



Although this is Newsletter number eight only, it is important that it marks our tenth anniversary and details of our celebrations at Uphill on 28th July 2007 are included. Much has been achieved in the ten years and the computerised records, which now amount to over half a million, reflect the hard work put in by many members, not just on field meetings but steady plodding away recording in their home areas. This steady work 'behind the scenes' is very much appreciated. We also thank everyone who has contributed to this newsletter and invite more members to send in observations or notes for inclusion in our next issue. Send to Caroline Giddens.

REPORTS OF MEETINGS, 2007.

Indoor Winter Meetings 2007.

The Annual members' meeting took place on Saturday 13th January, 2007 at Natural England offices, Roughmoor, near Taunton. It followed the usual popular sequence of business in the morning, a 'bring and share' buffet lunch and chat, slides, raffle and book/plant sale in the afternoon. The slides shown were by Brian Laney from Northampton whose energy left us all wilting, he seems to manage to visit everywhere and everything but his photographs were extremely interesting and much enjoyed.

The second indoor meeting, also at Roughmoor was on Saturday 10th February and this was devoted to members' slides as there is never enough time to show them all at the Annual meeting. Steve Parker kicked off by giving a presentation of our records on MapMate and this showed how numbers are growing and where further work is needed. Records from the *Atlas Flora of Somerset* (1997) Green, P.R., Green, I.P. and Crouch, G.A. have now been incorporated by permission of the authors and with assistance from at SERC. This was followed by illustrated talks about flowers from members Margarete Earle (Dolomites), Jeanne Webb (Morocco), Liz McDonnell (Crete), Ann Cole (Turkey) and Christine Lowden (Dolomites). What a well travelled lot we are – it is a wonder we find time to study the Somerset flora!

We must thank Natural England for allowing us to use their offices at Roughmoor for our past meetings and now look forward to future indoor meetings at Taunton Castle, courtesy of Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. The first of these took place on Saturday, 1st December, 2007 and it seems likely that we will find this an ideal centre. Access to the interesting library of old and new botanical books should prove a great asset.

Leigh Woods, Stokeleigh Camp & towpath Sunday, 11th March, 2007.

This was the first SRPG recording meeting of 2007. The Avon Gorge is well known for the large number of rare and scarce plants. Members gathered at the entrance to Leigh Woods National Nature Reserve. We soon came across our first plants of interest, with many Narrow-leaved Bitter-cress (*Cardamine impatiens*) frequent near the footpath; we discovered a good number of populations of this plant during the day. As we clambered around the ramparts of the Iron Age camp we came across a large colony of Green Hellebore (*Helleborus viridis* subsp. *occidentalis*). The group estimated that the population was in excess of 100 plants, and increasing in extent. One cannot visit the Avon Gorge without looking out for the many rare *Sorbus* species associated with the Gorge. On the Plain we had seen the collection of planted specimen trees. Libby Houston, the acknowledged local expert on the area and its *Sorbus*, showed the group a number of different species, including *Sorbus bristoliensis*, *S. porrigentiformis* and *S. latifolia*. After a picnic lunch, we made our way slowly down the steep wooded slopes of Nightingale Valley to the towpath. A number of national rarities occur here. On the edge of the railway line below Brunel's famous bridge, we recorded a colony of *Hutchinsia* (*Hornungia petraea*). Libby cut away some bramble and other woody plants that reduce the habitat for the *Hornungia*. On our return trip to the car park we searched for Lady Orchid (*Orchis purpurea*) but we could find no signs. This plant (last recorded in 1999) must now be considered extinct on this site.

Steve Parker.

Ebbor Gorge.

Saturday 7th April 2007.

Nine of us met at Ebbor Gorge on a lovely spring day, and recorded a surprisingly high number of species in two 1km squares. Ebbor Gorge is an SSSI, managed by Natural England, and is also a National Nature Reserve.

We recorded around the Display Centre first, admiring patches of Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*), Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*), then descended into the valley, where ferns abound. Rocky outcrops were explored and an Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*) was found. Two damp meadows in the woodland added many species to our list, including Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), Bog Stitchwort (*Stellaria uliginosa*) and Twayblade (*Listera ovata*, or now *Neottia ovata*). The path passes below some mighty Hornbeams, standing in an apparently meaningful circle.

On rocks either side of the entrance to the gorge, we found two patches of Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*). A field identification was made, later confirmed microscopically, and it was useful to be able to compare this species with the common Intermediate Polypody (*Polypodium interjectum*). We admired the majesty of the gorge as we gently ascended at botanists' pace, stopping regularly. In the gorge we found Hairy Rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*), Wall Lettuce (*Mycelis muralis*) and Nettle-leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*).

Lunch was partaken in sunshine at the viewpoint – a well used but nice bit of calcareous grassland. Here we recorded many species including Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*), Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*) and Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), with other walkers joining us in our search! We then made our way to a less accessible bit of grassland just around the clifftop, where we found Carline Thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*), Spring Sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*), Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and Small Scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*).

The return to the car park added more woodland species. Three members had to leave then, but the rest of us set off to record in an adjacent square. We followed a stream

up the hillside, walking up a valley carpeted with Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*). We recorded 114 species in a short time, not finding anything of particular note, but seeing a wonderful array of spring flowers in sunshine, at a lovely site.

Helena Crouch

Castle Neroche, Blackdown Hills

Sunday, 22nd April, 2007.

