



This is the last Newsletter compiled and edited by Caroline Giddens. Caroline has done this task each year since our first modest issue in 2000 - a slim 4-page document comprising short accounts of the field meetings. Each year we have increased the content, which has reflected the variety of activities of the Somerset Rare Plants Group. We now include not only more extensive notes of our meetings but also plant notes, new Somerset and vice-county records, surveys that members have undertaken and other botanical news of interest to Somerset botanists. We thank Caroline for all her hard work over the last 12 years. Liz McDonnell (Coordinator)

## REPORTS OF MEETINGS, 2012

### **Annual Members Meeting and AGM Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

This was held as usual at the Lifelong Learning Centre at Shapwick NNR. Twenty two members came to this annual social event, bringing a variety of exhibits, including books to sell and show, plants and displays too. Steve Parker welcomed everyone and Anne Cole gave a financial report and distributed a balance sheet showing a bank balance of £1,300.79. Steve reported that it will be necessary to replace the SRPG computer in the near future and other survey equipment may also be needed. We discussed types of field meetings, and feedback from the group was that the mix of recording meetings and plant-hunting meetings was a good one. Trips to Minehead, Clevedon and Lytes Cary got special mention as favourite days. The meeting at Quants was encouragement for further joint meetings with SANHS and workshops were very popular with members. Helena gave a brief update on the Somerset Rare Plant Register. The SRPG website design and use was discussed. Helena reported that the Bristol Naturalists Society used ours as a good model to follow. The use of 'live' distribution maps on the SRPG website was discussed and data protection problems too. Clive Lovatt gave us a short talk on historical aspects of Somerset botany including how Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*) was found and re-found in Somerset. He brought an old poster of a sale of maiden Elms at Langport in 1842, leaf-prints of the Avon Gorge Whitebeams made in 1979 by Dr Mark Smith, the Curator of Bristol Botanic Garden and a specimen of the recently named *Sorbus leighensis* from

Leigh Woods which had been collected by George Garlick during the 1950's. Liz gave a short presentation on the SANHS Herbarium now housed in the Somerset Heritage Centre and asked if any members were willing to help with its reorganization, as there are no staff at the centre with time or experience to undertake this important role. Our traditional 'Bring and Share' buffet was magnificent, with tables full of delicious food. The annual raffle and quiz (devised by Steve Parker) concluded this excellent and well-attended members meeting.

### **Members Slide and Talk Meeting Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2012**

This meeting was held in our usual winter venue at Shapwick NNR. 15 members attended and we had seven short talks. Chris Loudon showed us progress on the SRPG website. This is currently hosted by SERC, with the help of SERC staff member Tony Price, but Chris, as SERC and SRPG volunteer is responsible for its development and design. Chris is very keen to know how members use the site and welcomes feedback for further development. As we have a link to 'Where's The Path' mapping website, it was decided to send a contribution of £50 to that site in an acknowledgement of its usefulness to us. There was much discussion about plant distribution mapping and linking in to MapMate maps from the Somerset Rare Plants Register page, but this is a complicated issue and it was decided that we could not pursue this development at present.

Helena Crouch, one of the VC6 Recorders gave us a talk on botanical highlights of 2011. Space here will not allow for a full account,

but a few highlights are as follows. *Bolboschoenus laticarpus* is a newly recognized taxon, similar to Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), which is not formally described yet. The spikelets are long-stalked and there are differences in the nutlets of the two taxa. The plant we have been recording on the Somerset Levels and at inland sites is likely to be the new species. Martin's Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria reuteri*) was thought to be extinct in Somerset since 1920, but has been recorded in Bath and is thought to be spreading, so it needs to be looked for elsewhere in the county. Greater Burnet-saxifrage (*Pimpinella major*) has disappeared from its Chapel Cross site, but was recently found at Walton, Street. Lesser Water-plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*) is a declining species in Somerset, but has been recorded at Greylake on the Somerset Levels. Orange Foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*) and Round-fruited Rush (*Juncus compressus*) are both frequent at Hawkridge Reservoir and Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*), Golden Dock (*Rumex maritimus*) and Mudwort (*Limosella aquatica*) have all been recorded at Chew Valley Lake.

Margaret Webster's talk was on 'The Changing Face of Sand Bay'. Sand Bay is an excellent botanical site where at least 15 Rare Plant Register species have been recorded over the last few years. Margaret reported that Yellow Horned-poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) which had appeared in 2008 had not been recorded in 2011. There were images of abundant and very tall Grass-leaved Orache (*Atriplex littoralis*) plants in 2009 while in 2010 images showed how the second lot of high tides washed piles of debris high up onto the fixed dunes. Later in the season this was where many of the plants normally found on the strandline germinated. This included a few plants of *A. littoralis* (with none on the strandline in 2012), some Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*) and many Prickly Saltwort (*Salsola kali*) plants; all of these are SRPR species. By 2011 blown sand had covered this debris and no SRPR strandline species were found on the fixed dunes. *Atriplex laciniata* and *Salsola kali* were plentiful on the strandline so they are clearly not at risk. No *Atriplex littoralis* was found anywhere in Sand Bay in 2011. Margaret also reported that Marsh-mallow (*Althaea*

*officinalis*) seemed to be struggling. One plant had died and two of the others failed to flower. Seedlings had been searched for in both years, but none had been found, which was surprising since there had originally been four large plants, all of which had flowered and fruited well. Seed was collected from the one plant that had flowered and fruited in 2011 in order to test seed viability. Finally there was some history of the site; it seems that the present fixed dunes were created in the 1980's by pumping sand in from the bay to create a sea defence against flooding. Should global warming cause a rise in future sea levels then the bay and its habitats will change again, as will the plants!

Ro FitzGerald talked about her experiences in writing her new book 'A Gardener's Guide to Native Plants of Britain and Ireland' recently published by The Crowood Press. As a first-time author, Ro reported that this was an intense task, involving not only writing accounts of wild plants and their usefulness in the garden, but also dealing with the technicalities and difficulties of preparing quality digital images from slides. She found the lack of personal contact in modern publishing, without a caring guiding editor very difficult. Ro described the low point when she received the review copy, realising that it was too late to correct two photos that had slipped through the editing process and were printed completely wrongly - hundreds of copies of her book were already being shipped from Malaysia where they had been printed. However, SRPG members were very complimentary about Ro's book and several copies were sold at the meeting. It is copiously illustrated with Ro's own beautiful photos and those of Bob Gibbons.

Simon Leach gave an illustrated talk about his work on first flowering dates (FFDs), and in particular how FFDs in recent years compare with those recorded by Walter Watson in the early 20th century. Simon is recording FFDs each year for 339 species, and his observations have shown that in every year since 2008, when he started, the FFDs for most species have been markedly earlier than they evidently were in the 1920s and 30s. In 2011 the extraordinarily warm February and April (the latter almost 4 deg C above the long term average) led to unprecedented early flowering of a great many species, with the

average FFD (all species combined) being about 20 days earlier than that recorded by Watson, at least 8 days earlier than in 2008 and 2009, and 17 days earlier than in 2010. It was indeed a remarkable spring, with many late-spring/early-summer species like White Bryony (*Bryonia dioica*) and Zigzag Clover (*Trifolium medium*) coming into flower at least six weeks earlier than in previous years. As an aside, Simon told us how Clive Lovatt had sent him copies of two letters written by Walter Watson, one of which showed that Watson lived for a time at Pool Farm on the southern outskirts of Taunton – and on one of Simon's regular flower-spotting (and dog-walking) routes. Possibly some of the plants being monitored by Simon now are descendants of those recorded by Watson in the 1920s.

Louise Redgrave gave a presentation on plants of Upper Teesdale. The official botanical walk had to be cancelled as Margaret Bradshaw had broken her ankle, but Louise and Karl Crowther took some of the recommended walks in the area. Mountain Pansy (*Viola lutea*), Melancholy Thistle (*Cirsium heterophyllum*) and Globeflower (*Trollius europaeus*) were found between Low Force and High Force. Karl struggled to take a picture of Shrubby Cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*) leaning over a cliff near High Force, but easily found it on river shingle on the return walk. At Moor House – Upper Teesdale NNR, Spring Sandwort (*Minuartia verna*) and Alpine Bistort (*Persicaria vivipara*) were recorded, but Bird's-eye Primroses (*Primula farinosa*) were already over. Also of interest was a fossil tree (*Sigillaria* sp.) in the village of Stanhope, which had been found in a nearby quarry in the 1960's.

Liz McDonnell gave a little presentation on the recording that she and Ro FitzGerald did in Shetland in July 2011 for the Shetland Biological Records Centre whilst on holiday in South Shetland. This included 'square-bashing' in several 1km squares, especially around the holiday croft at North Hamarsland, searching for Curved Sedge (*Carex maritima*) where it had not been seen for several years and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) in one of only two sites on Shetland. We recorded Early Orache (*Atriplex praecox*) and Oysterplant (*Mertensia maritima*), two plants never likely

to be seen in Somerset as they are northern coastal species.

