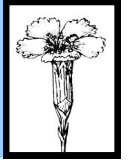


SOMERSET RARE PLANTS GROUP



2015 Newsletter

Issue no. 16

Editor Liz McDonnell

Introduction

The membership of SRPG is rising each year and at the end of 2015 it reached 86. We welcome all our new members and hope that they will fully participate in our activities in the coming year.

Visit www.somersetrareplantsgroup.org.uk to see the current year's meetings programme, Somerset Rare Plant Register, Newsletter archive, information on SRPG recording, the Photo Competition archive and other information.

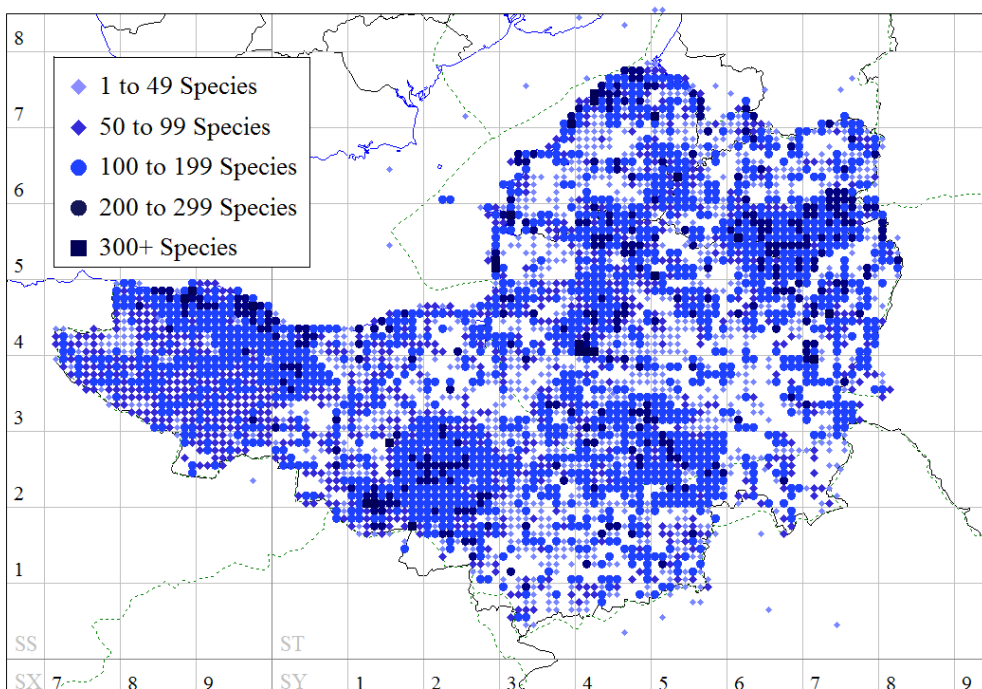
In 2015 we had three indoor meetings and 20 field meetings, which were widely scattered over our large area of VC5 and VC6. Some of these were 'Meet and Scatter' meetings, where we split into small groups to record in different areas to cover more ground. On those occasions, we met up at the end of the day (in a nearby café when possible) to compare notes, report on our finds and to hand over the recording cards to the person who was to enter the data on MapMate. Most of our meetings this year were for general recording, as all our Somerset records will go to the BSBI Atlas 2020 recording scheme, but individuals were also recording and monitoring our rare species for the ongoing Somerset Rare Plants Register. We held one identification workshop (on Willowherbs) which was very successful, resulting in much improved recording of *Epilobium* species in the county.

An innovation this year was a photographic competition, the aim of which was to give prizes for photos (plants and people) taken on SRPG meetings and to populate the website with images of our activities and an archive of photos that can be used for the Newsletter and the Rare Plants register.

This year we have made a large number of botanical records, both on SRPG field meetings and by the efforts of individual members working in their own adopted areas. The map shown here is updated with all the recording done in 2015. If you compare it to the map in the 2014 Newsletter, you will see the huge effort that SRPG members have put into recording in 2015. Members of the SRPG currently record at a scale of monad (1km square) level or finer. Six and eight figure grid references are routinely

recorded for rarer species.

VC5 and 6 Total Species per Monad 2000 onwards



If you would like to help to turn more of this map blue, recording in your adopted patch or adopting species, contact Steve Parker for areas in VC5 or Helena Crouch for VC6 (see page 32 for contact details). We can provide you with updated SRPG Recording cards.

Reports of Meetings

Annual Members Meeting and AGM Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay Sunday 18th January 2015

Report: Liz McDonnell

22 members attended this annual meeting which was held at the Avalon Marshes Centre, Westhay. We met for coffee and a chat before the main business of the day. Four members were unable to attend and sent their apologies. Anne Cole has given up being SRPG Treasurer and Clive Lovatt has kindly offered to take up that role. Notification will be sent to Barclay's bank to this effect and for a change of signatories. Clive presented the accounts and ideas were put forward for expenditure in 2015, including further MapMate workshops, printing our newly designed recording cards (special thanks to Paul Green for his hard work on this) and financial help for recording equipment such as GPS's.

Steve Parker gave a brief account of the 18 field meetings held between April and December 2014 and reported that many important records were collected on these meetings. Sunday meetings were discussed and although a few members were unable to attend the AGM due to Sunday commitments, it was generally felt by the group that it was good to have both Saturday and Sunday meetings (and even a few mid-week ones too). Instead of a post-Christmas trip, we agreed to hold a winter field meeting in the first days of January 2016, so that we could contribute to the BSBI's annual New Year's Plant Hunt. Any suggestions for outside speakers for next year's indoor meetings should be sent to Liz.

Chris Loudon gave an update on the SRPG website www.somersetrareplantsgroup.org.uk. The comments box was deleted as rarely used, but there is now a search facility and hit-counter, which will be useful to see how widely the website is used. Chris requested photos of meetings, members and plants to populate the pages and provide a picture archive – photos can be sent via email or on a memory stick /flash drive. Chris emphasised how helpful Tony Price (SERC) had been in the development and support of this website and we agreed to send him an appreciation from

the group. Ian Salmon offered to coordinate a photo competition which will run throughout 2015. Members will be able to choose the winner at next year's AGM & Members meeting.

Liz reported on plans for building a new Avalon Marshes Visitor Centre. SRPG sent a letter of support for this exciting project, but the plans have fallen through due to financial reasons.

Helena Crouch gave a brief update on the Somerset Rare Plants Register to report that 47 taxa have been added to the master list following the publication of the England Red List. 82 accounts are already written and available on the SRPG website and updates and amendments are constantly being made as a result of active recording by SRPG members.

Libby Houston gave a short note on two of the rare Bristol Whitbeams and reported proposed changes to the railway along the Avon Gorge which may affect some of the rare species there. Ian Salmon reported that he is surveying all the known and possible sites of native Black Poplar in Somerset and producing detailed maps of their occurrence. He has a list for each hectad, which can be sent to members who wish to help with the survey. He is starting in the Exmoor area and working eastwards. Clive reviewed a few recent botanical publications, two of which related directly to Somerset.

Lunch was the usual splendidly varied array of delicious bring-and-share food, including a sumptuous homemade carrot cake. In the afternoon, Steve entertained us with a botanical quiz, which the VC6 team won and Helena gave a presentation on some of the important botanical records that have been made in 2014, including *Centunculus minimus*, which is the first record for VC6 since 1919, and *Dryopteris remota* which is new for England!

'Towards Atlas 2020'

Saturday 28 February 2015

Pete Stroh—BSBI Scientific Officer

Report: Liz McDonnell

For this second indoor meeting, we invited VC Recorders from the other SW counties and were pleased to welcome Ian Bennallick from Cornwall, Roger Smith and Bob Hodgson from Devon and Robin Walls from Dorset. It was a well-

attended meeting with 31 members, friends and invitees. Pete Stroh gave an interesting talk about work in progress towards a new Atlas of the British Flora – an update of the 2002 publication. He outlined the reasons for doing it all again so soon and gave some indication of what it would look like. The previous atlases of the British Flora (1962 and 2002) were based on 10km square plant distribution maps, but recent recording effort and technological advances – GPS etc., have made it possible to map species at a much finer resolution. Atlas 2020 will accommodate these advances and will produce maps (online and in the published volumes) at tetrad level. As well as distribution maps for all species in Britain & Ireland, there will be analysis and trends on native and introduced species, including new, spreading and invasive plants. Guidance on how to record for Atlas 2020 is currently in preparation and can be downloaded from the BSBI website when available. This includes notes on difficult, under-recorded and critical taxa, a fern crib and several new handbooks. We discussed the progress of recording in Somerset and how we can use the sampling strategy (5 tetrads or 12 monads in each hectad) to best advantage to cover the ground. Pete was very encouraging and all the VC Recorders were congratulated on their efforts. Help was offered to those members who were willing to adopt an area for Atlas 2020 recording. Helena gave us an update on the Somerset Rare Plants Register progress. The total number of taxa in the register currently stands at 639, 138 of which are fully written and available on the SRPG website.

**SRPG Winter Identification Meeting
Langford Budville Village Hall
Sunday 22nd March 2015
Report : Liz McDonnell**

For the last of our indoor winter meetings, 18 members met in the wonderfully spacious Jubilee Hall – a new occasional venue for us. The aim of the meeting was for members to become more familiar with recording species vegetatively, as this is needed for recording during the winter months. Simon Leach had collected an impressive variety of winter twigs and I had gathered a large number of herbaceous species from the lanes and hedgerows around Wedmore and from

some weedy allotments. I collected common ubiquitous species, including several grasses, as recorders often struggle with the identification of grasses not in flower. We laid all the specimens out and spent the morning putting names to them all with the aid of several plant guides and reference books. We used *The Vegetative Key to the British Flora* by John Poland & Eric Clement to do a joint exercise in keying out a *Symphytum* species that I had brought in, looking carefully at hooked hairs, leaf length, leaf shape and whether the plant was creeping at the nodes. We discussed terms such as decurrent, antrorse, retrorse and medifixed. After lunch in the hall with the sun streaming through the windows, we went out to record in the lanes around Langford Budville. Two groups went to different under-recorded monads using the re-designed SRPG Recording Form that had just been printed for us. Highlights of the afternoon were few, but Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*) was found in flower for the first time this year.



SRPG members identifying species with the aid of floras and a binocular microscope © Liz McDonnell

Field Meetings

**Prior's Wood, Portbury (VC6)
Sunday 26th April 2015
Leaders: Clive Lovatt & Liz McDonnell
Report: Liz McDonnell**

This was a joint meeting with Bristol Naturalists' Society and twelve members of both groups met at the north entrance on Caswell Lane. We walked up the track through the field and into the ancient semi-natural broad-leaved wood.

Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*), which was just coming into leaf, is frequent here and we found masses of seedlings with their characteristic fingered cotyledons. The rarity of native Lime is partly due to the requirement for enough warmth to ripen seeds – last year was very suitable in this regard.



Strange finger-shaped cotyledons of Small-leaved Lime
©Mary Wood

Oak (*Quercus robur*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) are abundant and we found many clumps of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) at the base of Hazel coppice stools. Many of the typical ancient woodland indicators were seen, including Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Wood Millet (*Millium effusum*) and Giant Fescue (*Schedonorus giganteus*). In a cleared area where plantation had been felled, one plant of Pale Sedge (*Carex pallescens*) was recorded. We dipped briefly into the southern woodland spur that leads down to Bullock's Bottom and returned along the western edge of the valley. We found a large patch of Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) with well over 500 spikes along a 120metre stretch, not far from the path. It was growing amongst dense Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*). We recorded in three monads during the day and found over 160 species between us.

Great Breach Wood, Polden Hills (VC6) Saturday 9th May 2015

Leader & report: Steve Parker

SRPG and SANHS planned a joint visit to the wood at the request of Natural England to help with site monitoring and update the plant list for

the wood especially some of the key species listed in the SSSI citation.

Part of the wood is managed by Somerset Wildlife Trust and their contractors have been removing some of the commercially grown timber from the site. Much of this non-native timber was planted in the 1960s. However the ground flora is still of considerable interest. The network of woodland rides were especially species-rich, at the time of the visit and Cowslip (*Primula veris*) and Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) were in full flower. Scattered through the rides were spikes of Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*), Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and Early-purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*). A small clump of False Oxlip (*Primula x polyantha*) was found growing near the lunchtime picnic spot. A large patch of Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) was recorded with dozens of the fronds of this small fern in the short grassy sward of a large glade. Other plants of interest found in the rides and glades included Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) and Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*).

