



REPORTS OF MEETINGS, 2011.

The AGM and Members' Meeting**Saturday 15th January 2011**

Sixteen members attended the Annual Members' Meeting and AGM at the Lifelong Learning Centre at Shapwick on Saturday 15th January 2011. Steve Parker welcomed everyone present and said the Group had enjoyed a good year with thanks due to all who had led the various excursions and meetings which were reported in the Newsletter now being distributed. We were pleased to welcome Emma Koblizek from SERC and she was asked to convey our thanks to the Record Centre for their help with funding for a further supply of Recording Cards, ten hand lenses and the promise of a grapnel for help with the study of water plants. She also offered to look into the possibility of MapMate training sessions if members required these. We were also pleased to welcome a young student from France who was here to gather information on Groups studying wildlife on the Somerset Wetlands. Helena Crouch said a few words on some of the interesting plant species which had been found during 2010. Steve spoke on the project involved with the reintroduction of *Sium* and also gave details of the hoped for establishment of a recording group for the Avalon Marshes. Anne Cole gave a financial report and distributed a balance sheet which showed a balance of £1,126.79 in hand on 14th December 2010. Total income for 2010 was £488 and total expenditure £108.44. We now have 60 members. Liz McDonnell said that for various reasons it had been proposed that we should have a new Logo and members were asked to submit designs for this. Christine Loudon spoke about developments on the Group's website.

The 'bring and share' lunch was enjoyed next, followed by the raffle with prizes donated by those present and finally a fiendishly difficult quiz devised by Steve with VC6 competing against VC5. The latter won by a nose.

Conifer Workshop**Saturday 12th February 2011**

This indoor meeting was held at Shapwick Lifelong Learning Centre where Clare and Mark Kitchen presented a day of conifer taxonomy, mainly demonstrating the use of John Poland's Vegetative key. Material from a wide range of species was available but the emphasis was on identifying those that are commonly planted and found naturalised in the wild. Help was given with understanding the botanical terms used in the key. The features used in the key are, as expected, vegetative but it is useful to use cone features for confirmation of identification so these were also available. In addition to the species used for identification, material was available from similar species for comparison. It is hoped the attendees finished the day more confident in their identification of common species.

Clare and Mark Kitchen

Members' Photos and Talks**Saturday 19th March 2011**

Twelve members met at the Lifelong Learning Centre for an informal morning of talks about botanical projects and work that they have been involved with. Helena Crouch gave a beautifully illustrated talk about exciting botanical finds that members have made in our Somerset recording area in the last year. Notable amongst these were three species new to Somerset – Membranous Nettle (*Urtica membranacea*) found in the centre of Nailsea, Small Goosegrass (*Galium murale*) found as a pavement weed of the Royal Crescent in Bath and Tender Brake (*Pteris tremula*), also from the Royal Crescent, Bath. Amongst other species, Helena showed photos of Field Fleawort (*Tephrosia integrifolia*) one of Somerset's rarest plants. A tiny population of only two plants is found in just one site in Kilmington, which is VC6, but in administrative Wiltshire.

Chris Billingham gave a presentation on the botanical work undertaken in 2009 with members of the SRPG and Somerset Botany Group. They surveyed the fields, ditches and rhynes of Godney Farm as part of the SWT Brue Valley habitat survey. This is a working dairy farm owned and run by Mr & Mrs Churches. Although, as would be expected from a large dairy farm, most of the fields had little botanical interest, the ditches and rhynes had been managed very sympathetically and many were rich in botanical species. Five ditches adjacent to the River Sheppy in the north-east of the farm contained Rootless Duckweed (*Wolffia arrhiza*), a JNCC vulnerable species; and one of Helena's photographs showed *Wolffia* reproducing by budding. Another vulnerable species, Marsh Stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*), was found in two sites close to ditches in the south-west of the farm.

Steve gave a talk on the "Conservation of Water Parsnip in Somerset". This BAP plant has declined over the past ten years in the county. The talk included information on the distribution, conservation and ecology of the plant. The SRPG have been involved with monitoring the plant for 10 years. Steve gave some information on the ongoing reintroduction programme in the Brue valley. The need for ongoing conservation was highlighted by details of the very recent damage to a large population at a site near Westonzoyland. This was caused by unsympathetic management of ditches.

Christine Loudon told us about her continuing to work on the development of the SRPG website. She has done a great deal of work on the new design; examples of the improved layout were shown to the members. The web pages are an important way of presenting the work of the SRPG to the general public and members. Christine was keen to ensure the pages presented a friendly image of the SRPG.

After lunch we took advantage of the warm sunny weather and walked along the Discovery Trail boardwalk at the western end of Shapwick Heath, where Greater Water-parsnip was introduced in May 2009. Steve showed us two plants, one of which was a small plant completely free and floating, the other, apparently well rooted, which had very dissected underwater leaves, very unlike the

aerial leaves of the mature summer plants. The boardwalk, constructed a few years ago from recycled black plastic was well used and taking on an organic undulating shape of its own. It looked rather Japanese as it snaked through the winter reeds.

Liz McDonnell

Hutton Wood

Saturday 16th April 2011

On a fine day, sixteen members and guests met at Bleadon Hill for the first walk of the season. Our challenge for the day was to find Purple Gromwell (*Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum*) in three 1km squares, which involved walking through six 1km squares! Setting off along the lane to Upper Canada, we found several Twayblades (*Neottia ovata*) on shady banks. A field carpeted with Daisies was a stunning sight. On the track to the wood, a single plant of Cut-leaved Dead-nettle (*Lamium hybridum*) was discovered. This species has been infrequently recorded recently, so it was an excellent record and we were able to compare it with Red Dead-nettle (*Lamium purpureum*) nearby.