### **Identification Workshop Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

This was another in the series of plant identification workshops that we have held at the Lifelong Learning Centre at Shapwick NNR. This meeting, lead by Liz McDonnell, was to help members identify plants in their vegetative state (which is useful for winter recording), by using The Vegetative Key to the British Flora by John Poland & Eric Clement (2009, BSBI). Freshly gathered material of trees, shrubs and herbs was brought to the meeting to use as examples when working through the identification keys. Liz explained the ways in which the keys are constructed and emphasised the importance of the indentation, especially on the first key to major divisions which takes the user to different sections in the book.

As the first training session, we worked carefully through the keys as a group with two familiar non-native species – Wilson's Honeysuckle (*Lonicera nitida*) and Laurustinus (*Viburnum tinus*). We were confronted by terms such as 'interpetiolar ridge', 'medifixed hairs' and 'indistinct anastomosing veins', which entailed frequently consulting the extensive glossary, drawings and photos in the back of the book, but all of these terms were well described and fairly easy to understand. After this initial session, individual members felt more confident to use the keys on their own. This was a useful day using a book which most members had already bought, but only a few had used in the field.

### **Swell Wood and West Sedge Moor Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012**

There is always a little extra thrill about the first field meeting of the season, and a dozen members gathered with enthusiasm and warm greetings in the RSPB car park at the top of Swell Wood. However this was proving to be an uncomfortable month – 'blackthorn winter' passed mildly in March, but late April was bringing something verging on 'hawthorn winter', with cold winds and cutting showers, and weather and other things sometimes made the meeting feel less than idyllic. Early on, some members were smitten

by ill health and lost keys, while those who at once plunged keenly into the wood found it a tad disappointing. It is a steeply sloping calcareous ash/hazel wood, known to have species such as Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*) and Herb-Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*), so expectations were quite high, but the upper parts of the slope were undistinguished. The abundant growth of Bluebells was thick with Goosegrass (*Galium aparine*) trails, and there were a number of unexpected ruderals seen such as burdocks and thistles. Plaintive questions began to go up and down the line including 'Where is the *Adoxa*?' and 'Have you seen any Early-purples?' Clearly something was not ideal. The slope is very steep, so the upper zone may be somewhat leached, and in places the busy road is very close, but there was speculation that something in the management history was probably involved. Cessation of management for coppiced hazel can degrade the ground flora as light levels decrease, and in open access woods such as this the necessary construction of paths and steps (as well as possible run-off from the road) may possibly have knock-on effects. Target species were all located in the end, a number of small-leaved limes noted, and a 'real' crab apple *Malus sylvestris* prettily coming into bud was found, but all the more interesting species were restricted to the lower boundary of the wood, and none were seen in abundance.

Weather delivered a few chilly splashes, but was mostly kind enough and, after having a sheltered picnic sitting on log piles in the wood, and admiring some lovely views of West Sedge Moor just greening up but still with flashes of standing water, members took to the droves for the main challenge of the day. The last group meeting to search for Mousetail (*Myosurus minimus*), using many pairs of sharp eyes, had been in 1999. Occasional spot checks in intervening years had confirmed presence at least, but this curious buttercup relative has such a specialised life style that it can be vulnerable to catastrophic changes in its habitat. Like other 'mud plants' it is an annual, living as a seed-bank in silt under winter inundations. Such plants need to be able to germinate without competition, on bare mud, as soon as the winter water dries up, and they can do this extremely rapidly, racing into flower and fruit

before warmer temperatures dry the habitat out and shrivel the plants. Mousetail was formerly well-known from the Somerset Levels, when winter inundation was the norm, and stock and machinery moving onto the droves in spring created lovely muddy ruts, but of course management changes over the last forty years or so have made this habitat itself scarce and endangered. Most droves used by tractors now have stabilised surfaces, and this often applies to muddy gateways as well. Such work was known to have happened in part of our target area, so it was not at all certain what, if anything, we might find. There had also been a very warm dry March, and mud annuals have to be opportunists, adjusting their growth to prevailing conditions. It is not an easy species to spot anyway with almost grassy little leaves and a thin plantain-like fruiting stem – the tiny pale yellow petals which show its buttercup connections are only there briefly – and it seemed likely that any possible plants there might be would be minute drought specimens, even more inconspicuous than usual. Inside the first gateway showing hopeful ruts any members who were already 'Friends of the Mousetail' dropped to their knees, noses almost in the mud, and thankfully glad cries came almost at once. Some plants were indeed extremely small, less than a centimetre high, but some had multiple flowering stems, and in several individual spots more than 100 plants were estimated. These sub-populations were restricted to places on a single drove (or in the track from this drove to a nearby RSPB scrape) so although it was exhilarating to see this brilliant little specialist still 'doing its thing' so vigorously, the smallness of areas of suitable habitat, set in the wide landscape of the moors, did seem terrifyingly vulnerable. Other population areas may still exist in other parts of West Sedge Moor. A late afternoon extended search by Helena Crouch and Simon Leach, on another drove, produced the terrific record of nearly a thousand more plants, but this still represents a dot in the landscape. A more comprehensive survey would need dauntingly lengthy searches and complicated access permissions, neither of which in the remit of modern conservation are likely to be attainable. The only outlying plants found were just off the first drove, very surprisingly by the edge of a tarmac farm track, where

three or four 'enormous' multi-flowered plants more than 5cm high were found, giving excellent photo opportunities without straining the macro facilities on cameras!

Steve Parker, leading this very interesting meeting, had arranged a final treat, some botanical tourism after the searching, recording and counting duties of the day were done. This was a visit to a small meadow below Fivehead Wood, which has a thrillingly rich flora. The turf was spread with flowering Cowslip (*Primula veris*) among drifts of Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) – an unusual and beautiful combination as the anemones growing in full light develop handsome red-toned leaves – with in places the always-exciting sight of groups of Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*) with their varying purple shades. Poking about showed abundant Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*), Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), wonderfully spotted rosettes of a *Dactylorhiza* and Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), along with commoner species in a rich mosaic, while treasures such as Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) were occasional. Management of this extremely rich grassland seemed to have been mowing only, in recent years, and it was felt that grazing was needed to open out the texture of the turf a bit, giving the *Anacamptis* at least a chance for seedling establishment. The current very dense sward, while exciting to see so stuffed with good plants, would need some cutting through by hoof-prints to allow orchids to increase. Walking back through an adjoining field (a recently created 'wild flower meadow') could not have been more of a contrast, as this consisted mostly of a bizarre (foreign?) Salad-burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) and Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) growing in a positive sea of young Yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) plants – hundredweights of seed must have been spread when the field was bare!

**Ro FitzGerald**

### **Ash Priors Common Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

This was a joint field meeting with the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society. There were about a dozen of us,

several people having decided against coming as a result of the extremely wet weather during the preceding week. Let's just say that those with wellies had a more enjoyable day than those without! Steve made possibly the most exciting discovery of the day before the rest of us had even arrived, but he had taken a photo to prove it: a splendid male Pied Flycatcher, perched in a tree alongside the open grassy ride next to the car-park.

In the morning we wandered through the woodland on the south side of the main road through the site, taking in some species-rich areas of wet heath with several colonies of Bristle Bent (*Agrostis curtisii*), stands of Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*) and a scattering of Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*). We were surprised by the amounts of Common Twayblade (*Neottia ovata*) in the wet heathy areas; a most unusual habitat for this species, we thought. On the whole the (mainly secondary) woodland was not particularly rich in species, with many characteristic woodland herbs being surprisingly sparse, or even absent. We did see a few patches of (presumably introduced) Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum* subsp. *campestre*), plus a smattering of Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), which occur at this site along with the Spanish Bluebell (*H. hispanica*), found growing on the bank beside the car-park, and the hybrid between the two (*H. x massartiana*).

Some of us spent time listening out for bird-song and gazing intently through the trees, the site lying within one of the tetrads being recorded by the Leader for the upcoming atlas of Somerset's birds. We saw a recently fledged family of Long-tailed Tits, which was the first evidence of confirmed breeding of this species in the square; we also deliberated long and hard over several Garden Warblers which (sadly) all turned out to be Blackcaps. Returning to the car-park for lunch, we were lucky enough to get some decent views of a pair of Spotted Flycatchers.

In the afternoon we concentrated on the area to the north of the main road, investigating a variety of habitats including flower-rich grassy paths and 'rides' with Zigzag Clover (*Trifolium medium*) and Fragrant Agrimony (*Agrimonia procera*), and open areas of short acidic grassland with

Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), a small colony of Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) and some impressively large patches of Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), already in full flower. We searched (yet again) for Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), which was recorded here back in the 1990s – but even though conditions still look suitable, and we knew exactly where to look, we again drew a blank.

In all we recorded just over 200 vascular plant species, a decent enough total despite the lack of rarities, and adding only a handful of new species to those recorded by members of the group on previous visits. But it was a most enjoyable day, not least for the good company and the opportunity it gave us all to familiarise ourselves again with a wide range of relatively common species; to become a little less rusty, perhaps – except in such wet conditions some of us felt rustier at the end of the day than we had at the start!

