

## Part 2: Articles 2020

### The story in the picture: Arthur G Tansley (1871-1955), H Stuart Thompson (1870-1940) and the Sharpham Moor Plot (ST465389)

Clive Lovatt



Plate 1. Arthur G Tansley recording the flora and vegetation at the Sharpham Moor Plot, North Somerset, 23 June 1923. From the Natural England Archives courtesy of Steve Parker. Photograph by H Stuart Thompson. The negative may be in the Special Collections, University of Bristol Library. Tansley's notebook may be in the Cambridge University Library. 'I very much enjoyed my visit' Tansley wrote to Thompson some years later.

#### Tansley

At the Somerset Rare Plants Group's AGM on Saturday 18 January 2020, Steve Parker, our Chair, delivered one of his now traditional 'pumpkin-head' quizzes, in which teams divided by affiliations to the north (the half that looks like a pretty snail shell according to one member) or west of the county (the slimy foot of the snail) vie to identify each other on images taken at field meetings from their particular clothes, field bags, or bodily posture, their heads and headgear being covered by a strategically placed pumpkin, which is later electronically erased to the great amusement of all.

As part of this quiz, though without the necessity of disguise because it was so long ago, Steve introduced the image above, later explaining that it was taken on the Sharpham Moor Plot, one of the reserves owned by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. At this point, knowing the story of Stuart Thompson's interest in the site I was able to deduce that the man in the gabardine recording the plot was no less than the great Arthur G Tansley, variously: lecturer at Cambridge and Professor of Botany at Oxford; founder of the New Phytologist Trust and the British Ecological Society and editor of both of their journals; editor of *Types of British Vegetation* in the

heady days of 1911 and sole author of the genuinely monumental *The British Islands and their Vegetation* (1939); the issuer of an invitation to Clapham, Tutin and Warburg to write a new British Flora (published 1952), and finally a founder and first Chair of the Nature Conservancy.

Oh yes, and Tansley was also the author of *The New Psychology and its Relation to Life* (1920). By 1923 it had sold over 10,000 copies – almost seven times the print run of his *Types* (1911). Between late 1923 and 1925 he visited Vienna for two several-month periods as a student of Sigmund Freud and on his return, he became a full member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society. Indeed Tansley had a dream 'Out of Africa' (which he had visited) involving a gun, Africans in the bush with spears and a 'Woman in White', perhaps his wife but according to Freud, representing Tansley's undying love of botany – personified as Flora herself.

So how was it that Stuart Thompson, a quite different character, came to know Tansley? And what is the significance of what they were doing here?

#### Thompson



Plate 2. H Stuart Thompson in his older years from a newspaper obituary in 1940. A striking series of three professional photographs at intervals of 10 or 15 years, one probably contemporary with his photograph of Tansley, is in the archives of the Linnean Society of London. This one would be not long after Tansley and Thompson's last meeting in 1935.

Thompson, who never married, was a Quaker from Bridgwater and is buried with his father (also a plant collector) and two sisters in the Friends' cemetery on Wembdon Road near there. He seems to have gone up as an undergraduate to Christ's College Cambridge in 1889. He was secretary of the Cambridge University Botanical Club in February 1891 but, for reasons that are not yet wholly clear, he did not complete his degree; by mid-May that year he was 'now engaged in Land Surveyor's work'. He pursued that employment as a Land Agent in Birmingham until about 1902, before becoming fully engaged in British and Continental botany. After much moving about, by 1918 he had settled in Clifton where he remained, in a succession of at least six flats, for the rest of his life.

Thompson was a keen photographer and thousands of his negatives, together with a mass of botanical correspondence are deposited in the Special Collections of the University of Bristol Library.

In 1917 he took a picture of JW White, the author of the *Flora of Bristol* (1912), who had earlier (1901) acknowledged Thompson's 'great gift or enviable faculty of turning up rare plants in unexpected places'. In his photograph below (Plate 3) he shows us his own botanical study.



Plate 3. 'Plant Press and Cabinets', in one of Thompson's Clifton flats c. 1922, with vasculum, an easy chair, a bookcase and paintings including an alpine scene. Photo by HS Thompson from the negative in the Special Collections, University of Bristol Library. The painting below the alpine scene, *Caltha palustris* by Gulielma Stephens of Bridgwater, one of Thompson's lady relatives, was given in 1938 to the Botany Department at the University of Bristol, held by CML for many years and then passed on to Kay Ungless, who has family connections with the Bridgwater Thompsons.

Aside from a long involvement with the Watson Botanical Exchange Club in two spells as Secretary and Editor, Thompson was, like Tansley, a botanical author. *Alpine Plants of Europe* (1911) has this as part of one of its selected quotations: 'The sense of

independence, of self-confidence, induced by the great precipices and vast silent fields of snow is something wholly delightful. Every step is health, fun and frolic. The troubles, cares of life ... are left far below'. This is all highly reflective of Thompson's frequent state of anxiety. His second book, *Sub-alpine Plants of the Swiss Meadows* was published in 1912. (Thompson's parents were, unusually, married in Switzerland.) No wonder that White, who had by then known him for over 20 years, wrote to him, 'what a literary man you have become', adding that he would never touch another once his *Flora of Bristol* was off his hands.

### Tansley and Thompson: Cambridge, the Continent and Conservation

There is a possibility that Tansley and Thompson might have encountered each other as undergraduates. Tansley read Natural Sciences at Trinity College Cambridge, but being a year older than Thompson, went up in 1890. His biography (Ayres 2012, see below) indicates that 'student societies and gatherings dominated his first year' – when as indicated above, Thompson was secretary of the University Botanical Club. Although for different reasons neither might have much wanted to talk about those days, it could have helped the two alumni to form a bond.

Tansley, who was by then a Cambridge lecturer, indicated that he and Thompson met in 'about 1910' (Rix 1973, see below). However, it was not until around May 1911 that Thompson returned to live in Cambridge. He was perpetually trying to get work as a herbarium assistant as he had briefly been at Kew some years earlier, but on this occasion he was clearly finishing off his *Sub-alpine Plants*: the Preface dated May 1912 thanks the Cambridge Botany School's Professor and the herbarium Curator who allowed him to 'freely consult' the herbarium and library.

Though this time there is no Cambridge acknowledgement in its preface, Thompson clearly had in mind his next book: *Flowering Plants of the Riviera* (1914). In his copy, Thompson kept various mementos, so many that – as he wrote on the Boots the Chemists envelope in which they were later packaged and deposited in the archives of the Bristol Naturalists' Society – it made the book bulge.

One of the items thus preserved is an invitation from Tansley in March 1912 for Thompson to dine with him (and his wife, Edith) 'to discuss the Maritime Alps' – part of the area covered by Thompson's

Riviera book (Plate 4). The two of them might have simply bumped into one another in the tearoom or corridor but equally might have been introduced by Charles E Moss, a fellow member of the Watson Botanical Exchange Club (which had less than 60 members), a sometime Somerset schoolmaster who had published an account of the *Geographical Distribution of the Vegetation of Somerset* in 1907, and who was now in charge of the Cambridge herbarium.

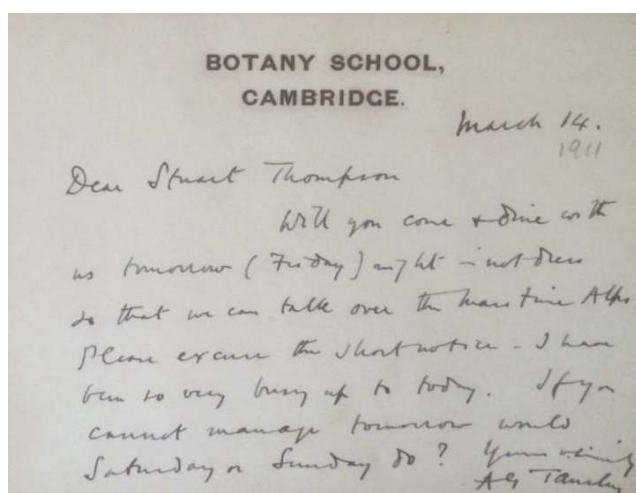


Plate 4. An invitation from Arthur G Tansley to Stuart Thompson, dated 14 March, to dine with him to discuss the Maritime Alps, suggesting it was a place familiar to both of them. Although Thompson has added the year 1911, the reference to 'tomorrow (Friday)' makes it clear that it was in 1912. From the Archives of the Bristol Naturalists' Society.

In the Preface to Thompson's book (Plate 5), dated 12 January 1914, he notes that he had taken many photographs of Riviera vegetation in 1912 and 1913 (November 1912 to June 1913 according to his photographic diary) and he thanked Tansley 'not only for help and encouragement but [also] for his kindness in writing an introduction on Riviera Vegetation'. There is a letter from Tansley dated the following day, returning a draft of the preface after review, and adding how pleased he was to see as many as 80 grasses covered (BNS Archives).

The Riviera Vegetation account is nine pages long and is plainly written with a personal knowledge of the habitations, gardens, wild plants and vegetation – and of travelling by train. This gives a flavour: 'A little away from the actual coast, up among the hills ... it is easy to walk for a day amongst the pine woods and flowering shrubs with no let or hindrance, and without meeting anyone but an occasional peasant'.

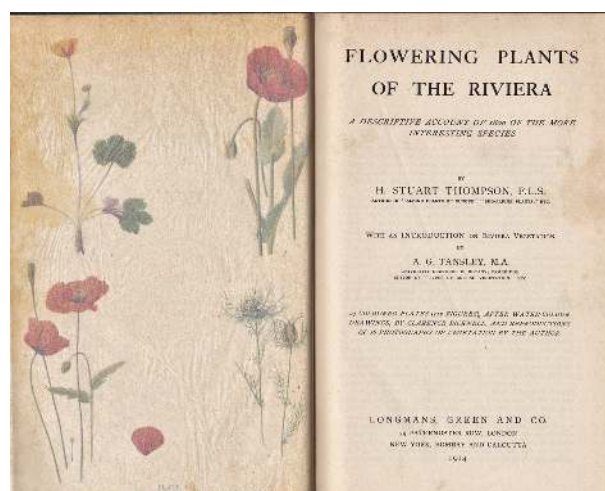


Plate 5. The title page and frontispiece (behind an aged tissue guard) of *Thompson's Flowering Plants of the Riviera* (1914), clearly showing that the book included an account of Riviera Vegetation by Tansley, accompanied by Thompson's photographs.