A prominent patch of *Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum* was admired at the entrance to the wood. Beside the woodland path, more Twayblades were seen, together with seven Greater Butterfly-orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha*). Sadly we failed to find *Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum* at a former site on the south side of the wood, but all appreciated the picturesque Bluebells, Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*) and other woodland flowers.

Most of the party adventurously descended the steep north side of the hill to search for *Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum* at another known site. Beside the path we were distracted by a very strange aberrant Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta* forma *bracteata*), which has floral bracts up to 10cm long. A good number of scattered shoots of *Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum* were found on the rocky wooded hillside, the site spanning the boundary of two 1km squares, so the re-ascent of the hillside was all worthwhile and we had completed our challenge.

Returning along the lane to Bleadon Hill, we nobly recorded in a fourth 1km square,

inspired by the fact that the only record on MapMate for this square was a Petunia! We recorded 94 species: no Petunias, but we finished with a splendid plant of White Comfrey (*Symphytum orientale*) in the car park.

Helena Crouch

The Quants / Buckland Wood

Saturday 7th May 2011

This was a joint field meeting with the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. There was a good turn-out, with around 15 people joining in for at least part of the day. (There were too many to attempt an exact count.) It was a rather mixed day weather-wise, with warm sunshine and an occasional sharp shower. The visit had been billed as an opportunity to do some general botanical recording in the Butterfly Conservation nature reserve (also an SSSI), and a chance for beginners to see a good range of 'spring flowers'. But spring had already sprung...

It was, as you'll remember, one of the warmest Aprils on record – the mean temperature almost 4° C above the 1971-2000 average – and temperatures in February and March had been above average too. The unprecedented cold of December 2010 (5° C below average) was already a distant memory, and many spring-flowering plants were coming into flower two to three weeks earlier than last year. Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), for example, was flowering in the Taunton area before the end of March; while hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), once again belying its alternative English name of 'May', was first seen in flower as early as 6th April. Walter Watson, who recorded first flowering dates in Somerset back in the 1920s and 1930s, would have been flabbergasted: species that he would have expected to start flowering in the week leading up to this field meeting had in fact begun to bloom, on average, almost five weeks earlier. So, to live up to its billing, our meeting should really have been held in the first week of April.

Never mind, we revelled in the opportunity to see a much wider range of species in flower than most of us would have anticipated. Keith Gould (Butterfly Conservation and SANHS member) knows this site well, and gave us an excellent brief introduction to its

history and wildlife interest. The reserve comprises a rich and varied mixture of (mainly somewhat calcareous) grassland, scrub and woodland. Our total count of 217 taxa – not all flowering, of course – could have left the beginners in the group wondering what had hit them. Highlights of the day, other than the excellent company, included some fine specimens of 'false oxlip' (*Primula vulgaris* x *veris*); two rather grand Wild Service-trees (*Sorbus torminalis*); an area of more acidic grassland supporting Pale Sedge (*Carex pallescens*) and Hairy Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis* subsp. *vestita*), plus areas of short turf with flowering Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*); and in woodland about half a dozen scattered plants of Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*).

Under Keith Gould's guidance, a patch of wet woodland was searched for Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*). We located some wooden stakes that evidently 'marked the spot', but sadly no sign of the helleborine which, according to Keith, hasn't been seen here for some years. We did, however, see Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*) – both species introduced for their value as butterfly food-plants and seemingly holding their own in the small area into which they were originally planted. And, to everyone's delight, Keith and Eileen Gould tracked down a newly-emerged Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*), a scarce and extremely local butterfly which occurs here at the western edge of its range in Britain – and a species for which this reserve is rightly famous. Camera shutters clicked madly as the butterfly obligingly kept still for us.

This proved to be a super day, and a successful joint meeting with SANHS which introduced several new people to the pleasures of botanising – as well as a few botanists to the pleasures of butterfly-watching.

Simon Leach

Purn Hill

Thursday 12th May 2011

Purn Hill is a small promontory projecting southward from the Mendip ridge; it is an SSSI and an Avon Wildlife Trust reserve, home to three Nationally Rare plant species.

On a fine day, this midweek meeting attracted twelve members and two angelic dogs.

We ascended through woodland on the east side of the hill, soon reaching the rich limestone grassland of the ridge. Most of the rarer species grow on the steep rocky W-facing side. Several patches of White Rock-rose (*Helianthemum apenninum*) were soon found. This pretty plant is Vulnerable and Nationally Rare, found only on Brean Down and Purn Hill in Somerset and on Berry Head in South Devon. Some splendid examples of the hybrid *H. x sulphureum* were seen, with pale yellow flowers midway between the parents: White Rockrose and Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*).

Another target for the day was *Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *ferronii* which was soon found on the steep rocky W-facing slope. This surprisingly distinctive grass is short, with dense erect panicles. Purn Hill is the only recent site in Somerset, although it was also formerly recorded on Brean Down. There had been no records for Purn Hill since 1983 so this was a significant find. Another rare grass found on the rocky W-facing slope was Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*). In Britain, this Vulnerable, Nationally Rare species is restricted to a small area of the western Mendips. It is distinguished from the more common Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*) by its fibrous swollen culm-bases.

Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) was also seen on the rocky W-facing slope. This Nationally Rare species is restricted to the western Mendips in Somerset, the Avon Gorge (vc34, not Somerset) and the Berry Head area of Devon. We were also pleased to find *Euphrasia tetraquetra* and about thirty plants of Pale St John's-wort (*Hypericum montanum*) which is Near Threatened.