The poorly drained soils result in some of the rides being externally wet, Brookweed (*Veronica beccabunga*) had found its niche on the edge small pool created by upturned tree root, other signs of water logged soils included the extensive stand of Great Horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*).



Herb Paris with its distinctive leaf arrangement ©Cath Shellwell

Under the canopy of Oak (*Quercus robur*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) the group recorded several ancient woodland indicators such as Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), Yellow Archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon* ssp. *montanum*) and

Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*). Carpets of Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) are occasional in some parts of the site.

Undoubtedly the star find of the day was Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) with its amazing flowers. During the visit we made 278 plant records, thirty species were added to the records for ST5032, including Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), which was a new 10km record. Rather surprisingly, Wood sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) was the first record for this well recorded site!

Cannington Park (VC5)

Sunday 10th May 2015

Leaders: Ro FitzGerald & Liz McDonnell

Report: Ro FitzGerald

This was a joint meeting of the WFS and the Somerset Rare Plants Group. Somerset botanists are in dedicated recording mode this year. With the national 'Atlas 2020' project well under way we are making great efforts to record both rare and common plants in detail (using 'monads', 1x1km squares, as the basic unit). We have just produced a new county recording card for this huge undertaking – all 'Atlas' records must be post year 2000 – so being visited by keen helpful botanists is a joy. WFS members from Gloucestershire joined local SRPG members, and it was both valuable and enjoyable to meet and have their support.

Recording meetings are hard work, getting every species 'onto the card', but sharing the effort with like-minded friends helps particularly with the duller species, so many voices calling out 'Have we had Nettle yet?' or 'Here's *Trifolium repens* at last' keeps progress swinging along. Using a new card, with the 'new Stace' names, is also amusing in good company when these minor memory tests and challenges can be shared with a cheerful group!

The day was luckily mild and pleasant without the cold spring winds, so the very slow pace of detailed recording was tolerable, and we lunched on a sunny slope, chiff-chaffs and black-caps singing in the wood behind. This locality has varied habitats; sheep-grazed pasture with limestone outcrops, stony ash woodland, more ruderal and disturbed banks and track sides round a working quarry. Star plants in the morning were Subterra-

nean Clover (*Trifolium subterraneum*), with its curious little stemless ground-level flowers ready to produce pods which bend over to drill into the ground; Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*) a characteristic annual of calcareous areas of coastal West Somerset; and White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*). All these are nationally Scarce, and the latter was a new population for this county Rare Plants Register species. A splendidly handsome alien Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*) is abundant here and the huge white-edged prickly rosettes made an excellent show round the stony outcrops. contrasting with tiny ephemeral species such as Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*). Various small medick and clover species, including Slender Trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*), had everyone on their knees experiencing the demands of 'grovel turf', and an unexpected treat was finding White Bryony (*Bryonia dioica*) already in flower.



Searching the limestone grassland at Cannington Park for Spring ephemerals such as Subterranean Clover © Margaret Earle

The woodland in the afternoon produced pretty Early Purple Orchids and Bluebells, with abundant Greater Chickweed (*Stellaria neglecta*). This is a characteristic plant of hedgebanks and in dappled shade in the area, and it was useful to be able to compare it with Common Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) as it has a very distinct 'jizz' once seen, as well as sound diagnostic characters such as the very large seeds.

Areas surrounding the working quarry, at the end of the circular walk, were found to be quite degraded, but the group bravely kept up the challenge of 'filling the card', and were rewarded with several populations of Wild Clary (*Salvia ver-*

benaca) - another Somerset Rare Plant Register species. We found several fumitories for keen sepal comparisons, and counting up the huge immature plants of 'the wierdo', a large leafy rosette. This is almost certainly Great Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*), well known in Bristol, but quite unfamiliar to us in VC5, presumably carried to the quarry by lorry traffic.

This meeting certainly made a serious and valuable contribution to Somerset recording, and both of us leaders are delighted and grateful for this, but most of all for the excellent company and generous sharing of knowledge and ideas which made the day such a pleasure.

Blackdown Hills (VC 5)

Saturday 23rd May 2015

Leaders: Conrad Barrowclough & Simon Leach

Report: Simon Leach

This was the first of two 'meet-and-scatter' meetings in 2015 to explore various sites/monads in the Blackdown Hills. On a grey morning, eleven members gathered at Staple Hill car park, where we split into four groups and then set off for our allotted monads. It cleared to a warm, sunny afternoon – perfect weather for recording. The day involved visits to four county wildlife sites across six under-recorded squares: Widcombe Moor (ST2016 and ST2116); parts of Priors Park/Hawk's Moor (ST2216); Devil Pits Wood (ST2317); and Staple Common/Ruttersleigh (ST2615 and ST2616). Our aim was to produce full species lists, with GPS location and population details for any 'Rare Plant Register' species encountered – including any taxa assigned Near Threatened (NT) or threatened (VU or worse) status in the England Red List, published in 2014.

At Widcombe Moor, 13 Red-listed taxa were found, including the day's only populations of several oligotrophic mire/wet heath species known to have highly localised distributions in VC5, e.g. Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) [NT], Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) [VU], Bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*) [NT] and Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) [NT]. For Bog-myrtle these monads are two of only four in which it has been recorded since the turn of the century, the other squares being some

way to the west, at Haddon Hill (SS9528 and SS9628).



Common Sundew at Widcombe Moor © Helena Crouch

ST2216, including parts of Prior's Park and Hawk's Moor, held a range of habitats including wet woodland, conifer plantations, heathland, stream banks and seepages/flushes. A total of 10 Red-listed species were found here, including the day's sole record of Quaking Grass (*Briza media*) [NT] – which occurred on road verges close to the cross-roads in the SE corner of the square – and one of only two records of Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*) [NT].

A visit by Conrad to Devil Pits Wood at the end of April had turned up a large patch of Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*), but it couldn't be found today. Underlying soils hereabouts are evidently more calcareous than at the other sites visited, and this was reflected in some of the species found, including the day's only Traveller's-joy (*Clematis vitalba*) and Cowslip (*Primula veris*). As elsewhere, the woodland ground-flora here included plenty of Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*) [NT].

Back on (often wet) infertile and more acidic soils, Staple Common/Ruttersleigh had good numbers of Red-listed taxa, with 12 in all, including the day's sole occurrences of Ragged-Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*) [NT], Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*) [NT] and Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*) [NT]. There were also some large colonies of Wood Horsetail (*Equisetum sylvaticum*) amongst 'flush-mire' species such as Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*) and Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*).

We did well. In less than six hours, we recorded 326 species, of which 20 are listed as NT or VU in the England Red List. Interestingly, all of these 20 are currently assessed at GB level as being of 'Least Concern', i.e. not threatened – which serves to emphasise the severity of their declines in England in comparison with their relative stability across the rest of Britain. Even today, we consider many of these species to be commonplace and un-noteworthy. To take three examples from our day in the Blackdown Hills: who, before the England Red List, would have paid much attention to the likes of Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) or Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*)? Certainly, these species wouldn't have had us fumbling excitedly for our GPS machines! And yet, since they tend to be found in habitats known to have suffered massive declines in recent decades, it really shouldn't come as a huge surprise to find them featured in the England Red List. Given the extent of their losses across many parts of England, it is heartening to know that the Blackdown Hills remain an important stronghold for so many of these widespread yet declining species.

**Leigh Woods (acid end), Bristol (VC6)
Thursday 28th May – evening meeting
Leaders: Clive Lovatt & Liz McDonnell
Report: Clive Lovatt**

A group of about a dozen members of Bristol Naturalists' Society and SRPG (including one faithful member who had driven all the way from Exmoor) met at the Forestry Commission car park at 7 pm to look at some less-often visited parts of Leigh Woods. Because the main gate reportedly is closed at 9 pm we couldn't go far. First we went south to see *Sorbus x thuringiaca*, the solitary wild specimen in Leigh Woods of the hybrid between Common Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), in a small patch of Bluebells on the Red Trail. Both parents occur here as fairly isolated specimens. It has intermediate leaves with several quite characteristic and definitive basal pairs of leaflets. There is a herbarium specimen dated 1842. I was shown it here by Mr Nethercott in 1977 and it has been remarkably difficult to re-find ever since. J W White himself in 1912 described it as "strangely

elusive" whereas Swete in 1854 reckoned '*pinnatifida*' was frequent. It flowered well in 2002 and fruited copiously in 2004, the red fruits normally containing just one seed. The tree doesn't look that old, even allowing for it having two stems so the suggestion that it may have been there all along was considered unlikely.



A small shoot and leaves of *Sorbus x thuringiaca* growing from the base of the solitary tree © Graham Lavender

We then went back to the car park (through lime coppice) and off to what had been an oak coppice on slightly acid soil. Notionally Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), some members thought the leaves displayed hybridity. Pill Sedge (*Carex pilulifera*) is quite frequent here where there are grassy areas, or around stumps. We found Pale Sedge (*Carex pallescens*) in two places, and Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) with its comb-like fertile fronds was easily discovered. Tormentil, (*Potentilla erecta*) was seen in a couple of places and here (unlike on the Downs) it was indeed standing up. This contrasted nicely with a creeping *Potentilla* which I had found a month or two ago. White had recorded, Trailing Tormentil (*P. anglica*) in Leigh Woods more than a century ago but there has been no subsequent record. Whether what we now have is this species or ei-

ther of two hybrids of a similar appearance will only be discovered from whether it forms seed. We may have to wait as there looked as if there was only one flower.

Five St John's Worts (*Hypericum*) were seen – Hairy, Perforate, Square-stalked, Slender, and Tutsan. Were these the five species White remarked on after part of the wood was coppiced? We didn't find Trailing St John's-wort (*Hypericum humifusum*), as it now looks far too shady, nor Heath Wood-rush (*Luzula multiflora*), which has been not infrequently reported in Leigh Woods – something else that is proving elusive.

Hardington Moor NNR & West Coker Village (VC5)

Saturday 30th May 2015

Leader & report: Steve Parker

The morning of the meeting was spent recording Hardington Moor NNR. This small site comprises a remnant of species rich hay meadow, once common throughout lowland England. Four SRPG members were joined by the 14 members of the local branch of the Somerset Wildlife Trust. After an initial talk by Natural England voluntary warden, I lead the Wildlife group on a site tour while three SRPG members took charge of the recording form. This is a well recorded site, especially well known for its fine display of orchids such as Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*) which were particularly common in the lower of the three fields. Other neutral grassland species included Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*) and Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*). The whole group sat down to enjoy a picnic on a sunny bank overlooking part of this wonderful little nature reserve

After lunch the SWT group departed leaving the SRPG members to do some 'square bashing' around West Coker, an under-recorded monad. A small remnant of unimproved grassland provided some most of the native species recorded in the area, including Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) and Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*). The village churchyard, walls and street weeds produced a reasonably diverse list of 163 species. With the native Rustyback (*Ceterach officinarum*) and Maidenhair Splenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *quadriva-*

lens) on the older walls together with the non-native Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*), Adria Bellflower (*Campanula portenschlagiana*) and Trailing Bellflower (*Campanula poscharskyana*). As always the churchyard was one of the more interesting areas of the town. It was nice to see that the local community had built a large bug hotel in the churchyard.



Green-winged Orchids in the species-rich grassland of Hardington Moor NNR © Graham Lavender

Holme and Clean Moors SSSI (VC5)

Wednesday 10th & 11th June 2015

Leader & report: Steve Parker

A small group of SRPG members spent two days on the private SSSI assisting Natural England staff with an assessment of the site condition of this small but very important SSSI and Special Area of conservation. **Holme Moor** has been visited by SRPG members in 2010 and 2014. Considerable conservation work has been carried out to reduce the Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) scrub. Great Fen-sedge (*Cladium mariscus*) appears to be expanding and now dominates much of the open habitat on the site. There are still small populations of Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermis-*

sa) and possible orchid hybrids. Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) and Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) can still be found, however a number of species listed on the SSSI citation seem to have been lost in recent years. More monitoring is required to see if the recent conservation efforts have helped in the restoration of this important little site.

Clean Moor –the first part of this site visit was to an ex-arable field that had been in a restoration scheme for nearly ten years. Many of these restorations schemes seem to result in a species poor grassland of very little interest to the botanist. Here however we were very pleasantly surprised with the diversity of plants found in this field, the standout plant was Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) which was so frequent it created a pink haze over large patches of the field.