It does not appear that Tansley joined Thompson in the Riviera to write this account. From a recent biography, *Shaping Ecology: The Life of Arthur Tansley* by Peter Ayres (2012), there were various pioneering University ecology field courses which Tansley was involved in: several in Brittany (1904-1906) and at least one in the Provence (1914). However, the one occasion mentioned by Ayres when Tansley was in the Riviera was in February 1904, on his (delayed) honeymoon. The couple stayed for two weeks in Cannes in the warm sunshine, and, before moving on to Pisa (where Tansley had been before as an undergraduate), Rome, Naples and Sicily, they spent 'two delightful afternoons', even though in less clement weather, at the well-known tropical garden of Sir Thomas Hanbury at Menton, close to the Italian border.

Clearly impressed and recalling the visit, Tansley writes, on the first page of his account of Riviera Vegetation: 'The variety of trees and flowers from all parts of the world which can be and are cultivated in the Riviera gardens is immense, as may be realized most vividly by a visit to the famous garden founded by the late Sir Thomas Hanbury at La Mortola near Menton'. Tansley's notebooks are extant (Cambridge University Library) and begin in 1901; and they are evidently full of detail concerning plants, soil, topography, vegetation patterns and at least some have details of travel and travelling companions. If there is relevant material it might be usefully compared with the printed account of Riviera Vegetation with its sections on: woods of maritime pine and cork-oak; maquis; Aleppo pine-woods; garigues; stone pine-woods; sandy shore vegetation,

vegetation of shady ravines; and montane and sub-alpine vegetation.

In 1916 the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR; eventually to become the Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts, now known as The Wildlife Trusts, and serving as an umbrella organisation for the county trusts) printed a list of 284 sites they believed worthy of protection and which were proposed as nature reserves. It can be no coincidence that Tansley and Thompson are (separately) credited with having suggested some of these sites, now known as *Rothchild's Reserves* (see the book of this title, by Miriam Rothschild and Peter Marren, 1997).

Tansley's sites were of course, grander and less parochial than Thompson's, and two became National Nature Reserves, the first-named under Tansley's own watch in 1952: Kingley Bottom (Vale), Staffhurst Wood (Surrey), and Wistman's Wood. Thompson suggested two, both allocated to SPNR's second league: Burnham and Berrow dunes, and Pitts (or Pills) Wood, which was in suburban Birmingham where Thompson used to live until late 1902. It was a hardly bigger site (3 acres) than the Sharpham Moor Plot (1.4 acres). But here we learn that Thompson had written to local councillors and alderman deploring the misuse of the wood and published a note about its merits in the *Journal of Botany*. Not just 'Mr Angry of Clifton' as I have earlier termed him, but an early campaigner for the preservation of small but special wild places.

Over the years Tansley and Thomson exchanged correspondence about how the sales of their respective books were doing and in August 1922 Tansley wrote about his plans to go to Vienna, explaining, 'I want to be analysed by Freud'.

It is likely that what had brought them back into touch was Thompson's paper, *Changes in the Coast Vegetation near Berrow, Somerset*, published in 1922 in the *Journal of Ecology* where Tansley was still the editor. It was a study which has much in common with the work of the pioneers of ecology in Britain and it must have been appreciated by Tansley. Two of Thompson's Berrow photographs appear in Tansley's heavyweight 1939 book, on Plate 140 showing 'Glycerietum' – stabilised saltmarsh turf above the muddy *Salicornia* zone, dominated by *Puccinellia* (then *Glyceria*) *maritima*.

### **The Sharpham Moor Plot: the story in the picture**

Like the home of the Badgeworth Buttercup in Gloucestershire, the Sharpham Moor Plot is an SSSI, owned by the county Wildlife Trust, small, well-studied, and was acquired by private subscription in the early days of the nature conservation movement with the preservation of one particular plant in mind. That the two reserves have taken a different historical trajectory surely owes as much to the relative charisma of the plants involved as to the contrasting accessibility of the sites: one has been maintained as a species reserve, whilst the other became a place where ecological succession, which as we now appreciate, can lead to the disappearance of the specialist or niche plants, could be studied.

Steve Parker has kindly sent me copies of two documents about the Sharpham Moor Plot from the Natural England archives, a management plan 2009-2019, and '*a stimulus to its study*' made in 1973 by Graham Rix – and so it proved for he became the voluntary reserve manager. I haven't seen his paper on the site's history in the SANHS Proceedings for 2001 (145: 195-199) but, like an art historian explaining the context and content of a mysterious canvas, I am here more concerned with the story in the picture (Plate 1) and the relationship between Tansley and Thompson and how it might have facilitated the establishment and survival of this early nature reserve.

### **The discovery of *Carex x evoluta* at the Sharpham Moor Plot**

On 8 July 1915, Thompson discovered a hybrid sedge, then regarded as new to Britain, whilst collecting specimens of *Carex lasiocarpa* (Slender Sedge) at the eastern end of the peat moor between Edington and Street. Thompson explained that he was botanising 'where it was known' to his Great Uncle Thomas Clark, whose herbarium Thompson possessed. Specimens gathered in 1857 and 1859 can be seen on the *Herbaria at Home* website, the first 'by a fir plantation of Cousin James Clark's near the eastern end of the moor' (Plate 6 below, which uses the old name *Carex filiformis*) and the other 'about a mile north west of Sharpham Park'. As it happens, these locations tally at ST452381, a mile south-west of the Sharpham Moor Plot (ST465389). As usual, as well as expertise, a little serendipity can be attached to the discovery.

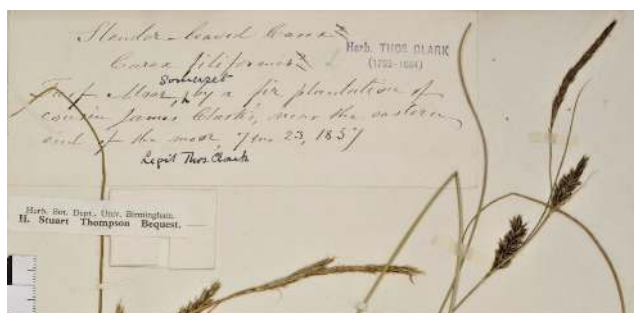


Plate 6. *Carex lasiocarpa*, (then *filiformis*) Slender Sedge, collected on 23 June 1857 by Thomas Clark, from an image on the Herbaria at Home website, part of Stuart Thompson's herbarium donated by him to Birmingham University. [*Carex lasiocarpa* used to be called *C. filiformis* and it is labelled as such here. Modern-day *Carex filiformis* is a different rare sedge.] The specimen seems to have inspired Thompson's visit to the area when he found *Carex x evoluta* at the Sharpham Moor Plot. Though Thompson found *Carex lasiocarpa* there, Clark's specimen of this rare sedge in Somerset was from a mile away.

More recently an 1833 specimen of the hybrid from Cambridgeshire has been identified as the first British record. At the Sharpham Moor Plot, it was last seen in 1955 but it was later found on Street Heath which was used to source a reintroduction at its original site in 2006, though it ultimately failed to survive there (Steve Parker pers. comm. to CML). It has only been found in two other sites in Britain and Ireland.

Although both the initial report in the *Journal of Botany* for 1915 (53: 309) and the report in the Watson Botanical Exchange Club for 1916 (when a second set of specimens were sent out) lists it as a species (*C. evoluta*), the detailed accounts make it clear that it was identified as the hybrid between the Greater Pond-sedge *Carex riparia* and *C. lasiocarpa*. It grew in quantity with the latter, though not within a hundred yards of the former.

Rix (1973), who saw letters from Thompson to Tansley in the latter's (or site) archives, states that Thompson's 'concern about the probable future destruction of the habitat of this [hybrid] sedge was communicated to ... Tansley'. It is this that lay behind the subsequent acquisition of what was to become known as the Sharpham Moor Plot.

### **The *Carex evoluta* fund for the purchase of the Sharpham Moor Plot**

The Sharpham Moor Plot was the first designated nature reserve in Somerset. The southern part of Leigh Woods on the Somerset side of the Avon Gorge was given to the National Trust in 1909 but more for landscape and archaeology; at Brean Down

in 1912, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds bought out the shooting rights and land was not acquired until later.

The following is from Rix's (1973) account. 'Tansley and Thompson visited the plot on 23 June 1923 and listed about 100 species in two to three hours. Tansley saw the plot as containing a rich variety of peat habitats in which ecological investigations could be carried out over a period without disturbance if this were to become a nature reserve. In August 1923 he offered £20 to help in its purchase for the National Trust. Thompson found 31 other donors who contributed from 2 guineas to 10 shillings each to raise the £45 for the purchase. The National Trust suggested the plot was more suitable for the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves. They accepted on condition that the local committee agreed to pay the upkeep and the Society could dispose of the plot if they should default'. SANHS, Rix also explained, provided 10 shillings a year for upkeep for at least the next decade.

Generally, modern narratives of the acquisition emphasise Tansley's involvement as a man of national importance, and without doubt underestimate the initiatives and involvement of Thompson, 'the local man on the ground'. Thompson's obituary in the Bristol Naturalists' Society Proceedings for 1940 was written by the Professor of Botany at Bristol University, Macgregor Skene, who around that time had become the site manager on behalf of the SPNR. Skene wrote that Thompson 'took the chief part in securing the purchase of the Sharpham Moor Plot'.

Thompson's appeal also preceded the visit by Tansley. There is a letter dated 11 May 1923 in Thompson's correspondence from TB Blow, a fellow Quaker, known as a collector of Charophytes from many countries, who sent half a guinea (ten shillings and sixpence) for what was referred to as the '*Carex evoluta* fund'. The date of August 1923 (after the visit) which Rix gives for Tansley's contribution rather makes it clear, as well as does Thompson's pre-existing interest in creating small local reserves, that the motivator was Thompson, not Tansley – contrary to the assertion appearing on the Somerset Wildlife Trust's website. That they approached the National Trust first seems surprising, but it could well have arisen from their mutual knowledge of the good intentions but limited follow-through of the other organisation and a hope that the National Trust might meet the management costs.

More or less coinciding with moving to a new Clifton address, and a loss on his investments, Thompson was thinning out his books and collections of paintings and drawings, both before and after photographing Tansley at the Sharpham Moor Plot. This would all have been a concern on his mind at the time. In April 1923: 'If your means are smaller than ever are you being fair to yourself in exhibiting such generosity?' wrote someone at Birmingham Museum, and then 'Why give away pictures when you ought to turn them into cash?'

Thompson was by nature generous, but on his own admission in 1924, 'I have been quite a poor man since the war'. Tansley too was renowned for his financial generosity but was wealthier. I assume Thompson made one of the smaller donations – Rix rather suggests there may be a list rather than just a count. Another report mentions 33 donors, and as Rix mentions Tansley, then says 'Thompson found 31 other donors' we may well take it that 'other' means, 'other than Thompson himself'.