**Simon Leach**

### **Sand Point and Middle Hope Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

Despite threatening skies, fifteen members assembled on a blustery day to explore the limestone promontory of Sand Point where several rare species had no recent records. Although narrow, the peninsular is laterally bisected by a 1km grid line: we recorded the north part in the morning, the south after lunch. Once we reached the open grassland of the ridge, most members assumed a prostrate position and scattered patches of Slender Trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*) were soon found, the first records for 14 years. Three plants of the Nationally Scarce Suffocated Clover (*Trifolium suffocatum*) had been found new to Sand Point in 2007: we found hundreds, in many places along the ridge. After much searching, Bird's-foot Clover (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*) was also discovered in flower and we were able to make the first records for ten years. Hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) and Small-flowered Buttercup (*Ranunculus parviflorus*) were exciting finds and on the rocky ridge a few plants of Sea Fern-grass (*Catapodium marinum*) were discovered. A particular target of the day was Sea Stork's-bill (*Erodium maritimum*), last recorded here in 1998. We were delighted to find plants in both 1km

squares, in flower and fruit, however the tiny flowers, lacking petals, are a bit of a disappointment!

Homage was paid to the clumps of Cheddar Pink (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*), introduced here over 60 years ago, now spreading into the grassland. Six rosettes of Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) were found beside the pink and were carefully compared with nearby rosettes of Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*). Two spikes of Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederiae*) were seen on the north side of the ridge and a little further along we found five shoots of Pale St John's-wort (*Hypericum montanum*) which is Near Threatened. Perhaps the most exciting find of the day was Bulbous Meadow-grass (*Poa bulbosa*). Although not a stunning plant, this was a new 10km square record for a Nationally Scarce species and we counted nearly 1,000 plants.

Towards the western end of the south side, thousands of plants of Honewort (*Trinia glauca*) were found in flower and fruit. We were able to compare the male and female plants of this dioecious species. To our surprise, a Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) was seen in flower; we found 17 plants altogether, the first record for this species on Sand Point since 1998. On south-facing rocks we saw many plants of Tall Sea-lavender (*Limonium procerum* subsp. *procerum*), followed by hundreds of plants of Somerset Hair-grass (*Koeleria vallesiana*). We finished the day with a diversion to see hundreds of Green-winged Orchids (*Anacamptis morio*) in flower on the north-facing slopes of Middle Hope, where many fronds of Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) were also seen.

Fourteen Rare Plant Register species were recorded during the day. Many species were recorded for the first time for over ten years and a new site was discovered for a Nationally Scarce plant.

**Helena Crouch**

### **Shapwick Heath Friday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

This walk was planned to help launch the Avalon Marshes Bioblitz on its inaugural day, however most other recording groups began their events during the following weekend so we were a select group of five members and two local volunteers. The day began with a

visit to one of the Canada Farm meadows, where recently created ditches provided interest. In 2011, thirteen plants of Greater Water-parsnip (*Sium latifolium*) were planted along one ditch. Five of these were seen on this occasion. (Later in the year, seven plants were seen during a *Sium* monitoring visit.) Large patches of Thread-leaved Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus trichophyllus*) had colonised the ditch, with occasional handsome plants of Fine-leaved Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe aquatica*). Eight species of sedge were examined in the meadow: Distant Sedge (*Carex distans*), Brown Sedge (*C. disticha*), Green-ribbed Sedge (*C. binervis*), Glaucous Sedge (*C. flacca*), Carnation Sedge (*C. panicea*), Hairy Sedge (*C. hirta*), Cyperus Sedge (*C. pseudocyperus*) and Common Sedge (*C. nigra*). Southern Marsh-orchids (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) were beginning to flower.

Heading west along a drove we admired a large stand of Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) with young sterile fronds unfurling along a ditch. Within Somerset, this Nationally Scarce fern is only found in an area about 10km x 10km in this part of the Levels.

Crossing a narrow plank bridge across a ditch, we headed south through fields of Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*), stopping to admire two sundew species in one field: Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) and Oblong-leaved Sundew (*D. intermedia*), both Rare Plant Register species. This is the only site with recent records for *D. intermedia* in VC6, the only other site being Street Heath where it was last seen in 2001. Our final stop was a glorious meadow at Brickyard Farm where Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*) was admired in flower and an additional sedge, Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*), was seen. The walk was a good introduction to a tiny portion of the National Nature Reserve.

**Helena Crouch**

### **Walk Farm, near Bruton Friday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

Thirteen members, friends and relations met on a glorious hot day to explore the traditionally managed hay meadows of Walk Farm, kindly led by Steve Portch of Natural England. We crossed the first species-rich meadow to join the Macmillan Way.

Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) was found at the edge of the track, updating the only Atlas Flora of Somerset record for ST73. Heading south, the meadows were increasingly spectacular. We were excited to find 20 spikes of Heath Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata* ssp. *ericetorum*) in one field: the next field had hundreds. We stopped for lunch surrounded by Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*), Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*), Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria* ssp. *tinctoria*), Bitter-vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius* var. *montanus*) and Heath Spotted-orchids galore. Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*) was found in several places. Other species included Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), which will be spectacular in late summer, Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Cowslip (*Primula veris*) and Pignut (*Conopodium majus*). Three flowering spikes of Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*) were found in the lunchtime field and a BSBI Threatened Plant Project form was completed. Later we found 86 flowering plants in another field, indeed in another 1km square, and a second form was filled in. We walked through a small area of three different 1km squares, recording just under a hundred species in each. These beautiful meadows are cut for hay during late summer, and then grazed. The farmer told us that he leaves it as late as possible because he loves to see the flowers. Our walk followed a permissive path which allows others to enjoy the meadows as well. We were very grateful to Steve Portch for leading the meeting.

**Helena Crouch**

### **Westhay Heath SSSI Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

Westhay Heath is a small area of fen notified as an SSSI, it is partly owned by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. This site was one of the first restorations following peat extraction. Recently a major scrub and tree management project has removed much of the Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) that had developed on the site in the past few years. The site is now an open fen with scattered trees. Access to much of the site is impossible due to deep water channels or the dangers of walking on a

floating mat of vegetation. However, the group recorded a very good range of species.

On a peaty drove a few young plants of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) were found, reflecting that fact the before peat extraction the site was a heathland. From the ditches and open water channels samples of Rootless Duckweed (*Wolffia arrhiza*) Soft Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum submersum*) and Greater Bladderwort (*Utricularia vulgaris*) were collected.

On the edge of the water a large population of Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) stretched along the bank. Scattered throughout the fen Milk-parsley (*Peucedanum palustre*) and Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*) were frequent. A few ferns are associated with the dryer parts of the wet woodland with Narrow Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) characteristic of this area. However we could not re-find Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*), a small patch of this fern was seen by me in August 2010 but this area is now flooded. At the southern end of the site the South Drain was covered with Yellow Water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*).

As we walked through the site we also came across other wetland wildlife. It was great to see Hobby hunting the swamps of dragon and damselflies. We could also hear the call of the Cuckoo and the boom of a nearby Bittern, while overhead a Marsh Harrier hunted.

**Steve Parker**

### **Hatch Hill**

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2012**

The purpose of this meeting was to search for Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) in one of its few locations in Somerset. The last record of Early Gentian at Hatch Hill was thought to be 1998, but confusion over grid references and site names mean that it may not have been seen here for at least 20 years. *Gentianella anglica* is a very rare plant. It is a Schedule 8 species, Red Listed and is a notified feature for East Polden Grasslands SSSI.

On a damp rain-threatened day which was also the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, nine members met in Combe Hill car park and walked through conifer woodland towards the open species-rich grassland of Hatch Hill. We fanned out and searched an area where a few

Early Gentian plants had been recorded in 1992, without success. Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*) dominated the flat area at the top of the hill and the steep south-facing slopes were very species-rich with many anthills. Species such as Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*), Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*), Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*), Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*) and Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) were frequent. A Grizzled Skipper butterfly was found resting, wings outstretched, amongst the grass. After lunch, we continued westwards, recording in grassland, scrub and woodland. In woodland near the Butleigh Monument, we found the nest of a long-tailed tit constructed precariously on the bark of a huge Ash tree. From Butleigh Monument, there is a magnificent view through the trees to Glastonbury Tor. This was our most westerly point before returning back at the end of the day. Despite searching carefully, no Early Gentian plants were located on our visit, but two 1km squares were well recorded.

**Liz McDonnell**

### **White Sheet Down**

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2012**

After a bad start, due to a car park misunderstanding, a flustered leader, nine members, guests and a dog assembled in the middle of the planned walk. The unexpected route proved interesting however, with Cut-leaved Dead-nettle (*Lamium hybridum*) and Field Pansy (*Viola arvensis*) discovered on the disturbed track-side. The top of White Sheet Down was formerly in Somerset until the large parish of Kilmington was lost to Wiltshire in 1896; but it remains part of vc6. We spent the (thankfully dry) morning discovering the many treasures of this glorious chalk grassland, including Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*), Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*), Autumn Gentian (*Gentianella amarella*), Autumn Lady's-stresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*), Clustered Bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*) and Chalk Milkwort (*Polygala calcarea*). This last species is spectacular here and also on the chalk of Long Knoll, to the north. Elsewhere in Somerset, it is restricted to three hillsides

near Southstoke and Combe Hay, south of Bath, where it grows on oolitic limestone.

