to the cars the decision was taken to drive to the more sheltered Robber's Bridge car park. From here, we followed the Weir Water carrying out general recording; this is a botanically rich area, the mires and flushes supporting a very good selection of sedges, with twelve species seen during the trip. Along the edge of the river in very wet ground a small colony of Few-flowered

Spike-rush (*Eleocharis quinqueflora*) was found, this is a new location for Somerset. Growing out of a hedge bank were two large trees of *Salix x multinervis*, a hybrid willow, common but probably under recorded. A search for Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*) was successful; this part of Exmoor is a well-known area for this species. Further along the stream we started to come across large colonies of Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*). The SRPG last monitored this species in May 1999, the colony appears to be stable, similar in extent and size of population as it was eleven years ago. We crossed the stream (nobody got too wet) and started to return to the car park; two members of the group found a small number of plants of Heath Pearlwort (*Sagina subulata*) growing on the track from a small quarry. This was a good meeting with excellent plants and good company.

Steve Parker

ALFRED'S TOWER AND STOURHEAD ESTATE. Saturday 31st July, 2010

Eight members met at Alfred's Tower for a walk in the woods of the Stourhead Estate, at the eastern edge of the county. Unusually for VC6, this is an area of Greensand, so our targets were acidophilic species which, although widespread in VC5, are scarce in VC6. We soon found good patches of Climbing Corydalis (*Ceratocarpus claviculata*); we recorded this species in three 1km squares during the day. Other species typical of acidic soils included Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*), Hard-fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*). We found seven species of *Carex*, including large patches of both Greater Pond-sedge (*Carex riparia*) and Lesser Pond-sedge (*Carex acutiformis*) dominating damp spring-lines in the woodland.

The star find of the day was Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*) at the edge of a ditch beside the Macmillan Way. In VC5, this species is not uncommon on Exmoor, the

Blackdowns and the Quantocks; however in VC6 it is scarce, restricted to a line of scattered sites from Black Down to the eastern border. Apart from sites on Black Down, this is the first VC6 record since publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset.

On a damp path, we were puzzled by a mint, which keyed out as Whorled Mint (*Mentha x verticillata*), the hybrid between Water Mint and Corn Mint. Emboldened by this identification prowess, we later recorded another hybrid, *Potentilla x mixta*, on a sunny track. These are not uncommon hybrids, but are probably under-recorded.

The Stourhead Estate is vast and we explored only a tiny portion of the VC6 part. Further exploration is needed – but we say that after every walk!

Helena Crouch

BUCKLAND ST. MARY, BLACKDOWN HILLS. Sunday 8th August, 2010

After a very slight mix-up as to which side of the church to park, a large number of SRPG members set off to carry out general recording in Buckland St Mary and the Jan Hobbs Nature Reserve, a small site owned by the Somerset Wildlife Trust.

On an old spoil heap a single and very tiny specimen of Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) was found, a plant that seems to be turning up regularly in the county, this was a new 10km record. Further down the lane in a scruffy old gateway as is so beloved by botanists, we found a couple of plants of Corn Spurrey (*Spergula arvensis*). This is a widespread species in VC5 but is declining nationally due to agricultural intensification. The Jan Hobbs reserve is neutral grassland with small areas of Greater Tussock-sedge (*Carex paniculata*). A small patch of Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) was found with scattered plants of Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) and other sedges. Returning to the cars a number of plants of Moth Mullein (*Verbascum blattaria*) were discovered on waste ground in the village.

Steve Parker

**BOWER'S HILL near FENNY CASTLE,
WELLS Sunday 22nd August 2010**

The location of this meeting was changed at short notice from the advertised Queen's Sedgemoor, as nearly all the ditches had been cleaned out shortly before the meeting date and few aquatics remained. Bower's Hill is on the low hills that run from the Wedmore ridge through to Wells and is not well known botanically. A small party met up at Fenny Castle and took the footpath up across improved fields and then up to the steep slopes of Bower's Hill. Here the calcareous grassland was under-grazed and becoming very scrubby with Hawthorns, but still species-rich with Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor* ssp. *minor*), Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and many other species. Autumn Ladies-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) and Nit-grass (*Gastridium ventricosum*) had been recorded here in the past, but despite searching for them we did not find these species. The tall, under-grazed sward looked rather unsuitable for the small delicate Ladies-tresses, but it may still be there. In a moderately species-rich field to the north we recorded one plant of Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*) near the footpath. We walked up Hembury Lane and then back to our starting point down Castle Lane. No rare or scarce plants were encountered on this field meeting, but this area was explored and found to have some species-rich grassland and rich hedgebanks and road verges and would merit further botanical recording.