Broad-leaved Cotton-grass at Clean Moor ©Ian Salmon

This SSSI part of the site is an exceptionally rich rare type of mire with many uncommon species including Black bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Broad leaved Cottongrass (*Eriophorum latifolium*) and Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*). The site was last visited by SRPG members in June 2010, it appears to have changed very little in the intervening five years. Species list from 2010 and 2015 were very similar, however Pale Butterwort

(*Pinguicula lusitanica*) was not seen on this visit, the site looked in need of cutting or grazing management and there are worrying signs of scrub gradually closing in around the edges of the site. The most significant find was Narrow-leaved Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza traunsteineriodes*), eight plants were located in the mire, and this species was confirmed by Dr Ian Denholm from photographs taken Graham Lavender. This is new VC5 record and only the second site in Somerset. Further visits are planned for 2016 to collect specimens for a full determination.

Bickham Wood (VC5 & VC9)

13th June 2015

Leaders: Robin Walls & Steve Parker

Report: Steve Parker

This was a joint meeting with the Dorset Flora Group, with Robin Wall the BSBI recorder for VC9 Dorset leading the walk. The borders of the county are under-recorded and although this meeting at Bickham Wood is in Somerset, it is in VC9 (Dorset). After a few brief introduction to the wood we set off in to the wood to search for Beech Fern (*Phegopteris connectilis*), which was last recorded in May 1989 by Ian Green. I had visited a few times but failed to find this uncommon fern. The woodland is very overgrown and extremely wet in parts making access and movement through the site very difficult. Nine botanists searched forlornly for over an hour in the location given by Ian Green in 1989. Possibly the Beech Fern is still present in the woodland but we suspect that the conditions in the woodland may have changed so much and the fern is now lost!

In the afternoon the group divided in to two parties to undertake general recording. The Dorset group headed for the small meadow area managed by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. This meadow are a nice example of a wet grassland with Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), Lesser spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) and Common fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*). The Dorset botanists also searched the area known as Lower Allotments Plantation, here they recorded Pill sedge (*Carex pilulifera*), Carnation sedge (*Carex panicea*) and marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*). Meanwhile the Somerset contingent plunged in to the wet woodland. This was

an amazing woodland with many fern species including Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), and Broad Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*). Large patches of Giant Horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*) dominated the wetter area and in a few places we saw the very beautiful Wood Horsetail (*Equisetum sylvaticum*). The walking here was extremely hard going, standing still often resulted in sinking up to the knees in the wet mud. Smooth-stalked sedge (*Carex laevigata*) was found both in the woodland and the neighbouring grassland. At the end of the meeting Robin produced a large specimen of a *Dryopteris affinis*, this was keyed out using the British Pteridological Society "Dryopteris affinis Complex A Field Key" and was determined to be *Dryopteris cambrensis*. This was a really good meeting it was a pleasure to meet fellow enthusiastic botanist from Dorset but very sad we didn't find Beech Fern, our target species for the day.



Dryopteris cambrensis at Bickham Wood © Ian Salmon

East Dundry slopes, Bristol (VC6)

Sunday 21st June 2015

Leaders: Mary Wood & Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

East Dundry Slopes is a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) on the south edge of Bristol with a variety of habitats, including woodland, scrub and abandoned pasture. This was a joint meeting with Bristol Naturalists' Society and on a fine summer's day, eight members of both societies met at the edge of the Hartcliffe residential area to walk into the site. Mary Wood (main leader) knows this site exceptionally well, having drawn up a management plan for the area. We

were also honoured to have the company of two members of the Friends of Dundry Slopes, who guided us all day and were keen to discuss management issues for the site.

We spent the morning exploring the interlinked fields at the west end of the site. These are sadly not grazed and now support a tall herb community with thistles making access difficult; however the paths cut through them show the potential for restoration. In one meadow we found Pepper Saxifrage (*Silaum silaus*) on the path. To illustrate the benefit of regular grazing/cutting, we left the SNCI to look at an adjacent field which is farmed: the difference in species diversity was immediately apparent.

We had lunch in one of the richest areas, amongst Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*). Large patches of brambles had been cut here, but the regrowth illustrated again just how difficult it is to manage grassland without livestock. After lunch, we headed east, passing a tree which confused many of us. It is a large specimen of the unusual One-leaved Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior* 'Diversifolia'); its origin is a mystery, but it was presumably planted. In a hidden area, we were delighted to find Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*), Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*). Again, management of this area was discussed as the floristic interest of the grassland is in danger of being lost.

Several streams run down the hillside, in small ravines. We were interested to see the tufa deposits in one stream, leaves and twigs appearing petrified by the deposition of calcium carbonate on their surfaces. A large patch of Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), Ragged-Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*) and Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) were found beside streams. We puzzled over a mystery willow by the footpath, later identified as Broad-leaved Osier (*Salix x smithiana*), the hybrid between Osier (*S. viminalis*) and Goat Willow (*S. caprea*).

We returned through further meadow areas in the adjacent monad, finding Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*) and Zig-zag Clover (*Trifolium medium*), and more Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*). This all-day meeting was a useful in-

roduction to one of Bristol's many Sites of Nature Conservation Interest; it was also an interesting insight into the difficulties of managing grassland without livestock.

Winscombe & Sandford (VC6)

Sunday 28th June 2015

Leaders: Liz McDonnell & Ro FitzGerald

Report: Liz McDonnell, Ro FitzGerald & Graham Lavender

The purpose of this meeting was to separate into smaller groups to record in under-recorded or unrecorded monads. We met in the car park at Winscombe and separated into three groups. Ro FitzGerald, Pam Millman & Christine Loudon took on two easy-access monads at Sandford Batch and towards Banwell. They recorded road verges and pavements, on the old Strawberry Special disused railway track, in allotments, fields and footpaths. They recorded Garden Solomon's-seal (*Polygonatum x hybridum*) and Perennial Cornflower (*Centaurea montana*), both which appeared to be long established in a hedgebank. Cut-leaved Dead-nettle (*Lamium hybridum*) was found at the edge of the Cemetery allotments. This is an uncommon plant in Somerset, with a very scattered distribution and this record was the first for ST45.

Ian Salmon and Graham Lavender had a short journey of 2 miles to Brinsea which promised two totally unrecorded monads, with a couple of arable fields and a golf course. They started with what proved to be the best habitat of the day, the hedgerows and relatively small but overgrown verges. Nothing exceptional was recorded, but they did boost the numbers and led to the golf club for which they had high hopes, with memories of the rich habitats of Berrow golf course, but this was no Berrow. The rough was not much longer than the greens and was species-poor, most trees were planted and could not be recorded and the boundaries produced nothing we hadn't seen on the roadside. The Greenkeeper found us wandering and was most happy to direct us, I think he even offered a lift on his motorised buggy but we just are not good enough to record at speed. With a little more direction we found the ponds which gave us most of our records for the golf course. One was infested with New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) but

the others seemed to be clear. It is hoped that this does not escape into the surrounding ditches of Congresbury Moor. Four willows, four rushes, Water plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) and Galingale (*Cyperus longus*) boosted the numbers together with the usual marginals. There was much discussion on what could be recorded and most were rejected as probably planted but we did find Russian Vine (*Fallopia baldschuanica*) which we decided was well naturalized. Ian also pointed out False acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) which seemed to have suckered into a ditch as indeed had Variegated Poplar (*Populus x jackii* cultivar *aurora*). In all we recorded 153 in first monad and 109 in second, a very pleasant day's recording.

Ellen McDouall, Margaret Webster and Liz parked at Sandford and after recording in the churchyard, walked along Sandmead road and along the green lane of Common Lane. Most of the species encountered during the day by each group were common and unremarkable, but there were few post-2000 records for this area, as most of the recording here was done in 1980s for the Avon Flora Project, the results of which were published in 'Flora of the Bristol Region' (2000) by Green, Higgins, Kitchen & Kitchen. At the end of the day, we met up in the Woodborough Arms for a cup of tea and a chat. We had recorded in 6 monads and made over 880 records between us.

Quantock mires (VC5)

Friday 3rd & Saturday 4th July 2015

Leader: Steve Parker

Report: Steve Parker & Ro FitzGerald



Steve Parker and horses at Wilmots Pool ©Ro FitzGerald

The aim of this two day meeting was record the plants of The Quantocks SSSI. On the first day we gathered together at the northern end of the Quantocks. Dividing in to two groups on party headed up on to the heathland. As we walked we recorded the typical plants of the heathland including Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Western Gorse (*Ulex galli*) and Bristle Bent (*Agrostis curtisii*). The parasitic threads of the Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*) were seen scabbling over heather and gorse.

However the main target for the meeting was the mire communities, which are a notified feature of



Simon Leach with *Dryopteris affinis* © Ro FitzGerald

the Quantock SSSI. We found Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) in great sheets, with Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and tufts of Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) and the delicate Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*) in the wettest parts of the mires. Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) and Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) were found growing around the edge of the mires. Another target for the day was to locate Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*), I am pleased to say that we came across this small plant many

times, thus greatly updating its recorded distribution. It was good to see that the ongoing removal of Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) was having a very positive effect, but there was still much to do as seedling plants were scattered across some parts of the site.

Day two was the southern end of the site and again we divided in to two groups. Botanising on the Quantocks, during a spell of very hot, dry weather, does highlight the best and worst elements of their habitats. Much of the high ground, above the tree line, is very exposed, hard grazed by deer and the commoners' sheep and ponies. Although the main ridge often catches cloud and precipitation, so there is more moisture available to plants than the rarity of the few mires and the one pond (Wilmot's Pool) might suggest, the heath areas and well-worn tracks can get extremely parched. The rock is Old Red Sandstone, almost the lowest-of-the-low for nutrients, so substrates are extremely poor, the thin peaty layers just adding to the general acidity. Typical vegetation is based on a few common ericaceous species, Western Gorse (*Ulex gallii*), and the very abundant Bristle Bent (*Agrostis curtisii*). As this group found in the hot afternoon sun, the effort of recording a grudging list from the unrelentingly poor selection could be quite trying! Even Wilmot's Pool, which is believed to have featured in a Wordsworth poem, and which we all imagined as cool and attractive, turned out to be a large grey puddle, trampled by the thirsty commoners' ponies and almost without plants, let alone any exciting aquatics.

However, we were sustained by having enjoyed a morning in the best of Quantock habitats. The upper end of Ram's Coombe, near Crowcombe Gate, has interlinked small mires which run down into a really damp wooded defile in the lower part of the coombe. Although the target plant of the two-day meeting was Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*), it was only showing tiny 'pennies' in this location (though abundant in other search areas). We found plenty of species which have restricted local distribution, and the narrow sloping mires with their lines of shiny Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*), bright yellow spikes of Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), and their sound of gently trickling water, were delightful to squelch about in.

Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*) was abundant, nearly showing its small pink flowers. The clear pale blue of Creeping Forget-me-not (*Myosotis secunda*) and patches of pale pink Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) gave very pretty effects. Plants which are uncommon on the Quantocks, though much more abundant on the Blackdowns and Exmoor, such as Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) and Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), were found in small quantity, adding to the value of this restricted local habitat.

Down closer to the woodland in the main part of Ram's Coombe there were much wetter areas, dominated by Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) and Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*). During the morning two batracian *Ranunculus* species were found, one of them in this very boggy area, and it was pleasing when the group could rejoin their books at the end of the day to confirm that both Ivy-leaved Crowfoot (*R. hederaceus*), typical of puddled tracks and muddy ditches, and Round-leaved Crowfoot (*R. omiophyllus*) which is characteristic of acid moorland pools and mires, had been found. This sheltered and shaded part of the coombe also had quite magnificent displays of ferns, including some very grand clumps of Scaly Male-fern (*Dryopteris affinis*), though no unusual variants were found.

An odd, and possibly unwelcome additional find, on the main woodland track, was a hectad 'smartie' – New Zealand Willowherb (*Epilobium brunnescens*), whose tiny alien feet have crept over much of Britain since being first recorded in 1908. Known in the Quantocks since 1956, it was still given the status of 'rare alien' in the Somerset *Atlas* (1997), but is obviously still spreading.

Meeting back at the end of the day there was an excellent and well deserved cup of tea and cake. A really great find of the day was Hay-scented Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris aemula*), the first record from the Quantocks since the 1997 *Atlas*. This was a really good meeting producing a great number of detailed records all of which can be used by Natural England in assessing the condition of the SSSI and helping with the planning of ongoing conservation of this important Somerset landscape.