A single plant of Musk Stork's-bill (*Erodium moschatum*) was an exciting find. This species has only a few sites in Somerset and was last recorded on Purn Hill in 1996, also only a single plant. It has been known there since 1888. We searched in vain for White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), last recorded here in 1985, then descended.

In the roadside rhyne, large patches of Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) were observed. This invasive alien was first seen here in 2007 and has so far resisted attempted eradication by the

Environment Agency. At the end of the walk, the discovery of Horned Pondweed (*Zannichellia palustris*) and Small Pondweed (*Potamogeton berchtoldii*) was eclipsed by the leader's sudden disappearance down an invisible concrete-edged hole in the ground which fortunately caused only a dramatic bruise – a painful end to what was otherwise a brilliant day. Altogether, records were updated for eight Rare Plant Register taxa.

Helena Crouch

Kingston St Mary / Gadd's Bottom

Sunday 22nd May 2011

I often joke that botanists walk so slowly that it can take over an hour to leave the car park. On this occasion the first species we were searching for was previously found in the car park. In 1998 Paul Green recorded Mossy Stonecrop (*Crassula tillaea*) in the churchyard of Kingston St Mary. However, after looking under cars and getting down on our hands and knees we failed to find this species. Leaving the car park (after only 30 minutes) we walked up Church Lane, here we discovered a plant that we could not name, this mystery plant had naturalised from a local garden, the owner of a local property told us the plant had been in his garden for many years, however he did not know what it was called. Later investigations by Helena Crouch (with the help of British Museum) confirmed this silver leaved plant to be *Hieracium lanatum*, a new species for Somerset. A little further up the lane the pale pink flowers of Common Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria muralis*) were found, this species was scrambling through the hedgerow. On leaving the village a search was made of arable fields. There are old records of Tall Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria bastardii*); however most of the fumitories we examined proved to be either Common Ramping-fumitory or Common Fumitory (*Fumaria muralis*).

Sitting on a sunny bank in Gadd's Bottom we had our lunch. This is Crown Estate land, later we came across an ivy-covered sign saying "No Picnicking"! The main target for the meeting was to monitor a small population of Annual Knawel (*Scleranthus annuus*). After some searching, this rare species was found growing on thin soils just off the track. This site also supported a few plants of Subterranean Clover (*Trifolium*

subterraneum). On leaving Gadd's Bottom we walked along Volis Hill; by Volis Cottages we were pleased to find Broad-leaved Leek (*Allium nigrum*). This plant has been known in the vicinity for many years, but was a new plant for many of the group. We returned to the church car park and, once most of the cars had departed, I again searched the car park for the Mossy Stonecrop but still no luck, possibly the plant had succumbed to a dry spring or maybe the car park has been resurfaced. I will have to return next spring to search again.

Steve Parker

Barley Wood, Wrington Sunday 19th June 2011

Thirteen members met in the car park of The Walled Garden, a restored Victorian kitchen garden and café to the east of Wrington village. We walked up to the road and then eastwards along Long Lane to the bridleway that runs up the east side of Prestow Wood. The grassy verges of the track were species-rich with a calcicolous flora including Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis* subsp. *vestita*) and Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*). Whorled Mint (*Mentha x verticillata*) was found in the damp edge of the track. This is a new 10km record, but it is probably under-recorded. The adjacent scrubby edges to the wood had Spurge-laurel (*Daphne laureola*), Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*), Bearded Couch (*Elymus caninus*), Wild Madder (*Rubia peregrina*) and several large healthy plants of Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) with their distinctive hard white stony fruits. We had lunch beside the footpath in a colourful field at the north end of Prestow wood. Oxeye Daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) were so abundant that the field appeared white in the distance. The field had obviously been re-seeded with a wild-flower mixture, as some of the species were very tall and vigorous - Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*) in particular - or not usually found in this area, such as Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*). The Bird's-foot Trefoil was the introduced subspecies *Lotus corniculatus* subsp. *sativus*, also a new

10km record, and Alsike Clover (*Trifolium hybridum*) was abundant. There was much discussion over lunch about whether these introduced plants should be entered onto our MapMate database. From here we walked along Wrington Hill and then returned to the village down the wooded track of Bullhouse Lane. This had a surprisingly poor flora, as it was heavily used as a bridle path and had rather degraded edges. Returning along the village road, we found a clump of Flattened Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*) growing at the base of a garden wall. An arable field yielded Black-grass (*Alopecurus myosuroides*), Wild Oat (*Avena fatua*), Fig-leaved Goosefoot (*Chenopodium ficifolium*) and Great Brome (*Anisantha diandra*). We returned to the Walled Garden café at the end of the afternoon for pots of tea and cake in the garden.

Liz McDonnell

Minehead Golf Course Saturday 25th June 2011

Steam train trips are always very popular with SRPG members so once again we boarded the train for the trip from Bishops Lydeard to Minehead. Arriving at the station we walked quickly (a very difficult thing for botanists) along the sea front towards Butlins Holiday camp and towards the beach and sand dunes. Once in the targeted 1km square, plant recording began. In the mown grass at the side of the road a large number of plants of Sea Fern-grass (*Catapodium marinum*) were found. Nearby the holiday camp or the golf club had set aside a small wild flower area* - here we found Greek Dock (*Rumex cristatus*) which has been known in the Minehead area since 1942 (see Atlas Flora of Somerset). Goat's-rue (*Galega officinalis*) was also found in the wild flower area this has also been known on this site for many decades. On the top of the beach a large patch of Lyme-grass (*Leymus arenarius*) was seen. This large grass has a very limited distribution in VC5, known only at this site and Steart Island.