Conifers are difficult, so on this self help day we planned to try to identify a few of the many species planted in the Forestry Commission's plantation. This site is within the Neroche project area, a scheme to restore 900 hectares of forest in the Blackdown Hills to semi-natural ancient woodland. Conifers identified included Lawson's Cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*) and Western Hemlock-spruce (*Tsuga heterophylla*). A species list for the area was also collected, no rarities were recorded. A site to revisit once the habitat restoration scheme has been completed.

Steve Parker

Hatch Hill, Polden Hills.

Saturday, 12th May, 2007.

On Saturday 12th May, six members braved a blustery, showery day to look at Hatch Hill. This is a steep base-rich site on the Poldens, which in the past has become covered with scrub - mainly blackthorn, hazel and bramble. A restoration programme, has brought back a calcareous grassland with mostly fine grasses including Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Meadow Oat-grass (*Helictotrichon pratense*) and Downy Oat-grass (*H. pubescens*), Red and Sheep's Fescues (*Festuca rubra* and *F. ovina*), Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*), Yellow Oat-grass (*Trisetum flavescens*), and there was some Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*).

There is a rich, diverse flora which includes Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*), Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*), Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Small Scabious (*Scabiosa*

columbaria), and Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*).

A lovely sight was a good spread of Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*) across the upper part of the site. Unfortunately we did not find any sign of the Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) in what has been a historically good site. This may have been a consequence of the long spring drought.

Anne Cole

Blackmoor Reserve and Ubley Warren. Saturday 19th May 2007.

Surrounded by the scarred landscape of lead-mining, eleven members met at Blackmoor Reserve, Charterhouse, to explore the exposed rock faces, black glassy slag heaps, watercourse and wetland for species with exceptional tolerance to metal-contaminated soils and often very little soil at all!

On the limestone exposures we discovered Hairy rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*) coming into flower and Field Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) on the drier areas. In the valley bottom, where Marsh Horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*) can be found, we collected a specimen with characters of both of these species. This is likely to be the hybrid *E. arvense* x *E. palustre* = *Equisetum* x *rothmaleri*, known on Mendip mining sites, and needs further investigation. In the open water were large stands of Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*).

On the warm, arid banks of black clinker, Alpine Pennycress (*Thlaspi caerulescens*) was still flowering and we gathered round the only known established colony of Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*) to count its population. Each shoot of daintily folded leaves was marked with a stick, 48 plants in all, and at this timely moment Liz joined us.

After lunch, we emerged from our cars and reconvened by the small cliff beside the car park. Here a single plant of Spring Sandwort (*Minuartia verna*) was found, together with Soft-leaved Sedge (*Carex montana*), Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) and Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*). From Blackmoor, we walked round to Ubley Warren where the first highlight was a visit to the site of Mountain Everlasting (*Antennaria dioica*). This was found in 2005 – the first record of this species in Somerset for 80

years. The small patch had a few flowers just showing.

On our way to the Rakes (mined cuts in the limestone), we meandered south of the path. Several members were surprised to find a mixture of plants of heathland, such as Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*) and Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) growing alongside species typical of calcareous grassland. In mining hollows, we were delighted to find Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*). Other ferns of interest included Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*) in abundance, Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) and Southern Polypody (*Polypodium cambricum*).

On a gravelly hillock, we found a tiny skeleton of Hutchinsia (*Hornungia petraea*). Later, on a rocky outcrop, 3 plants were discovered still in flower so that everyone could appreciate this exquisitely minute rarity. There was great excitement when one member discovered a small specimen of Wild Service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) growing from the side of a rake. Although small, it seemed quite old and appeared to be growing out of the rock-face!

Leaving Ubley Warren, we returned to the cars through the southern part of the Blackmoor Reserve. A patch of Agrimony caught the eyes of several members and we were fairly certain that it was Fragrant Agrimony (*Agrimonia procera*). This species is scarce in vc6 and only recorded from the east of the vice-county, so it will be checked again. Beside the path, we recorded a veritable carpet of Soft-leaved Sedge (*Carex montana*), which we were able to compare with Spring-sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*). To our delight, we also found Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaria*) and more Adder's-tongue.

All agreed that the whole day had been extremely enjoyable. We were so lucky with the weather, saw many more species than we expected and made lots of updated records to contribute to the forthcoming Somerset Rare Plants Register.

Linda Carter and Helena Crouch

Landacre Bridge, Exmoor Wednesday, 23rd May, 2007.

Six members met at Landacre Bridge on Wednesday, 23rd May for a day on Exmoor. Although the primary reason for the meeting

was not fulfilled, the sun shone and everyone appeared to enjoy the meeting. The morning was spent searching for Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium dryopteris*) in its former site on rocks by the River Barle. It was recorded here by Murray in 1896 and by Paul Green in 1993. Caroline last saw 16 plants in 2002 but our search today was in vain. Perhaps we were too early, perhaps the Greater Wood-rush has proved too great a competition, perhaps it will be refound in a future search. Other species seen in the area included Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*); Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*); Montbretia (*Crocasmia x crocosmiiflora*) and Alternate Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum alterniflorum*). One Small Pearl-bordered butterfly fluttered by.

A picnic lunch was enjoyed beside the River Barle before making a slight change to the published programme with Jeanne Webb and Caroline Giddens driving the group to Withypool by car so that they could walk back via the riverside path. Before setting out on the return trip, some refreshing ice-creams were sought out.

Jeanne and Caroline stayed for a while in Withypool where they recorded 100+ plants for the 1km square including a double flowered form of Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*); Welsh Poppy (*Meconopsis cambrica*) and Greater Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*).