Liz McDonnell

**GORDANO VALLEY
Saturday 11th September 2010**

Eight members gathered on a very pleasant day at Weston-in-Gordano to check on the flora of two Avon Wildlife Trust reserves. Most of our time was spent around the rhyes. The two grykes, man-made short, broad 'ponds' gave us very good populations of Fen Pondweed (*Potamogeton coloratus*), and plenty of Stonewort (*Chara vulgaris*). One rhyne where we usually get a good list had unfortunately been very recently keetched (yes, since the recce! Why does this so often

happen?) But we found Fennel Pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*) distinguished from Small Pondweed (*P. berchtoldii*) by pulling the leaf back, when the joined stipule jumps off the stem, meaning that the leaf does not arise from where it appears to as in the latter. I hope this makes sense!

A previous record of Whorl-grass (*Catabrosa aquatica*) was confirmed, but we realised that if that rhyne was keetched completely the plant would be seriously threatened. AWT are to be approached suggesting piecemeal keetching to safeguard the site. Keetching is the local term I believe for ditch clearing.

After a picnic lunch in the sun, supplemented by picking blackberries claimed by Howard to be from his local patch, we progressed to Walton Moor, the site for Brown Galingale (*Cyperus fuscus*). There have been problems over the site management for some years and we found cattle grazing at this vital flowering time. The necessary earlier poaching did not appear to have taken place. After diligent searching we only discovered 3 plants in flower. At Steve's suggestion I have now written to Bob Corns of Natural England over our concern for this Rare, Vulnerable and UKBAP plant and have been informed that there had been a breakdown in communications between NE and the Environment Agency over management, also a change in grazing regime for the future. I hope we have alerted NE to their responsibility and shall make sure I visit the site on several occasions next year.

So, our convoy drove the 2 miles to Clapton Moor, causing a few hold-ups for traffic coming in the opposite direction, but we outnumbered them! Here the Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*) in the second re-introduction site was doing well with about 20 metres of the rhyne bank providing a good habitat.

An area of rhyne close to a bridge enabled us to see a large population of Whorled Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum verticillatum*). Other plants of interest were *Ranunculus lingua*, *Carex disticha*, *Ranunculus trichophyllus*, *Berula erecta*, *Alisma*

plantago-aquatica, *Spirodela polyrhiza* (and four *Lemna* species), Frogbit, *Sparganium emersum* and *S. erectum*. Many thanks to Helena for filing in the record cards.

Everyone enjoyed their day in the Gordano Valley including noting the unmoving traffic driving south on the M5 above us at one time! Maybe some blessed me for our route around Clapton Moor where we had to climb 5-barred gates at least four times! The grazier certainly knows how to tie his knots on the gates – talk about belt and braces!

Pam Millman

BICKHAM WOOD

Saturday 25th September 2010

The plan for this meeting was to re-find Beech Fern (*Phegopteris connectilis*). However, the only person to find the car parking location was the leader, so it was the smallest possible party that set out to carry out general recording in this woodland and grassland. The Beech Fern was not found, I suspect that if still there it is to be found in or around a small stream. The SRPG have visited the site in 2003, but the fern was not found, the history of recording of the fern is given in the SRPG newsletter of 2003. I recorded 98 species of plant in the woodland and the small meadow (owned by SWT). The woodland and grassland also had a good range of fungi; the area is well worth another visit.