Following lunch on the beach we started recording along the narrow dune ridge between the beach and Minehead golf course. This area is very rich in RPR plants, the SRPG have visited the site a few times. Our target for the day was to monitor the Sand Catchfly (*Silene conica*). This rare species has

been known on this site since at least 1882 when a specimen was collected by E S Marshall (see herbarium sheet <http://herbariaunited.org/specimen/202172/>)

In 1905 Marshall described the plant as abundant on Minehead Warren; on this trip we only found a few plants and this after a long search. Also recorded on the day were a number of tiny clovers including Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*) and Rough Clover (*T. scabrum*) together with eight other clover species. A small patch of Sea Sandwort (*Honkenya peploides*) was discovered, it was not until entering this record on to Mapmate that I discovered this was the first record for this area since 1971. Recording over, we hurried to catch the train from Dunster station.

Steve Parker

** This area was set up by Exmoor Natural History Society and managed by them as a Wild Flower Walk from 1987-1994. The land was leased to Minehead Town Council from Butlins but when the lease ran out renewal was refused. It was a popular circular walk and an illustrated leaflet was issued. – Editor.*

Lytes Cary Manor Estate

Sunday 10th July 2011

This walk exceeded the leader's expectations in terms of the number of exciting and Rare Plant Register species encountered! Thirteen members met on a fine day to explore a small part of the estate of Lytes Cary Manor on permissive paths (mostly!) We set off through pasture which looked uninteresting but contained a good number of grass species, including Meadow Barley (*Hordeum secalinum*), Yellow Oat-grass (*Trisetum flavescens*) and Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*). A tall stand of Stone Parsley (*Sison amomum*) was admired. We encountered this species several times; in fact we saw ten different umbellifers during the day.

Entering the first arable field (under wheat), we immediately found Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*), Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*) and Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia elatine*), as well as commoner weeds, including Field Pansy (*Viola arvensis*), Fool's Parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*) and Black-grass (*Alopecurus myosuroides*). Along the broad headland were clumps of

Alsike Clover (*Trifolium hybridum*), Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) and a single fruiting Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*).

Crossing a green lane, the path continued along the edge of a field which has been grassland for a few years. Clumps of Lucerne (*Medicago sativa* subsp. *sativa*) lined the broad margin of the field, whilst Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) was seen in abundance. Great excitement accompanied the discovery of Slender Tare (*Vicia parviflora*) at the edge of the grassland, with purple-blue flowers and more than four seeds per pod; we later found this Vulnerable, Nationally Scarce species in abundance in this field. A single Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) was found at the edge of the field and further plants of *Euphorbia exigua*. We found this species in every field we explored.

Despite having progressed through only three fields, lunchtime was declared when a convenient bench was reached! Refreshed, we entered another grassland field and a new 1km square. A splendid stand of over a hundred Pyramidal Orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) was admired. *Kickxia spuria* and Broad-leaved Spurge (*Euphorbia platyphyllos*) were found on the trodden path, suggesting that this was formerly an arable field. The west part of this field is a newly sown pasture: some astonishingly large Dwarf Spurge plants were found here.

Entering a wheat field with broad margins, we were greeted by a fantastic stand of *Euphorbia platyphyllos*, later found all along the margin of this field. Even more exciting was the discovery of Spreading Hedge-parsley (*Torilis arvensis*), an Endangered, Nationally Scarce, UKBAP species; we saw hundreds of plants all the way around the field! *Euphorbia exigua*, *Kickxia spuria* and *Kickxia elatine* were all found in this field. At the NE corner, we admired a stand of Elecampane (*Inula helenium*). Perhaps the star plant of the day was the Nationally Scarce Blue Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis* subsp. *foemina*); altogether we saw five tiny plants. With a lens, it was possible to see the sparse hairs on petal margins: petals of scarlet flowers have a dense fringe of hairs. Exciting discoveries continued: we found a few hundred spikes of the Vulnerable Field Garlic (*Allium oleraceum*), a small patch of Corn

Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*) and several clumps of Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*) which is Vulnerable and Nationally Scarce. Five RPR species in one field!

Returning to the manor, a stiff blue fescue was noticed along the edge of a wheat field. This was later determined as Hard Fescue (*Festuca brevipila*), an introduced species, perhaps included in a seed mix for the field margin. A small dried-out pond added a few more species, including Pink water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*) and Common Water-starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*). Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*) grew alongside the driveway, but received only a cursory glance as tea in the courtyard beckoned! We explored only a small part of the estate and have been invited to visit again.

Helena Crouch

Northmoor SSSI

Saturday 23rd July 2011

One of the biggest problems in organising a field meeting is trying to find a large enough parking area. To overcome this problem the members of the SRPG group met at the Athelney Monument lay-by and then travelled in a small convoy to Middle Moor Drove. This is part of North Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest, in this area of the Levels most of the fields have been improved by agriculture and are species poor but the ditches and rhynes are more interesting, supporting a good range of aquatic plants. A good selection of water plants were recorded including Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*), Cyperus Sedge (*Carex pseudocyperus*), Lesser Water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*) and Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*), these are species that are common on the Levels. It was with great pleasure we found one of the most attractive plants of the Levels the Flowering-rush (*Butomus umbellatus*).