Meanwhile, Liz led the remainder of the group back along the path on the south side of river to record the other 1km squares between Waterhouse Farm & Landacre. Common Bistort (*Persicaria bistorta*) which had been noted by Liz in the past near Withypool was not recorded on this occasion. A large clump of Climbing Corydalis (*Ceratocarpus claviculata*) was found on a hedgebank near Waterhouse Farm. It was scrambling amongst the ferns – Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) and others, and other shade-loving plants. The damp areas near the river have a species-rich tall herb community with Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*). The group was delighted to see a few plants of Great Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) growing between the footpath and the river bank. This is a rare plant in Somerset, confined to Exmoor and most common along the valleys of the Rivers

Exe & Barle. Most of the flat meadows along the river have been improved, but a few remnants of the species-rich sward were recorded at the field edges with species such as Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*) and Betony (*Stachys officinalis*). A few damp stony areas were searched for small plants such as Blinks (*Montia fontana*) and Bristle Club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*). Small Sweet-grass (*Glyceria declinata*) was a common plant in watery runnels and boggy areas near flowing water, recognisable by its blue-green leaves, prostrate habit and anthers less than 1mm long. This 2 ½ mile route along part of the River Barle SSSI is a beautiful and interesting walk

Caroline Giddens & Liz McDonnell

Pridley Plantation and Young Wood Sunday 3rd June, 2007

This meeting had two main aims: (1) to gather up-to-date information on populations of several Red-listed and/or Nationally Scarce species, including White Helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*) [Vulnerable in the Red List] in Pridley Plantation, and Spreading Hedge-parsley (*Torilis arvensis*) [Endangered], found by Ian Green in a field corner adjoining Young Wood in 1991 but not seen since; (2) to do some general botanical recording for the Taunton Flora, encompassing four ½-km squares ('quartads') – ST2619SW, ST2519SE, ST2519SW and ST2518NW.

We started the day with every intention of heading straight in to the wood, but instead were drawn to the roadside opposite by several plants of Greater Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*) [Near Threatened] in fine flower in a herb-rich grassland that included Zigzag Clover (*Trifolium medium*) and Pepper Saxifrage (*Silaum silaus*). One thing led to another... the open grassy margin to the arable field looked interesting too, and here we saw several 'goodies' including Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*), Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) and Round-leaved Fluellin (*Kickxia spuria*). A second visit here at the end of June turned up thousands of plants of Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*), a species listed as 'Near Threatened' in the 2005 Red List – another target species for our Rare Plants Register.

After a brief encounter with French Oat-grass (*Gaudinia fragilis*) [Nationally Scarce], on the grassy verge next to our parked cars (where it had first been found in 2003), we finally entered the woodland and set about the task of monitoring the White Helleborines. Easier said than done, since conifers across much of this area were felled last winter, and large amounts of ‘brash’ and fallen timber had been left on the ground. Pridley Plantation lies within the area covered by the ‘Neroche Project’, and the intention here, having felled the conifers, is to leave the woodland to regenerate naturally. A good idea, perhaps, but we weren’t sure about the wisdom of leaving such a thick layer of brash on the woodland floor. The helleborines were clearly struggling, and seemed to have declined since our previous visit: 417 flowering stems in 2006 – recorded by just three of us on an evening visit and in bad light – while this year a really thorough search by a larger group of recorders and in better light conditions produced a total of 285.

Having spent a couple of hours scouring the wood for White Helleborines, we were starting to feel a bit weary, so stopped for lunch. The presence of hornets helped us to get going again, and we then spent the rest of the afternoon doing some general recording in Young Wood – or at any rate that part of the wood to the south and east of Witch Lodge. Highlights included two new squares for Greater Butterfly-orchid and three for Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*). And, to cap it all, in “Ian’s field” we located a single specimen of Spreading Hedge-parsley (where Ian had seen “...lots of plants” in 1991), plus Round-leaved Fluellin and what we eventually decided was the blue form of the common Scarlet Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis* subsp. *arvensis* f. *azurea*), rather than Blue Pimpernel (subsp. *foemina*). Natural England take note: as with a number of other botanically interesting arable fields being managed under ‘stewardship’ in this part of the Blackdowns, “Ian’s field” now has grass margins – although, from the point of view of the Spreading Hedge-parsley and other arable species, it would be much better if the margins were *cultivated*.

Our afternoon’s ‘square-bashing’ proved enormously worthwhile, adding a significant number of new records (see Table following).

½-km square (Quartad)	Previous total	New species found on 3rd June	New total
ST2619SW	115	52	167
ST2519SE	119	13	132
ST2519SW	137	42	179
ST2518NW	2	123	125

Simon Leach

Priddy Mineries

Wednesday 13th June 2007.

Eight of us met to explore Priddy Mineries, the number rising to nine just before lunch. We were blessed with a dry morning, but it was not to last. Priddy Mineries is a fascinating area. Centuries of lead mining, intensified during Victorian times, have left a legacy of pools, buddle pits, hummocks and spoil heaps, with the remains of buildings and smelting flues adding to the interesting habitats.

We first explored the tumps of lead spoil beside the bridleway. The largest is renowned as the site of Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*), but we found further plants scattered in the grass by the path and on smaller tumps across the path. The Moonwort (Scarce in vc6) was doing very well this year - we counted about 200 plants. Sea Campion (*Silene uniflora*) was flowering well on the tumps and Spring Sandwort (*Minuartia verna*) was bedecked with exquisite little starry flowers. It was great to see so much of it, having only found one plant at Blackmoor/Ubley Warren. *Minuartia verna* is Near Threatened and Nationally Scarce. As at Blackmoor, we also found Hairy Rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*) and Alpine Penny-cress (*Thlaspi caerulescens*) on areas of lead spoil. The latter is also Nationally Scarce, so we made useful records for the Somerset Rare Plants Register.