Steve Parker

BRIDGWATER & TAUNTON CANAL

Saturday 30th October 2010

This meeting was a joint meeting with the Wild Flower Society, so members of that Society were also looking out for plants in flower for the last Hunt. The other objective for the day was to search the canal for alien plant species. Our first problem was finding the way to the canal, we got lost in a really horrid industrial estate and so had to re-trace our steps. Eventually the leader did find the route to the canal and the search for aliens started. We had to work very hard and by lunch time the only non-native species

discovered was Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*), this plant was first recorded in Britain in 1883, and is now widespread across lowland Britain. In Somerset it is a familiar species on the Levels and Moors, in some years thick mats of the plant develop along the drainage ditches and rhynes. A small weevil found in the county does however feed on the water fern thus keeping the population in check. After lunch we continued our search of the canal. Only one other interesting non-native was discovered, one plant of Water-lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*) was spotted in the centre of the water-course. Water-lettuce was first discovered in the county in 2004 when a few plants were discovered on Burnham Level. The plant is now well established in the Bridgwater to Taunton Canal. It was thought that last year's cold weather had killed off this species. Other plants of interest included a Dwarf Elder (*Sambucus ebulus*) on both sides of the canal on the edge of Bridgwater. In order to get a closer look at the Water-lettuce, a small party drove closer to Taunton to see a population that Simon Leach had seen earlier in the month. Here many plants were seen floating on the surface of the water. Water-hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) had been seen on the canal in 2009, no sign of this aquatic species was found on the site this visit.

Steve Parker

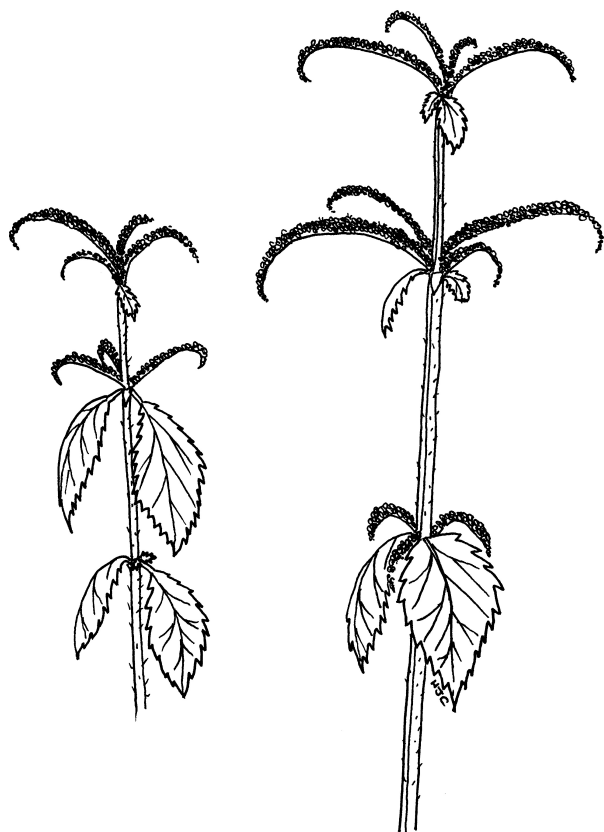
PLANT NOTES

Two Mediterranean weeds new to Somerset

Some noteworthy additions to the flora of Somerset this year are two Mediterranean plants, both discovered in VC6.

In April, a strange nettle in full flower was found by Pam Millman in the centre of Nailsea, growing in the crack between the pavement and the rear walls of a shop. It was immediately identified by Fred Rumsey (from a photograph) as *Urtica membranacea* (Membranous Nettle), which has a Mediterranean and Western European distribution. Over a hundred plants were seen, around two sides of the building, suggesting that it may have been there for a

few seasons. By mid-April plants were already in fruit. *Urtica membranacea* was first recorded in Britain in April 2006 growing in an identical habitat in Warwick (Boucher and Partridge, 2006). This nettle is monoecious. The upper (male) racemes are distinctive, having flowers on the topmost surface only, the lower surface being inflated and membranous. In 2008, Ian Green found this species growing as a weed amongst plants at B&Q in Elgin, where it is still to be found; it has also been found in Cornwall and London.