We did not find many submerged aquatic species but one of note was Nuttall's Waterweed (*Elodea nuttallii*). A non-native species which is now common across most of the area, it is so frequently found that it is rather hard to believe that it was only found in the wild in Britain in 1966, with the first Somerset record in 1976. If you look at the "Atlas Flora of Somerset" you will see that Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*) is

widely distributed across the Somerset Levels and we came across a large stand of this plant in the drove side ditch. However, recent research indicates that the *Bolboschoenus* in inland parts of the UK may not be *B. maritimus* but the European species *Bolboschoenus laticarpus*, with this in mind we collected samples and these have been sent off for determination. We await the results of this work. (See following 'Plant Notes' – Ed.)

Steve Parker

Black Down

Sunday 7th August 2011

The highest hill in the Mendips, Black Down is glorious on a fine day but not a good place to be in rain. The forecast for the day was awful so it was fantastic that twelve members turned up to seek Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) and Hare's-tail Cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) on the north side of the hill. All four species had been recorded here for the Atlas Flora of Somerset; none had been recorded here since.

We ascended gently from Burrington Combe with several stops to admire the view. Along the rides, many clumps of the American alien Slender Rush (*Juncus tenuis*) were seen but sadly no Heath Rush (*J. squarrosus*). Black Down is an anticline, its summit an outcrop of Old Red Sandstone, flanked by Carboniferous Limestone. Along the north edge we reached a small patch of calcareous grassland where Fairy-flax (*Linum catharticum*), Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*) and Salad Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *sanguisorba*) made a surprise appearance. Despite the forecast, it was fine all morning and lunch was enjoyed in a delightful glade with Silver-washed Fritillaries floating overhead.

Heading up the west edge of Black Down we found the first of our target species, Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*), on both sides of the path. Tragically the rain began just as we reached a small pond, its surface covered with Bog Pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*). An adjacent mire looked promising and indeed we found abundant Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris* subsp. *palustris*) and a tiny

patch of Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) which were good records. As rain became torrential, shelter was found under trees, together with a lot more Lesser Skullcap. Half the party prudently departed, while a stalwart band headed out onto Black Down.

We made a short diversion uphill to check on Bristle Bent (*Agrostis curtisii*), found here (new to VC6) by Liz McDonnell in 2008. Four large clumps and several young plants were seen so it seems to be increasing. Determined to continue the search for *Eriophorum vaginatum* and *Narthecium ossifragum* on the north side of the hill, six brave explorers headed into the bracken, negotiating *Molinia* tussocks to reach a group of willows. These appeared to correspond to spring heads on the map, which seemed a likely spot, but alas the mission was unsuccessful. Six drenched botanists headed back for the promised ice cream, sensible members opting for a hot drink instead.

Helena Crouch

Beckington and Lullington Saturday 13th August 2011

Nine members met at Beckington Village Hall on a fine August day. We planned to record in two 1km squares. This meant a short brisk walk to start recording, whereupon we 'lost' two members almost immediately, busy chatting! Reunited, we began our recording down a busy, narrow lane. On the verge one plant of Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) was found and later three plants of Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*). Across the field by the river we could see swathes of bright yellow Broad-leaved Ragwort (*Senecio fluviatilis*). The footpath led us past pheasant pens, already stocked with poults and cared for by a poetic keeper who had a 'Polite Notice' on each stile:-

"A kindly walker you may be,
Please take my pheasants seriously,
Of this notice please take heed,
Keep your dogs upon a lead,
Then we all may live happily."

At the end of the first square, we crossed the River Frome and picnicked on the riverbank. In the river was a tall stand of Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*), which some members rarely see, and the large leaves of Yellow Water-lily

(*Nuphar lutea*). Liz pointed out the Alder Tongue Gall looking like a little red tongue poking out from alder cones.

After lunch we took the footpath around Orchardleigh golf course, where *Rumex x pratensis* (*R. crispus x obtusifolius*) was found, continuing to the picturesque village of Lullington with its village green and well. The churchyard yielded many species including Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) growing on the wall with Long-headed Poppy (*Papaver lecoqii*). Returning along the lane to the Mill House five fruiting plants of Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*) were spotted, a new tetrad for this Nationally Scarce species. Altogether we recorded the grand total of 223 species in this 1km square.

Crossing the footbridge and re-entering our first square, the hedgerows were yellow and red with the fruits of Cherry-plum (*Prunus cerasifera*). A couple we met gathering Cherry-plums joined us for our return walk along part of the Macmillan Way. A single plant of Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*) was seen surviving on the edge of a set aside field which was being cut as we passed. Ribbed Melilot (*Melilotus officinalis*) and a large patch of Shaggy Soldier (*Galinsoga quadriradiata*) were admired, both new species for the 10km square. We recorded 185 species in the Beckington square, finishing with a detour to see the plant of the day: White Mullein (*Verbascum lychnitis*). The site for this plant is now mown so at first we could only find two small rosettes of leaves pressed into the grass; however two more dead and fruiting spikes were found in the longer grass away from the road. This Nationally Scarce species was first noted here in 1791 so it is holding its own. Maybe next year we will see a flower?

Gill Read

Clevedon coast Saturday 3rd September 2011

This meeting was well attended with 18 people counted at the start of the walk; although by the end, it was a straggly group and lamentably I didn't count them all back (though I suspect no-one is still out there). We started from the base of Wain's Hill and found White Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata*) still present near the sluice gates

and Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederæ*) at the roadside. Despite the high tide we could not resist a quick look on the beach here. There was Babington's Orache (*Atriplex glabriuscula*) and Common Sea-lavender (*Limonium vulgare*) at the top of the salt marsh. With the help of Fred Rumsey and Mark Kitchen we identified our first *Salicornia* species of the day: Common Glasswort (*Salicornia europaea*).