Stear Marshes (VC5)

Saturday 11th July 2015

Leaders: Steve Parker & Simon Leach

Report: Simon Leach

A joint meeting with SANHS to investigate ST2544, the 1km square around the main Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust car park at Steart Marshes. For some of us, this was our first visit to the extensive new area of grazing marsh, salt-marsh and mudflats/lagoons created on former agricultural land on the Steart peninsula.

In true botanical fashion, it took us ages to even get out of the car park. The grass verges and boundary banks had been seeded with a wonderfully out-of-place mixture of colourful but unfamiliar aliens. Should we record these imposters, or ignore them? Record them, we decided – but with the records flagged up in the database as 'deliberate introductions'. Well, that's easy enough with neophytes such as Austrian Chamomile (*Anthemis austriaca*), Yellow Chamomile (*A. tinctoria*), Bristly Hawk's-beard (*Crepis setosa*) and Fodder Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *balearicum*). But what about archaeophytes like Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) [Vulnerable in England], Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*) [Vulnerable in GB and England] and Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*)? These too could well have arrived in the same 'wild flower' seed mix; yet it's also quite likely that Henbane, at least, may have come in under its own steam, since there are a number of old records of this species from the coastline between the Parrett estuary and Stolford. There was also Kidney-vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), a colourful native but undoubtedly a component of the same mix. Yet anyone finding it here in a few years' time, once the grassland has 'matured' and become more natural-looking, could be easily misled into thinking it must be a long-established native.

The native-alien conundrum continued once we had crossed the road into the 'marshes' proper. Here we were immediately confronted by a small patch of a strange flat-leaved rush (*Juncus*). This was later sent to Kew for determination and the surprising result was a North American species Many-headed Rush (*Juncus polycephalus*) not recorded in Somerset, or indeed in Britain or Ireland! We assume this was planted in error during the wetland re-creation project.



The flat-leaved Many-headed Rush *Juncus polycephalus* at the edge of a new pond © Liz McDonnell

A little further on and we found another rush, Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*) – a native species, yes, and certainly not out of place here. But this is only the second record for it in VC5, and one can't help wondering whether it was brought in – maybe inadvertently – with wetland plants trucked over from East Anglia to 'speed up' colonisation of the site.

It was surprising to learn that ditches and pools well vegetated with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Grey Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*), and already looking convincingly 'natural', were actually planted with these species within the last 18 months. Yet it's quite likely that, in time, they will be augmented by plants of the same species of local origin, at which point any attempt to determine what's native and what's not will be well nigh impossible. So, while at one level the results of all this planting are pretty impressive, we were left scratching our heads about quite a few of the plants we saw. Mare's-tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*) and Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), for example, we

recorded here at their first localities in ST24: native or not native? We'll probably never know. Close to the Mendip Hide we located path-side plants of Hairy Buttercup (*Ranunculus sardous*), a typical 'grazing marsh' species which is decidedly scarce in Somerset – this was a new tetrad record as well. Late in the day we also stumbled upon two of the special grasses to be found in this sort of habitat – Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) [Nationally Scarce and Vulnerable] and Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*) [Nationally Scarce]. Our lunch break was taken in the Mendip Hide, after which we examined areas of mudflat and saltmarsh in front of the hide. Not many plants of interest, but the open mud had some wonderfully intricate networks of desiccation cracks. Some of us got a bit carried away by these extraordinary 'cracksapes'... (Thank goodness for digital cameras.)

In all we saw well over 200 plant species, a decent total for a single visit to a 1km square. We also had some interesting non-botanical finds. On track-side thistles, we saw caterpillars of the Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) – a migrant butterfly from S. Europe. Roadside Black Poplars (*Populus nigra* subsp. *betulifolia*) at Marsh Farm had 'pouch' or 'spiral' aphid galls caused by three *Pemphigus* species, plus distorted and rolled leaves caused by a fourth aphid species, *Thecabius affinis*. But perhaps the most exciting non-botanical find of the day was another gall, on Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*), caused by the gall midge *Gymnetron villosulum*. It was remarkably abundant and easily spotted, even from a distance, by the speedwell's distinctly swollen ovaries – like miniature water melons. The first record of this nationally scarce gall midge in VC5, and only the second for the county as a whole!

Watchet (VC5)

Saturday 18th July 2015

Leaders: Jeanne Webb & Steve Parker

Report: Jeanne Webb

SRPG members travelled to Watchet on a steam train of the West Somerset Railway. Hot and sunny weather ensured a pleasant walk along the Mineral Line to Cleeve Hill SSSI for eight members and visitors, making records as we went

with some aliens to start the card off. The large field alongside Tucks Brake was parched and brown so many of the expected limestone plants had already shrivelled. Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*) was one of the plants which we intended to monitor but it was absent where it had been previously recorded. Nit-grass (*Gastridium ventricosum*) was eventually discovered in its usual place among the short grass on the dry slope. It was very short in height and the fruits (nits) were ripe for dispersal. Also found were two species of Centaurea – Common Century (*C. erythraea*) and Lesser Century (*C. pulchellum*) but a notable absence was Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) which had flowered and seeded months earlier than usual. Plenty of Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*) was scattered around the slopes as well as Dwarf Thistle (*Cirsium acule*) and Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) with its outer florets enlarged into a whorl as all the knapweeds in this area seem to display.



The serious business of searching for plants and then photographing them © Steve Parker

We moved on, passing hundreds of healthy Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) on a grassy bank, arriving at the lower clearing in the woodland where historical ploughing had left deep ridges making an interesting habitat. Here Dodder was spectacularly in flower with sheets of it crossing and re-crossing the ridges. I had found the Dodder a few weeks previously but not actually in flower so the display was well-timed for our meeting.

A further walk through the rough woodland brought us to the site of Rough Mallow (*Althaea hirsuta* but now renamed *Malva setigera*). We have been monitoring this plant since 1996 and

improving the habitat with cutting back scrub and raking but this was the first year it had not thrived having succumbed early to the exceptional drought. The end of season count actually came to 23 plants whereas 2014 was 400+ plants. (Later visits by me in the autumn after rain found hundreds of seedlings had appeared, hopefully assuring a good number for next year). Plenty of time was left for the 2km walk back to Watchet to catch the train back to Bishop's Lydeard.

Ilminster—urban botany (VC5)

Saturday 25th July 2015

Leader & report: Steve Parker

This meeting started off in the outskirts of Ilminster town searching the walls for Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*). This we found but there were only three plants which were growing on the old wall opposite a large hotel. From here we walked quickly (well, as quickly as a botanist can) to search a very unlikely location— the drains of a housing estate! In 1999 Ian Green had found the Maidenhair Fern “growing in a storm drain in Blackdown View”. For twenty minutes or so we looked down and indeed lifted as many drain covers we could find. Regrettably we were unable to re-find the plant but at least the local residents didn't call the police to tell them about the strange people in the street!

From the housing estate we headed away from the town, moving in to the countryside to do some square bashing along footpaths, arable fields and waste ground. Lunch was taken sitting on the banks of the River Isle. This river meanders naturally through a series of small fields, some grazed by cattle, while others appear to have received no recent farming management. In the muddy margins of the river Square-stalked St John's-wort (*Hypericum tetrapterum*) and Tufted Forget-me-not (*Myosotis laxa*) were growing side by side with the less welcome Indian Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*). Spiked Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) was plentiful in the river possibly suggesting the high nutrient level of the river water. The group made its way back to the town via an old industrial site that is probably due for redevelopment in the near future. A total of 326 records were entered on to MapMate as a result of the days recording effort.

Willowherb Workshop

Sunday 2nd August 2015

Leaders: Helena Crouch & Liz McDonnell

Report: Liz McDonnell

19 members met on a fine sunny day at the Avalon Marshes Centre for a much-needed *Epilobium* workshop. Many of us had been turning a blind-eye to this genus that had a reputation for being difficult, not least because of the bewildering number of hybrids that can occur between many of the species. Helena and I went out the previous day to some Mendip quarry sites collect as many species as possible, and Graham Lavender responded at short notice to get a sample of Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*) from Exmoor. We laid out a wide variety of Willowherbs on the table in the classroom, most of them named and labelled. Helena gave us a good introduction to the genus, pointing out the main identifying features and some tips on recognizing some of the common hybrids most likely to be found in our area. The message of the day was that the relatively small number of true species of *Epilobium* are not too difficult to separate from each other and the importance of looking at all the characters, including seed viability. Members had the opportunity of using keys and identification guides and illustrations and we made good use of the dissecting microscope that John Gibson gave to the group before he died. At lunchtime, we sat in the sun and tried to identify



Dee Holladay, Helena Crouch & Linda Everton using the microscopes to help with identification ©Steve Parker

all the species found in the car park. We found Square-stalked (*E. tetragonum*), Broad-leaved (*E.*

montanum), Hoary (*E. parviflorum*) and American (*E. ciliatum*). Margaret Webster brought in from her garden the two introduced creeping varieties - New Zealand Willowherb (*E. brunnescens*) and Rockery Willowherb (*E. pedunculare*).

Several members obviously felt more confident at naming specimens after the workshop, as the number of *Epilobium* records in Somerset increased dramatically in the last few recording months of the year.

Wellington (VC5)

Sunday 9th August 2015

Leader & report: Steve Parker

For a few years now I have spent one day in August on an alien hunt around the town of Wellington, this year I invited SRPG and Wild Flower Society join me. The area is very well recorded, many of the plants are the familiar non-native plants typical of most Somerset towns, with Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*) and Adria Bellflower (*Campanula portenschlagiana*) found on many of the older walls. Small areas of waste ground are quickly covered by annual weeds such as Sun Spurge (*Euphorbia helioscopia*). Street and pavement weeds are always exciting, it is not uncommon to find the odd Petunia seedling or hanging basket escapee, such as Bacopa (*Sutera cordata*) which was found in the main shopping area of the town. This year I didn't add to the long list of aliens in the town but did find a few plants for Wild Flower Society diaries.

Larkbarrow area, Exmoor (VC5)

Wednesday 12th August 2015

Leader & report: Graham Lavender

The recently published "A Vascular Plant Red list for England" by P A Stroh et al. identified the loss of lowland heathland, unimproved grassland and lowland bogs as one of the main reasons for significant decline of some taxa and inclusion in register as Near Threatened. For what was to be my first meeting as organiser, I was drawn to Exmoor and its relative abundance of a number of Near Threatened species. I was concerned that this approach might result in poorly attended meeting but on the day ten SRPG members including a new member Lorne Thomson, all the

way from Yeovil, for what was a perfect summer's day on the Moors. Given the numbers, Liz took one group off towards Ram's Combe to re-find Beech Fern (*Phegopteris connectilis*) and Helena, Ian, Tim and I headed towards the Larkbarrow ruins to record two monads. Habitat included Molinia grassland, tracks, walls, streams and accompanying mires that converged at our final destination of Three Foots Combe. Although the first section seemed to be unremitting Purple Moor-grass, Helena showed us Lemon-scented fern (*Oreopteris limbosperma*) almost invisible at first glance growing in deep narrow gully's that surface water had eroded but obscured by Bracken and Molinia. Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) was frequent along the track, out first Near Threatened plant from The Red List, as was Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*). Another Near Threatened plant, Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*) was common as soon as we met damp moor. It was hard to believe that outside of Exmoor this is a rare plant and close to extinction in VC6 given the abundance of the beautiful blue flower. Following a combe with small stream at its centre and damp mire/bog either side we found abundant Alternate Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum alterniflorum*) which is on The Somerset Red List although not the English Red List. Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*) grew on some disturbed ground just above the stream. This is now rated as "vulnerable" in the English Red list and possibly our best find of the day. We followed the stream and found numerous Greater Tussock-sedges (*Carex paniculata*) growing on rocks in the stream and stream side. On sheep grazed grass, an Eyebright was keyed out by Helena to *E. anglica*. Other Red list plants included Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) which is just on the Somerset Red List and Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) which is now rated as vulnerable on the English Red list due to a greater than 30% decline in range and numbers. Liz's group eventually located the Beech Fern from GPS readings, but found that the site was difficult to re-find, as a large Sallow tree had fallen across the stream, partially hiding the damp bank where the fern has been known for at least 28 years. 70 fronds were counted on this occasion, many less than the 'hundreds' recorded in 2009. Liz's group struggled up the steep slopes to find a small area



Beech Fern in Rams Combe, where about 70 fronds were counted on a steep stream side bank © Liz McDonnell

of species-rich grassland with Spring Sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*), Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) and Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*) before wading through wet, waist-high Molinia back to the path back to the cars. In total, we recorded in 4 monads and had over 80 species in each of them, with a relatively high percentage of them being of conservation concern, primarily through habitat loss.