The plant of the day was definitely Frog Orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*). We found many plants in closely-grazed turf, particularly on one tumulus and on the southern bank of the Neolithic camp. They were only just beginning to flower in this exposed site at 240m. Unfortunately we found no Field Fleawort (*Tephrosia integrifolia* subsp. *integrifolia*), which was the main target of the day. It had been seen here two years previously, but appears to be suffering disastrous losses from many former sites. In compensation, we took an unplanned excursion 'abroad' (to VC8) for lunch, to admire a splendid patch of Early Gentians (*Gentianella anglica*) on the ramparts of White Sheet Castle (an Iron Age hill fort).

After lunch sheltering in a ditch of the fort, we returned to home territory to seek Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), finding a solitary plant, still in bud. Rain set in and numbers were depleted to four. Instead of the planned afternoon on top of the Downs, we headed back to the more sheltered disused chalk quarry near the car park. A sheet of Kidney-vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) was a stunning sight on a steep west-facing slope. The quarry was dotted with hundreds of flowering Common Spotted-orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and Twayblades (*Neottia ovata*). One hollow had a veritable lawn of tall Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*). A large patch of Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) was the grand finale: impressively large fronds and the first record for the hectad (10km square) since the Atlas Flora of Somerset was published. Despite completing only part of the planned walk, and that in reverse, we saw a good selection of species in a habitat not found elsewhere in our area.

**Helena Crouch**

### **Porlock Marsh**

**Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2012**

A small party from the SRPG set out from the car park in Bossington. A very wet day almost stopped the SRPG doing any meaningful plant recording; however, we decided to go ahead with the meeting. As the rain lashed down we made our way along a lane towards the Porlock Mash. Recently

planted hedgerows added a few shrubby species to the soggy recording card and by searching the margins of arable fields on either side of the track we found few common arable plant species.

The target of the meeting was to search the marsh for Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*) for the BSBI Threatened Plants Project. However when we arrived at the grid reference no suitable habitat could be found. This may have been due to the loss of fresh water marsh caused by the breach in the shingle (October 1996) ridge.

A large stand of Sea-purslane (*Atriplex portulacoides*), stretches across the lowest part of the marsh. This is probably the largest population of this plant in Somerset. At lunch time we sheltered from the rain behind walls of a small ruin. This is the location for *Allium ampeloprasum* var. *babingtonii*. There were about 50 plants growing around the ruin. The population seems to be stable despite the habitat changes on the surrounding area.

On the shingle ridge a large colony of Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum* subsp. *maritimum*) scrambled across the large pebbles. The top and sides of a small pebble wall was covered with Wall Pennywort (*Umbilicus rupestris*). This was in full bloom, while along the base of an old wall Sea Fern-grass (*Catapodium marinum*) was found. Now the rain had stopped we were able to make better records and found on a small area of the ridge, nine species of clover, including Subterranean Clover (*Trifolium subterraneum*), Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*) and Bird's-foot Clover (*Trifolium ornithopodioides*). On reaching the lane we headed back towards Bossington. In the hedgerows White Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata* subsp. *babingtonii*) was seen. A large population of Water Bent (*Polypogon viridis*) was found in the car park gravel by the entrance to the toilet block.

**Steve Parker**

### **Yoxter Ranges**

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2012**

Meeting at Chancellor's Farm we were greeted by Kate Lawrence of Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Bob Corns of Natural England. They explained to the group the history of the range as well as its biological importance. The site was purchased

in 1933 as a military training camp, and there is no public access. We had permission to go on to the area to help update Natural England's records. Kate organises the grazing of the area, during our visit we saw a sheep and Exmoor ponies munching away at the flowery sward. After a cup of tea and a quick safety talk we set off across the meadows of Chancellor's and on to the range. This is a flat open landscape with scattered hawthorn trees; Bob Corns describes the area as Somerset's savannah.

Of particular interest are areas with a high lead content. In the open ground here we found many hundreds of Spring Sandwort (*Minuartia verna*) plants. This plant has a very restricted distribution in Somerset at a small number of locations on the Mendip hills. Another special plant of the ranges is Soft-leaved Sedge (*Carex montana*). Urged by Liz McDonnell we did try to collect seed from the plant for Kew seed bank, however very few seeds could be located, the plant must flower early and drop its fruits quickly. Other species of interest included Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*), Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*), Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) and Pill Sedge (*Carex pilulifera*). A large single plant of *Cotoneaster integrifolius* was recorded at the edge of a lead rake, how the plant arrived here is a mystery but may have been bird sown. The surface of a dew pond was covered with Common Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*) together with Various-leaved Water-starwort (*Callitriche platycarpa*). Water-purslane (*Lythrum portula*) was on the muddy edges of the pond; this habitat was kept open with grazing by the Exmoor ponies.

**Steve Parker**

### **Lytes Cary Manor Estate Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

Following our successful visit last year, ten members met on a lovely summer's day to explore more of Lytes Cary estate and re-visit the best of the arable fields seen previously. We started off along the River Walk, finding Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*) in the first meadow. The arable fields here have broad permanent headlands, where we found our first interesting legume, Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) and a handsome Pyramidal Orchid

(*Anacamptis pyramidalis*). A few plants of Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*) were seen at the margin of a rape field, along with a very large Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*) which is Near Threatened and thus a Rare Plant Register species.

Having driven through floods on the way to Lytes Cary, it came as no surprise that the River Walk became impassable for those without wellies. The promised lunchtime bench was forsaken and the route adjusted. A large clump of Lucerne (*Medicago sativa* subsp. *sativa*) was seen on a headland, and later Alsike Clover (*Trifolium hybridum*). Three members left around lunchtime, which was sad because we saw more exciting plants in the afternoon. We left the designated River Walk to join Ridgeway Lane, heading north. The next RPR species of the day were Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*) and Slender Tare (*Vicia parviflora*), both Vulnerable and Nationally Scarce and in VC6 largely restricted to the south-west, but both in impressive quantities along the verges of the lane.

Eventually, weary from the unaccustomed heat, we reached the promised land of the most northerly field of the National Trust estate. To our delight we found this arable field (this year under beans) had broad cultivated unsown margins with a fantastic array of rare arable plants. Over 1300 plants of the Endangered, Nationally Scarce UKBAP species Spreading Hedge-parsley (*Torilis arvensis*) were counted along the west margin alone. We also saw Knotted Hedge-parsley (*Torilis nodosa*) here. *Euphorbia exigua* was present, together with the more impressive Broad-leaved Spurge (*Euphorbia platyphyllos*). We waded through a swathe of *Lathyrus aphaca* and found more *Vicia parviflora*, which we were able to compare with Smooth Tare (*Vicia tetrasperma*), also seen here. We found a single plant of Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*), exactly where we found a single plant last year, and a few hundred spikes of Field Garlic (*Allium oleraceum*) still thriving on this west margin. To complete the suite of thrilling species, five plants of the Blue Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis* subsp. *foemina*) were found. All agreed that one edge of the field was enough excitement for one day and a happy weary band of botanists returned for tea and cake in

the courtyard. Some members stayed longer to see the gardens, others went in search of yet more rare plants, some went home, but all agreed that it had been an excellent day.

**Helena Crouch**

### **Bramble Meeting**

**Friday 13<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

This meeting, led by Rob Randall, was an event shared with the BSBI. The weather was not too bad and number of members from both groups met up on the first day at the top of Porlock Hill where *Rubus pyramidalis* was identified. Descending down to Robbers Bridge *R. longithyriger*, *R. bloxamii*\*, *R. altiarcuatus*, *R. cinerosus* and *R. adscitus* were added. On North Hill, Minehead *Rubus avaloniensis*, *R. wirralensis*\*, *R. albionis*, and *R. scabripes* were recorded and a specimen thought to be *R. morganwgensis* var. *devonii* taken for confirmation later. The next day searches were made to the south of Minehead with *Rubus flexuosus* at Bonniton, *R. longithyriger* again at Nutcombe Bottom and *R. dasyphyllus* and *R. tamarensis* at Gupworthy. Haddon Hill proved quite fruitful with finds of *R. rubritinctus*, *R. pyramidalis*, *R. leyanus*, *R. nemoralis*\*, *R. altiarcuatus*, *R. bercheriensis*\*, *R. plicatus*, *R. vestitus*, *R. adscitus* and *R. polyanthemus*. At Simonsbath there was *R. dentatifolius* and *R. scabripes*. We were very glad to have these records of Exmoor brambles confirmed, where for obvious identification reasons recording of microspecies has been sparse. Those marked with an asterisk above proved new for Exmoor list. The third day the Quantock Hills and the Blackdowns were visited but this being outside Exmoor area we left recording of species to others but the records will no doubt eventually filter through to SRPG on MapMate if they have not already done so. (Please also see Rob Randall's report on recording brambles in Plant Notes section.)

**Alastair Stevenson and Caroline Giddens**

### **Staple Hill Plantation**

**Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

The group gathered to carry out a survey of a small area of the small Blackdown mire. The site had recently been cleared of trees and has been grazed by cattle; this was undertaken as part of the Neroche project. Once we

gathered together we made our way from the new car park at Staple Hill downhill just above Mount Fancy Farm.

Along the edge of the tack leading to the mire there were a few scattered specimens of Water-purslane (*Lythrum portula*). Here there was a small patch of tall herb fen; this supported a magnificent display of Wild Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Ragged-Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*) and Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*). This area was alive with a wide range of hoverflies, butterflies and other insects busily feeding on the abundant nectar sources. We slowly made our way downhill; here the ground was extremely wet and we spent time jumping from one patch of dry ground to another. Plants here included Marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) and Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*).