### **The Tansley/Thompson Survey of the Sharpham Moor Plot**

Tansley's book *Practical Plant Ecology* (1923, the preface signed in April) was written 'as a guide for those who are attracted to ecological work but are uncertain of how to set about it' so it is quite helpful in showing how basic ecological work was practiced at the time. There are sections on the primary survey and on notebooks and note-taking in the field which give a 'feel' to the approach being followed by Tansley in the photograph. Tansley knew, 'it is always essential to make notes on the spot' and that facts should be clearly separated from hypotheses or preconceived opinions.

The term 'primary survey' (as opposed to reconnaissance) recalled the surveying style of the first ecologists who had been working on British vegetation, covering huge swathes of land 20 years earlier, 'recognising and describing the larger vegetation units, ..., making lists of their floristic composition, studying their relationships and the general nature of their habitats, and recording their distribution on topographical maps ...'. As to note-taking, Tansley urged a systematic approach, lest the worker having departed the site found that they had omitted to record some important detail. 'But', he added 'no system, of course, can be a substitute for the activity of an alert and imaginative mind' (which Thompson is known to have possessed). Head bowed in concentration, Tansley would have been oblivious of sinking into the mire. Another year

(1925), Thompson would be forced to walk on hedge trimmings to traverse the plot.

But of course Tansley was not alone: the photographer was a co-worker in the enterprise. Thompson always considered that 'habitats' was one of his 'strong points'. Tansley was aware that his skills in plant identification in the field might not be as expert as someone whose primary expertise was that of a field botanist, and consequently in his academic life he liked to have what he called a 'florist' on hand. The early ecological excursions he had been on in Brittany put the students in groups of three: a surveyor, a diarist and a collector. One has to be alert to the context because someone writing in a notebook may be taking notes, or taking dictation, or taking possession of the data.

### **Afterwords**

Although Tansley is photographed writing in his notebook (will it prove to be one in the Cambridge University Library?), Rix (1973) describes the plant list as 'Thompson's list of vascular plants' and notes that Thompson increased the site total from 100 in 1923 to 130 in 1924, and to 140 in 1925. Thompson also repurposed a laundry card (a bachelor-like transgression of the systematic recording recommended by Tansley) to jot down various details which Rix was able to superimpose on a modern site map. But as these include information about site clearance and boundary ditch ownership, they cannot, (as Rix was aware) have been made during the visit shown on the 1923 photograph.

Something the two may have discussed when they met (but how did they travel there and did Tansley ever visit other parts of Somerset?) comes out in a letter from Tansley to Thompson a couple of months later (25 August 1923, Thompson correspondence, but I've no note this letter mentions Tansley's £20 donation that month): what was the status of Hornbeam in the west? 'Do I understand that Mr White now thinks the Leigh Woods locality may not be a native one? ... But still, the Wye Valley may be a genuine native habitat as I believe is true of the Beech at Symonds Yat'. If I may butt in to their conversation, the main area of occurrence of Hornbeam in Leigh Woods is the early 19th Century 'New Plantation' on the southern edge of the ancient and embanked woodland, so White's new belief must be correct.

On 6 January 1927 Tansley wrote that 'I am very sorry that you are suffering so much financially that you have to resign from the British Ecological

Society'. Nonetheless, Thompson's follow-up paper, *Further Changes in the Coast Vegetation near Berrow, Somerset* was published in their *Journal of Ecology* in 1930. Tansley's 1927 letter added, referring to the Somerset peatmoors 'I very much enjoyed my visit some summers ago'. On Thompson's part, there is a 1933 letter in his correspondence from GW Hedley (the second of the three successive author/editors of the *Flora of Gloucestershire* (1948) about the acquisition and initial management (fencing) of the Badgeworth reserve. It has the pertinent comment, clearly alluding to the Sharpham Moor Plot, 'you've been through the same thing yourself'.

### Last visits

In 1933 Thompson took the great amateur botanist JE (Ted) Lousley to visit the site (Rix 1973). Thompson described Lousley as 'a keen London botanist' (a draft letter to Hedley in the Thompson correspondence dated 3 May 1937) and took him around the Avon Gorge on 19 July 1933, so that date probably coincides with their visit to the Sharpham Moor Plot. Lousley went on to write Floras of the Isles of Scilly (1971) and Surrey (1976).

According to Rix (1973): 'Early in 1934 Tansley asked Thompson to write a history of the Plot with plant lists for the *Journal of Ecology*. The manuscript dated 10 August 1934 seems never to have been published, perhaps because Thompson invited more editing than Tansley had time to undertake'.

'In 1935 (25 August 1935 according to Rix's marginal note) the plot was visited by Tansley and Godwin with Thompson. This was the last meeting of the two men responsible for the creation of the reserve'. Harry Godwin, later Sir Harry, was in the 1960s the 'peat and pollen' Professor in the Botany School at Cambridge and was author of *The History of the British Flora: a factual basis for phytogeography* (1956; 1975).

Thompson continued to visit the plot throughout the 1930s, cutting *Molinia* and scrub. Rix mentions a pencil note by Thompson on a letter to Tansley dated 18 July 1939, 'it has been terribly overgrown of recent years, impassable in places'. Thompson died some months later on 3 March 1940.

In September 1955, at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, held at the University of Bristol, Tansley delivered his last significant lecture. Tansley died two months later on 25 November 1955. Whilst in Bristol he must have greeted his old doctoral student JF Hope-Simpson,

who co-authored the chapter on *Vegetation* in the meeting handbook, *Bristol and its adjoining Counties* (1955), and H-S, as we knew him, was at the time the warden of the Sharpham Moor Plot. Within a mile of where his old friend Thompson had lived, and a short distance from the Sharpham Moor Plot where the two had twice met, Tansley might have paused, reflected, and in the evening raised a last glass in their memory.

## Searching for Adder's-tongue during lockdown

Liz McDonnell



Adder's tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum* ©Liz McDonnell

Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) is a small green fern with a fleshy single 'leaf' and a small 'tongue' where the spores are produced. It is often only a few cms high. It is tolerant of a wide range of soil types and occurs in old pastures, in churchyards, limestone and chalk grassland, old quarries, damp peaty sites and amongst bracken, in woods, copses and hedgebanks. It also occasionally occurs on garden lawns (I once stayed with some friends in Suffolk and spotted hundreds of tiny plants on their lawn – they had lived there for many years and never noticed them!) The 2019 distribution map

suggested that it was declining in Somerset, but looking more closely into the recent records, it appeared to be an under-recorded species and many of the sites in which the Green twins had found it whilst recording for the Atlas Flora of Somerset (1997) had either not been revisited, or the plant had not been re-found in that area.

I prepared a long list of former sites – from MapMate, BSBI DDb and from the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) databases, for which we had no post-2000 records, as this was to be one of the species that the SRPG members could search for in 2020. In March when Covid19 prevented all but essential travel, I did not distribute the list but a few members who knew that this was a priority species to search for, sent me records from their local walk or cycle rides.

I already knew of a site in my immediate locality of Wedmore where I had found it in 1980s but had not revisited it since moving house, so I decided that I would walk across the fields to try to re-find it. On Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April I woke to a stunning sunrise with a huge red sun rising above the Mendips, so I filled a flask and packed my lunch for a plant hunting expedition to the neighbouring hamlet. I walked along the edge of the golf course where the May blossom was blooming in thick creamy white swags of beauty and the day was bright with promise. I met villagers walking along the same well-used path and we stopped to chat at a safe distance. I was pleased to find that one of the un-mown areas of the golf course (created in 1992 from a series of improved and semi-improved pastures) was still fairly species-rich and had a few Cowslips (*Primula veris*) and Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*).

I stopped to drink my morning coffee and added these to my recording card. The adjacent hay field was also fairly rich and I wandered across it adding Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*). But it was the colour of the grassy sward in the next field that caught my eye – this was dull beige and olive green, which indicated to me that this was not an agriculturally improved sward. I slipped under the loose wire to find that I was in a rather neglected field where scrub was spreading into the field from the hedge and where Common Knapweed and Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*) were abundant. There was much dead grass in the sward indicating that it had not been managed well recently, but in an area where the vegetation was thin, I spotted a few fronds of the Adder's-tongue. There were more than

30 tiny fronds, many without 'tongues'. I was delighted to find them, as this was a completely different field from the one that I was seeking.

I photographed them, took detailed notes and an 8 fig. grid reference and then continued on to the original-intended field. This was a very disappointing site, as the old damp sloping species-rich pasture had been improved and had been recently smothered with very pungent liquid manure. The sward was now bright green Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*) dominated species-poor grassland and there was no sign of any Adder's-tongue, Cowslips, Creeping-Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*) or sedges (*Carex* sp.) that I remember so clearly from all those years ago.

Encouraged by finding a new site at Cocklake, the following Saturday I decided to walk to a small field that I had noticed many times whilst driving along a local road out of Wedmore. The B-road is usually very busy with speeding local traffic and there are no pull-ins or parking places, but six weeks into lockdown, there were few cars on the roads and it seemed an ideal time to explore areas on foot, I prepared for a whole day out and walked along the beautifully quiet road out of the village, passed only by dog walkers and cyclists.



The roadside field, Wedmore ©Liz McDonnell

The roadside field in question was a small long rectangular field adjacent to the golf course and the reason why I had noticed it was its unusually thick untrimmed hedges and mature boundary trees. I had also seen deer grazing in there on several occasions as I drove past. I hopped over the rusty metal gate and was immediately struck by the unimproved nature of the sward – a rare site in an agriculturally improved landscape.



There were two low-lying parallel depressions running the length of the narrow field and in one of them where the vegetation was thin was a group of 100-200 small fronds of Adder's-tongue fern. Associated species included Glaucous Sedge, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Creeping-Jenny, Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) and Common Knapweed. I was so thrilled to see such a large number of fronds and hoped that little field does not get swallowed up in the expansion of the adjacent golf course. These two fields are very special and there are very few like this in this area of low-lying land and gentle slopes as most have been highly 'improved' for intensive dairy farms and sheep grazing. This recording adds to the knowledge of this unusual small fern in Somerset.

## Corona

### Georgina Shuckburgh

I remember when Corona  
 Was a fizzy red drink,  
 Long before we were  
 Keyed by Lockdown.  
 Men with yellow floppy hair  
 Lead us who knows where  
 And we resort to Zoom,  
 Our new neighbourhood.  
 The Queen comes out of hibernation  
 To evoke another Dunkirk  
 And ask us to stay at home,  
 Saving the odd trip to the supermarket,  
 Where staff with huge lollipops  
 In strict two metre exclusion zones,  
 March the aisles.  
 And march we still in daily exercise  
 To the beat of virus doom.  
 Friends remark on guilty secrets  
 Of peace and quiet and bird song  
 Of books read and puzzles solved.  
 The domestic violence of our precious lives  
 Wielded not at each other  
 But at another clod of earth.  
 We few, we precious few,  
 Give some thought to  
 Those that risk their lives  
 Whilst others fight for their's  
 And each Thursday proffer claps  
 In exchange,  
 Applauding our own survival.