Portishead Down & Weston Big Wood (VC6)

Sunday 16th August 2015

Leaders & report: Liz McDonnell & Clive Lovatt

This was a joint meeting with Bristol Naturalists' Society and 12 members and friends of both societies met on Valley Road to record on roadsides, ancient woodland and species-rich grassland. During the day we added many records to the two monads that we covered during the walk.

In the disturbed verges by Black Rock quarry we found Narrow-leaved Everlasting Pea (*Lathyrus sylvestris*), Water Bent - or as we know it, Teddybear Grass - (*Polypogon viridis*), Ploughman's Spikenard (*Inula conyzae*) and 20+ plants of Pale St John's-wort (*Hypericum montanum*). This has a GB Red List category of Near Threatened and has not been recorded at this location before, so was a good find. We noted that the well-known road verge population of Purple Gromwell (*Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum*) was doing

well, currently 24 m in length and that the lower part of the dense mat had been trimmed by the local authority. The current season's grey fruits were developing, but a few hard white shining seeds from last year were still visible on some of the old shoots. In the wood above we later found about a dozen saplings of Wild Service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*), some no more than a foot high but assuredly older than they looked. We could not locate a mature tree though.

Weston Big Wood is a large ancient woodland managed by the Avon Wildlife Trust. It is dominated by Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*) and has a rich ground flora. We climbed the steps to the top and made our way along the circular path to the north-east. Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*) was recorded in two places, one patch having at least 100 plants, a few with a large single black fruit in the centre of the four or five large leaves. A group photo was taken by a splendid fungus on a decaying tree trunk, which Margarete Earle identified as Chicken of the Woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*).



SRPG & BNS members admiring the magnificent Chicken-of-the-Woods bracket fungus in Weston Big Wood © Liz McDonnell

We had lunch on the south-facing species-rich slopes of Portishead Down which had species such as Salad Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba*), Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), Woolly thistle (*Cirsium eriophorum*), Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*) and Burnet Saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*). We made our way back to the woodland through a sloping damp tall-herb-dominated field into which scrub was spreading from the surrounding

woodland and hedgerows. A small flush was well trampled by cattle and species including Bog Stitchwort (*Stellaria alsine*) and Small Sweet-grass (*Glyceria declinata*). Back in Weston Big wood we found a few spikes of Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) by the path, the flowers on two of them being more of a purple colour than the usual pink.

We walked the southern half of the circular woodland path through an open clearing, mostly dominated by brambles, but with interesting grassland species beside the path such as Wild Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*) Wild Basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*) and Zig-zag Clover (*Trifolium medium*). Back in the wood, a new member called back Libby saying he had seen a whitebeam by the path in dense shade with large round leaves. After some reflection it was confirmed as Round-leaved Whitebeam (*Sorbus emiens*). This proved to be the tree (now a coppice with a number of slender twisted stems) noted as known to Steve Parker for some years in his report of the SRPG meeting to this site in May 2002.

Glastonbury (VC6)

Sunday 23 August 2015

Leaders: Ellen McDouall & Helena Crouch

Report: Helena Crouch

The weather forecast for this meeting was so appalling that several members were put off attending; however nine members and three guests turned up and the forecast was wrong, for it stopped raining at noon. By kind permission of Wessex Water, we met at the Sewage Treatment Works (STW), assembling in the comfort of the staff common room, and spent the morning exploring the grounds, recording 123 species. Inevitably we found Tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*) in several places, but two plants of Cape-gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana*) were more unusual, growing in a skip! This was only the second recent record for VC6, the other being near Saltford STW. Several clumps of Annual Beard-grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*) were found in open gravelly areas. This species is not native in Somerset, but has been known at Glastonbury since 1970, almost certainly arriving as a wool alien (at the adjacent former sheepskin factory).

Inspired by our recent workshop, records were confidently made for five willowherbs: American (*Epilobium ciliatum*), Great (*E. hirsutum*), Short-fruited (*E. obscurum*), Hoary (*E. parviflorum*) and Square-stalked (*E. tetragonum*). The site also presented a great opportunity to become familiar with four goosefoots as we found Fat-hen (*Chenopodium album*), Fig-leaved Goosefoot (*C. ficifolium*), Red Goosefoot (*C. rubrum*) and Many-seeded Goosefoot (*C. polyspermum*). We also had a mini-masterclass on distinguishing the two species of Swinecress (*Lepidium coronopus* and *L. didymum*). Perhaps our best records were for two native species. On bare ground we found eleven rosettes of Bugloss (*Anchusa arvensis*), which updated an Atlas Flora of Somerset record and is the first inland record for VC6 since publication of the flora. On the edge of a kerb we found Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium pu-*



A very wet morning at Glastonbury Sewage Works—not everybody's idea of fun, but it was a botanically rich site. ©Graham Lavender

sillum), which was the first record for this hectad since before 1969! This species is distinguished from *G. molle* by its downy fruits and five of the ten stamens lacking anthers.

After lunch we split into two groups to venture beyond the STW and explore two monads with no recent records: one rural and one suburban. The rural group made 162 records. Ditch species included Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*), Curled Pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*), four species of Duckweed (*Lemna minor*, *L. trisulca*, *L. gibba* and *Spirodela polyrhiza*) and Various-leaved Water-starwort (*Callitriche platycarpa*), only the fourth post-2000 record for VC6 for that

species of Water-starwort. Alongside a cycle path we recorded four species of willow, but found a small plantation of a willow nobody recognised. This was later identified by Jeanne Webb as *Salix x mollissima* var. *undulata*, a hybrid between Almond Willow (*S. triandra*) and Osier (*S. viminalis*). It is the second record for this taxon in Somerset.

The suburban group walked along the streets of Beckery, through the industrial estate and along a minor road with ditches on either side. There was a small area of waste ground by the side of the road where Fodder Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* ssp. *balearicum*) was growing with Wild Turnip (*Brassica rapa* subsp. *campestris*). There were various attempts to extract aquatic plants from the deep ditches on either side of the road with limited success, but we spotted Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*), Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*) and Unbranched Bur-reed (*S. emersum*). When we reached the B3151, we found a few small plants of Green Bristle-grass (*Setaria viridis*) on the bridge pavement. This is a non-native grass found as a casual in a few places in Somerset. The most interesting species found on this route was Bastard Cabbage (*Rapistrum rugosum*), a yellow-flowered crucifer with small round fruits appressed to the stem. It was found as a casual on waste ground near a roundabout. This was the fifth post-2000 record in Somerset.

Our groups converged walking back to the Sewage Treatment Works, recording two roadside halophytes, Lesser Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia marina*) and Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), in Beckery Road. On a verge outside the STW we were surprised to find Des Etang's St John's-wort (*Hypericum x desetangsii*), apparently in the absence of either parent. Returning to the STW common room for tea and cakes, our grateful thanks were expressed to Ellen McDouall who organised and facilitated this meeting.

Cliffs West of Minehead (VC5)

Sunday 13th September 2015

Leader & report: Graham Lavender

This proved to be a popular meeting with 15 members gathering at the car park west of Minehead Harbour for what had been advertised as "A chance to see Somerset Whitebeam (*Sorbus sub-*

cuneata) and Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*)” and that’s exactly what we did see and more. *Sorbus subcuneata* is only found in VC4 and VC5 and hence is listed as “vulnerable” on the current Red List for England.

We took the coastal path through the woods to Greenaleigh Point and a number of us doubled back along the beach to admire 12 small trees of *Sorbus subcuneata* in more or less a line from the beach up the North Facing cliff. These specimens are well recorded and when I sent a picture of the bush to Dr Tim Rich, the BSBI Sorbus referee, he was able to confirm identification from a previous visit he had made. An unexpected find on a rocky outcrop just past the Somerset Whitbeam was Rock Sea Spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*). In the Atlas of Somerset this was only recorded at Hurlstone Point, where it still persists, together with a new site at the Ivy Stone west of Porlock. This is, I understand, the third VC5 record and close to changing from “rare” category to “scarce” on the Somerset Rare Plant Register. Another rare Somerset plant is Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) which we found growing on cracks in Culver Cliff face.



Sea Spleenwort in crevices on the cliffs west of Minehead © Ian Salmon

A small sub-group made their way down to a tiny scrap of saltmarsh surrounding a small saline pool in the shingle near Greenaleigh Point. Here we were found many plants of Purple Glasswort (*Salicornia ramosissima*), prostrate and reddish-coloured on the damp mud. While having lunch here, we noticed that there were a couple of small burial mounds nearby with flowers. These were small animal graves and a surprising find

was a plant of Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*) on the grave spoil of ‘Billy’, a pet dog. This is an unusual plant in the Exmoor area.



A prostrate form of Wood Vetch scrambling over cliffs and shingle near Greenaleigh Point © Liz McDonnell

The group moved on westwards finding Sea Spleenwort in a new monad. We stopped to admire the Wood vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*) which was scrambling abundantly on the steep cliffs and across shingle at the back of the beach. Although past its best, there were still a few flowers still hanging on. Other species of interest here included Rock Stonecrop (*Sedum forsterianum*) and Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*). Possibly the one that took the most attention was a ‘Brassica’ on the cliff base some considerable distance from arable field and habitation. Was it Wild Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*)? As far as I know no conclusion was made.

Blackdowns (VC3)

Saturday 26th September 2015

Leaders: Conrad Barrowclough & Liz McDonnell

Report: Conrad, Liz & John Day

This was a ‘Meet and Scatter meeting’ to record in several different part of the Churchinford area of the Blackdowns. This is an under-recorded area as although it is in administrative Somerset, it is in the botanical Vice County of South Devon. Starting at the Churchinford cricket ground, we split into four small groups to cover more ground. Christy and I went to ST2314 and it was an interesting mix, and very typically Blackdowns! The two private sites we’d obtained permission for comprised of very wet alder carr with a diverse understorey including Marsh Violet

(*Viola palustris*), Lesser Scullcap (*Scutellaria minor*) and Smooth-stalked Sedge (*Carex laevigata*). Where the woodland opened up there were well managed Purple Moor-grass/rush pasture areas with abundant Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Fen Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*). After losing (and eventually recovering) a boot in one of the wetter Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea ssp. oleifolia*) stands, we exited the carr and topped up the list with a bevy of species from some typically rich Blackdown hedgerows. We made our way through a floodplain meadow next to the River Yarty, which in places was so wet that Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*) was growing in dense stands, this field also included patches of Musk (*Mimulus moschatus*), a casual reasonably frequent in the Blackdowns compared to much of Somerset.

Ro and Chris went off to the lanes around Hunter's Lodge and the edge of Trickey Warren, recording 139 taxa, all reasonably common in verges and hedgerows in this area.

John, John and Ellen went to Newtons and were kindly given permission by the landowner to wander at will over his garden (which proved rich pickings contributing 20+ new records—possibly the richest area of cultivated habitat in the monad!), mires and woodland. The boggy ground was difficult to traverse and this formerly grazed mire was now Sallow-dominated woodland. Here they found, mainly confined to the glades, several notables including Fen Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*), Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*), and Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*). Ellen located a single plant of Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*). This is the only recent record for the Blackdowns—an important find. Lunch was taken on the banks of a pool which supported *Callitriche brutia ssp. hamulata*. In a large block of wooded pasture with seepages, Narrow Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) was recorded. At the end of the day, a respectable 231 taxa had been recorded in this varied monad.

Liz, Steve and Simon went to species-rich grassland at Munty, near to where the owners were building an eco-house. We were very impressed by their little wattle & daub temporary privy in the woodland! We recorded in species-rich



Sarah & Rob's wattle & daub privy at Munty © Liz McDonnell

grassland amongst the anthills surrounded by bawling Highland cattle with very long impressive horns, which we kept a close eye on! We made our way to the very wet valley mire where we sent Steve in - as he was the only one with Wellingtons. Here we found several plants of Smooth-stalked Sedge (*Carex laevigata*). We crossed the stream and scrambled up the steep stream side, keeping the two lists for the two owners in this valley separate. We walked back along the lane to the cars at Munty, recording Hard Shield-fern (*Dryopteris aculeatum*) in a couple of places on the stony hedgebanks and then met up with the rest of the group at the playing field to compare notes and give the completed recording cards to the data-inputter.