We visited the Waldegrave Pool, where we could admire the dominant Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*), sadly now accompanied by quantities of Parrot’s-feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*). Across the pool, we could see Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) which we were able to compare later with Hare’s-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*).

Walking back across grassland dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and Silvery Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), Fred found a solitary clump of Deergrass (*Trichophorum cespitosum* subsp. *germanicum*), which is Scarce in vc6.

We stopped for lunch at the linear heap of mining spoil, which should have been a lovely spot. Tragically, the heavens opened and we all got drenched. Three members were so wet that they had to leave. The remaining six continued botanising in drizzly rain. On the mining spoil, we studied horsetails, looking for hybrids. We had seen abundant Field Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), Marsh Horsetail (*E. palustre*) and Water Horsetail (*E. fluviatile*), so there was the potential for any of three hybrids. Some convincing shoots of *E. x rothmaleri* (*E. arvense x palustre*) were collected and later confirmed as *E. x rothmaleri* by Fred Rumsey.

Beside the path, we saw several specimens of Southern Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*). By the large lake we found splendid examples of the hybrid *Dactylorhiza x grandis*. We also found Small Pondweed (*Potamogeton berchtoldii*) in the pond – and thousands of toad tadpoles! Several species of *Carex* were seen during the day, but the stars were huge clumps of Greater Tussock-sedge (*Carex paniculata*), most of them taller than any of us!

The smelting flues and remains of buildings added to our list of ferns for the day. There, we found Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), Rustyback (*Ceterach officinarum*), Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*), Maidenhair Spleenwort (*A. trichomanes*) and Wall-rue (*A. ruta-muraria*). Elsewhere we had seen Male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*), Broad Buckler-fern (*D. dilatata*), Narrow Buckler-fern (*D. carthusiana*) and Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*). We finished by exploring the extensive piles of black glassy mining spoil at the far side of the site, before marching back along the path to warm up!

Helena Crouch

The Perch SSSI, Cheddar 17th June 2007

This meeting had to be cancelled last June due to intense heat of the summer heat wave. This year the weather was just right for a botanical search of the species-rich limestone

on south-facing slopes of the Mendips at Cheddar. The Perch SSSI is important for its assemblage of Nationally Rare and Scarce plants and the aim of the meeting was to plot the exact location of some of the rare species including Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*), Spring Cinquefoil (*Potentilla neumanniana*), Slender Bedstraw (*Galium pumilum*) and Rock Stonecrop (*Sedum forsterianum*). Spring Cinquefoil was found in a few places on thin soils and tightly grazed grassland and one clump of Rock Stonecrop was found on rock outcrops near scrub on the southern part of the site. We recorded Slender Bedstraw in several places in rock crevices and scrambling over limestone clitter. It has small creamy-white flowers and leaves generally with a few small prickles, mostly directed backwards. The Cheddar population of this species differs from all the others in its more compact habit and flowers and was considered to be a distinct species identical to French specimens of *Galium fleurotii*, but has recently been reclassified as *G. pumilum*. Cheddar Pink has been known for many years from the northern end of The Perch where it occurs in two separate locations, on rock outcrops and at the edge of a small quarry. It is not known whether it is an introduction at this site, but it looks very native growing in rock crevices and hanging down the face of the low mini-cliffs of the limestone outcrops near the north-east boundary. GPS readings of all these special plants were taken and the information passed to Natural England for site monitoring purposes.

Liz McDonnell

Fivehead Arable Fields SSSI Wednesday 20th June, 2007

A trip to this SSSI, managed as a nature reserve by the Somerset Wildlife Trust, is always a crowd-puller, and this mid-week evening visit was no exception. Fivehead Arable Fields SSSI is well known both locally and nationally as one of the best localities in the UK for arable plants. We had been here more than once already, but a visit to this site is always a pleasure and the abundance of the rare species is truly astonishing.

The chief purpose of the present visit was to update our records for the forthcoming Rare Plants Register. We were able to

confirm once again the presence of huge populations of Broad-fruited Cornsalad (*Valerianella rimosa*) [listed as Endangered in the 2005 *Red List*], Narrow-fruited Cornsalad (*V. dentata*) [Endangered], Spreading Hedge-parsley (*Torilis arvensis*) [Endangered] and Slender Tare (*Vicia parviflora*) [Vulnerable]. As on previous recent visits, we also saw lots of Broad-leaved Spurge (*Euphorbia platyphyllos*), Dwarf Spurge (*E. exigua*) [Near Threatened], and Shepherd's-needle (*Scandix pecten-veneris*) [Critically Endangered], but were again unable to find either Venus's Looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*) or Field Gromwell (*Lithospermum arvense*) [Endangered]. Do they occur here still? (Maybe another visit is called for...!)

We were particularly keen to record Corn Buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*) [Critically Endangered], which according to our site maps had been seen in the past roughly in the centre of the north-western field. We trudged slowly up through the field, the light by this time beginning to fade, and had more or less given up hope when the shout went up – Phil Quinn had found a tiny group of plants, in full fruit and displaying wonderfully well the distinctive spiny achenes. The rest of us joined the search... to start with, it was a real struggle, but then they began to leap out at us, and within about ten minutes we had found more than a hundred plants. Quite why *Ranunculus arvensis* is restricted to this relatively small part of the site remains a mystery, but Phil's 'find of the night' was a fitting end to an excellent evening.

Simon Leach

Wet Moor Muchelney Saturday, 30th June, 2007.