After lunch we made our way up the slope to the wettest area of the mire. This supported a blanket of Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), scattered amongst this we could see the bright yellow flowers of Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*). However this part of the mire was far too wet and boggy to support our weight making a complete search impossible. On the edge of the mire a few specimens of Bristle Club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*) were found. Tall plants of Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) covered much of the drier habitat. Scattered through the rush were the most impressive displays of Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*). Here we also recorded Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*). Nearing the end of the meeting we happened to meet two of the voluntary wardens. We explained our interest in the site, congratulating them on their good work and urging them to increase the grazing on the mire.

**Steve Parker**

### **Bridgwater Bay**

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

This was a joint meeting of the BSBI and Wild Flower Society, with help from several members of the Somerset Rare Plants Group. The reason for the two day meeting was to update records, particularly of nationally rare, scarce and red-listed species, for Bridgwater Bay National Nature Reserve for Natural England. This reserve consists of a large area

of mudflat, shingle ridge, saltmarsh, grazing marsh and sand dunes.

On the first day we decided to split the group in two to record different areas and habitats. The first group, led by Simon Leach, concentrated on recording the grazing marsh at Wall Common, along with the sand dune, saltmarsh and shingle habitats immediately to seaward of the common. The small yellow flowers of Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*) were soon being spotted along the edge of the track-way leading across the common. Several sizeable populations were seen, along with much Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) and the rather harder to spot Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*), some of which was found to be still in flower – very late for this species, which usually finishes flowering by early June. Diligent searching also resulted, quite literally, in the 'unearthing' of *Alopecurus x plettkei*, the hybrid between *A. bulbosus* with Marsh Foxtail (*A. geniculatus*), the first record for this grass at this site since 1990. Making their way on to the shingle ridge the group located a few plants of White Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), while in an extensive area of transitional saltmarsh-sand dune they came upon a breathtaking display of tens of thousands of plants of Tall Sea-lavender (*Limonium procerum* subsp. *procerum*), all in full flower. In sandy areas several plants suspected of being *Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *thominei* (a Soft-brome); the hairless lemmas are a useful character in distinguishing this (probably under-recorded) taxon of sand dunes and other sandy places near the coast.

The second group plunged in to the large area of coastal reed bed. Walking was difficult through the head-high Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). After searching, a single plant of Marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*) was found at the base of the sea wall, in a location clearly under threat from encroachment from the reed bed. Making our way along the sea wall several patches of Sea Clover (*Trifolium squamosum*) were found on the drier areas while in the saltmarsh Hard-grass (*Parapholis strigosa*) was frequent.

The two groups met up for lunch and a chance to discuss the finds of the morning. Bob Corns, Natural England's Lead Adviser with responsibility for Bridgwater Bay, talked to the group about the proposed coastal

realignment in the area. After many years the Environment Agency and others had started work on a major scheme to remove the sea wall and allow the sea to flood an area of arable fields. Like all such schemes of this nature some in the party supported such a project while others were strongly opposed.

Recording continued after lunch on an area of upper saltmarsh and grazing marsh, here plants included Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) and a single specimen of Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*). A drainage ditch on the grazing marsh at Wall Common was found to contain a small population of Brackish Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus baudotii*).

On the second day, the whole group walked from the NNR car park at Steart to Fenning Island, an area of sandy beach and grazed saltmarsh. Large stands of Sea Couch (*Elytrigia atherica*) made walking difficult, so many of the party searched along the beach or in dried-up tidal pools. Interesting plants included Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*) a very rare plant for VC5 with only three locations known. By lunch time we had reached Steart Point, at the mouth of the River Parrett. The saltmarsh is grazed by sheep in summer and by large flocks of waders and wildfowl in winter. By the bird hides a line of conifers including Austrian Pine /Corsican Pine (*Pinus nigra*) had been planted in the 1970s as a screen. Walking back to the car park, Mark Kitchen collected a specimen of what proved to be another Soft-brome, this time *Bromus hordeaceus* subsp. *longipedicellatus* – only the second record for VC5. Despite the complete lack of tea-shops and pubs, this was a very enjoyable meeting and we would like to thank everyone for making it a success.

**Steve Parker and Simon Leach**

### **Pill Saltmarsh**

#### **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

Nine members and friends met at the slipway at Pill to record along the saltmarsh eastwards towards The Royal Portbury Dock and to search for Slender Hare's-ear (*Bupleurum tenuissimum*). This Nationally Scarce and Red Listed (Vulnerable) species is one of ten taxa listed for special attention this year for BSBI's Threatened Plants Project. Partial searches on the other side of the river

in 2012 had failed to locate any in old habitats near Sea Mills and Shirehampton. The first species of interest found was the Nationally Scarce Stiff Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia rupestris*), several small plants of which were found between the cobbles on the slipway of the Portishead Cruising Club. The name *rupestris* refers to the nearby St Vincent's Rocks in the Avon Gorge, below which it was first found and described from over 200 years ago. Pavement weeds along the raised walkway included two under-recorded but widespread and locally abundant Fleabanes, Guernsey Fleabane (*Conyza sumatrensis*) and Bilbao Fleabane (*Conyza floribunda*) and Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium pusillum*). The saltmarsh is now largely ungrazed and dominated by dense Sea Couch (*Elytrigia atherica*). When surveyed in 1981 by Catherine, Lady Packington, a Bristol Botany undergraduate, it was still cattle-grazed. Clive showed us a photograph from his own thesis showing the short turf, and some of Catherine's transects showing *Bupleurum tenuissimum* throughout a 10m strip above the regularly inundated *Aster tripolium* zone. We explored small wet areas at the back of the saltmarsh where the vegetation was shorter and Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardii*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) were frequent, in the hope of finding Bulbous Foxtail (*Alopecurus bulbosus*) where it was found in the past, but were not successful – it may have been too late in the year. Continuing westwards, several patches of Sea Purslane (*Atriplex portulacoides*) were found on the banks of muddy inlets of the River Avon. Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*) was also found nearby in damp rills, with a large patch nearby by a footpath. At our lunch spot beneath the M5 bridge, we recorded hundreds of *Puccinellia rupestris* plants in bare open ground. Hoary Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*) with its appressed fruits and distinctive one-seeded terminal segment was a common species here.

The richest area of the day was a gravelly track by pylons to the west of the motorway bridge. We found a large patch of Flattened Meadow-grass (*Poa compressa*) on bare open ground. Stopping to examine this, a few small specimens of Slender Hare's-ear were found. A thorough search of the gravelly path revealed 21 plants of Slender Hare's-ear in

total and Helena completed a detailed BSBI TPP recording card for it. This was the same area where 72 plants were recorded by SRPG in 2000. Continuing along the track designated as a 'Wildlife Corridor' by Bristol Port Authority, we recorded Smooth Tare (*Vicia tetrasperma*) and Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) in the grassy verges. A bush of Stinking Tutsan (*Hypericum hircinum*) was found near the second pylon (west of the sluice). An important find at this area was Annual Beard-grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*), three clumps at the edge of the track. Clive first found it whilst doing the recce for this field meeting a week earlier. This Nationally Scarce species is found as a native in SE England, but is considered a casual in Somerset. It has been recorded in VC6 from Glastonbury, where it has a long history, Dimmer Tip, Brislington Tip in 1979 and at West Dock Portishead in 1977. This was an interesting record, especially as it was found in water-filled edges of the track behind the sea wall, in a similar situation to its native habitat in the east. The alien Water-bent (*Polypogon viridis*) was nearby, where previously recorded. A small group struggled through to the end of the footpath on the sea wall, to the saltmarsh beyond, but no further records of Slender Hare's-ear were made. As we sat on a bench (with Druce's Crane's-bill *Geranium x oxonianum* growing around it) looking towards the mouth of the Avon, Clive spotted a single plant of the saltmarsh form of Curled Dock, *Rumex crispus* ssp. *uliginosus* which occurs at low density in the Avon and Severn Estuaries.

**Liz McDonnell and Clive Lovatt**

### **Clatworthy Reservoir**

#### **Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012**

The aim of this meeting was to search for Small Water-pepper (*Persicaria minor*) for the BSBI Threatened Plants Project. This plant was first recorded at Clatworthy in 2003 by W. Bleeker and T.C.G. Rich; they found it in the "marshy vegetation by stream in draw-down zone". However when we arrived on site it was clear that the extremely wet summer had filled the reservoir to the brim and there was no draw-down zone. Undeterred we started out searching in the shallow margin of the water body. Under a

few inches of water we soon found many plants of Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*), these were growing with extensive patches of New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*). The next plant of interest was a small population of Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*), this was in flower with only a very few plants showing their characteristic fruits. This plant was first identified from this site on a SRPG meeting 2001; which was a first record for England.

We slowly made our way around the edge of the reservoir; here there was an excellent display of the pink flowers of Amphibious Bistort (*Persicaria amphibia*) floating on the water surface. Lunch was taken on some very wobbly picnic tables. During lunch Ro FitzGerald told about her new cloud spotting book and some time was taken in identifying various cloud formations.