Botany Articles

Parsley-pierts - *Aphanes australis* or *avensis*, are there recording errors?

Graham Lavender

Parsley-pierts have been fairly well recorded in Somerset, although there are relatively few post-2000 records. I decided to add to the local records for these species on Exmoor in 2015 and

looked in 'Stace' and 'Rose' for guidance on the differences between Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*) and Slender Parsley-piert (*A. australis*).

I duly made three records of *A. arvensis* before having one of those 'am I really that confident?' moments and sent the next specimen off to Mike Wilcox the BSBI *Aphanes* referee. I was somewhat taken aback to be informed my sample was *A. australis* but had kept a voucher sample and Mike was very kind and went through each of the features that had determined it as *A. australis*. Having looked again at the reference books my error was to rely heavily on one of the prominent features and not consider the whole plant. Both Stace and Rose very prominently show **more open** sepals on *A. arvensis* and **almost closed** on *A. australis*. I did not get beyond this and clearly did not look with care at the stipules. Mike guided me to the fact that stipules are generally are more open on *A. arvensis* (but that this isn't always the case). He led me through the 'finger like stipules' of *A. australis* but again cautioned that this can also be somewhat variable in smaller plants. He then explained that *A. australis* has **weakly ribbed fruit** whereas *A. arvensis* is **more strongly ribbed**. He also pointed out that it is worth looking at the hairs on the fruit; *A. australis* has **all the same short stubby hairs**, whereas *A. arvensis* has **shorter and longer hairs on the side** of the fruit. Fruit size is also important; 0.8-0.9mm in *A. australis* and 1-1.2mm in *A. arvensis*.

Mike also explained that on the acid soils of Exmoor he would expect *A. australis* to be the more likely plant and that *A. arvensis*, which prefers more basic soils, is unlikely. Indeed I have now



Aphanes australis showing the finger-like stipules
© Graham Lavender

had a chance to look again and although it is early days, have only found *A. australis* in the Exmoor area conforming to my voucher sample.

Looking at our current MapMate distribution maps, it appears that *A. arvensis* has been well recorded on Exmoor. Given the information from Mike that *A. australis* is much more likely than *A. arvensis* to be found on the acid soils of Exmoor, are errors are being made in recording? Or is it possible that *A. arvensis* is being recorded as the default option rather than the aggregate? Mike reports that no Parsley-piert specimens were sent to him for determination in 2015 (apart from mine) and tells me he welcomes more specimens.

I recommend that in 2016 we should send our *Aphanes* specimens to Mike for determination to clarify the distribution in Somerset.

Things I've learnt since I started my Black Poplar Survey

Ian Salmon

Many members will be aware that a year ago I set out on a quest to re-find all the County's Native Black Poplars (*Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*). Some will be interested in my progress, others may just want to know if I've given up yet. In terms of progress, last year I completed surveying the hectads west of Taunton (SS84 to ST14) and this year I'm doing the hectads on the same longitude as Taunton (ST21 to ST25). My current tree count, which includes both the trees I have surveyed so far and previous records for the hectads still to be surveyed, is 613 but this changes almost on a daily basis as new trees are found or old trees are not.

Although I started out just wanting to know how many we have and where they are, many other issues have come up. A few are set out below.

Retrieving and making sense of old records.

My first task was accumulating details of previous records to make a list of 'tetrads of interest' which would form the basis of my work. I then tried to work out, where there were several records in an area, which of them were likely to refer to the same tree (or group). I allowed 200m variance as a rounding bracket on grid references but where recorders would not have had distinctive features to accurately calculate their location

these errors proved to be greater. This was a reminder of how map reading has become much easier with a GPS device and since the Ordnance Survey's 1:25000 Explorer Maps were published. It has also proved the value of giving both a good description of a location in addition to a grid reference (particularly when all that remains is a decayed stump). It will always be quicker to 'lose' a tree through inaccurate recording than for it to actually decay and die.

The conduct of the survey.

Before I started I believed that the main constraint of how much I could do each year would be the number of locations I could get to during the flowering period. In the event however I found that, because locating trees in winter and checking their sex did not always require me to



Black Poplars at Cannington, December 2015
© Ian Salmon

get right up to the tree, I left myself more work to do in the summer when I wanted to check leaf characteristics and record galls on the trees. This would always involve getting close to the tree with the added time taken in gaining the landowner's permission where appropriate. In the summer there are also so many other demands on our time, both botanical and personal – our summers are far too short!

Another quandary I had was deciding how much time to spend searching for old records and

when I could afford to spend time searching new likely locations. Many previous records had been made by recorders who would not have had time to go back and confirm their identification or to make a detailed survey of the number of trees at a location. I felt I had taken on the responsibility of performing this task, but also wanted to search adjacent areas where possible. I have managed to do some exploring of my own but realise that to some extent there will always be new areas that could still do with a good search. Another issue was – what should count as a single tree? I have found trees that have grown from separate cuttings that were 'bundle' planted, trees grown from suckers that are now possibly larger than their parent, trees that have grown from fallen (layered) branches but may now not be attached to their parent and also horizontal trees that appear to have two or more rooting points. After some thought I decided to take a conservative approach and deal with these cases as single trees listing all of the components as features of that tree. When searching the landscape in winter to try to spot trees by comparing the form and colour of tree crowns good natural light and good viewing positions become important. Undulating ground on a bright but slightly overcast day was my preference, however I still seemed to be out in driving rain and having to wipe my glasses every few minutes.

The life cycle of the tree.

I was particularly grateful to have been given a number of photographs by Liz McDonnell and Ro FitzGerald from their surveys in the early 1990s. These included some trees which were then newly planted. This allowed me to see how the growth of these trees had progressed in the intervening years and study the factors that had caused them to begin to develop their characteristic form. These include such issues as the reasons why trees develop a lean (prevailing wind, soil erosion, etc.) and thereby cause stem forking in an attempt to correct the structural imbalance that this produces.

Liz and Ro's photographs of mature trees also allowed me to see how decay had progressed in trees in which they had noted defects. Although studying the decay (and sometimes death) of trees some may find depressing, in most cases

they were little changed, and 20 years appeared as a very short time in the life of a Black Poplar. I was particularly impressed by the tenacity with which old stumps and remnants cling to life, coming into leaf for a few months each season just producing enough food to remain alive.

Hybrids and confusion with other poplars.

People often say that it is easy to confuse our native black poplars with hybrids and other species in the genus. I could not at first understand this as in most cases there are obvious differences. The white and balsam poplars usually have distinctively pale undersides to their leaves. The trees that are usually referred to as Hybrid Black Poplar (*Populus x canadensis*) which are crosses with the North American Eastern Cottonwood, whilst having superficial similarities have quite different leaf characteristics. However I was to learn that there are many hybrids within the *Populus nigra* species between our native sub species (*ssp betulifolia*) and continental varieties. It is these that present a more substantial challenge particularly in determining young trees that are yet to display the full range of characteristics particularly of bark and form. I therefore now think it may be better, when coming across young trees without any known provenance, to delay recording them as native and just wait and see what they decide to grow up to be!

Conclusion.

As I came to the end of my surveys last year, for each tetrad I found myself asking the question – had I really finished work in that area? I thought the best way to do this was to attempt to answer two questions. Firstly, was there any more work to do on the trees listed and secondly, how much of that tetrad had I covered. This was done in the hope that it would assist anyone taking out a similar study in another 20 years.

Finally when asked – can you get fed up with just looking at just one species every day? The answer is yes sometimes, but I think the weather can have a lot to do with it as well.

Recording— a journey or an arrival? Ro FitzGerald

The SRPG is named for a purpose – we need to know and monitor our precious rare species and their sites, and to keep increasing the data for our county RPR. None of us question these aims,

but at this point in time when the huge effort to build the big national picture by recording for Atlas 2020 gives significance to every single record, I'm wondering if we should make this wider task our unarguable priority?

The Somerset Rare Plants Group has worked very hard over the past years, and it feels as if many of our most threatened species have had active attention, and key localities have been well visited. I know that some people want the emphasis to be on RARE, and believe that meetings promising a bit of a twitch are good for attracting new members and keeping the membership focused, but strictly Rare Plant meetings have a number of associated problems. Time is precious for us all. Many of the special sites have limited access and limited parking – an important factor which can cause huge and time-consuming headaches for the noble members who arrange the meetings programme, while a recording meeting to focus on several monads can be much more easily organised.

I do admit to personal prejudice! Having worked for nearly 20 years on Rare Plant Surveys in Britain and Ireland I have a massive mental database of memories from this work. It included elements which I loved; the detective process starting from a 19th Century herbarium specimen and ending with a find in some forgotten scrap of habitat; the chances to visit remote and lovely places; learning from the plants themselves about how they survived at their limits of physical tolerance or among human threats - but those years were often full of stress. Professionals such as doctors or psychiatrists are warned not to become emotionally involved with their clients, and I should have learned that lesson. Instead I was frequently anxious and afraid. If I failed to re-find a plant at a former site I used to feel that I had condemned it to extinction by not searching well enough, and any loss would be 'all my fault'. It's an ironic comment on my life that my most passionate affair ever was probably with Pygmy Rush (*Juncus pygmaeus*)!

The Surveys had been conceived in the early 1980s, by Lynne Farrell and Gigi Crompton, as the first step in an on-going monitoring process. The surveyors were to audit the resource of Schedule 8/Red Data Book plants, then the wonderful Quinquennial Reviews were to check up

on the most protected species EVERY FIVE YEARS, to monitor any change in status or threat. However it became obvious quite soon that this ideal was going to become lost in the struggles with governments for any kind of nature conservation budget, so we had an oppressive sense of being (in some cases) the LAST CHANCE.

Botanising can never be a really horrid life, but in Rare Plant Survey terms it could be pretty tense, and very frustrating. Sometimes we (the small gang of original surveyors) felt that our reports went straight into some great dustbin in the sky, and that the plants we recorded and the sites we described still had little protection. The development of county RPGs and RPRs has been wonderful, bringing hope and continuity to sites and species, giving them a voice and good botanists ready to fight their corner, but it is common plants rather than rarities which have given me a happier new botanical existence away from the overt stresses and dangers surrounding the rarest species.

Current threats and pressures from farming and development are extreme, and have intensified rapidly during the past 40 years. Establishing a total picture of British vegetation, in the relatively snap-shot period (in flora assessment terms) of 20 years has now become a crucial necessity rather than a fuss-budget reworking of the 2002 *New Atlas*. So now we all go 'square-bashing' and I find that I just LOVE this peaceful, pottering, but WORTHWHILE way of botanising! The feeling of adding even 50 species to records for a 1km square which has had none since 2000 is so satisfying! Every nettle is a plus, nothing is wasted, every walk is productive. Without the pressure of having to find a lost rarity, there is time to look round, to listen to birds, to think... and at the end of the walk there is a new, valuable card started. Often even the dullest square produces some surprise – maybe a new site for a plant on the Somerset Rare Plant Register, maybe just something not often seen in that locality – anyway, most satisfying to the finder. My biggest surprise in 2015, found while trudging round a neglected monad near home, was the spectacular Yellow Dodder (*Cuscuta campestris*), lurking with other aliens in a small patch where a farmer in a stewardship scheme had unloaded some sacks of (an unremarkable) 'wild flower' seed mix. The exact

chain of introduction and specific vector was impossible to trace – the trail started from Mole Valley Farmers in Bridgwater – but the brilliant colour and vigour of this life-time 'first' gave me a real thrill. I found I was even keeping my ankles out of reach of the tendrils! It is known from four other localities in Somerset, but was a 'squeak' for me, and a hectad record for ST14.

Recent 'scatter meetings' to generate records for under-recorded areas have been both enjoyable and productive in this way – the botanical companionship makes really dreary habitat bearable, and the teamwork can combine the essential recording of common plants with more thorough rare plant searches. The Quantock mire survey this year was an excellent example of recording in an under-recorded area and finding rare species along the way. Sand Spurrey (*Spergularia rubra*), Cornish Moneywort (*Sibthorpia europaea*) and a possible new addition to the hill flora, Hayscented Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris aemula*) were found whilst on a routine 'square-bashing' meeting.