Wet Moor is well named, well at least on the day of our visit. Heavy rain had swollen the river, so finding plants was somewhat difficult. But a few species were gathered by grapnel. Moving on to another part of the Moor, we recorded at a ditch rich in aquatic macrophytes, with rafts of Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) covering the surface of the water. The showy flowers of Flowering-rush (*Butomus umbellatus*) were frequent amongst other emergents. But the real find of the day and the target species was a very large stand of Marsh Stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*) with its small paper white

flowers. The ditch also supported a good number of plants of Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*.

Steve Parker

Stert Island 11th July 2007

A small party of Natural England staff visited this small island in Bridgwater Bay. We were expertly guided across the sand and mud flats at low tide by Robin Prowse the Bridgwater Bay site warden, crossing a side channel of the River Parrett in ankle-deep muddy water. OS maps show two separate islands, but on our visit, a substantial shingle ridge connected the north island to the south.

Our first steps on the island were on *Spartina*-dominated saltmarsh at the western side of the island. This vegetation gave way to a wide band of Sea Couch (*Elytrigia atherica*) with few associates, one of which being Grass-leaved Orache (*Atriplex littoralis*). The sandy ridge was species-rich with Sea Spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*), Sea beet (*Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima*), Sea Wormwood (*Seraphidium maritimum*), Sea Couch (*Elytrigia juncea*), Lyme-grass (*Leymus arenarius*) and many plants of Curved Hard-grass (*Parapholis incurva*) in bare open sand. A few scattered plants of Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*) were found on the eastern edge of the northern part of the island, near Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali* ssp. *kali*) and Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*). We walked to the north tip of the island where a large metal buoy formed a sculptural landmark. A few Yellow Horned-poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) plants were found on the narrow shingle bar linking the two former islands. There was a patch of Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) and one small wind-pruned Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) shrub.

A rather scruffy fox was flushed out of the vegetation by the disturbance of our group. Field record cards for the two 1 km squares that the island falls into were completed and several specimens were collected for later determination. Two of these were identified as Guernsey Fleabane (*Conyza sumatrensis*) and Large-flowered Evening Primrose (*Oenothera glazioviana*).

Liz McDonnell

**Burrington Combe
Sunday 15th July, 2007.**

In torrential rain, six brave botanists (all female!) met at the top of Burrington Combe and donned all available waterproof gear! We set off across a patch of nice calcareous grassland, where Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis* ssp *vestita*) was a good find. The vegetation soon changed to more acid grassland, with species such as Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). The first target species for the day was Bird's-nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) which is 'Near Threatened'. An extensive search was made under trees where it had been recorded previously, but unfortunately none were found. Even more unfortunately, one member went missing during this search and was not refound for over an hour. Despite the rain and upset, 133 species were recorded in the first 1km square.

After lunch, regrouped and with an additional member, we set off again, heading for the rocky outcrop to the west. Species found here included Dwarf Mouse-ear (*Cerastium pumilum*), which is 'Near Threatened' and 'Nationally Scarce'. The target species for this area was Soft-leaved Sedge (*Carex montana*), found at Burrington Combe in 2006. Sadly this species also eluded the bedraggled botanists on this occasion, but all agreed that a search should be made in spring next year.

Although the programme promised ice creams, tea or hot chocolate seemed more appropriate for this particular summer's day! Refreshed at the café, we finished with some botanising around the car park in the combe. Pale St John's-wort (*Hypericum montanum*) was an exciting find here – another 'Near Threatened' species. The rain soon worsened, and most called it a day. Libby and I, however, headed back up the combe in search of Bloody Crane's-bill (*Geranium sanguineum*). This species is native in Cheddar Gorge but was planted in Burrington Combe in 1955, as part of a University of Bristol experiment. After a steep climb up from the road, we found eight clumps, some in flower and clearly surviving well. It was a brilliant ending to the day!

Helena Crouch

**10 Year Anniversary Celebration Botanical
Picnic & Field Visit. River Axe & Uphill.
Saturday 28th July, 2007**

From the car park near Uphill marina, we followed the footpath towards Walborough Hill then cut across the coastal pastures towards the sea bank. Here we encountered two Somerset rarities; Sea Wormwood (*Seriphidium maritimum*) and Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*) growing amongst the Sea Couch dominated saltmarsh. Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) was also seen on the grassy banks, especially where the vegetation is thin. It has a very distinctive 'jizz', the inflorescence looking very stiffly bristled and a pale straw colour when ripe. We stopped to compare the glumes of all three *Hordeum* species that were growing in close proximity, the other two being Wall Barley (*Hordeum murinum*) and Meadow Barley (*Hordeum secalinum*). In a fenced off enclosure, saltmarsh vegetation communities were developing well and we were able to find hundreds of bulbous basal stems of Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*) and many plants of Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*). A surprising find was an abundance of French Oat-grass (*Gaudinia fragilis*) amongst tall grass at the edge of a ditch. The glossy red slender stems were easy to pick out from other species. On the circular walk back to the car park, we recorded many species on limestone outcrops amongst the scrub and puzzled over a small dark-green rosette of Bedstraw-like stems with whorls of leaves. We could not decide if it was new growth of Field Madder (*Sherardia arvensis*) or a *Galium* sp.

On returning to the car park we carried our anniversary picnic bags from the cars to the disused quarry nearby, finding a grassy spot with large flattish slabs of rock. All the mystery contributions were unpacked and we found that we had a wonderful spread of savouries, salads, snacks, fruit, a big birthday cake and bottles of champagne. It was a splendid picnic and we managed to light the birthday candle representing the first 10 years of our busy and friendly botanical group.