After lunch we continued around the edge of the reservoir making occasional sorties in to marshy vegetation and wading along the waters edge. About three-quarters of the way around we found gold, not the expensive metal kind of gold but the kind that grows in rabbit burrows. On a steep sided bank at the back of a small rabbit hole the moss known as Goblin Gold (*Schistostega pennata*) was found by Fred Rumsey (but I am not sure why he put his head in a rabbit hole!). The moss has reflective protonema making it appear luminous. Many in the party could not resist photographing such an unusual plant. Almost at the end of the walk a single specimen of Field Woundwort (*Stachys arvensis*) was found growing at the end of an access track. On an adjacent sunny bank there was a small population of Bird's-foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*) with its distinctive bird's foot shaped fruits.

A few days later I received an email with confirmation that some of the party had also found Six-stamened Waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*) on the edge of the reservoir. Despite our best efforts we did not find our target species Small Water-pepper (*Persicaria minor*). A return trip will be necessary to find this plant. Maybe then we will find some more botanical gold.

**Steve Parker**

## **Bridgwater Town Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

Unsurprisingly a grey, wet day in Bridgwater did not attract many members to an urban recording meeting. However three of us diligently searched the streets, wastelands and road verges around the old Bridgwater docks. Our first interesting find was Bibao Fleabane *Conyza floribunda*; this was a frequent weed of pavement cracks and waste ground, it is probably expanding its range in Somerset but is under recorded. It may well be a common plant of urban habitats across the county. The next species, Cockspur (*Echinochloa crus-galli*) is a plant that has recently expanded its range. This was seen growing at the base of the River Parrett flood defence wall. Over the wall on the banks of the river it was clear that local residents had been disposing of their garden rubbish. It was here we found a well established specimen of Galingale (*Cyperus longus*); this was a new 10km record. Growing close to the Cyperus was a rather tatty looking plant which keyed out to Confused Bridewort (*Spiraea x pseudosalicifolia*), later we discovered this was a new record for Somerset.

After lunch we ventured into VC6 to record in a little-visited square, much of which is an industrial estate. Hawkweed Oxtongue (*Picris hieracioides*) was seen on some waste ground. This has a scattered distribution in Somerset and was new for the tetrad. The only *Conyza* species seen was *Conyza floribunda*. Alongside the waste ground was a large patch of Great Horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*) which is uncommon in this part of Somerset. After trekking along a main road, we came to the riverside. The banks of the River Parrett are largely lined with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) along this stretch, but some saltmarsh species were found in a small break in the reeds: Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*), English Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia anglica*), Common Saltmarsh-grass (*Puccinellia maritima*) and Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*). For the first three species, this was the first record for the 10km square since publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset; all three are approaching their inland limit at this point. 114 species were recorded for the square: a respectable total for an industrial area at the end of October. Returning to the car, a few plants of

Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acer*) were found in flower: a little treat for noble, dutiful industrial wasteland recorders.

**Steve Parker & Helena Crouch**

### **Steam Train to Dunster**

**Friday 28<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

To everyone's relief, after what seemed like *months* of dull, sunless days and heavy and persistent rain, the weather turned out better than predicted; and so we enjoyed a surprisingly dry encounter with the coastline between Minehead Warren and Blue Anchor. Catching the 10.25 from Bishop's Lydeard, eleven of us made our way by steam to Dunster, where we were joined on the station platform by Jeanne and Tim Webb. On the journey we spotted Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*) at Washford station, on the bank where Steve had previously recorded Crown Vetch (*Securigera varia*), one of very few sites for this species in VC5. Helena explained how as a child her great uncle used to catch the steam train each day to go to school in Minehead; and we even caught a glimpse of her great grandmother's house on Watchet seafront.

This was our inaugural 'Christmas walk', and the objectives of the day were chiefly non-botanical, to enjoy a decent stroll in good company, reflect on the year just gone and look forward to the year ahead. But there's no getting away from it: drop a motley collection of botanists anywhere in the Somerset countryside and they just can't stop themselves – and so we set ourselves the challenge, in the bleak depths of winter, of seeing how many plants we could find *in flower*.

We had already seen one or two from the train – Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), to name but two – and no sooner had we alighted at Dunster than plants of all kinds started to show themselves. Even before we left the station we'd added more than ten species to our list. And by the time we reached our lunch stop, on the sand dunes in front of the beach huts, we had reached forty! Highlights included Clive's find of a very early Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*) in flower, White Ramping-fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata* subsp. *babingtonii*) still blooming by the pill-box on the edge of the golf course, and one tiny flower-head of

Hare's-foot Clover (*Trifolium arvense*), spotted by Helena – who was clearly starting to appreciate the fun to be had from recording things in flower, and at this rate may have to join the Wild Flower Society in a bid to find other like-minded souls.

The sand dunes produced a good crop of plants in flower, including Fragrant Evening-primrose (*Oenothera stricta*), Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), Musk Stork's-bill (*E. moschatum*), Viper's Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) and Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), while close to the bridge over the mouth of the canalised river Avill we saw flowering Great Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), Rough Chervil (*Chaerophyllum temulum*) and Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*). At lunch time we also had good views of a Peregrine flying over, along with a Little Egret down on the shore – but no Snow Buntings, sadly.

About one kilometre further along the coast we came across a large colony of Tree Mallow (*Lavatera arborea*), and we managed to find one plant with a solitary flower, which caused great excitement, especially for Helena of course. Closer to Blue Anchor we discovered two small specimens of (presumably self-sown) Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) – not flowering, but a good record nonetheless of a species only rarely found naturalised in the county. We had seen large (planted) trees of this species a little earlier in the day, and it seemed quite likely that a fallen branch or cones from these had washed along the shore and given rise to these youngsters. As usual with the cypress trees, we debated long and hard about the scent of the foliage – citrus, certainly, but was it lemon or orange?

We arrived in Blue Anchor with an hour to spare before the last train back to Bishop's Lydeard, and so took tea at the legendary Driftwood Café – a truly wonderful establishment, complete with flowering Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) on the verge outside – before a final search in fading light along the station platform turned up a few plants of Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*). Back on the train, Liz produced large quantities of homemade cake (a real treat) after which there was much idle chatter and a little snoozing too. In all we had seen 65 species in flower, an excellent total for the

day – but more importantly, it had been great fun to join with friends for a botanical walk at Christmas time, and several members expressed enthusiasm for devising something similar for a year’s time, weather permitting!

**Simon Leach**

## **PLANT NOTES**

### **ELECAMPANE AND YELLOW OXEYE**

Last year, I was sent a new record for Elecampane (*Inula helenium*) and the finder was interested to know more about this species. Elecampane is now considered to be an archaeophyte, having been grown in gardens for its medicinal and ornamental value since at least 995AD. The roots have long been prized as a remedy for coughs and colds. Nowadays it is grown less frequently and is declining as an established escape from cultivation.

While researching Elecampane, I became aware of the similar species, Yellow Oxeye (*Telekia speciosa*) and wondered how often I had overlooked it. *Telekia speciosa* resembles *Inula helenium* in habit: both are tall hairy plants with simple leaves and large yellow daisy flowers. However *T. speciosa* has cordate (not cuneate) basal leaves, slightly smaller (5-8cm) capitula than those of *I. helenium* (6-9cm) and also has a scaly receptacle and lacks pappus hairs. This species is not mentioned in the Flora of the Bristol Region, but the Atlas Flora of Somerset gives two records in VC5. At one site, the plant was originally recorded as Elecampane but re-determined as *Telekia speciosa*.

There is a large stand of “Elecampane” recorded beside the canal towpath near Bathampton, mentioned in Murray’s (1896) Flora of Somerset and White’s (1912) Flora of Bristol. It straddles a 1km grid line and thus has two spots in the Flora of the Bristol Region. Passing this on a family walk I grabbed a specimen. The capitulum clearly had scales on the receptacle and basal leaves were cordate. *Telekia speciosa* has been in cultivation since 1739 but was first recorded in the wild in 1914 in Easternness, where it persists. If the large patch by the canal at Claverton is indeed that mentioned by Murray (1896), it predates the first recorded record of this attractive neophyte. By coincidence, a friend in Bath texted me a record for *Inula*

*helenium* at the very same spot two weeks later, so the confusion continues. It would be worth checking other sites of Elecampane carefully.

**Helena Crouch**

### ***BRACHYPODIUM PINNATUM/ B.***

#### ***RUPESTRE***

Until recently, there were only two species of *Brachypodium* recognised amongst the native flora of Britain and Ireland: False Brome (*B. sylvaticum*) and Tor-grass (*B. pinnatum*). These were the only species mapped in the New Atlas of the British & Irish Flora and recent Somerset floras. In the second edition of Stace (1997), *B. rupestre* is mentioned in Other spp., as “reported in 1991 but requiring confirmation and close to *B. pinnatum*”. The third edition (2010) includes *B. rupestre* as a third native species.

Tor-grass (*B. rupestre*) is native and often dominant in grassland on chalk and limestone. Heath False-brome (*B. pinnatum*) is native in grassland, scrub, open woodland and marginal habitats, often on clay. The distribution of each species is currently unknown, since all records have previously been ascribed to *B. pinnatum*. In Somerset, true *B. pinnatum* has been recorded at West Quantoxhead churchyard, whilst this year *B. rupestre* was determined on Wavering Down and Cross Plain. Both species are included in the Somerset Rare Plant Register and both may genuinely deserve to be there, but we need records to establish the distributions of each. We could all have a go at this!