Urtica membranacea

In May, Fred Rumsey found a single plant of *Galium murale* (Small Goosegrass) growing on the pavement of the Royal Crescent in Bath. It was already in fruit; a few weeks later it was gone. *Galium murale* was recorded by J. Fraser in 1911 near Musselburgh, where it was possibly a wool alien; it was also found as a wool alien at Blackmoor in North Hampshire by Rodney Burton. Recently, this species was discovered at the base of a wall in Lostwithiel, Cornwall, by Matt Stribley in 2007 and has also been reported from a driveway in Eastbourne (Nicolle, 2008). *Galium murale* is a small procumbent plant with one to four yellowish

flowers in an inflorescence. The cylindrical fruits have hooked bristles towards the apex (ideal for catching in wool).



Galium murale

Both these species are Mediterranean winter annuals. They have probably arrived recently as weeds of Mediterranean container plants (eg palms, olives or figs); indeed both were recorded by Hoste and Verloove (2010) in a survey of stowaways growing in the containers of Mediterranean plants in garden centres across Belgium. These are definitely two species to look out for. Their appearances so far have been sporadic – they could arrive as passengers and jump ship wherever Mediterranean container plants are grown.

Helena J. Crouch

References

- Boucher, A. & Partridge, J. (2006). *Urtica membranacea*, an annual nettle, in Warwick: a first British record? *BSBI News* 103: 29-30.
- Hoste, I & Verloove, F. (2010). Container plants and their stowaways: a potential source of invasive plant species. In: Segers, H. & E. Branquart (eds). *Science Facing Aliens. Proceedings of a scientific meeting on Invasive Alien Species, Brussels, May 11th 2009*. Belgian Biodiversity Platform, 2010.
- Nicolle, D.J. (2008). *Galium murale* – a foothold in Eastbourne? *BSBI News* 109: 57-58.

Small Water-pepper (*Persicaria minor*) returns

This Vulnerable species has always been rare in Somerset and until this year it was thought to be extinct in VC6, last seen at Meare Heath by D. Munro-Smith in 1960. It is thus very exciting to report that *Persicaria minor* was found by Robert Cropper in September, on Tealham Moor. Steve and I visited the site a few weeks later; we saw 6 plants growing in a small, recently-made ditch (a “grip”) which runs across a damp meadow. The grip was delightfully species-rich, with both Nodding and Trifid Bur-marigold and abundant Marsh Yellow-cress (*Rorippa palustris*). *Persicaria minor* is an annual, so we shall monitor this site and search the neighbourhood for further plants next year.

In VC5, I had mistakenly believed this species to be extinct, the only record having been made at Stogumber in 1938 by A.E. Ellis; however I was wrong. It was found in 2003 at Clatworthy Reservoir by Tim Rich and W. Bleeker beside a stream in the draw-down zone. With one recent site in each vice-county, this is one of our rarer plants. The species account can be viewed on our website.

Helena Crouch

***Potamogeton obtusifolius* (Blunt-leaved Pondweed)**

When H.W. Boon found Blunt-leaved Pondweed at Norton Fitzwarren in 1973, Capt. Roe wrote to him exclaiming “How exciting about the *Potamogeton obtusifolius*! This is an important record for the county”. It was indeed a first for Somerset. Since then, this species has been found at three other sites in VC5 but, until this year, was absent from VC6. It is thus sensational news that in August James McGill found *Potamogeton obtusifolius* at Ham Wall National Nature Reserve, near Glastonbury.

Potamogeton obtusifolius is a widespread but patchily distributed species, mostly found in mesotrophic neutral or acidic ponds or lakes. It most closely resembles the far commoner *Potamogeton berchtoldii* (Small

Pondweed), but leaves are broader, the apices more blunt, the inflorescence has more flowers and the turions (vegetative propagules) are wider. The discovery of a native vascular plant species new to a vice-county is a rare event and James is to be congratulated for his brilliant observation skills.