The walk in the afternoon took us to Walborough Hill where Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*), Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) and Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) were growing on well-

grazed rocky outcrops. Other species included Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) and Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*). The end of the celebration was marked by checking up on the small population of Goldilocks Aster (*Aster linosyris*) on rock outcrops near the big quarries. Libby Houston & Helena Crouch scrambled over the rocks and fences to count the individual plants which numbered 55 spikes.

Liz McDonnell

**Pawlett Hams, Bridgwater
Saturday, 11th August, 2007.**

The group met at Pawlett Hams to monitor the population of Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) that has been known in the area for about ten years. The plant is not native here, it was accidentally introduced by the Environment Agency in a seed mix used on a new sea wall. Many thousands of plants were found, these were mainly found along the edge of a drainage ditch with a few plants scattered in the grassland and on the sea wall. The plant is doing well and appears to be spreading, and is now present in two 1 km squares. Other plants recorded included Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*), Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) and Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*). Other wild-life spotted included a Wall butterfly (*Lasiommata megera*) and an otter spraint.

Steve Parker

**West Moor
Saturday, 1st September, 2007.**

Steve was unable to lead this meeting but Liz stepped in to act as Leader. A thorough search for the Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*) was made along both sides of Hutchings Drove, a former site, but without success. Likewise, Whorled Water-Milfoil (*Myriophyllum verticillatum*) was not found. However, Hair-like Pondweed (*Potamogeton trichoides*) was present, also Rootless Duckweed (*Wolffia arrhiza*) and lists were made for two 1 km squares.

CJG.

**Worthy to Culbone, Exmoor
Sunday, 9th September, 2007.**

Eleven members of the SRPG gathered at Worthy Toll House for some recording in Yearnor Wood. There were two squares to do between Worthy and Culbone. The shady

climb up through the tunnels (built by Lord Lovelace to prevent the sight of tradesmen delivering to his country house spoiling his view!) yielded good records of woodland species as well as some unusual (planted) trees. Liz was paying great attention to ferns and soon found what she was looking for – Hay-scented Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris aemula*). As soon as the first one was seen we could all find it easily and the lovely hay smell was a very obvious aid to identification. Many other ferns were common in the woodland and fine huge examples of Scaly Male-fern (*Dryopteris affinis*) lined the path. Part of the purpose of the day was to record the endemic Whitebeams, however, these are more numerous on the part of the cliff path that is now closed due to its slumping into the sea and the area is now inaccessible. The coast path has been diverted to a higher contour and there are only a few scattered whitebeams at this higher level, but we soon came across the first example. From the leaves we determined it to be *Sorbus vexans* but only after a lot of discussion and measurement of the fruits which seemed very variable in size and colour. Two further examples of *Sorbus* species were found on the edge of the path, one more *S. vexans* and one possible *Sorbus subcuneata* – leaf samples were taken to confirm this. Other unusual plants seen included the hawkweed *Hieracium umbellatum* and one example of Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*) of which there are a number in this area; the orange trunk of the *Arbutus* stood out well in the dark woodland.

Culbone Church, the smallest complete Church in England, only 35 ft in length, was eventually reached and after a visit inside, more recording was carried out in the churchyard adding a number of other species to the list. One plant not found was Forked Spleenwort (*Asplenium septentrionale*) although at least two members spent a lot of time looking for it. Last recorded in 1939 it has been ‘done to death’ by botanists and collectors (mostly of the Victorian era) and is now thought to be extinct in Somerset. A beautiful September day spent in a peaceful corner of Somerset was enjoyed by all – thanks to Steve for leading and Liz for sharing some of her secrets of instant identification.

Jeanne Webb

Stolford

Saturday, 22nd September

The original plan for this meeting was to complete the recording of the west end of Catsford Common as a follow-up to last year's recording at this site, but as Liz and Steve had made an unscheduled visit a few weeks previously and had recorded it fairly well, the decision was made to record the area to the west of Stolford towards Hinkley Point. The first port of call was the brackish ditch near the car park, which has dense underwater mats of Beaked Tassleweed (*Ruppia maritima*). This was fruiting profusely and it was easy to see the distinctive asymmetrical pear-shaped fruits on long slender stalks. A small south-facing grassy bank behind the sea wall proved to be fairly species-rich and much time was spent spotting the many small inconspicuous plants of Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*) which were well camouflaged in the autumn grassland. Its frequent companion Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) was found a few metres away on the top of the bare shingle ridge, with Yellow-horned Poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) and depauperate Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*) plants.

Hundreds of plants of the Nationally Scarce Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*) were found on the landward side of the sea bank in a damp low-lying area amongst Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardii*). The area surrounding a ditch outlet pipe was botanically interesting, with species including Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*), Wild Celery (*Apium graveolens*), Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*) and Grass-vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*). In a nearby ditch on North Ham, Horned Pondweed (*Zannichellia palustris*) and Fennel Pondweed (*Potamogeton pectinatus*) were found growing together. Further to the west where the ditch was partially dried out, Brackish Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus baudotii*) was frequent and Water-fern (*Azolla filiculoides*) abundant on the damp mud. Near the end of our circular walk, Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) was found at the edge of a reed-filled ditch, but the little botanical treat at the end of the day was a clump of Crown Vetch (*Securigera varia*) growing in the verge of the rough track leading back to the car park. Liz McDonnell

Portishead

Sunday, 7th October

In pleasant sunshine a small number of the members of the SRPG walked along the sea wall and on to the saltmarsh. A good number of common plants were recorded. On the saltmarsh we found a good stand of Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*) with scattered Sea Arrowgrass (*Triglochin maritimum*) and Sea-milkwort (*Glaux maritima*). The sea wall and cliffs had a number of alien escapes with Canary-grass (*Phalaris canariensis*) doing well on a rocky ledge. Growing in the wall the colourful Adria Bellflower (*Campanula portenschlagiana*) and Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*). As we moved along the coast we chanced on a number of Sorbus trees, sadly we could not determine these there and then. Libby has however taken samples, we await a final determination, but they look very unusual. The day ended with an ice cream, best way to end a day by the sea.