## VC5 A September day at Clatworthy

### Graham Lavender

This was one of those perfect autumn days when things go well, weather just right and targets are found and a few more ticks added to the monad totals. Chris, Linda and I met at Syndercombe Lane, the same parking spot as the SRPG meeting in May 2019, and notable for finding Faroese Dandelion, *Taraxacum faeroense* at the meeting (a full report is in the 2019 newsletter). This time the three of us had set ourselves the target of finding the Six-stamened Waterwort, *Elatine hexandra* which Fred Rumsey had located in 2012 with a few secondary targets to include Orange Foxtail, *Alopecurus aequalis* which had not been recorded at the southern end of Clatworthy since 2003.

Our convoy stopped at the sight of a brassica field at the top of Syndercombe Lane which leads down to the reservoir. Now personally I like to stick with targets but this field was compelling us to stop.

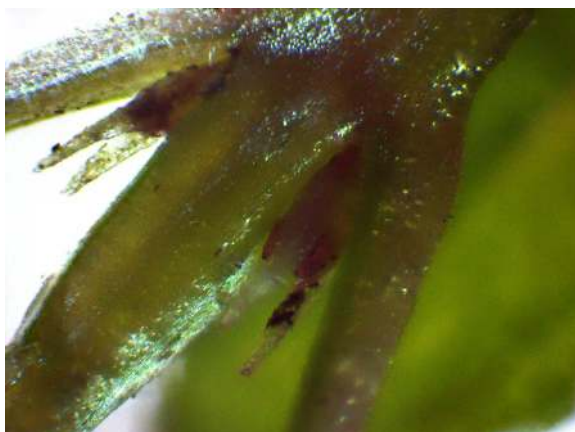


Field Woundwort, *Stachys arvensis* ©Graham Lavender

Immediately inside the gate was Field Woundwort, *Stachys arvensis* and not just one or two plants, this was a ten acre field so our estimate was something in the order of 10,000. The other interest was just a few - what at first glance were 'back of card' *Sinapis* - but on closer inspection (well actually we had to take them home for determination) were in fact White Mustard, *Sinapis alba* with very long terminal segment to fruit, ours in fact were up to 21mm. Possibly a plant overlooked or miss-recorded as Charlock, *Sinapis arvensis*?

Distraction over and 24 taxa added to the monad total, the convoy moved on to the car park at the bottom of the lane close to the reservoir. Now the records from 2012 showed *Elatine* over a 100m or so stretch so we searched it at snail's pace and then we

did the same again back in the return direction, then we searched a bit more. Although we had researched the plant before the meeting, we still really had little expectation of its size or just general jizz. It's surprising the variation of pictures on the web and book don't really give full impression of size, or just what a perfect specimen might look like. Linda found a few small things with spatulate leaves but they were tiny, there were no flowers and we felt they could be anything - but we kept them. At home under the microscope they had tiny pointed stipules which exactly matched the description and picture in Poland (*the Vegetative Key to the British Flora*) for *Elatine hexandra*.



Stipules of *Elatine hexandra* x40 ©Graham Lavender

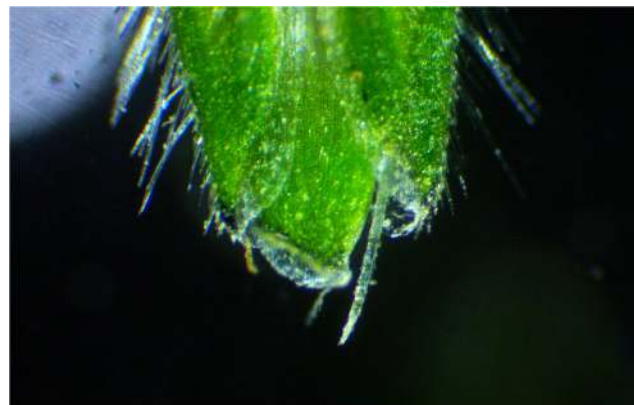
The two pointed stipules at 40x magnification are most clearly seen top left but the other two axillary stipules can also be seen in the centre of the picture. Fred responded very quickly and confirmed this as *Elatine hexandra* to our delight.



*Alopecurus aequalis* ©Graham Lavender

Our main focus now turned to the southern tip of the reservoir, where a small inlet stream and very large muddy, damp draw-down zone was a prime candidate for our next target. In fact we found *Alopecurus aequalis* almost immediately, its orange anthers making it impossible to miss.

Now in VC5 we have only one site for the record for its hybrid with Marsh Foxtail, *A. geniculatus* - *Alopecurus* x *hausknechtianus* recorded by Ian Green in 2000 and confirmed by Dr T A Cope.



*Alopecurus aequalis* awn ©Graham Lavender

In this picture the awn is 0.5mm, the limit for *A. equalis*, the hybrid will have awn in range from 0.5mm of *aequalis* and 1.5mm of *A. geniculatus*. Another visit is needed.

The third target was Northern Yellow-cress, *Rorippa islandica*. Tim Rich recorded in 2003 that the Clatworthy population was approx. 50,000 plants and the largest known site for them in country. After 17 years it seemed reasonable to have a close look and in the southern-most bay the estimate was 5000 alone. It was also interesting to note some Marsh Yellow-cress, *Rorippa palustris* at the site. At Wimbleball the week before we had found, Creeping Yellow-cress, *Rorippa sylvestris* but despite searching none was found and indeed there do not seem to be any records at Clatworthy for this RPR plant.

Clatworthy is a wonderful site with numerous RPR plants and possibly next visit will be to try and locate *Elatine hexandra* in the northern tip of Clatworthy.

## First Flowering - was it *really* such an exceptional year?

### Simon Leach

Our lives this year have been dominated by graphs and charts. And, worryingly, many of the lines on these graphs are now heading in the wrong direction again. Infection rates are rising, the 'rule of six'

prevails (except where it doesn't), and local lockdowns are starting to proliferate—though, thankfully, not in Somerset yet. One secondary school in Taunton has had two year-group 'bubbles' self-isolating within 10 days of the start of the new school year. That's more than 400 pupils, apparently. The test and trace system seems to be creaking under the strain. This doesn't bode well, and right now it's hard to see where it will all end.

We are in for a tough winter. From today's vantage point, perched on the autumn equinox, the notion that any time soon we might be able to meet in a room together to talk about plants seems fanciful. Let's hope that by the time of the *next* equinox we'll be able to meet again. Presumably some of the field meetings cancelled this year could be rolled forward to 2021: maybe we'll hold that early-April meeting in Orchard Wood after all, just twelve months later than anticipated.



Hazel, *Corylus avellana*, catkins in bud. 04/09/2020.  
©Simon Leach

But what about first flowerings? Has it *really* been such an exceptional year? This isn't the easiest question to answer, and it may have to involve a few charts or graphs, which I'm sorry about because we're probably all sick to the back teeth of such things. At least these graphs have *nothing*, absolutely *nothing*, to do with viral pandemics. So, let's try to think of them as light relief, if that's possible?

Walter Watson. Let's start with Walter Watson who, as you know, in the early decades of the last century kept detailed records of first flowering dates (FFDs). His paper, published in 1949, included a 19-page Table of average FFDs and 'flowering periods' for no less than 843 species. A total that puts the rest of us to shame, frankly. Watson lived in Taunton, and

much of the fieldwork he did was in the south and west of the county. For the bulk of species his FFDs were based on at least 10 years' records, which we think were made in the 1920s and early 1930s<sup>1</sup>. The man's energy was extraordinary. Don't forget that during this time he was teaching Biology at Taunton School, while also actively involved in the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, as well as being an internationally-renowned lichenologist, a more-than-competent bryologist and mycologist, and (as it happens) a man with an interest in plant galls. As if that weren't enough, he was an avid watcher of cricket. For most of his adult life he was a member of Somerset County Cricket Club; at the time of his death, in 1960, he was the Club's longest-serving member. He proved, if proof were needed, that one can combine natural history with a love of cricket. A relief to us all, I'm sure you'll agree.

But that's not the point. The point, really, is that Walter Watson bequeathed to his successors this amazing baseline of information, allowing us to compare FFDs today with those of roughly a century ago. Of his 843 species, this year we've recorded first dates for 526 of them. Up until mid-March the FFDs were mine, of course, but from the start of lockdown they could have been anyone's. Plotting our earliest FFD for each species in 2020 against Watson's FFDs gives us the graph in Fig. 1. There are 526 dots, each one a species.

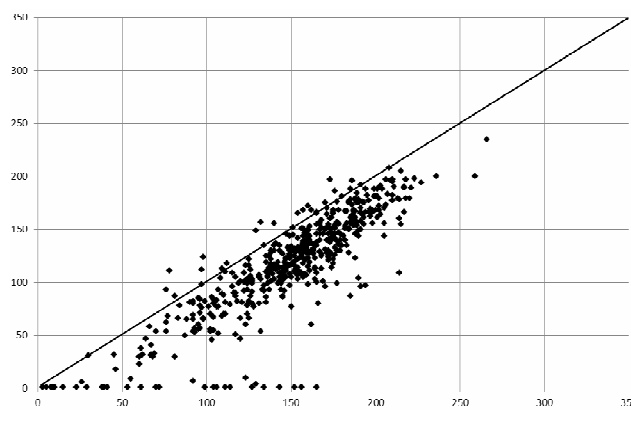


Fig. 1: First flowering dates (FFDs) for 529 species in 2020, plotted against 'average first flowering times' given by Watson. Dates are shown as day no. (1 January = day 1). The diagonal line marks the line along which the data-points would lie if 2020 FFDs were identical to Watson's; above the line the 2020 date is later than Watson's date, below the line is earlier.

<sup>1</sup> We don't know precisely *which* years, unfortunately.

You can see immediately that the data-points lie mainly *below* the line, indicating that our dates were, on the whole, earlier than Watson's. Indeed, only 19 species (3.6%) had later dates than Watson's, and some of these were probably only 'late' because during lockdown the places in which we might find them were hard for us to visit. If you don't like graphs, let's summarise these findings with a single statistic: overall, our FFDs were, on average, **31 days earlier** than the dates listed in Watson's big Table.