Helena Crouch

***Tephrosieris integrifolia* subsp. *integrifolia* (Field Fleawort)**

Field Fleawort is Endangered and nationally Scarce. It is an attractive plant with striking yellow composite flowers, restricted to short turf on shallow soils, usually on S-facing chalk, or rarely limestone. It is absent from VC5 and grows at only one site in VC6, although it is not strictly a Somerset plant any more, since the parish of Kilmington was lost to Wiltshire in 1896. *Tephrosieris integrifolia* was not included in The Atlas Flora of Somerset (which covers only modern administrative Somerset and thus excludes those parts of VC6 which are now Wiltshire). Capt. Roe, in his Flora of Somerset (1981), wrote: “Only on the chalk of White Sheet Hill (7) (Wilts) on the boundary of V.C.6”, but his card in the species card index has no records.

This year, with the help of records from Robert Cropper, Fred Rumsey and I found two plants near the top of White Sheet Hill, just south of a tumulus. Comparing the grid reference with the position of the parish boundary on the map, we believe these to be in VC6 – just! Capt. Roe’s statement is still perfectly correct. Sadly both plants had finished flowering. In 2012 this species will be one of the BSBI targets for the Threatened Plants Project, so a return visit is planned. With only two known individuals, this is currently one of our rarest species. Throughout the country, this species has declined as a result of under-grazing or scrub encroachment. The site in VC6 is at the very west of its national distribution.

Helena Crouch

NEW SOMERSET PLANT RECORDS

The following have been recorded new for Somerset in 2010 unless stated otherwise:

Chamaecyparis pisifera (Sawara Cypress) – Great Elm (ST746490), 28 May, seven short wide trees in rocky woodland on N side of Mells Stream, outside garden fence but in area with relic features of having been a garden, Helena J. Crouch & Gillian H. Read (det. Mark A.R. and Clare Kitchen), VC6.

Festuca arenaria subsp. *arenaria* (Rush-leaved Fescue) – Berrow Dunes (ST2951), 25 June 2009, at edge of golf course, beside reedbed, Liz McDonnell, VC6. The first record for this taxon as it is now understood: it is not possible to tell whether former records were for this subspecies because of nomenclatural confusion.

Galium murale (Small Goosegrass) – Bath (ST744654), 2 May, one plant growing on pavement of Royal Crescent at top of steps to a basement, Fred Rumsey, VC6.

Knautia macedonica (Macedonian Scabious) – Hinton Blewett (ST598566), 11 June 2009, one big plant in flower and fruit on verge at start of Hollow Marsh Lane, John P. Martin, VC6.

Nothofagus dombeyi (Dombey's Beech) – Monkham Wood (SS9838), 26 April, a few trees, thought this species, near road, Caroline Giddens, VC5.

Pilosella flagellaris subsp. *flagellaris* (Spreading Mouse-ear-hawkweed) – Ashton Vale, Bristol (ST567719), 19 May 2009, widespread and obviously long naturalised on former railway yard, Rupert J. Higgins, VC6.

Pteris tremula (Tender Brake) – Bath (ST74446543), 10 September, three plants in stonework at top of basement of 20A Royal Crescent and one at base of steps, Helena J. Crouch, VC6.

Sarracenia flava (Trumpets) – Westhay Moor (ST45334393), 15 July, three plants on peat at edge of wide channel, Helena J.

Crouch & Stephen J. Parker (det. Fred Rumsey), VC6. First seen here by Robert S. Cropper in 2008, growing with *S. purpurea*, but too small to be named with certainty until this year.

Urtica membranacea (Membranous Nettle) – Nailsea (ST47447080), 6 April, 100+ plants in flower at edge of paving along base of wall of bike shop next to public car park, Pam Millman (det. Fred Rumsey), VC6.

NEW VICE-COUNTY RECORDS

Cerintho major (Greater Honeywort) – Dunster (SS9944), 27 April 2009, roadside, spreading in Sea Lane, Alastair Stevenson, VC5.

Potamogeton obtusifolius (Blunt-leaved Pondweed) – Ham Wall (ST46334013), 17 August, James McGill (conf. Nigel Holmes), VC6.

OTHER INTERESTING SOMERSET RECORDS IN 2010

Armeria maritima (Thrift) – Bath (ST744627), 25 June, thirteen clumps in flower on central reservation of Wellsway, Helena J. & Jennifer M. Crouch, VC6. First inland record for VC6.