Steve Parker

NEW COUNTY RECORDS

Dryopteris affinis subsp. *cambrensis* (Western Golden-scaly Male-fern) – Maundown Hill, ST06042847, 11th August, single plant in hedge bank on north side of track, Matt J. Stribley, conf. Ken Trewren, VC5.

Equisetum x rothmaleri – Priddy Mineries, ST54675107, 13th June, few shoots on southwest side of linear slag heap, SRPG, conf. Fred Rumsey, VC6.

Iris xiphium (Spanish Iris) – Cheddar, ST4653, 10th April, probably this species in a field near the west end of Mascall's Wood, obviously planted, as several in a row, Liz J. McDonnell, VC6.

Polypodium x shivasiae – West Leigh, ST11403116, 24th February, patch growing in road side hedge bank, Matt J. Stribley, conf. Rob Cooke. VC5. Blackrock, ST48445450, 24th February, forming a small patch (0.5m wide approx) on face of a rocky outcrop to the north side of the path, Matt J. Stribley, conf. Rob Cooke, VC6.

Stellaria media var. *cupaniana* – Minehead, SS966461, 9th September, growing on a wall, Desmond Meikle, VC5. This is a Mediterranean species, which is very densely glandular-pubescent in the upper part under the inflorescence.

Tsuga canadensis (Eastern Hemlock) – Castle Plantation, ST2716 and ST 2715, 22nd April, SRPG, VC5.

NEW VICE-COUNTY RECORDS

Euphorbia amygdaloides subsp. *robbiae* (Turkish Wood Spurge) – Winterhead, ST4357, 29th April, escaped from adjacent garden, Liz J. McDonnell, VC6.

Hydrocotyle ranunculoides (Floating Pennywort) – Bleadon, ST335571, 25th July, Ann Halpin, VC6.

Poa infirma (Early Meadow-grass) – Minehead, SS97354582, 14th March, in a crack alongside the wall outside 20, Ponsford Road, Jeanne Webb, conf. Ro. FitzGerald, VC5.

Polystichum x bicknellii – Ham Woods, ST611452, 12th July, beside gate at entrance to woods above and east of quarry, Helena J. Crouch and Fred Rumsey, VC6.

Sisyrinchium striatum (Pale Yellow-eyed-grass) – Farrington Gurney, ST661555, 31st January, at edge of road, at base of wall on north side of street, Helena J. Crouch and Linda Carter, VC6.

Sutera cordata – Bath, ST755651, 5th January, one plant self-sown in pavement outside 54, Great Pultney Street, Helena J. Crouch and Fred Rumsey, VC6.

OTHER INTERESTING SOMERSET RECORDS DURING 2007

Anemanthele lessoniana (New Zealand Wind-grass) – Yeovil, ST560160, 4th January, single clump growing in pavement crack by bus station, Paul R. Green, second record for VC5.

Anthriscus cerefolium (Garden Chervil) – Old Cleeve, ST03634132, 29th April, extending along hedge of lane for c. 100m, Jeanne Webb, VC5. First vc and county record since 1922.

Cardamine bulbifera (Coralroot) – Ellicombe, SS98094456, 17th March, three plants by Ellicombe Roundabout, Alastair Stevenson, second record for VC5.

Crocus nudiflorus (Autumn Crocus) – Hawk Combe, SS8745, 8th September, clump at edge of track near house, Caroline Giddens, 2nd record for VC5

Dryopteris x complexa – Bilbors Hill, ST046725534, 14th July, clump on streamside/footpath, Matt J. Stribley, VC5. Matt has also recorded it from five other 1km squares in the area during 2007. Only once before recorded from Somerset, listed without location in the Flora of Somerset by Capt. Roe (1981). This record may well be a first for VC5.

Echinops sphaerocephalus (Glandular Globe-thistle) – Wedmore, ST4447, 11th August, a garden throw-out established in grassy verge of Mill Lane, Liz J. McDonnell, VC6. First county record since 1984.

Eruca vesicaria (Garden Rocket) – Faulkland, ST728540, 13th May, verge by A366 between Turner's Terrace and Faulkland, Helena J. and Jim Crouch, VC6. First county record since 1996 and first in VC6 since 1978.

Iberis amara (Wild Candytuft) – Faulkland, ST728540, 13th May, verge by A366 between Turner's Terrace and Faulkland, Helena J. and Jim Crouch, VC6. First county record since c. 1950 and first in VC6 since 1920.

Ipomoea purpurea (Common Morning-glory) – Taunton, ST21822518, early October, a plant near the River Tone, a garden throw-out, Stuart Holdsworth, det. Paul R. Green, VC5. Second record for VC5 and third county record.

Lycopodium clavatum (Stag's-horn Clubmoss) – Winsford, SS88223420, 11th August, patch on the rim of the Punchbowl, Jeanne Webb, VC5. Last reported from here in 1923 by W.D. Miller. (although ENHS had verbal records of it here seen by K.Staddon 1950's – CJG)

Melampodium montanum – Paulton, ST650566, 21st November at base of wall of the Red Lion pub, at edge of pavement. Helena J. Crouch, det. Paul R. Green. Second record for VC6.