We made our way round the bay, finding an increasing selection of salt marsh species including Distant Sedge (*Carex distans*) and Long-bracted Sedge (*C. extensa*) in the upper parts of the marsh. We looked at the couches in some detail: most was Sea Couch (*Elytrigia atherica*), with Common Couch (*E. repens*) present more locally and at least one small patch of their hybrid *E. x drucei*.

Beyond Gullhouse Point and into Woodspring Bay the flat grazed section of marsh above the lower sea defences proved interesting, with much Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*) and Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus tenuis*) along with Hard-grass (*Parapholis strigosa*) and Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*). Two plants of Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*) were spotted at the edge of the concrete track. Further scrutiny of *Salicornia* here revealed the Long-spiked Glasswort (*S. dolichostachya*) as well as the less distinctive Yellow Glasswort (*S. fragilis*) and more *S. europaea*. Some of the tidal pool edges had stands of *Bolboschoenus*; subsequent examination of fruits showed it to be Sea Clubrush (*B. maritima*) rather than the "new" *B. laticarpus*. A small clump of the apparently increasing Sea Rush (*Juncus maritimus*) was another good find. The most spectacular plant of the day had to be the beautiful stands of Sea Wormwood (*Artemisia maritima*) at what must be one of its best sites in VC6.

Despite the good range of salt-marsh species, many of them new 1km square records and several of them scarce, we were unable to find the target Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*). The leader confessed that he had never actually seen the plant here and had in fact assembled everyone under false pretences, although he had it on good authority that the plant was present in quantity a little further along the coast, beyond the

locked gate and barbed wire. Notwithstanding this deception, everyone seemed to have an enjoyable day. On the return, several made the pilgrimage around the base of Wain's Hill to look at the ancient specimen of Tree Medick (*Medicago arborea*), known here since 1973. One member acquired a spectacular Eyed Hawk-moth larva hitching a ride on their clothing at some point during this process. Finally Libby Houston showed us yet another exciting potential new *Sorbus* species on the cliff top of nearby Poet's Walk.

John Martin

Hawkridge Reservoir

Saturday 24th September 2011

The group was welcomed to Hawkridge Reservoir by Ellen McDouall, Wessex Water ecologist and SRPG member. Ellen gave a brief introduction to the reservoir and gave us some simple rules that had to be followed while on site. On many meetings we have to work hard to find the target species. This was not the case on this meeting: as soon as we walked on to site we found Round-fruited Rush (*Juncus compressus*), this was the first target species. We collected data for the BSBI Threatened Plants Project; this is a five year project looking at species that have undergone a rapid decline. Our second target species Orange Foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*) was growing with the *Juncus*. Having carried out this data gathering we started recording other plant species around the banks of the reservoir. The most conspicuous plant was the bright green mat of New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*). This invasive alien plant is now to be found at nearly all Reservoirs and many small ponds in the county. It was unclear if this alien species was having a detrimental effect on the two target species but it seemed it must be outperforming some native species.

Just before lunch we crossed the bridge to the north side of the reservoir. Again we monitored the same target species. With water levels very low we were able to walk along the entire north shore. A large ragwort was seen and following some discussion it was thought to be the hybrid *Senecio x ostenfeldii* (*S. jacobea x aquaticus*). A specimen was sent to the BSBI referee and he confirmed the determination. The last time this plant was

seen in Somerset was 1918 at Tarr Steps, Hawkridge by W Watson. To cross back over the Reservoir we were allowed to cross the top of the dam. Here the eagle eyes of Ian Green spotted a small population of Northern Yellow-cress *Rorippa islandica*. A new species for the site, this species first found in Somerset (and England) in 2001 has now been found at most of the reservoirs in the county, probably spread by birds or fishermen! This was a really enjoyable meeting with some exciting finds.

Steve Parker

Crewkerne

Saturday 8th October 2011

On a fine autumn day, five members met in the centre of Crewkerne for the last walk of the year. Obviously it took a while to leave the car park! First we paid homage to the Crewkerne Lucombe Oak, believed to be 200 years old, noting that it had currant galls. A *Conyza* caused a temporary blockage on the pavement; it was later identified as Bilbao Fleabane (now *C. floribunda*), only the second record for VC5. Nearby were self-sown plants of Thunberg's Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), whilst just beyond the car park, a tomato growing on the pavement caused some amusement.

Following a footpath through an industrial estate, we found Common Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) and Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*) on an old wall. Ten different ferns were seen altogether during the day. The alien theme continued, with Procumbent Yellow-sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*), Wallflower (*Erysimum cheiri*), Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and Mind-your-own-business (*Soleirolia soleirolii*) recorded along Easthams Road. As we left the town, heading east, we reached a series of abandoned pastures and had lunch in a field with far-reaching views to the south.

A wet flush in one of the meadows provided some interest, with Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Hard Rush (*J. inflexus*), Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*) and Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*), but nothing truly exciting. A steep dry bank was similarly disappointing, adding only Smooth Hawk's-beard (*Crepis capillaris*) and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*). The views were good though

and the return to Crewkerne took us along an ancient track, first under a tunnel of Hazel, then along an avenue of Hornbeams.

A surprising find was a large specimen of Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), presumably planted, on the path alongside the cemetery. A Maidenhair-tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) was admired within the cemetery and the question of whether to record planted trees arose – and was once more unresolved!