*B. pinnatum* has leaves flat when fresh, with minute prickle-hairs ( $\leq 30\mu\text{m}$ ) between and over the veins on the lower side ( $\times \geq 50$  lens needed apparently!) The raceme is usually slightly pendent and the spikelets are usually hairy.

*B. rupestre* has leaves usually inrolled even when fresh, without minute prickle-hairs between the veins on the lower side. The raceme is usually stiffly erect and spikelets are usually glabrous.

The authors of the new BSBI Grasses Handbook (2009) are sceptical about distinguishing these taxa at species level, particularly since the most consistently distinctive feature is the presence or absence of near-invisible prickle hairs. It will be

interesting to have a go but I, for one, will almost certainly need to use a microscope!

**Helena Crouch**

## **SELECTION OF *RUBUS* SPECIES FOR THE SOMERSET RARE PLANTS REGISTER**

One hundred years ago the brambles of Somerset were studied in detail by R.P. Murray, E.S. Marshall, J.W. White and their contemporaries, and species distribution was at that time covered probably better than many other counties. Since that time, however, many taxonomic changes have occurred and the current species names applicable to many of their records can only be gauged by reference to their herbarium specimens.

The only extensive recording that has occurred since that time was a visit made by Alan Newton to extract records from the combined White, Fry, Bucknall herbarium at Bristol, and my own field work to map brambles for the Avon Flora Project, with only a few excursions farther south, only one into VC5. A few visits have been made to localities in VC5 by Alan Newton and Len Margetts, but recording had been so sparse that I organised a BSBI bramble meeting in 2012 to help counter this. The intention was to cover as much good bramble country over a weekend as was feasible. Unfortunately the meeting was plagued with wet weather, so was less productive than it might have been. However, a return visit to the Quantocks, accompanied by Stephen Parker and Simon Leach resulted in some useful new records, and this prompted me to make further visits to the foothills of the Brendons.

The main object was, hopefully, to exclude species that historical records suggest might be rare or scarce, but where knowledge of their distribution in VC6 and elsewhere suggests that they probably would not be relevant for the RPR. To this extent the exercise has been successful, in that 7 species have now been excluded as being at least locally frequent in VC5, viz.: *R. pyramidalis*, *R. cardiophyllus*, *R. nemoralis*, *R. adscitus*, *R. micans*, *R. longithyriger* and *R. tamarensis*. Another year's field work might result in the exclusion of a few more.

But balancing this, 11 species new to VC5 were recorded: *R. purbeckensis*, *R.*

*acclivitatum*, *R. wirralensis*, *R. cinerosus*, *R. flexuosus*, *R. insectifolius*, *R. sempervitens*, *R. troiensis*, *R. asperidens*, *R. scaber* and *R. tuberculatus*. The exercise seems, therefore, to have had the wrong effect, but any improvement to the knowledge of this difficult genus is useful. There have also been complications:

a) *R. moylei* as currently mapped in the British Isles, is an aggregate of two or more taxa. The typical plant is found in a few places in VC6 and qualifies as rare or scarce, but there is a plant found from the peat moors southwards, which W.M. Rogers and others referred to as 'var. *cuneatus*', and this is widely scattered in VC5 and the southern end of VC6.

b) *R. bloxamii* as previously understood, did not qualify for inclusion, but it was mapped as two species in Atlas Florae Europaeae: *R. bloxamii*, sensu stricto, and *R. multifidus* (*R. bloxamii* var. *multifidus* of British botanists). The latter is widespread in both VCs, but *R. bloxamii* is restricted to one small area on Mendip, and so qualifies for inclusion.

c) *R. dentatifolius*, as currently mapped, consists of two taxa: *R. dentatifolius* sensu stricto, and what used to be called *R. vectensis*. The latter is locally frequent in both VCs, but the former is scarce in VC5 and very rare in VC6. Because these forms are currently held to be conspecific, a scientific paper will be required to prove the contrary. Hopefully it will be possible to do so before the Somerset RPR is published.

**Rob Randall**

## **PLANT RECORDS**

It is rare to find a new native vice-county record but several are reported below. Many of the additional interesting records are also for native Somerset Rare Plant Register species in a new site. As ever, there are also a number of new aliens; most of them are simply interesting curiosities, but one, *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*, is a scary thug. Thank you to everyone who has contributed records for this list. All records below are for 2012 unless otherwise stated.

## **NEW SOMERSET RECORDS**

*Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *pachyrachis* – Wembdon (ST28903793), 20 Mar 2010, few plants on inner face of churchyard wall

near signboard, Helena J. Crouch & Fred Rumsey, VC5.

*Crinum* x *powellii* (*C. bulbispermum* x *moorei*) - Portishead (ST450750), 25 Oct, few plants on spoil heap by derelict barns to SE of Nightingale Valley SSSI, Helena J. Crouch & Fred Rumsey, VC6.

*Cynoglossum amabile* (Chinese Hound's-tongue) - Taunton (ST22492473), 27 Sep, seven plants in newly-sown patch of grass adjoining the Third Way, near S. end of Greenbrook Terrace, Simon J. Leach (det. Helena J. Crouch & Simon J. Leach), VC5. Presumably arrived in imported topsoil or as grass-seed contaminant. *Nigella damascena* (Love-in-a-mist) and *Poterium sanguisorba* subsp. *balearicum* (Fodder Burnet) nearby.

*Euphrasia nemorosa* x *confusa* - The Perch, Cheddar (ST45335575), 19 Jul 2011, few plants in short turf, Helena J. Crouch, VC6. Specimen in Herb H.J. Crouch (det. A.J. Silverside).

*Geranium palmatum* - Dunster Station (SS99614473), 22 Jul, 15 plants self-sown between the railway tracks, between platform and engine shed, Helena J. Crouch, VC5.

*Mimulus* x *hybridus* - Wells (ST54954583), 29 Jun, one plant in flower on pavement of Sadler Street, Helena J. Crouch, VC6.

*Polygonum boreale* (Northern Knotgrass) - Taunton (ST22432458 to ST22382459, and ST22312459), 3 May, 500+ plants in bare soil on newly-sown grass bank, on the widened section of Castle Street adjoining car-park, Simon J. Leach, VC5. Only the second record of this northern species in England, presumably arriving here in imported topsoil or as grass-seed contaminant. Unfortunately, all plants killed in late May when verge was treated with herbicide, but specimens retained.

*Spiraea* x *pseudosalicifolia* (Confused Bridewort = *S. salicifolia* x *douglasii*) - Bridgwater (ST29893771), 28 Oct, one plant by sea wall, SRPG, VC5. First record for Somerset, but may have been under-recorded due to confusion with similar taxa.

#### NEW VICE-COUNTY RECORDS

*Bergenia* x *schmidtii* (*B. crassifolia* x *ciliata*) - Portishead (ST450750), 25 Oct, many plants on spoil heap by derelict barns to SE of Nightingale Valley SSSI, Helena J. Crouch & Fred Rumsey, VC6.

*Cynosurus echinatus* (Rough Dog's-tail) - Milverton Bypass (ST12122646), Jun, in roadside woodland, R.G. Corns, VC5.

*Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *pratensis* (Rostkov's Eyebright) - Weir Water Valley (SS82254642), 18 Jul 2010, many plants in grassland beside Weir Water, SRPG, VC5. Specimen in Herb H.J. Crouch (det. A.J. Silverside).

*Galium parisiense* (Wall Bedstraw) - Taunton (ST228253 to ST229254), 12 Jun, c.1800 plants in barish waste ground, grass verges and roadsides on S side of railway station, Simon J. Leach, VC5. Further patches were found nearby in the next few weeks. Three records for VC6 have all been considered dubious so this is the first confirmed record for Somerset.

*Lemna turionifera* (Red Duckweed) - Moorlinch SSSI (ST393352), 8 Aug, abundant in ditch to N of and perpendicular to Shapwick Right Rhyne, Helena J. Crouch & Judith Weightman, conf. R.V. Lansdown, VC6. Later found in 6 other ditches at Moorlinch SSSI.

*Telekia speciosa* (Yellow Oxeye) - Bathampton (ST78366496, ST78326502), 15 Jul, large patch both sides of towpath, Helena J. Crouch, VC6. See Plant Note.

#### OTHER INTERESTING SOMERSET RECORDS IN 2012

*Anagallis arvensis* subsp. *foemina* (Blue Pimpernel) - near Stoke St Mary (ST25302195), 3 Oct, at least three plants in arable field margin SE of Broughton Farm, Cath Shelswell, VC5. A new site for this Nationally Scarce taxon, found in only two areas of VC5.

*Atriplex littoralis* (Grass-leaved Orache) - Taunton (ST22252457), 11 Jul, a single plant on newly seeded grassy roadside bank, opposite side entrance to Tesco car park at Tangier, Simon J. Leach, VC5. First inland record in Somerset.

*Brachypodium rupestre* (Tor-grass) - Wavering Down (ST40875553), 30 Jun, Bristol Naturalists' Society (det. Mark A.R. Kitchen) and Cross Plain (ST4155), 23 Aug, Maggie Brain, Margaret & Jim Webster, VC6. First records for Somerset of this Waiting List taxon, but formerly recorded as *B. pinnatum* (see Plant Note).