Ophrys apifera var. *belgarum* – Appledoor Quarry, north of Knole, ST48342067, 10th June, seven plants in flower on open area near southeast corner of quarry, Helena J. Crouch and Fred Rumsey, VC6. Berrow, ST294526, 14th June, six plants in flower 20m from fence north of church, Rob Cropper and later Chris Hazel, VC6. The third and fourth record for the county.

Passiflora caerulea (Blue Passionflower) – Wiveliscombe, ST082276, 15th September, a number of seedlings self-sown on pavement/roadside near church, Matt J. Stribley, VC5. Second vice-county record.

Poa infirma (Early Meadow-grass) – Wells, ST545448, during March, in small quantity in cracks in paving and adjacent to south end of car park, VC6. Paul Stanley. Second record for VC6 and third county record.

Polypodium x mantoniae – Challick Lane, ST066275, 23rd February, bank on side of road, Matt J. Stribley, VC5. Matt has also recorded it from eight other 1km squares in the area. First county record since 1986.

Polystichum x bicknellii – Batscombe, ST03692502, 14th July, in sunken lane, Matt J. Stribley, VC5. Though this is not the first record for VC5, it is the first with a localised site.

Pteris records – see following report by Helena Crouch.

Rumex scutatus (French Sorrel) – Lower Peasedown, ST696574, base of wall alongside footpath, Cam Valley Wildlife Group, conf. Ian P. Green, VC6. First county record since 1958.

Trifolium incarnatum subsp. *incarnatum* (Crimson Clover) – Faulkland, ST728540, 24th May, verge by A366 between Turner's Terrace and Faulkland, Helena J. Crouch and Fred Rumsey, VC6. First county record since 1991 and first in VC6 since 1984.

The above records were compiled by asking Mapmate for new vice-county and 10km square records for 2007. Also a few other records have been included that I think are worth mentioning.

Paul R. Green

PLANT NOTES

Several years ago I spotted an interesting-looking Orobanche in the verge of Belmont Hill, a road very close to home at Failand. It was brilliant yellow all over! I felt it had to be Common Broomrape (*Orobanche minor* var *flava*). It has interested me ever since as it tends to move around within about 50 metres even crossing the road some years. When it turned up on the Tyntesfield NT estate I realised I had wrongly identified it. The brilliant colour had excited me to the extent that I had not realised there was an alternative – Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*). Yes, Stace was telling me that it is 'rarely yellowish'. But this is brilliant yellow! Apparently it lacks the gene for anthocyanin which normally masks the yellow colour. Not a new subspecies for our Mapmate records but certainly interesting.

Also at Tyntesfield I have this year found a further two sites for Green Hellebore (*Helleborus viridis*) which is locally scarce.

Pam Millman

RIBBON FERNS (*Pteris*) species in Bath basements

Last year, we found *Pteris multifida* in a Bath basement. That was a new county record and a short paper about it in BSBI News has encouraged *Pteris* hunting around the country! The Bath Basement Botanists have been busy this year and have recorded three more sites for *Pteris* in Bath, each for a different taxon. All four recent sites are in basements and these are the only known extant *Pteris* plants in Somerset. (There have been previous records for *Pteris cretica*, in Bath basements and in Gough's Cave, Cheddar, but those are now considered extinct.) The new finds are:

Pteris cretica

Laura Place, Bath. ST753650

5th Jan 2007, one plant under grille in basement of 9 Laura Place.

Helena J. Crouch and Fred Rumsey.

Pteris cretica 'Wimsettii'

Sydney Buildings, Bath. ST758646

30th Jan 2007, one plant growing from side of basement of house.

Helena J. Crouch and Fred Rumsey (originally found, but not identified, by Rob Randall).

Pteris multifida

Lansdown Road, Bath. ST748656

18th Oct 2007, six plants growing beneath grille to basement of 3 Lansdown Road.

Helena J. Crouch and Fred Rumsey (originally found by Mark and Clare Kitchen, and also known to Rob Randall, but identification not previously confirmed. There was an earlier record of *Pteris cretica* in this area which may in fact have been this plant.)

This is the second site for *Pteris multifida* in Bath, the other being in a basement in Pierrepont Street (ST 752646).

We would be delighted to hear of any other sightings of alien ferns in Somerset. The basements of Bristol are as yet unsearched. *Pteris* specimens have turned up in some strange places in the last year. Ian found *Pteris multifida* in an outlet pipe at Stourhead (new to Wiltshire) last winter; in London it grows on a dockside; and in Hampshire it has been seen down two wells inside pubs!

Helena Crouch and Fred Rumsey

GLOBAL WARMING?

Flowering dates are becoming more and more erratic and we can only wonder what the long-term results will be. I found it quite alarming this year when Rhododendrons (*R. ponticum*) in Exmoor area had a second flowering. I saw several in bloom on 16th September 2007 near Dunster and more on 29th September at Porlock. A Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* was fully out in Carhampton churchyard on 29th October and Triangular Garlic (*Allium triquitrum*), Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) and Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*) all flowered in October. It will soon be hard to tell whether a flower is early or late.

Another plant which may become more familiar is Giant Viper's Bugloss (*Echium pininana*). It has become popular in several Minehead gardens and this year I noticed it self-seeded in one or two places around the town. I have not seen one in flower yet and they are in rather unfavourable pavement cracks and likely to be removed, but sometime soon we may equal Cornwall and the Scillies. We already have self-seeded Cabbage Palms.

Caroline Giddens.