So I really hope that SRPG will concentrate on this kind of meeting during the remaining time of Atlas 2020 recording. I know this is a selfish wish because it's what I enjoy most, but I do believe that the Atlas 2020 scheme is massively important. Many of our own real county rarities have been well observed – well naturally, we are the SRPG! - and could be monitored by individuals during the next four years. I'm convinced that our group powers should be directed to covering as many squares as we can to contribute to the greater good and the bigger picture governing this point in time. Somerset is still a rich county botanically – let's make it as well botanised as it was before 1997 when the Green's *Atlas Flora of Somerset* was in preparation. The threats don't stop – let's take up the old scout cry and 'BE PREPARED'.

Botanical notes from Exmoor

Graham Lavender

Exmoor is fairly well recorded and with just four more recording years before Atlas 2020 my plan in 2015 was to spend some time looking for rarities with particular emphasis on those with no records post-2000 and also a few under-recorded monads. One of my themes for the

year was to re-record Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) which had five sites at the time of *The Atlas Flora of Somerset* (1997) although prior to that Capt. Roe had it at just one site and possibly it was increasing its distribution. I actually started off with some of the more obscure old records, and started in the first instance by looking for its habitat. It's always a little hard to know if a site has the necessary sparse vegetation and surface water all year. It's even harder to know if the surface water that's present in the summer will be present in the occasional drought years. So far I have to admit failure - no new sites and I am having concerns over some more recent records.



Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago* ssp. *Selago*) at Dunkery
© Graham Lavender

The site on Dunkery Hill is still a stronghold with 38 plants/clumps recorded this year. When BSBI News came out (issue 130 in September 2015) Michael Wilcox had an article requesting specimens for identification to subspecies level. There is a suggestion that the Scottish island records are possibly ssp. *arctica* and rest of UK has ssp. *selago*. There are, I understand, no English records to subspecies level and after some email discussion Michael felt it a good idea to confirm

the Exmoor specimens, the probability being that they are ssp. *selago*. I duly went to Dunkery to confirm that the plants had sporangia in the leaf axils and took a very small sample of one plant. In fact a second specimen was taken since recent animal movement had uprooted a plant. These were duly sent off and Michael identified one as *Huperzia selago* ssp. *selago* but the second sample had a much thinner stem more characteristic of ssp. *arctica*. Michael forwarded the specimen to Dr Fred Rumsey who said that it was definitely not ssp. *arctica*, but not typical of ssp. *selago* either. Fred indicated that further taxonomic work is needed in this genus.

The second project was the National Eyebright (*Euphrasia*) Study and I undertook to collect samples across Exmoor. I had the previous Euphrasia data from this area and also the aggregate records, although these proved of limited value. If there's a small patch of Eyebright and it is only recorded to monad level, it is very hard to re-find it. In the event I knew enough suitable localities to start collecting and, at time of writing, am awaiting the confirmed identification of the specimens I sent. It appears that English Eyebright (*Euphrasia officinalis* ssp. *anglica*), with its long glandular hairs, is the commonest Exmoor Eyebright. I eagerly await confirmation of glabrous specimens that I found. I would like to urge recorders to record the 8-figure location, even if this is the aggregate, and to make a note of the presence (or not) of glandular hairs. This will help with re-location of the plants and their future identification.

In May and June I helped a friend recuperate after a stroke. This involved regular walks on some of the only flat land around Bossington Marsh. Subterranean Clover (*Trifolium subterraneum*) was abundant on the gravelly paths, as was Bird's-foot Clover (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*). Danish scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*) is always common on the marsh but this is first time I have found English Scurvygrass (*C. anglica*) at Bossington, although I did find a few plants of this species around the cliff base at Culbone last year. Upright Chickweed (*Moenchia erecta*) was found where it looked like a mole hill had been cut in half and the plant had liked the relative shelter and lack of competition. I thought it might be a new record for the site but no, Map-

Mate revealed that SRPG recorded it at same grid reference at a field meeting in 2002. It is good to know that it is still flourishing. The best find was while checking the Yellow Horned-poppay (*Glaucium flavum*). This species has been recorded since 2002 on an area of relatively stable shingle at Bossington Marsh, but there was just one plant this year. At this location there was a fairly large cabbage like plant with purple stem, unlike anything I had seen on the marsh before. Tim Rich the BSBI Crucifer referee was kind enough to confirm Sea Kale (*Crambe maritima*) which I understand has long been considered extinct in Somerset. Given that the shingle ridge was only



Sea Kale at Bossington © Graham Lavender

breached in 1996 and the saltmarsh started to develop behind it, it is perhaps not surprising that the flora is still changing. The Sea Kale is growing above high tide but not above level of the spring tides, so is still vulnerable.

My friend was recovering and fewer walks on marshes led to an attempt to climb down the rope west of Hurlstone Point and record the cliffs on the way. Tide tables were consulted, as many people have been caught out by rising tides and the coast guard called out on this stretch of the coast. As a local, I clearly would not fall into that trap! Firstly, Ivy broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*) caught my eye on the climb up the path to Hurlstone, then Sea Fern-grass (*Catapodium*

marinum) growing in the cracks of the base of the old Coastguard Tower on The Point itself. Just a little further on, a patch of Rock Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*) was growing under the shade of a large rock next to coastal path. I imagined that this would surely be a new site, but MapMate revealed that Caroline Giddens had recorded it on the coastal path at same position in 1989 - so nice to find it was still present.

At the foot of the cliff and into SS9049 (previous records on Hurlstone Point are all for SS8949) was the largest patch of Rock Sea-spurrey I have seen. I counted 24 plants. Setting off to clear the seaward side of Hurlstone Point I was within 75m when I realised I had miscalculated and a frantic dash back to the rope saved an embarrassing call to the coastguard. Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) was also recorded here.

In September I stumbled over Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) in full fruit above Simonsbath. This was not a new site but the abundance of the fruit suggested that now might be a good time to update old records. Two separate sites above Simonsbath had fair sized patches of fruiting plants but Exford Common was the real gem. In 2003 just a few patches had been recorded and the comment on MapMate suggested that the area was drying out. But when I located the Cranberry, I found that it was abundant. I recorded one patch of about 20 sq. metres and it had even spilled over into a next monad - hence another new record. I have to confess to failure at a number of old sites but perhaps a few plants still survive and will make a comeback as on Exford Common.

One of the last trips was with Ian Salmon to look at Whitebeams at Culbone Woods and specifically the Rock Whitebeam (*Sorbus rupicola*) which has just the one record of one tree at this site, in 1997. Although we found many probable Bloody Whitebeams (*Sorbus vexans*), we could find no fruit, so their identity could not be confirmed. We searched, but could not find any *S. rupicola*. There was a comment on Mapmate that "A tree no 5995 from seed of this tree grows in Ness Botanic Gardens" Tim Baxter, Botanist at University of Liverpool Botanic Gardens was kind enough to confirm that although original tree has now gone, a seed was grown on from it and is still flourishing in the garden. It would appear there-

fore that *Sorbus rupicola* did grow at the Culbone site and more survey work will have to be done to see if it is still present.



Insects on the sticky leaf surfaces of Greater Butterwort at Robbers Bridge © Graham Lavender

I can confirm that the Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*) is still abundant at Robber's Bridge

2015 Plant Records

Records compiled by Helena Crouch

In 2015 we made over 80,000 records of vascular plants in Somerset: thank you to everyone who has contributed to this phenomenal achievement. Every record is valuable and there have been many more interesting records this year than can be listed here. As usual, most new Somerset/Vice-County records in 2015 were for alien species; however there are a few native taxa new to each VC. In addition, there have been some other very significant records made for Rare Plant Register (RPR) species, some of which are listed in the third section. All records below are for 2015 unless otherwise stated. Those marked with an asterisk are neophytes (recent introductions). Recorders and referees whose names appear more than once have been abbreviated as follows:

BNS	Bristol Naturalists' Society
SANHS	Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society
SRPG	Somerset Rare Plants Group
TAC	Tom Cope
HJC	Helena Crouch
RFitzG	Ro FitzGerald
DEG	Dave Green
IPG	Ian Green
PRG	Paul Green
GL	Graham Lavender
SJL	Simon Leach
CML	Clive Lovatt
EJMcd	Liz McDonnell
CM	Chris Metherell
SJP	Stephen Parker
JP	John Poingdestre
FJR	Fred Rumsey
ITS	Ian Salmon
JW	Jeanne Webb
MAW	Margaret Webster

Reference is made to the most recent floras for our area; these are abbreviated as follows:

Green, I.P., Higgins, R.J., Kitchen, C. & Kitchen, M.A.R. (2000). *The Flora of the Bristol Region*. Newbury: Pisces Press: *FBR*

Green, P.R., Green, I.P. & Crouch, G.A. (1997). *The Atlas Flora of Somerset*. Wayford and Yeovil: privately published: *AFS*

NEW SOMERSET RECORDS

* *Agrostis scabra* (Rough Bent) - Winford (ST54086478), 1 Aug, one plant growing as a weed in a large planted tub in front garden, MAW (det. HJC, conf. TAC), VC6.

* *Anthemis austriaca* (Austrian Chamomile) - Steart Marshes (ST252442), 3 Oct 2014, originated from seed mix around car park, now widely established, RFitzG & EJMcd, VC5. Still present in 2015.

* *Beta vulgaris* subsp. *cicla* var. *cicla* (Spinach Beet) – Bath (ST74876436), 16 Apr, one plant in car park against wall of flats in Lower Bristol Road, HJC, VC6.

* *Bupleurum fruticosum* (Shrubby Hare's-ear) – Maperton Ridge (ST66762693), 28 May, one shrub on N verge of road parallel to A303, maybe discarded or self-sown, HJC & FJR, VC6.

* *Cardamine heptaphylla* (Pinnate Coralroot) – Penselwood (ST76753135), 6 Mar, small clump in flower on verge of Coombe Street opposite cottage, HJC & FJR, VC6.

* *Clematis cirrhosa* (Early Virgin's-bower) – Tintinhull (ST50241973), 23 Jan, one self-sown on roadside wall of Tintinhull House, parent plant in nearby garden, PRG, VC5.

Euphrasia x *difformis* (*E. arctica* x *micrantha*) – Withypool Common (SS83243447, SS83333455), 29 Jun, several plants on roadside, N side of road, HJC, CM & FJR (det. CM), VC5.

Epipactis x *schulzei* (*E. purpurata* x *helleborine*) – Hunstrete (ST644622), Aug, four confirmed hybrids (and possibly more) amongst colony of *E. purpurata* under trees beside fishing lake, Richard Mielcarek, (conf. John Richards), VC6. Unusual plants have been seen and photographed by RM at this site since 2006 but it was only in 2015 that their identity was confirmed.

* *Juncus polycephalus* (Manyhead Rush) – Steart Marshes (ST25264419), 3 Oct 2014, one plant at edge of newly dug pool, probably planted in error during wetland creation by WWT, RFitzG & EJMCD (det. TAC), VC5.

* *Nonea lutea* (Yellow Nonea) – Alhampton (ST62693488), 7 Jun, one plant on pavement at base of stone wall, HJC & Jim Crouch, VC6.

* *Oxalis dillenii* (Sussex Yellow-sorrel) – Sandford Batch (ST417584), 28 Jun, at edge of cemetery allotments, RFitzG, Pam Millman & Christine Loudon, VC6.

* *Polystichum polyblepharum* (Japanese Tassel-fern) – Horrington Hill (ST58044782), 22 May, one glossy plant on bank by old track along S edge of wood, HJC & FJR, VC6.

* *Spiraea douglasii* subsp. *menziesii* (Steeplebush) – Enmore, SE of (ST24153461), 5 Sept, naturalised in a hedge near Tireland's Farm, EJMCD & RFitzG, VC5.

Salix x *mollissima* nothovar. *undulata* (*Salix triandra* x *viminalis*) – Westhay Moor (ST46374373), 15 Jul 2014, N side of Westhay Moor Drove between Dag's Lane and Lewis's Drove, JW, VC6.

NEW VICE-COUNTY RECORDS

* *Anthemis austriaca* (Austrian Chamomile) – Bath (ST74926435), 29 Oct, few plants on disturbed verge growing with *Centaurea cyanus* so probably originating from a seed mix, HJC, VC6.

Crambe maritima (Sea Kale) – Bossington Beach (SS8848), 8 Jul, one plant on stable shingle, GL (conf. Tim Rich), VC5.

Dactylorhiza traunsteineroides (Narrow-leaved Marsh-orchid) - Clean Moor SSSI (ST087252), 11 June, eight plants, SJP, GL & ITS (det. Ian Denholm), VC5

Epilobium x *interjectum* (*E. montanum* x *ciliatum*) – Westhay Moor Drove (ST462436), 2 Aug, single short well-branched plant on waste site, EJMCD & CML, VC6.