Returning into town along Mount Pleasant, we recorded Oregon-grape (*Mahonia aquifolia*) and Druce's Crane's-bill (*Geranium oxonianum*) on a bank, then found a veritable garden along the pavement, recording Californian Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), Garden Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) and a clump of a stiff blue fescue. This keyed out neatly as Hard Fescue (*Festuca brevipila*), only recorded once before in VC5. A large plant of Annual Wall-rocket (*Diplotaxis muralis*) was admired before the walk ended with afternoon tea in town.

Helena Crouch

PLANT NOTES

Bolboschoenus laticarpus

Within the last couple of years it has been realised that in Britain we have more than one species of *Bolboschoenus*, following publication of a paper by Zdenka Hroudová *et al.* in 2007. A second species, *Bolboschoenus laticarpus*, is now known to occur in Somerset and records have been made in both vice-counties this year. Specimens in major herbaria are being examined: so far the earliest Somerset specimens thought to be *B. laticarpus* are from Berrow (vc6) and from a ditch near Long Load (vc5), collected in 1881 and 1891 respectively, by R.P. Murray. Records for *Scirpus maritimus* at both of these sites are included in Murray's Flora of Somerset (1896).

Bolboschoenus laticarpus differs from *B. maritimus* in having an inflorescence comprising usually 2-7 sessile spikelets in a central group but also 2-5 rays bearing fascicles of 2-4 spikelets, or rarely single ones. *B. maritimus* usually has an inflorescence comprising only sessile spikelets, but may have 1-2 rays bearing

single spikelets or a fascicle of 2-4 spikelets. The arrangement of the inflorescence is thus a good, but not definitive, feature for identification of *B. laticarpus*. For confirmation, a cross-section of the nutlet shows that *B. laticarpus* has a thin exocarp and thick mesocarp, whereas *B. maritimus* has a thick exocarp and narrow mesocarp.

It is suspected that *B. laticarpus* will be found at the more inland sites at which *B. maritimus* has been recorded previously, particularly on the Levels, but records are needed to establish the distributions of the two species, formerly mapped as one. So far *B. laticarpus* has been found this year at West Sedgemoor and North Moor in vc5 and at Southlake Moor, Walton Moor and Butleigh Moor in vc6. This is certainly a species to watch out for next year.

Helena Crouch

Reference (available online)

Hroudová, Z. *et al.* (2007). Taxonomy, distribution and ecology of *Bolboschoenus* in Europe. *Annales Botanici Fennici* 44: 81-102.

PLANT RECORDS

This year there have been many interesting and significant records. In particular a good number of rare plant records have been updated for the Rare Plant Register. The list below includes only species newly discovered and a selection of other interesting records; however, in some cases these are less interesting, and in my opinion less important, than the many excellent records made for the RPR. For those, please have faith – they will be published eventually. All records below are for 2011 unless otherwise stated.

NEW SOMERSET RECORDS

Compiled by Helena J. Crouch

Bolboschoenus laticarpus – see Plant Note.

Hieracium lanatum (Woolly Hawkweed) – Kingston St Mary (ST22332972), 22 May, a few plants naturalised on Church Lane, Somerset Rare Plants Group, VC5.

Lemna turionifera (Red Duckweed) – Barrington Court (ST396182), 6 Apr, brick-lined ornamental pond within the walled garden, Richard V. Lansdown, VC5. First described in 1975, first recorded in Europe in 1986 and first found in Britain in 2007, this species is now known from five vice-counties but is possibly overlooked!

Ophrys apifera* var. *botteronii (Bee Orchid) – Ubley Warren, 26 Jun 2008, one plant, Simon

Mackie, VC6. New for Britain. A single plant was found nearby in 2009 and one in 2011. (See *Journal of the Hardy Orchid Society* 8: 79-83.)

Yucca gloriosa* var. *gloriosa (Spanish-dagger) – Sand Bay (ST33156527), one large rosette on dunes at N end of bay, John P. Martin (det. Helena J. Crouch), VC6.

NEW VICE-COUNTY RECORDS

Dryopteris cambrensis (Narrow Male-fern) – Pen Ridge, Stourhead Estate (ST75033279), 5 May, one large plant on S side of old hedgerow, to E of road, just E of large oak, Helena J. Crouch & Fred Rumsey, VC6.

Epipactis leptochila (Narrow-lipped Helleborine) – Forches Corner (ST184172), 15 Aug 1993, a single plant beneath beech trees next to a telegraph pole marked “22”, on roadside bank on E side of lane N of Forches Corner, Keith Gould (conf. Richard Bateman, John Richards and Ian Taylor), VC5.

OTHER INTERESTING SOMERSET RECORDS IN 2011

Abutilon theophrasti (Velvetleaf) – Chew Valley Lake (ST57946038), 23 Sept, one plant at top of drawdown zone, Helena J. Crouch & Ian P. Green, VC6. First record for Somerset since 1999.

Atriplex portulacoides (Sea-purslane) – Sand Bay (ST32956564), 23 Aug, a 2m x 2m patch in middle of saltmarsh, at edge of small creek, Helena J. Crouch & Somerset Botany Group, VC6. New site for this locally scarce species.

Berberis wilsoniae (Mrs Wilson’s Barberry) – Sand Bay (ST329659), 4 Jun., one bush in scrub beside steps by toilet block, John P. Martin, VC6. Second record for VC6.

Carex divulsa* subsp. *leersii (Grey Sedge) – Langridge (ST73596998), 18 Jul., one clump on S-facing slope, Helena J. Crouch & Fred Rumsey (det. F.J. Rumsey), VC6. A new 10km square for this taxon, now known from only one other site in Somerset.