Carex x deserta (*C. binervis* x *laevigata*) – Luccombe (ST91874377), 12 July, beside a stream at the edge of a wood where it meets the moor above Holt Ball, Jeanne Webb (conf. Arthur Chater and Mike Porter), VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

Corydalis solida (Bird-in-a-bush) – Worminster (ST57994387), 13 April, naturalised in copse opposite Churchill House, John Poingdestre, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1987 and only fourth record for VC6.

Euphorbia oblongata (Balkan Spurge) – Westonzoyland (ST364342), 12 June, eight plants on W side of lane, John Poingdestre, VC6. Second record for VC6.

Euphrasia arctica – Shapwick Heath (ST417406), 21 June 2008, many plants

scattered in herb-rich meadow at Canada Farm, Helena J. Crouch (det. Alan J. Silverside), and Shapwick Heath (ST41124062), 13 July, in species-rich margin of Brickyard Farm Meadow, Helena J. Crouch, Liz McDonnell & Stephen J. Parker (det. Alan J. Silverside), VC6. First records for Somerset since 1993.

Euphrasia confusa* x *micrantha – Weir Water Valley (SS82194642), 18 July, in acid grassland near Robber's Bridge, SRPG (det. Alan J. Silverside), VC5. First record for Somerset since 1997.

Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *anglica (English Eyebright) – Cheddar Gorge (ST486533), 11 July, many plants in grassland S of road, above track, Helena J. Crouch & Fred Rumsey (det. Fred Rumsey), VC6. First record for VC6 since 1992.

Orobanche elatior (Knapweed Broomrape) – Hellenge Hill (ST34955729), 11 July, two plants amongst *Centarea scabiosa*, 10 paces apart, near gate in SW part of donkey-grazed field, SRPG, VC6. First record since 1989 at the only known extant site in Somerset.

Persicaria minor (Small Water-pepper) – Tealham Moor (ST41434573), 11 September, several plants in flower within 1m stretch of shallow ditch (grip) across SWT meadow, Robert S. Cropper, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1960.

Sanguisorba officinalis (Great Burnet) – Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve (ST48437666), 17 August, one plant amongst *Juncus* at edge of large circular scrape in field, Bristol Naturalists' Society, VC6. Second record for VC6 since 1976. Regarded as a probable casual in VC6.

Scandix pecten-veneris (Shepherd's-needle) – Cary Fitzpaine (ST545277, ST545276), 25 April, frequent in two small fields with failed oilseed rape crops, and Cary Fitzpaine (ST544274) abundant in headland alongside E of A37 in field S of above fields, John Poingdestre, VC6. First records for VC6 since 1995.

Senecio inaequidens (Narrow-leaved Ragwort) – Westonzoyland (ST364340), 12 June, one plant in flower in pallet yard, and Westonzoyland Airfield (ST364341), 12 June, c.50 plants on roadside and rubble mounds, John Poingdestre, VC6. Second and third records for VC6.

Symphytum tuberosum (Tuberous Comfrey) – Dunster (SS9943), 31 March 2009, dump area, Alastair Stevenson, VC5. Horner (SS8945), 18 April 2009, a few in dumping area, Alastair Stevenson, VC5. Second and third records for VC5 and first records for VC5 since 1950.

Zantedeschia aethiopica (Altar-lily) – Bleadon (ST33985669), 11 July, one clump in ditch on west side of road, SRPG, VC6. Second record for VC6.

Records compiled by Helena Crouch

EXMOOR PLANT SURVEY

The survey of vascular plants in Exmoor area by 1 km squares being conducted by Exmoor Natural History Society as part of Exmoor National Park Authority's Five Year Plan has two more years to run. Good progress was made during 2010 and of the 750 squares involved, less than 100 remain. The problem is, that these are now in the most remote areas of Exmoor. If any SRPG members should be contemplating walking any of the long-distance paths, such as the Macmillan Way West, The Two Moors Way or The Tarka Trail and can do a bit of recording on the way, do please let Caroline Giddens know, even short lists can be useful.

email: carol.enhs@talktalk.net or
Tel: 01643 707624

SRPG Contacts:

Liz McDonnell 01934 712649
Steve Parker 01823 666006