*Carex arenaria* (Sand Sedge) – Taunton (ST226254), 2 Jul, old railway sidings area on south side of station, Simon J. Leach, VC5. First inland record in Somerset since publication of Atlas Flora of Somerset.

*Carex extensa* (Long-bracted Sedge) – Pill saltmarsh (ST51877685), 26 Aug, in small inlet amongst Sea Couch and (ST51807691), large patch 7m x 7m, SRPG, VC6. New 10km record for species scarce in VC6.

*Chenopodium hybridum* (Maple-leaved Goosefoot) – Bath (ST76186613), ST7618566133 one huge plant in newly created garden border in Ringswell Gardens, Helena J. Crouch & Rob D. Randall, VC6. First record for VC6 since publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset. Found by the garden owner.

*Cirsium x forsteri* (*C. dissectum x palustre*)-Moorlinch SSSI (ST38853551), 20 Jun, one plant with *C. dissectum*, Stephen J. Parker, VC6. Only third recent record for Somerset.

*Cordyline australis* (Cabbage-palm) - Taunton (ST233247), 8 Nov, one well-established young plant on kerbside at S end of St Augustine Street, growing with a varied selection of street weeds including abundant *Polypogon viridis* (Water Bent), and 15 Nov, a second plant nearby at the base of a lamp-post in Duke Street, Simon J. Leach, VC5. Second record for VC5 and first since publication of Atlas Flora of Somerset.

*Cuscuta campestris* (Yellow Dodder) - Dunster (SS99144381), 22 Jul, many patches parasitic on sunflowers outside The Luttrell Arms, High Street, Helena J. Crouch, VC5. Second record for VC5. Also Shepton Mallet (ST63014339), 30 Sept, many patches smothering *Antirrhinum* plants beneath Niger feeder in garden, Sheila & John Brown, VC6. Second record for VC6. [Note that the record formerly believed to be the first for Somerset and VC6, at Windmill Hill, Bristol, was actually just within VC34; thus the first record for VC6 and Somerset was made in 2003, in a garden in Frome, where it is still present.]

*Dryopteris cambrensis* (Narrow Male-fern) - East Water Valley (SS897430), 4 Jun 2011, several plants together on N side of path leading along N side of stream, British Pteridological Society, VC5. Third record for VC5.

*Dryopteris x complexa* (*D. filix-mas x D. affinis* sensu stricto) - Biddle Combe

(ST569479), 8 Mar, few large plants on bank above path, just S of where wall meets stream, Helena J. Crouch & Fred J. Rumsey, conf. FJR, VC6. Second record for VC6.

*Eleogiton fluitans* (Floating Club-rush) - Downhead (ST67824576), 12 Feb, small amount in acid stream in woodland, Sharon Pilkington, VC6. New 10km record for species scarce in both VC5 and VC6.

*Epipactis phyllanthes* (Green-flowered Helleborine) - Clarken Coombe (ST54477129), 15 Jul, under beech trees between path and wall, Steve Preddy, VC6. Third record for species in VC6. Initially thought to be *E. leptochila* but revisited on 5 Aug and re-determined as *E. phyllanthes*. Seen by Richard Miellecarek on 6 Aug and identified by him as var. *vectensis*. Plants photographed here in 1985 and recorded as *E. leptochila* are now also believed to be *E. phyllanthes*.

*Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *pratensis* (Rostkov's Eyebright) - Ashcott Plot (ST44173911), 23 Jun 2011, in tussocky grass, Helena J. Crouch & Fred J. Rumsey, VC6. Specimen in Herb H.J. Crouch (conf. A.J. Silverside). Also Cheddar Gorge (ST483535), 2 Sep 2011, in limestone grassland, Helena J. Crouch, VC6. Specimen in Herb H.J. Crouch (det. A.J. Silverside). First recent record for VC6.

*Festuca brevipila* (Hard Fescue) – Bath (ST74316531), 28 Jul, one clump on pavement in Marlborough Gardens, Helena J. Crouch, VC6. Third record for VC6.

*Filago vulgaris* (Common Cudweed) – Emborough Quarries (ST61975045), 19 Jul, 100+ plants in flower on damp gravel on quarry floor, Helena J. Crouch & Dave Green, VC6. New 10km record for this Near Threatened species.

*Gastridium ventricosum* (Nit-grass) – Uphill (ST31655810), 18 Aug, 30 plants in open ground (cattle tracks), Stephen J. Parker, VC6. New 10km record for Nationally Scarce species.

*Hordeum marinum* (Sea Barley) – West Buckland (ST1620), 16 Jul, abundant along fringe of slip road for about 5m, plus single patch close to where slip road joins main carriageway; also Taunton Services (ST1920), 16 Jul, single patch on central reservation of M5, Simon J. Leach, VC5. Specimens gathered from first site and conf. as the native

subsp. *marinum*. First and second inland records for VC5.

***Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*** (Floating Pennywort) – Portbury Wharf (ST47017626 to ST47387671), 23 Aug, rafts in the Portbury Rhyne and on the banks, Nick Bertrand, VC6. Fourth site for VC6 and first record for this 10km square.

***Hypericum hircinum*** (Stinking Tutsan) – Newton St Loe (ST706648), 3 Aug 2011, single plant on roadside, Dave Green (det. N.K.B. Robson), VC6. Also Pill saltmarsh (ST51707692), 26 Aug, one large shrub between pylon and fence, SRPG, VC6. First and second records for VC6 since 1905.

***Impatiens capensis*** (Orange Balsam) – Claverton (ST78376494), 15 Jul, few plants in flower on canal bank by towpath E of Bathampton, Helena J. Crouch, VC6. First record for Somerset since publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset.

***Isolepis cernua*** (Slender Club-rush) – Walton-in-Gordano (ST42227395), 26 Jul, hundreds of clumps in wet flush beside footpath leading through field to SE of coast path, Helena J. Crouch & Fred Rumsey, VC6. Fourth site for VC6.

***Myosurus minimus*** (Mousetail) - King's Sedgemoor (ST40643330), 11 May, approx. 200 plants covering 2m<sup>2</sup> in gateway on First Sedgemoor Drove, Stephen J. Parker & Simon Clarke, VC6. Third site for VC6 and first record since publication of Atlas Flora of Somerset.

***Ophrys apifera* var. *chlorantha*** (Bee Orchid variety) – Knighton (ST188454), 2 Jun, six plants by coast path, Anne & Eleanor Rivers, VC5. First record for VC5, although apparently known here for some years.

***Poa bulbosa*** (Bulbous Meadow-grass) - Sand Point (ST320659 to 324660), 6 May, c.600 plants on rocky slope above path along ridge, SRPG, VC6. First record for this 10km square since reported at Weston-super-Mare by St. Brody in 1856, that record considered to be an error in the floras of Murray and White.

***Poa infirma*** (Early Meadow-grass) – Sedgemoor Services (ST3552), 21 Apr, along edge of treed-up area and especially dense covering the root of a tree at edge, Clive M. Lovatt, VC6. Fifth record for VC6.

***Polypogon monspeliensis*** (Annual Beard-grass) – Taunton (ST22702483), 30 Jun, nine plants on edge of riverside between Town

Bridge and the Brewhouse car park, Simon J. Leach, VC5. First record of this Nationally Scarce species in this 10km square since seen by W. Watson at Firepool, Taunton in 1935, and fourth record for VC5 since publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset. Also Pill (ST51807688), 19 Aug, Clive M. Lovatt, three small clumps at edge of wet gravelly track behind saltmarsh counted 26 Aug, SRPG, VC6. New 10km square and second record for VC6 since publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset.

***Potentilla recta*** (Sulphur Cinquefoil) – Taunton (ST203259), 5 Jul, waste ground outside Somerset Heritage Centre, Simon J. Leach, VC5. First record for Somerset since publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset.

***Ranunculus sardous*** (Hairy Buttercup) - Ham Green (ST529756), 20 Sept 2008, few on disturbed mound of soil in amenity grassland to W of cottages at The Green, Margaret A. Webster, VC6. First record for VC6 since publication of the Atlas Flora of Somerset. Found on SRPG walk in 2008 but identification uncertain. Small plant taken into cultivation and positively identified the following year.

***Rumex crispus* subsp. *uliginosus*** (Curled Dock) – Pill (ST5177), 26 Aug, on salt marsh, Somerset Rare Plants Group (det. Clive M. Lovatt), VC6. First explicit record for this 10km square since 1999 although reported in “Bristol Botany in 2006” as persistent under Burwalls Wood (ST 5672).

***Pistia stratiotes*** (Water-lettuce) – Ashwick (SS8830), 12 May, in ponds, Caroline Giddens, VC5. First record for West Somerset, greatly extending known range of this aquatic alien.

#### FUTURE NEWSLETTERS

As this is the last Newsletter I shall be producing for SRPG I would just like to thank everyone for their help and patience when I have badgered them for reports over the last 12 years. Next time I shall greatly look forward to receiving a much more professionally produced Newsletter as Liz is taking over its production. Please help her by sending in your reports on time.

**Caroline Giddens**

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