Centaurea cyanus (Cornflower) – Lower Failand Farm (ST517742, ST518746, ST519746, ST519747), 12 Jul, abundant in many species-rich weedy field margins on organic farm, John P. Martin, VC6 and Beer Field, High Ham (ST418306), 25 Jul, single plant in flower in cornfield, John Poingdestre, VC6. Only recent VC6 records for genuine cornfield Cornflowers, in both cases growing with other interesting arable weeds.

Colutea arborescens (Bladder-senna) – Porlock Weir (SS8647), 4 Oct 2010, by car park, Caroline

Giddens, VC5. Second record for VC5 and first since 1975.

Cyclamen repandum (Spring Sowbread) – Vobster (ST705496), 29 Mar, one plant in shade beneath ash trees behind main gate to diving centre, VC6. Third record for VC6.

Digitalis lutea (Straw Foxglove) – Leigh woods (ST558730), 18 Jun, in flower on wall of former botanic gardens, John P. Martin, VC6. Second record for VC6 and third for Somerset.

Dorycnium hirsutum (Canary Clover) – Beckington (ST80355205), 8 Aug, four plants in cracks at kerb edge of pavement, Helena J. Crouch & Gillian H. Read, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

Drosera rotundifolia (Round-leaved Sundew) – North Hill, Priddy (ST54095115), 27 Sept, several plants in glorious bog near top of field on SW side of hill, Helena J. Crouch & Fred Rumsey, VC6. First record for Priddy area since 1861; otherwise now restricted in VC6 to a few sites on the peat moors.

Festuca brevipila (Hard Fescue) – Mount Pleasant, Crewkerne (ST44560989), 8 Oct, one stiff-leaved clump on pavement at base of wall, on N side of road, SRPG (det. Helena J. Crouch), VC5. Second record for VC5.

Fumaria reuteri (Martin's Ramping-fumitory) – Bath (ST722655), June, several plants in vegetable garden in Newbridge Gardens, Wendy Lambson (conf. Rose Murphy), VC6. Known here for last three years. Second record for Somerset and VC6, the only previous record being from Bath in 1920.

Gazania rigens (Treasureflower) – Minehead (SS975464), 29 Oct, single plant with three flowers, to seaward of sea-wall in area of accreting sand/shingle, Simon J. Leach, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

Glebionis segetum (Corn Marigold) – Lower Failand Farm (ST51957470), 12 Jul, one plant in species-rich weedy field margin on organic farm, John P. Martin, VC6. Only recent VC6 record for a genuine cornfield Corn Marigold, growing with other interesting arable weeds.

Lappula squarrosa (Bur Forget-me-not) – Charlton Musgrove (ST73083059), 20 Jul, large patch in vegetable garden, Helena J. Crouch & Gillian H. Read, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1987.

Parentucellia viscosa (Yellow Bartsia) – Yarty Moor (ST235164), 30 Aug, three or four plants in wet area in central part of reserve, Somerset Botany Group (det. David Tattersall), VC5. Second record for VC5 and first since 1993.

Pimpinella major (Greater Burnet-saxifrage) – Walton (ST45233690), 16 Jul, seven plants in flower on verge opposite the entrance to Whitley Farm and some young plants present, Sharon

Pilkington, VC6. A new 10km square for this taxon and fourth record for VC6 and Somerset. Last seen in Somerset in 2000 and believed lost from the only other recently known site.

Polygonum rurivagum (Cornfield Knotgrass) – Combe (ST415287), 31 Jul, about 80 small erect plants with *P. aviculare* in corner of arable field to E of lane, John Poingdestre (conf. John R. Akeroyd), VC6. Third recent record for VC6 and a new site.

Potamogeton perfoliatus (Perfoliate Pondweed) – Bath (ST707660), 24 Sept, on the sheltered side of a bend near where cycle track crosses river, Rob D. Randall, VC6. First record for River Avon since 1992 and only second recent record for VC6.

Rorippa islandica (Northern Yellow-cress) – Hawkridge Reservoir (ST21103643), 24 Sept, seven plants on top of dam wall, Somerset Rare Plants Group, VC5. Third site for VC5.

Scandix pecten-veneris (Shepherd's-needle) – Socombe Hill (ST38403790), 10 Jun, thinly scattered amongst *Torilis arvensis* along S boundary of arable field, John Poingdestre, VC6. First record of this Critically Endangered species in this 10km square since 1959 and only second recent record for VC6, the other being at Cary Fitzpaine, where JP reported "infestation proportions" in 2011!

Senecio x ostenfeldii (*S. jacobaea* x *aquaticus*) – Hawkridge Reservoir (ST20523606), 24 Sept, one plant at edge of reservoir, Somerset Rare Plants Group (det. Crinan Alexander), VC5. Second record for VC5 and first record for Somerset since 1958.

John Gibson obituary

Some members will have already heard that John died in June this year. John had been a member of the SRPG for over 10 years but none of us knew much about him, as he was a very private and modest man. I made some enquiries from Yeovil Religious Society of Friends, as we knew that he was a Quaker and received a testimony from someone who got to know him in the last few months of his illness. He studied languages at university and was destined for a career as a teacher, but felt called to join a religious community in Scotland where he stayed until he was fifty. Returning to Somerset he met and married his wife Marjorie and worked as a postman until retirement. He was very knowledgeable about plants and wildlife and lived a very humble and simple life, giving most of his money away to good causes. He very kindly donated his binocular microscope to the SRPG last year, which we have used for our identification workshops. He will be much missed.

Liz McDonnell