* *Houttuynia cordata* (Fish-plant) – Freshford (ST79126023), 18 Sep, two plants growing through tarmac of road to station (cultivar 'Chameleon'), HJC & DEG, VC6.

* *Ilex* x *altaclerensis* (*I. aquifolium* x *perado*) – Hunstrete (ST64446224), 1 Aug 2014, one shrub beside path alongside fishing lake, HJC & FJR (det. FJR), VC6.

* *Weigela florida* (Weigelia) – Thorney, E of (ST43202266), 22 Apr, large bush E side of dis-used rail track, JP, VC5.

OTHER INTERESTING RECORDS

* *Acanthus mollis* (Bear's-breech) – Backwell (ST49526858), three clumps in field hedgerow opposite houses, HJC & MAW; Somerton (ST48772850), large patch on bank by footpath alongside railway line, HJC & PRG, VC6. Fourth and fifth records for VC6 and first since AFS and FBR.

* *Agrostis castellana* (Highland Bent) - Chilcompton (ST648506), 1 Aug, on coal mining spoil near summit of New Rock Batch, HJC & EJMCD (det. TAC), VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

Alopecurus aequalis (Orange Foxtail) – Chew Valley Lake (ST55726027), 23 Sep, at a few places in Villice Bay, Rupert Higgins, VC6. Third record for VC6.

* **Amsinckia micrantha** (Common Fiddleneck) – Nailsea (ST47517089), 27 Jul, one plant on bank at corner of car park, at junction of Stockway North and Link Road, Terry Smith, VC6. Second record for VC6.

Anagallis arvensis subsp. **foemina** (Blue Pimpernel) – Barton St David (ST53753230), 20 Sep, one plant in flower, JP, VC6. First record for this GB Scarce species in this hectad since 1915.

Apium inundatum (Lesser Marshwort) – Shapwick Heath (ST42344082), 8 July, one patch in late successional ditch between fields E of Station Road, Colin Leppard & SJP, VC6. First record for Shapwick area since 1957.

Atriplex littoralis (Grass-leaved Orache) – Bath (ST73916222), 17 Jan, one plant on triangular verge in middle of A367 on W side of Red Lion roundabout, HJC & Jennifer Crouch, VC6. First inland record for VC6. Subsequently found by JP at four more inland sites in Somerset, along the A303.

* **Avena barbata** (Slender Oat) – Rode, SE of (ST81055353), 21 Jul, few plants at E edge of maize field, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

* **Avena sterilis** subsp. **ludoviciana** (Winter Wild-oat) – Old Cleeve (ST0441), 20 May 2009; Golsoncott (ST0238), 3 Sep, JW, VC5. First records for VC5 since 1986.

Bromus interruptus (Interrupted Brome) - Burnham-on-Sea (ST30864758, ST30874758, ST30884758), 15 Oct, 110 plants at S edge of area of Apex Leisure Park which is cultivated and sown with arable plants, HJC & FJR, VC6. Deliberately introduced here as a contribution to the long-term conservation of this English endemic, which is 'Extinct in the Wild'. First record for VC6 since 1915.

Catapodium marinum (Sea Fern-grass) – Ilchester (ST522223), 7 Jun, lots around margin of centre of roundabout and along edge of the B3151 leading from roundabout, PRG, VC5. First inland record for VC5. Also found at Axbridge by EJMcd & CML and at Glastonbury by IPG & PRG, the first inland records for VC6 since AFS.

Catapodium rigidum subsp. **majus** (Fern-grass) – Kingston, Yeovil (ST554164), 16 Aug, IPG & PRG, VC5. Second site for VC5.

* **Conyza floribunda** (Bilbao's Fleabane) – Yeovil (ST5316, ST5415), 30 Oct, rough ground, PRG, VC5. Fourth and fifth records for VC5.

* **Crepis setosa** (Bristly Hawk's-beard) – Steart Marshes (ST25214419), 3 Oct 2014, one plant in disturbed area at newly constructed car park, EJMcd & RFitzG; Otterhampton Marshes (ST24944365), 30 Jul, in re-seeded grassland of Steart Marshes, EJMcd & RFitzG; Knighton, Stogursey (ST19124460), 5 Sep, from seed mix at Bullen Farm, top of ridge, RFitzG, VC5. Third, fourth and fifth records for VC5.

* **Cuscuta campestris** (Yellow Dodder) -Knighton, Stogursey (ST19124460), 26 Aug, in seed mix strip at Bullen Farm, RFitzG, VC5. Third record for VC5.



Yellow Dodder on leguminous species in seed mix strip at Knighton, Stogursey © Ro FitzGerald

Dryopteris x deweveri (*D. carthusiana* x *dilatata*) – Penselwood (ST755308), 6 Mar, one large plant at top of rushy field below Underhill, HJC & FJR, VC6. Third record for Somerset and VC6.

* **Echinochloa colona** (Shama Millet) - Dyche, Stringston (ST16824133), 30 Aug, one plant in corner of maize crop, RFitzG, VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

Epilobium x interjectum (*E. montanum* x *ciliatum*) – Freshford (ST79055972), 9 Sep, one plant beside a minor road, Tony Mundell, VC6. Second record for VC6.

Euphrasia arctica subsp. *borealis* (Arctic Eye-bright) – Oare (SS80084706), 5 Jun 2011, frequent in hay meadow S of church, HJC & FJR (det. FJR); Withypool Common (SS83243447, SS83333455), 29 Jun, two plants on roadside, N side of road, HJC, CM & FJR (det. CM); Portford Bridge, Withypool (SS83173444), several plants on roadside, E side of road, just N of bridge, HJC, CM & FJR (det. CM), VC5. First records for VC5 since 1935.

Euphrasia confusa (Confused Eyebright) – Elsworth Hill (SS81134088), 12 Aug, in moderately species-rich acid grassland, EJMCD & SRPG (det. CM), VC5. First record for VC5 since AFS.

Euphrasia officinalis subsp. *anglica* x *micrantha* – Withypool Common (SS83643493), 29 Jun, on roadside bank, HJC, CM & FJR (det. CM), VC5. First record for VC5 and Somerset since 1952.

Euphrasia pseudokernerii (Chalk Eyebright) – Banner Down (ST78956827), 19 Aug, many plants in species-rich turf at SW end of Banner Down, HJC & DEG (det. CM), VC6. Fifth record for VC6 and Somerset and first since 1964.

Euphrasia tetraquetra x *confusa* – Cross (ST414549), 18 Aug, several plants with both parents on floor of disused quarry, HJC & FJR (conf. CM), VC6. First record for VC6 since 1988.

* *Festuca brevipila* (Hard Fescue) – Taunton (ST23502507), 19 Jul, several plants in recently sown new road verge on dual carriageway outside retail park; Taunton (ST207255), 17 Oct, grass verge, N side of entrance to Silk Mills park-and-ride car park, SJL, VC5. Third and fourth records for VC5.

* *Galinsoga parviflora* (Gallant-soldier) – Wellington (ST1321), 20 Aug 2014, one plant as street weed in Waterloo Road, SJP, VC5. First record for VC5 since AFS.

Galium parisiense (Wall Bedstraw) – Taunton (ST20812542), 17 Oct, 39 plants in brick paving and kerbside in Silk Mills park-and-ride car park, SJL, VC5. Second site for VC5.

* *Geranium nodosum* (Knotted Crane's-bill) – Chilcompton (ST64865090), 1 Aug, two plants at edge of Abbey Road, HJC & EJMCD; Freshford (ST78886021), 18 Sep, many plants along edges of footpath past mill, clearly escaped from adja-

cent garden, but spreading quite considerably, HJC & DEG, VC6. Fourth and fifth records for VC6.

* *Helianthus tuberosus* (Jerusalem Artichoke) – Butleigh (ST51303363), 24 Sep, several stems temporarily naturalised along verge near layby, JP, VC6. Third record for VC6 and first record for VC6 and Somerset since AFS.

* *Ilex x altaclerensis* (*I. aquifolium* x *perado*) – Leigh Woods (ST56117374), 27 Sep, one sapling by main path above Quarry 5, near corner of fence, HJC & BNS (conf. FJR); Bathwick Wood (ST76556510, ST76586508), 21 Oct, two saplings in wood, probably bird sown, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second and third records for VC6.

Juncus maritimus (Sea Rush) – Steart Marshes (ST25414409), 11 Jul, one plant at edge of wide ditch, SJP, SJL, SRPG & SANHS, VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

* *Lotus corniculatus* var. *sativus* (Common Bird's-foot-trefoil) – Cannington (ST24574153), 20 Aug, in Beere Manor area, probably part of an arable margin seed mix, EJMCD & RFitzG, VC5. Third record for VC5.

* *Narcissus* 'Telamonius Plenus' – Kilve Pill (ST144443), 4 Mar, clump NW of Limekiln, long naturalised, RFitzG, VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

* *Nassella tenuissima* (Argentine Needle-grass) – Batheaston (ST77486724), 18 Jul 2014, a few small plants self-sown into pavement cracks in High Street, Sharon Pilkington; Portbury Wharf (ST47357680), 31 Dec 2014, one plant at edge of pavement in Newfoundland Way, HJC; Glastonbury (ST50493831), 26 Dec, one plant in gutter of Chalice Way, self-sown from a nearby garden, HJC, VC6. Third, fourth and fifth records for VC6.

* *Paeonia mascula* (Peony) – Maperton Ridge (ST66652694, ST66672693), 28 May, three small plants on S verge of A303, HJC & FJR, VC6. Fourth site for VC6 and Somerset.

* *Physalis peruviana* (Cape-gooseberry) – Glastonbury (ST48553838), 23 Aug, two plants in flower/fruit at Sewage Treatment Works, one in a skip and one on a wall by filter beds, SRPG, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.



Physalis peruviana at Glastonbury Sewage Treatment Works © Helena Crouch

* ***Physolacca acinosa*** (Indian Pokeweed) – Camel Hill (ST58842570), 16 Aug, one mature fruiting plant against wall in horse paddock, outside walled garden, probably bird sown, JP, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first since AFS.

Polypodium x mantoniae (*P. interjectum* x *vulgare*) – Ridge (ST55025615), 18 Nov, large patch on hedge bank on E side of lane, HJC & FJR (det. FJR), VC6. Third record for VC6.

* ***Populus x jackii*** (*P. balsamifera* x *deltoides*) – Brinsea (ST44636193), 28 Jun, GL & Ian Salmon, in ditch, suckered (cultivar 'Aurora'), VC6. First record for VC6 since AFS and FBR.

Rumex x callianthemus (*R. maritimus* x *obtusifolius*) – Catcott Lows (ST40124186), 11 Aug, one tall plant in fruit amongst tall herb vegetation, with both parents nearby, HJC & SJP (conf. John Akeroyd), VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset, and first since AFS.

Salix x mollissima nothovar. *undulata* (*Salix triandra* x *viminalis*) – Glastonbury, W of (ST48543922), 23 Aug, small plantation of trees by cycle track, SRPG (det. JW), VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

* ***Scilla forbesii*** (Glory-of-the-snow) – Brent Knoll (ST34035092), 20 Mar, one plant of cultivar 'Pink Giant' on top of hill, Catharine Shellswell, VC6. First record for VC6 since AFS.

* ***Senecio inaequidens*** (Narrow-leaved Ragwort) – Batch (ST32425574), 14 Sep 2014, lots in yard, PRG; Ashton Gate (ST568712), 27 Apr, one on roadside, PRG, VC6. Third and fourth sites for VC6.

* ***Trifolium resupinatum*** (Reversed Clover) – Golsoncott (ST024398), 13 Jul 2014, on grassy bank in front of Escott Farm Buildings, JW; Steart (ST258433), 22 Oct, two good-sized plants at least, in rough grassland beside footpath between Mendip Hide and River Parrett, SJL, VC5. Third and fourth sites for VC5.

* ***Verbascum densiflorum*** (Dense-flowered Mullein) – Englishcombe, N of (ST71826328, ST72116327), 27 Oct, several plants along side of track and in yard S of Haycombe Lane, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first since FBR.

Subscriptions

The SRPG Annual subscription is £8 and is due in January of each year. Bring it to the January AGM & Member's Meeting or at other times, contact the treasurer Clive Lovatt for methods of payment.

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