Really? Watson, I think, would be spinning in his grave. Mind you, his dates were *average* FFDs over more than a decade, so obviously in some years his dates would have been earlier than average while in others they'd have been later<sup>2</sup>. But a *whole month* earlier? He'd doubtless protest that his dates were based on one pair of eyes operating across a fairly restricted geographical area, whereas ours had the benefit of many pairs of eyes scattered across the entire county. And, to be fair, he'd be right to insist that the latter would produce an earlier crop of dates than the former. In essence, then, he'd say that we had an unfair advantage.

So, maybe a fairer comparison would be to test our dates against his by restricting the analysis to just *one* person's FFDs. So let's try that. We'll take mine, if that's okay with everyone, since not only does that give us the largest pool of species to work with, it also comprises a set of records drawn from a geographical area that is roughly similar to Watson's. The first thing to be said, though, is that as soon as you use only one person's records you lose an awful lot of information, as the pool of species becomes substantially reduced—despite the fact that the individual concerned was being spurred on each week by everyone else's recording! I recorded FFDs for 406 species, just over three-quarters of the number recorded by the group as a whole. The results for these are shown in the graph in Fig. 2.

I'm not altogether happy with my own records for this spring. In late March and April, for instance, there were places I couldn't get to, either because they were beyond the limits of daily permitted exercise or because Ben had gone off with the car.

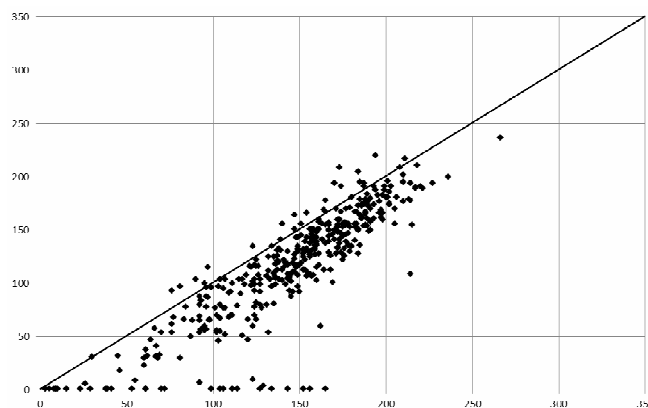


Fig. 2: FFDs for 406 species recorded by SJL in 2020, plotted against 'average first flowering times' given by Watson. Dates are shown as day no. (1 January = day 1). The diagonal line marks the line along which the data-points would lie if 2020 FFDs were identical to Watson's; above the line the 2020 date is later than Watson's date, below the line is earlier.

So some dates may actually be a little *later* than they would have been had we not been in lockdown. But bear in mind that Watson, too, was living through a pandemic—in his case the Spanish 'flu—and he'd probably be keen to stress that his own mobility would have been pretty limited<sup>3</sup>, and his records were made mostly while he was still working full-time, while I've had the advantage of being retired and with time on my hands. We could have argued the toss late into the night, him and me, but none of that would alter the fact that my own FFDs for 2020 are still strikingly early—below the line—in comparison with his. Again, for those who dislike graphs, my dates for these 406 species were, on average, **28 days earlier** than Watson's.

Interestingly, if we do the calculation again, but this time using the *group's* earliest FFDs for these species rather than my own, the figure is **34 days earlier**. Which illustrates well the added value of having many pairs of eyes, the *group's* FFDs being earlier, on average, by almost a week compared with my own dates. Actually, the difference would have been greater than this, since first-flowerers before lockdown (i.e. between January and mid-March) were only recorded by me, even though others in the group would doubtless have conjured up earlier records had they been involved from the outset.

So, okay: our FFDs in 2020 were exceptionally early in comparison with the sorts of dates that Watson

<sup>2</sup> The raw data from which his average FFDs were calculated cannot be found, so we have no idea the *range* of dates he recorded.

<sup>3</sup> There is much we don't know about Walter Watson. Did he own a car, for instance? Or did he have to rely on public transport to get around the county? We've got no idea...

was getting about a century ago. But, you might say, this is barely newsworthy: climate change is happening, the evidence is all around us, and frankly it would have been surprising had our dates *not* been much earlier than Watson's. And yet many of us still felt—at least during lockdown—that the spring of 2020 was unusual, even when assessed against today's 'new normal'. Was it, perhaps, that the season's gallop, its *speed of advancement*, accelerated just at the moment our own movements were suddenly curtailed? In which case, could our perception of 'earliness' really just have been an artefact of lockdown? Was it simply that we were keeping a closer eye on spring that we would normally do, and therefore noticing things that we might otherwise have overlooked?

Well, the *weather* this spring was certainly unusual. It was, after all, one of the driest and sunniest springs on record. In fact it was the sunniest since records began, in 1929. Also, it followed an exceptionally mild and relatively frost-free winter. Nationally, it was the sixth-warmest January since 1884, and the warmest in the 13 years that I've been recording FFDs, i.e. since 2008. February was also relatively mild, being the second-warmest during that same period (only 2019 was warmer). March wasn't especially mild, but this was followed by the second-warmest April and May since 2008. Summer was marked by prolonged periods of mainly dull weather; yet while June and July were relatively cool by today's standards, August 2020 was, nationally, the warmest on record. In SW England, seven of the nine months from December to August had mean daily temperatures at least 1°C warmer than the long term (1961-1990) average.

Given the weather, then, one might anticipate that spring 2020 would indeed have been 'early', even in comparison with other recent springs. We can test this by looking at the FFDs of species in 2020 against their 2008-2017 'decadal average' FFDs. This reduces the pool of species still further, since there are only 339 species for which we have a decade's-worth of FFDs. In 2020 I failed to record FFDs for ten of these, but results for the other 329 are shown in the graph in Fig. 3. Note that the x-axis has changed: it now shows my own 2008-17 average FFDs, rather than Watson's from back in the day.

Again, most data-points sit well below the line, indicating that FFDs in 2020 were for most species earlier than their decadal average. Look closely, though, and you'll see a little group of dots sitting well *above* the line around day 100 on the y-axis;

these 'late' FFDs were at the end of March/beginning of April when lockdown brought me to a temporary standstill and some usual haunts like Thurlbear Quarrylands and Orchard Wood suddenly became off limits. Nevertheless, taking all species combined, FFDs in 2020 were, on average, **15 days earlier** than the decadal average. More than that, though, it turns out that they were **4 days earlier** than even the *earliest* set of dates during that decade, in 2014.

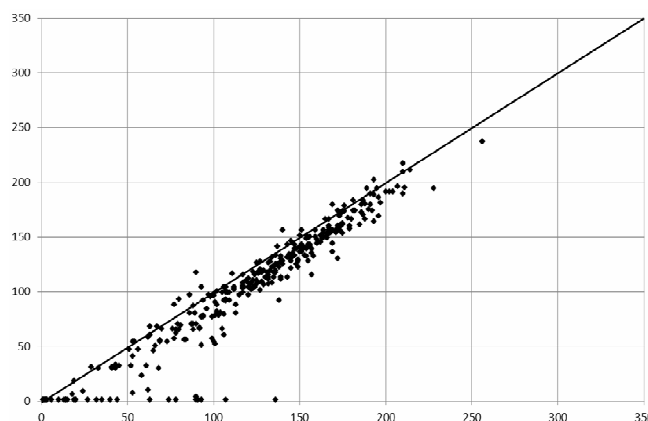


Fig. 3: FFDs for 329 species recorded by SJL in 2020, plotted against 2008-17 decadal average FFDs recorded by same observer. Dates are shown as day no. (1 January = day 1). The diagonal line marks the line along which the data-points would lie if 2020 FFDs were identical to the decadal average; above the line the 2020 date is later than the decadal average, below the line is earlier

In summary, then: FFDs in 2020 were 28-31 days earlier (on average) than in Watson's day, 15 days earlier (on average) than in the decade 2008-17, and 4 days earlier (on average) than even the *earliest* spring of that decade. So, to answer the original question: yes, it *has* been an exceptional year.

~\*~

Today, 21st September, has been sunny "from the word GO!", as weather forecasters like to put it. A cloudless sky to mirror perfectly the weather we were experiencing in Week 1 of lockdown. A lot warmer today though. The spring equinox was marked by a ground frost and a daytime maximum temperature of 14°C. Today's maximum is 25°C. We've been sitting in the garden enjoying Red Admirals, *Vanessa atalanta*, and Speckled Woods, *Pararge aegeria*, and a Hummingbird Hawk-moth, *Macroglossum stellatarum*, has been busily working its way across the patch of ground we optimistically call 'the flower border'.

Several of you have been reporting *second* first flowerings. An Indian summer can sometimes bring

with it a nod to spring, and so it's with a sense of *déjà vu* that Gill, Helena, and Margaret—and maybe others—have been noting flowers on trees of Holly, *Ilex aquifolium*, otherwise laden with berries. Ann F. and I have noted Wayfaring-tree, *Viburnum lantana*, blooming again in the Taunton area—Ann has seen flowering Spindle, *Euonymus europaeus*, too—while Hester's Greater Chickweed, *Stellaria neglecta*, was soon followed by Grass-leaved Vetchling, *Lathyrus nissolia*, on a grassy bank in Longrun Meadow, as well as Goat's-beard, *Tragopogon pratensis* and its startlingly beautiful hybrid with Salsify, *T. porrifolius*, *T. x mirabilis*, which hadn't been seen flowering since the end of May. There have also been records of Dogwood, *Cornus sanguinea*, and Apple, *Malus domestica*, flowering a second time, while one or two of you have mentioned unseasonal sightings of Cowslip, *Primula veris*, and Primrose, *P. vulgaris*. Margaret claimed possibly the unlikeliest record of the last few weeks when she saw several newly-flowering Yellow Iris, *Iris pseudacorus*, in a ditch near Chew Valley Lake on 15th September. Blooming ridiculous, if you'll excuse the pun!

This morning at Thurlbear I've had a wide variety of still-flowering plants like Wild Basil, *Clinopodium vulgare*, Hawkweed Oxtongue, *Picris hieracioides*, Wild Thyme, *Thymus drucei*, Musk Mallow, *Malva moschata*, Agrimony, *Agrimonia eupatoria*, and Traveller's-joy, *Clematis vitalba*. We are used to the flowering periods of such species continuing long into the autumn, but these records of spring/early-summer species are much more surprising. It's like we're viewing the world through a distorting mirror, the seasons temporarily jumbled in an early-autumn heat haze. We claimed that spring had finally ended with the first blossom of Ivy, *Hedera helix*, but now there's this echo, a faint reprise of better days—like a *second* spring, of sorts. But it won't last, it never does, and as the temperatures tumble so these flowers will begin to falter, like little lights going out. The Ivy, though, will see us through. You can always rely on the Ivy.

## Some Interesting Finds

### Margaret Webster

#### Bracteate Bluebell

First, not a species or even a variety, the bracteate Bluebell is simply a mutant where the bracts grow abnormally long. It's not often found in the wild; this one, growing beside a normal Bluebell was by the

roadside on one of the little roads behind Bristol Airport.

Clive Lovatt commented 'Bluebells normally have short green bracts beneath the flowers but occasionally they produce long ones, longer than the flowers. In this state it has been described as variety *bracteata*, though it is now regarded as a mere occasional mutation and the name is not currently used. There is a short account of it in White's Flora of Bristol (1912: 594-5). An example was found in Pillgrove Wood near Long Ashton sometime before 1905, and it was persistent'



Bracteate Bluebell ©Margaret Webster

#### Hybrid bramble

At the top of Long Lane near Felton Common I came across a bramble with flowers about 4 cm. across about the size of wild roses! It was quite pretty. I sent some images to Rob Randall as I wondered if it might just be Dewberry, *R. caesius*; I had read somewhere that earlier flowers were sometimes larger (but I have never seen any that large).

Here is part of Rob's reply " As you say, it is very like Dewberry but the large flowers and hint of pink in the petals suggest it is a derivative of that species. Because it is so like the true plant, I expect it is a back-cross to *Rubus caesius* from another hybrid or one of the brambles in Section *Corylifolii*."



Hybrid Dewberry near Felton Common May 2020  
©Margaret Webster

**Lesser Canary-grass, *Phalaris minor***



Lesser Canary Grass, *Phalaris minor* Woodspring Priory car park 22 May ©Margaret Webster

On 22nd May Jim and I had a walk around the coast near Woodspring Priory where I saw an abundance of a grass I didn't recognise. I took a sample back for ID and found it to be *Phalaris minor* or Lesser Canary Grass, which Helena tells me is new to VC6. It has arrived in force - a rough count indicated at least 81 "clumps" of it, some large some very small all around the car park area.



*Phalaris minor* head ©Margaret Webster

The largest plants and greatest concentration was centred on ST34717 66207, but ST 347 661 comes close behind. The slopes are covered with some sort of string netting, presumably for stability in the wet winter and all of the netted areas have the *Phalaris*. The photos show part of the site, the sample I collected and a close up of the head. Not shown are the long ligules, one of the characteristics of the species.



Habitat and abundance of *Phalaris minor*, Woodspring Priory car park, 22 May 2020. ©Margaret Webster

Clive Lovatt adds 'there seem to be no recent records in Somerset or Gloucestershire: there is a record in Yeovil, VC5, as a casual in 1960, and there are a few records in the northern half of Gloucestershire, up to 1984.

*These notes were first published in the July 2020 edition of the Bristol Naturalists' Society Bulletin.*

**Hairy Mallow *Althaea hirsuta* at Cleve Hill SSSI**

**Jeanne Webb**

Having been called the above name for all its known history, Hairy Mallow has been given a new name so it is now Rough Mallow *Malva setigera* - I prefer to call it Hairy Mallow and that is how I refer to it.

The first record in Somerset was listed in Murray's Flora in 1875 where it was said to be native in fields and woods at Butleigh. In 1980 it was found in Aller Wood by Trist and in 1982 John Keylock, a Somerset teacher and botanist, found it at Cleeve Hill. Out of the county it was recorded in Kent in 1792 and Surrey 1862 with a few casual records in southern England.

The flower is pink (called mauve by Stace!), the lower leaves are shallowly lobed and the upper ones deeply lobed or palmate. It is coarsely hairy with long simple and short stellate hairs everywhere except on the petals. The seeds are like tiny ammonites with usually 12 in a starry case.



Hairy Mallow *Malva setigera* ©Jeanne Webb

In 1989 there were two sites in Somerset, Aller Hill and Cleeve Hill, and Hairy Mallow was made a Schedule 8 plant which gives it legal protection – there are 17 other Schedule 8 plants in Somerset on our Rare Plant Register. Cleeve Hill was designated an SSSI and this was followed by a Plantlife 'Back from the Brink' designation for Hairy Mallow and Natural England's 'Species Recovery Programme', when conservation work began.



Rough Mallow glade after cutting 2019 ©Jeanne Webb

Tim and I became involved in helping to clear scrub on the site at a Plantlife volunteer work-party in 1998 when the number of plants had declined to only four and there was talk of abandoning it to its fate. We offered to continue the work on a regular basis and over the years cut down and cleared brambles and small scrubby trees reversing the general deterioration of the grassland.

The three sites were cut annually, initially by us, but later with help from the owners, the Crown Commissioners. Over the years we developed a process whereby we raked the growing areas with a springbok rake making places for seeds to develop. There is now an annual increase in the plants from a maximum in 2011 of 830 to an annual stable number in the hundreds.

All three sites are now scrub-free and are full of limestone grassland plants such as Nit-grass, *Gastridium ventricosum*, Pyramidal Orchid, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, Dwarf Spurge, *Euphorbia exigua*, Carline Thistle, *Carlina vulgaris*, Lesser Centaury, *Centaureum pulchellum* and wild Carrot, *Daucus carota*.

### Update on the Colour in the Margins (CitM) project

#### Alison Mitchell, CitM Monitoring and Advisory Officer (Mid-Somerset Hills, North Downs and Worcestershire)

As the Colour in the Margins project is nearing the end in its current form, I wanted to share with you some of the great work we have achieved in Somerset. 2020 has been a difficult year for so many, and it obviously had an impact on the work we could do. We were unable to work with groups of volunteers or run workshops which sadly meant we had to cancel all of our planned events including the joint survey day with SRPG. We were also limited by the number of surveys we could carry out and where we could travel. However, we still took full advantage of the opportunities we did have, when possible, running small 'Covid-19 secure' volunteer days collecting, carrying out re-introductions and revisiting as many farms as possible.

During 2018-2020 we visited a total of 20 farms to carry out inventory surveys, species population surveys and to give management advice. 12 of these holdings were found to have CitM primary species; seven had Spreading Hedge-parsley, *Torilis arvensis*, three Corn Buttercup, *Ranunculus arvensis*, one



Broad-fruited Cornsalad, *Valerianella rimosa* and one Pheasant's Eye, *Adonis annua*. These holdings were visited on several occasions throughout the project in order to monitor the populations of primary species present. Of these sites there were only two where we failed to record species on subsequent visits.

The *Adonis annua* site was drawn to our attention by local botanists in 2019. One large plant was found growing on a strip of grazed grassland adjacent to the King's Sedgemoor Drain. This was a very unusual location and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it was not present during a 2020 survey. In 2019 one very sorry-looking *Ranunculus arvensis* was found in a field near Somerton but was not observed during 2020 surveys.



Corn Buttercup *Ranunculus arvensis* ©Flickr Back from the Brink

In all cases we have continued to work with the landowners throughout the project and the majority of our recommendations have been implemented to the benefit of the species present. One particular success occurred on a farm near Bridgwater where *Torilis arvensis* had been historically recorded. A 2019 survey revealed only one plant, however the farmer was keen to implement management changes in order to improve conditions for arable plants and agreed to trial two autumn-cultivated uncropped plots. On a return visit in 2020 over 200 plants were recorded in the plots along with huge populations of Shepherd's Needle, *Scandix pecten-veneris*, and increased numbers of Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia exigua* and Broad-leaved Spurge *Euphorbia platyphyllos*. Both the landowner and the project team were delighted with the results and this management is set to continue.

We have now undertaken *Torilis arvensis* reintroductions at four carefully selected sites, one in February 2020 (delayed due to ground conditions) and three in September 2020. In the summer we revisited the site sown in February and were delighted to find over 350 plants which is a real success. These results are very encouraging, and we look forward to revisiting these sites in the summer of 2021.

A large part of the Colour in the Margins project has been to increase awareness of arable plants and to provide training on their identification. I have had the privilege of working with over 30 dedicated, enthusiastic and passionate volunteers throughout the project. I'm incredibly grateful for all the support they have given the project and the commitment they have shown. We really could not have achieved everything we have without you – thank you to all who have been involved!

Finally, due the difficulties we have encountered this year, we have been granted an extension to the project until August 2021 to allow us to continue our work. We will have fewer staff and at this stage we are still working out the details, but the good news is we will be around a little longer and look forward to seeing you all in person in 2021!

## Plant Records for 2020

### Compiled by Helena Crouch

Astonishingly, despite the lack of meetings, and all the terror and restrictions of 2020, over **48,000** records were made for vascular plants in Somerset, which is a phenomenal achievement. Venturing out recording has kept SRPG members united, even if solitary, but this year we received records from many new contributors too. Thank you very much to everyone who sent any records. The list of new Somerset/Vice-County records is usually dominated by alien species, but in 2020 seven new native taxa were added to the Somerset list (admittedly, all hybrids, infraspecific taxa or "critical" species). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the last section includes many garden escapes in areas near habitation, reflecting the limitations to travelling far from home during lockdown. Despite that, many significant records were also made for native taxa, including Rare Plant Register species, some of which are listed in the third section.

This year, records for *Taraxacum* species are included in this list, although these are restricted to

first records for Somerset/VC5/VC6. All records below are for 2020 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:

DB	Damon Bridge
HJC	Helena Crouch
RFitzG	Ro FitzGerald
RG	Roger Golding
DEG	Dave Green
IPG	Ian Green
GEL	Graham Lavender
SJL	Simon Leach
CML	Clive Lovatt
EJMcD	Liz McDonnell
SJP	Stephen Parker
SP	Sharon Pilkington
RDR	Rob Randall
GHR	Gill Read
AJR	John Richards
APR	Andrew Robinson
FJR	Fred Rumsey
MMS	Mike Shaw
JW	Jeanne Webb
MAW	Margaret Webster

Where reference is made to the most recent floras for our area; these are denoted as follows:

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

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

### New Somerset Records

\**Allium cristophii* (Star of Persia) – Somerton, Polham Lane (ST484282), 2 May, 78 flowering heads in a shady spot underneath a hedge tree, surrounded by nettles, a garden throw-out, David Robins, VC6.

*Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *trichomanes* (Maidenhair Spleenwort) – Birchanger Bridge

(SS86314680), 21 Feb, on mossy rocky wall of bridge at exit of tunnel, GEL (conf. FJR), VC5.



*Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *trichomanes* ©Graham Lavender

*Eleocharis palustris* x *uniglumis* – Minehead, Lower Marsh Farm (SS99344607), 29 May, in large depression of some 50 x 20m in surrounding marsh/grazing land just behind golf course, GEL, VC5.

\**Guizotia scabra* – Old Cleeve (ST04164178), 26 Dec, 1 large plant appeared in garden, probably from birdseed, JW (det. Stefano Doglio), VC5.

*Hieracium acuminatum* (Tall Hawkweed) – Clutton, Kings Lane (ST62606007), 3 Jun 2015, 4 plants on stonework of bridge over railway, N side of road, HJC & Peter Watson (specimen collected 1 Jul 2020 conf. MMS), VC6.

\**Lamprocapnos spectabilis* (Asian Bleeding-heart) – Hawkcombe (SS87584577), 26 Apr, escaped from garden of 'The Stables' onto bridleway, GEL (det. RFitzG), VC5.

\**Nemesia denticulata* (Toothed Aloha) – Clevedon, Sunnyside Road (ST406713), 5 Apr, Dee Holladay (det. CML), VC6.

*Poa infirma* x *annua* – Taunton, Silver Street (ST23152442), 29 Mar, on small traffic island with Silver Street sign on it, opposite Sainsbury's, GEL (det. CML), VC5.

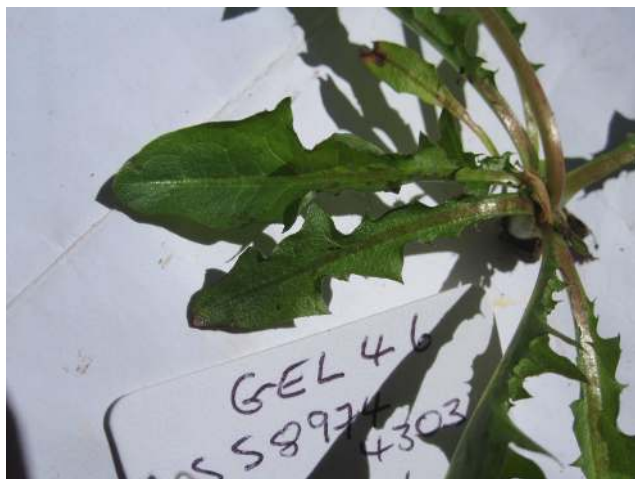
\**Scabiosa atropurpurea* (Sweet Scabious) – Midsomer Norton, West Road (ST66245500), 22 Jul, 1 plant in flower at base of garden wall, on pavement, possibly the cultivar 'Black Knight', HJC, VC6.

\**Solanum chenopodioides* (Tall Nightshade) – Bath, Pierrepont Street, 30 Sep, 1 well-established plant

on basement retaining wall, RDR (det. Richard Pooley), VC6.

\**Spergularia bocconeii* (Greek Sea-spurrey), Holnicote Estate (SS91134624), 2 Jul, 40+ plants in a corner of the National Trust car park, SP, VC5.

\**Taraxacum angulare* (Angular-lobed Dandelion) – Ellicombe (SS98354484), 13 Mar, grassy roundabout on A39, GEL (det. AJR), VC5.



*Taraxacum berthae* ©Graham Lavender

*Taraxacum berthae* (Bertha's Dandelion) – Stoke Pero (SS89744303), 12 May, verge E of Cloutcham Farm where road crosses stream within woodland, GEL (det. AJR), VC5.

*Taraxacum inclinorum* – Cloggs Down (SS83293194), 17 May, in remote area of unimproved grassland, beside stream, GEL (det. AJR), VC5. First record for Britain. A species otherwise so far only recorded from Ireland, and previously assumed to be an Irish endemic.

*Taraxacum stictophyllum* (Stiff-leaved Dandelion) – Hawkcombe Woods (SS86374552), 9 May, in oak woodland, verge of ford across stream, GEL (det. AJR), VC5.

### New Vice-County Records

\**Camassia leichtlinii* (Great Camas) – Trull (ST21702189), 25 Apr, a single patch at edge of field in rough grassland close to woodland, presumably a garden cast-out, SJL & Vicki Fairfax-Ross (det. HJC), VC5.

\**Cotoneaster dammeri* (Bearberry Cotoneaster) – Porlock (SS8846), 6 Dec, on wall at bottom of Porlock Hill, GEL, VC5.

\**Cotoneaster hjelmqvistii* (Hjelmqvist's Cotoneaster) – Yeovil (ST5516), 27 Jul, on walls, IPG, VC5.

\**Cotula coronopifolia* (Buttonweed) – West Sedgemoor SSSI (ST35182550), 9 Jul, growing in a shallow gutter, DB; West Sedgemoor SSSI, 17 Jul, (ST35132550) c. 500 plants, (ST35322549) bare ground in gateway, SJP & DB, VC5.

*Dryopteris affinis* subsp. *paleaceolobata* – Ley Combe, Hawkcombe Woods (SS88474562), 6 Oct, in damp humid coombe, GEL, VC5.

*Dryopteris lacunosa* (Pitted Male-fern) – Hawkcombe Woods (SS87414576), 29 Sep, 1 plant on opposite side of footpath to stream, GEL (det. RG), VC5.

\**Hieracium scotostictum* (Dappled Hawkweed) – Doverhay (SS88894637), 18 Apr, 7 plants on stone wall on R side of road going uphill, just before wood, GEL (det. MMS), VC5.

\**Impatiens sultanii* (Busy-Lizzie) – Pensford, Church Street (ST61866372), 25 Sep, 1 plant with bright pink flowers on W bank of River Chew, beneath bridge, HJC & DEG, VC6.

\**Lepidium virginicum* (Least Pepperwort) – Yeovil, Princes Street (ST55561599), 27 Jul, several plants around a drain, IPG, VC5.

\**Phalaris minor* (Lesser Canary-grass) – Woodspring (ST347661, ST347662), 22 May, c. 81 clumps around the NT car park near Woodspring Priory, MAW, VC6.

\**Sedum kimmachii* – Porlock (SS8846), 1 May, very common on outside garden walls and verges around village, GEL (det. RFitzG), VC5.

\**Taraxacum nitidum* (Shining Dandelion) – Old Cleeve (ST04814182), 3 Apr, in driveway of 'Torcross', JW (det. AJR), VC5.

\**Taraxacum angustisquameum* (Multi-lobed Dandelion) – Old Cleeve (ST04444188), 12 Apr, Claydowns Hill, in field gateway, JW (det. AJR), VC5.

### Other Interesting Records – Native species

*Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *trichomanes* (Maidenhair Spleenwort) – Putham Lane (SS93823856), 10 Oct, 1 plant on very dark very damp vertical section of rock edge of footpath, GEL (conf. FJR), VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

**Baldellia ranunculoides** (Lesser Water-plantain) – Shapwick Heath (ST42334083), 28 Jul, 4 plants on N edge of ditch across Cottongrass Fields, HJC & FJR, VC6. First record for this Near Threatened species in this hectad (or the Avalon Marshes) since 1992.

**Dryopteris affinis** subsp. **paleaceolobata** – Portishead, East Wood (ST47137754), 2 Jan, 1 plant on bank on S side of road along N edge of wood, HJC & FJR (conf. RG); Lower Woods, Longleat Estate (ST79684351), 25 Jun, 1 plant at W side of road through woods, just N of large lime tree, HJC & GHR (conf. RG), VC6; Putham Lane (SS93793887), 10 Oct, sunken lane, growing on left verge going downhill, in very damp humid conditions; Doverhay Woods (SS88894561, SS88904562), 11 Oct, 1 in very damp area of woods adjacent small stream, 1 in ditch/currently dry small stream beside footpath in very damp humid location; Birchhanger Bridge (SS86704689), 23 Oct, 1 on section of bridleway cutting across Toll Road, in very damp spot under trees adjacent to small wall; East Lucott Wood (SS86334552), 1 Nov, 1 opposite side of stream from footpath, near top of bank 2ft from stream, GEL, VC5. Second and third records for VC6 and Somerset, and second and subsequent records for VC5.

**Dryopteris lacunosa** (Pitted Male-fern) – Hawkcombe Woods (SS87354573), 30 Sep, 1 plant 1m from stream between stream and footpath, GEL; Hawkcombe Woods (SS87054556), 3 Oct, 1 plant on bank of Hawk Combe stream, GEL (det. RG); East Lucott Wood (SS86554545), 6 Oct, 1 plant in woodland at edge of stream, GEL; Chilly Bridge (SS92493047), 20 Oct, 1 plant bottom of steep rock face under canopy of trees, beside car pull in, GEL, VC5. Second, third, fourth and fifth records for VC5.

**Elytrigia x drucei** (*E. atherica* x *repens*) – Porlock Weir (SS86264815), 9 Jul, patch of some 2metre square in centre of saltmarsh; Bossington beach (SS89434855), 10 Jul, possibly vast majority of *Elytrigia* at this location are hybrid; Bossington Marsh (SS88944811), 25 Jul; Porlock Marsh (SS87914748), 26 Jul, GEL, VC5. Second and subsequent records for VC5.

**Elytrigia x laxa** (*E. juncea* x *repens*) – Minehead Warren (SS98504649), 13 Jul, on dunes, GEL, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

**Fumaria bastardii** var. **bastardii** (Tall Ramping Fumitory) – Nailsea, Bucklands Batch (ST479696), 7

Oct, several plants on east side of road, EJMCD & CML, VC6. Second record for VC6 since AFS/FBR.

**Gaudinia fragilis** (French Oat-grass) – Freshford, Dunkirk Mill (ST78545953), 19 Jun, 1 clump by side of track near Dunkirk Mill, DEG, VC6. New hectad record for this Nationally Scarce species.

**Hieracium calcaricola** (Toothed Hawkweed) – Witham Friary, Dark Lane (ST75343885, ST75353884, ST75353885), 6 Aug, 44 plants in flower on SW-facing bank of Dark Lane, S of large oak, by small lay-by, HJC & GHR (det. MMS); Harptree Combe SSSI (ST56165595, ST56165597, ST56185601), 7 Aug, 23 plants on top of stone buttress wall at end of aerial water pipe, 30 plants on N-facing side of buttress wall and pier support of water pipe, 30+ plants on N-facing side of stone pillar supporting water pipe, HJC & FJR (det. MMS), VC6. First recorded in Somerset at Harptree Combe in 1917 as *H. calcaricola*, but plants at both these sites were recorded in AFS and FBR as *H. trichocaulon*.

**Hieracium trichocaulon** (Hairy-stemmed Hawkweed) – Bourton Combe, Flax Bourton (ST50816846), 13 Jul, c. 30 tall specimens on limestone rock outcrops in small remnant of open rocks, surrounded by trees and scrub, EJMCD & MAW (det. MMS), VC6. Fourth record for VC6 (although one now dubious) and first record for VC6 and Somerset since AFS/FBR.

**Huperzia selago** (Fir Clubmoss) – The Warren (SS78644096), 16 Oct, several plants on irrigated rock face on slope, Andrew Branson & SP, VC5. First record for this site since 1990.

**Lemna turionifera** (Red Duckweed) – Kewstoke, Sand Road (ST33626439), 8 Sep, frequent in ditch on S side of Sand Road, HJC & FJR, VC6. Fourth site for VC6.

**Medicago polymorpha** (Toothed Medick) – Portishead Dock (ST47087681), 2 Jan, 1 plant in flower on verge by dock, HJC & FJR, VC6. New hectad record for this Nationally Scarce species.

**Oxybasis glauca** (Oak-leaved Goosefoot) – Highbury (ST69274927, ST69314926), 8 Jul, several plants in blocked drain on N side of Highbury Street and 1 plant at edge of kerb, W end of bus stop, HJC & DEG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset since 1938.

**Oxybasis urtica** (Upright Goosefoot) – Piles Mill (SS90464646), 14 Jul, 40 plants on dung heap in arable field just off footpath, GEL (conf. John Akeroyd), VC5. First record for VC5 and Somerset since 1940.

*Pilosella officinarum* subsp. *micradenia* – Selworthy Sands (SS90794908), 19 May, GEL, VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

*Sagina maritima* (Sea Pearlwort) – Taunton (ST22252423), 22 Apr, several plants on verge of A38 at top of Compass Hill, with *Trifolium ornithopodioides* and *Catapodium marinum*, SJL, VC5. First inland record for VC5.

*Wolffia arrhiza* (Rootless Duckweed) – Ashton Court Estate (ST560721), 29 Aug, in dew pond nearest the house, David Hawkins, VC6. New hectad record for this Nationally Scarce species.

### Other Interesting Records – Alien species

\**Allium cristophii* (Star of Persia) – Brent Knoll, Middle Street (ST32815174), 9 May, 1 large open flower beside rhyne, APR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Anthemis punctata* subsp. *cupaniana* (Sicilian Chamomile) – Porlock (SS8846), 1 May, at bottom of New Road opposite village hall, escaping over garden wall, GEL (det. RFitzG), VC5. Third record for VC5.

\**Avena sterilis* (Wild Winter-oat) – Huntworth Business Park (ST3034), 17 May, SJP, VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

\**Berberis thunbergii* (Thunberg's Barberry) – Glenthorne estate (SS7949), 15 Jul, on cliffs below house, presumably escaped from gardens, GEL, VC5. Second record for VC5.

\**Bergenia crassifolia* (Elephant-ears) – Porlock (SS8846), 14 Feb, few plants up Porlock Toll Road past entrance to Village hall car park, growing on outside of wall, GEL, VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

\**Beta vulgaris* subsp. *cicla* var. *flavescens* (Swiss Chard) - Coxley Wick, Mill Lane (ST530441), 22 Aug, on soil heaps deposited in a field on E side of Mill Lane, near the old railway line, Pat Steele, VC6. First record for this variety and second for the subspecies in VC6 and Somerset.

\**Brachyglottis x jubar* (Shrub Ragwort) – Porlock, Parson's Street (SS8846), 21 Nov, garden escape, GEL, VC5. Third record for VC5.

\**Cardamine occulta* – Paulton, Farrington Road (ST64635639), 22 Apr, 1 plant in container with small Olive tree, HJC, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Carpobrotus edulis* (Hottentot-fig) – Sand Bay (ST332651), 29 May, 2 patches (>1m square) flowering yellow on dunes, APR; Sand Bay (ST33176524), 14 Jul, large patch 3-4 x 2-3m on dunes, MAW, VC6. Third site for VC6 and Somerset. Natural England and Environment Agency alerted and plants removed, although scraps of plant were found at ST33176514 on 8 Sept by HJC & FJR, all collected and destroyed.

\**Chenopodium giganteum* (Tree Spinach) – Bath, Alfred Street (ST749652), 19 Oct, on basement steps, RDR, VC6. Fifth record for VC6.

\**Coincya monensis* subsp. *cheiranthos* (Wallflower Cabbage) – Glastonbury, Morlands Enterprise Park (ST48733827), 20 Jun, several plants in flower/fruit, on site of former sheepskin factory, John Poingdestre, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Coriandrum sativum* (Coriander) – Allerford (SS90694687), 20 Jul, on gravel between lane and wall, between Allerford and Brandish Street, GEL, VC5. Third record for VC5 and first since AFS.

\**Cotoneaster hjelmqvistii* (Hjelmqvist's Cotoneaster) – Perry's Cider Mills, Dawlish Wake (ST375127), 28 Jul, self-sown on wall, IPG, VC5. Second record for VC5 and fifth for Somerset.

\**Cotula coronopifolia* (Buttonweed) – Tynning Wood (ST77823904), 23 Jun, 1 plant in flower on W shore of pond to E of track, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Cynodon dactylon* (Bermuda-grass) – Bridgwater (ST296375), 24 May, c. 20 plants growing in pavement, SJP, VC5. Second site for VC5.

\**Digitalis lutea* (Straw Foxglove) – Milverton Bypass (ST12572623, ST12572624), Jun, at roundabout, Christine Loudon & Linda Everton, VC5. Second record for VC5.

\**Euphorbia maculata* (Spotted Spurge) – Pensford, Church Street (ST61856373), 25 Sep, few plants on pavement outside cottage on N side of street, HJC & DEG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset, and first outside a garden centre.

\**Euphorbia mellifera* (Canary Spurge) – Portishead, Beach Road West (ST46207700), 2 Jan, 5 plants self-sown at edge of road, at base of garden wall, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Geranium x magnificum* (Purple Crane's-bill) – Nailsea & Backwell (ST4769), 7 Oct, EJMCD & CML, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.

\***Helianthus x laetiflorus** (*H. rigidus* x *tuberosus*) – Rudge Lane (ST82495110), 6 Oct, large patch in flower on W verge of lane, HJC & DEG, VC6. First record for VC6 since AFS/FBR.

\***Iberis sempervirens** (Perennial Candytuft) – Yeovil (ST5516), 28 Jul, on wall, east side of Mudford Road A359, IPG, VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

\***Ipomoea purpurea** (Common Morning-glory) – Stolford (ST23104601), 10 Sep, 1 plant in flower bottom of wall on landward side of path to Hinkley Point, RFitzG, GEL, Ian Salmon & JW, VC5. Third record for VC5 and Somerset.

\***Lathyrus hirsutus** (Hairy Vetchling) – Alhampton, Haddon Wood (ST630343), 1 Aug, 5 plants flowering and fruiting on an excavated bank of a wildlife pond, which had been sown with wildflower seeds from various sources in 2014, Daphne Osmond, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1971.



*Lathyrus hirsutus* ©Daphne Osmond.

\***Lathyrus odoratus** (Sweet Pea) – Taunton, Canal Road (ST228252), 15 May, a single sprawling patch with beautiful flowers, probably just 1 plant, on waste ground on N side of road, SJL (det. HJC), VC5. Second record for VC5 and fourth for Somerset.

\***Linaria maroccana** (Annual Toadflax) – Taunton (ST22752521), 17 Apr, several plants in tarmac and waste ground by Canal Road on edge of old market site, SJL (det. HJC), VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

\***Malva x clementii** (Garden Tree-mallow) – Blue Anchor (ST03474344), 26 Sep, large patch on waste ground behind pub, GEL & RFitzG, VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

\***Nicotiana sylvestris** (Woodland Tobacco) – Bath, Hedgemoad Park (ST750656), 6 Jul, 5 plants at base of retaining wall and on roadside kerb, RDR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

\***Oxalis dillenii** (Sussex Yellow-sorrel) – South Horrington (ST57044620), 4 Nov, small patch at edge of pavement, HJC & FJR, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.

\***Phormium cookianum** (Lesser New Zealand Flax) – Uphill (ST32145902), 15 Jun, Small clump with no flowering stems on edge of playing fields, APR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

\***Phuopsis stylosa** (Caucasian Crosswort) – Huntworth (ST318343), 20 Jun, small patch at base on garden wall on canal towpath, SJP, VC5. Fifth record for VC5.

\***Pleiblastus humilis** – Porlock (SS88584656), 17 Oct, on edge of footpath, escaped from garden nearby, GEL, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

\***Polystichum tsus-simense** (Korean Rock-fern) – Bath, Abbey Green (ST751645), 21 Oct, stonework of basement, RDR (det. HJC), VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

\***Salix elaeagnos** (Olive Willow) – West Lynch (SS90054772), 21 Apr, 1 medium size tree on bank of stream, probably escaped from house over hedge, GEL (det. JW), VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

\***Salvia hispanica** (Chia) – Frome, Clink Road (ST79734880), 14 Oct, 1 plant on N edge of road, on bridge over A361, HJC & DEG; Chew Valley Lake (ST554593), 16 Oct, 1 plant at Heron's Green, opposite N end of pool on other side of road, MAW, VC6. Second and third records for VC6 and Somerset.

\***Spergularia bocconeii** (Greek Sea-spurrey) – Porlock Weir (SS86354801), 9 Jul, a solid patch of 30 x 40cm on R side of path from weir to saltmarsh, at end of small step over railing, GEL, VC5. Second site for VC5 and Somerset.

\***Stachys annua** (Annual Yellow-woundwort) – Radstock (ST69085470), 12 Jul, 1 plant on waste ground on former disused railway sidings, now edge of housing estate, HJC, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first for VC6 and Somerset since 1908.

\***Trifolium tomentosum** (Woolly Clover) – Huntworth Business Park (ST30423436), 17 May, large population on roadside bank by Bridgwater Services, SJP, VC5. Second record for VC5.



*Stachys annua* ©Helena Crouch

\****Verbascum densiflorum*** (Dense-flowered Mullein)  
– Tadwick (ST745706), 3 Aug, 1 large plant beside an unkempt hedge on waste ground by the A46, RDR, VC6. Third record for VC6.

\****Zantedeschia aethiopica*** (Altar-lily) – Hawkcombe (SS88284585), 20 Apr, on S bank of stream very close to water edge, GEL, VC5. Fourth record for VC5.

## SRPG Membership and Contacts

Somerset Rare Plants Group annual subscription is currently £8, payable in January of each year. Members who paid for 2020 are exempted from payment for 2021. Payment can be made directly into the SRPG account as one-off transfers or by standing order. Contact the Treasurer Clive Lovatt (see below) for account details. Members attend meetings at their own risk. Field meeting leaders carry a list of emergency phone numbers so please contact Ellen McDouall if you have not completed a membership form, so that she has the telephone numbers of those to contact in case of illness or accident.

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