

**Ecology in Somerset 2019: Natural History Reports 2019**

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# NATURAL HISTORY REPORTS 2019

## VASCULAR PLANT REPORT 2019

In 2019 botanists across Somerset were united in a final recording effort for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland's new Atlas: an astonishing 93,000 plant records were made here in one year. During such a formidable effort to map the distributions of plant species as comprehensively as possible, it was inevitable that new taxa would be found in Somerset. As always, the list of new species includes many garden escapes, which are interesting and important to record, but the few new native taxa recorded in Somerset in 2019 reflect the assiduous searching by increasingly knowledgeable and discerning local botanists. One species found new to Somerset has only recently been recognised: *Dryopteris lacunosa* (Jagged Male-fern) was first described in 2011 as a new species within the *Dryopteris affinis* aggregate (Jessen *et al.* 2011), so it is no surprise that it had not been recorded previously.

Hybrids will not be mapped in the new Atlas, partly because their distributions are not truly known. Some are genuinely rare, but many depend upon a particularly critical botanical eye for their discovery: several have not been found in Somerset again since they were recorded for *The Atlas Flora of Somerset* (Green *et al.* 1997). Hybrids have historically been much studied in Somerset; it is thus particularly thrilling that a new hybrid sedge *Carex x boeninghausiana* has been recorded for the county, especially as this is considered to be one of the more frequent sedge hybrids (Stace *et al.* 2015). One parent species, *C. paniculata* (Greater Tussock Sedge), is restricted to wet acidic habitats, but not uncommon, whilst the other, *C. remota* (Remote Sedge), is widespread and invariably found at sites of the former species. The other hybrid found new to Somerset in 2019, *Scutellaria x hybrida* has parents which are less common and not often found together: *S. minor* (Lesser Skullcap) is a calcifuge of nutrient-poor wetlands and woodland rides, whereas *S. galericulata* (Skullcap) is usually, but not exclusively, a plant of more base-rich habitats. This is likely to be a rare hybrid, although it forms long-persistent patches which are shy to flower, so may have been overlooked for years. In contrast *Tragopogon x mirabilis*, the hybrid between *T. pratensis* (Goat's-beard) and *T. porrifolius* (Salsify), is a strikingly handsome plant. It was recorded in 2019 for the first time in Somerset since before 2000.

Roses are a particularly difficult group of plants to identify, mostly because of their peculiar method of reproduction, which results in a large number of hybrids.

Only a few brave botanists attempt to record hybrid roses (and not just because they are tricky to package safely to send to the referee!), but as a result of dedicated effort a new rose hybrid was recorded in South Somerset (VC5) in 2019, and two others were found for the first time since before 2000. Thistles, although not taxonomically challenging, are also not easy subjects to study closely, press, or package up, but *Carduus x stangii*, the hybrid between *C. crispus* (Wetted Thistle) and *C. nutans* (Musk Thistle) is convincingly intermediate in all characters, so is unlikely to be overlooked. In 2019 it was found for the first time in Somerset since 1994, which probably reflects its rarity, the parents having different ecological preferences.

Not all new sites for native species are the result of intensive recording or better understanding: some rarer species are genuinely increasing, exploiting new habitats (see Crouch 2019). Like several other species which in Somerset have been restricted to coastal sites until recently, *Trifolium ornithopodioides* (Bird's-foot Clover) was found on a scruffy verge at a service station in 2019, the first inland record for North Somerset (VC6). *Bupleurum tenuissimum* (Slender Hare's-ear), a Nationally Scarce species of saltmarshes and sea walls, has very few inland records in Britain, and had not been seen away from the coast in Somerset since before 2000: in 2019 a large population was discovered on a bridge over the M5 motorway near Bridgwater. Although known at the coast in VC5, *Crassula tillaea* (Mossy Stonecrop) has only ever been found in the far east of VC6, on woodland rides on Lower Greensand. In 2019 it was recorded in a caravan park at Burnham-on-Sea, a dramatic expansion of range for another Nationally Scarce species.

Some of the most interesting finds of 2019 were plants of arable habitats, three of them seriously declining archaeophytes (species introduced by Man before AD 1500). The discovery of a single large plant of *Adonis annua* (Pheasant's-eye) at the edge of a ditch, not near any house, is inexplicable. It is the first record of this species in Somerset since 1938. *Ranunculus arvensis* (Corn Buttercup) was found for the first time in VC6 since before 2000, and *Oxybasis glauca* (Oak-leaved Goosefoot) for only the second time. Two fumitory species were also recorded in VC6 for the first time for many years: *Fumaria bastardii* (Tall Ramping-fumitory) had not been seen since before 2000, whilst *Fumaria purpurea* (Purple Ramping-fumitory) was last seen in 1903.

The species listed below are only a fraction of the important plant records made in Somerset in 2019. The list cannot include the many hundreds of updated and new hectad (10km x 10km) spots added to the distribution maps in the forthcoming Atlas which 93,000 new records will have generated. The focus for the next few years may swing towards more detailed local recording, rare plant monitoring and more careful study of species and genera which are difficult to identify ('critical' taxa). Although such a great volume of recording may not be achieved again for a while, there are always likely to be exciting botanical records to report.

The records below were, unless otherwise stated, made during 2019. They fall into one of the following categories:

- A taxon recorded for the first time in the wild in Somerset (Watsonian vice-counties 5 (South Somerset) and 6 (North Somerset)), i.e. *a new county record*
- A taxon recorded for the first time in the wild in one of the Somerset vice-counties, either VC5 or VC6, i.e. *a new vice-county record*
- Other records of particular interest, for example second or third vice-county record, species re-found after a long absence, or newly discovered populations of Nationally Rare, Scarce or threatened species. (A Nationally Rare species is one found in 15 or fewer hectads in GB; a Nationally Scarce species is one found in 16-100 hectads in GB.)

Within each category, records are listed alphabetically by 'taxon', which may be a species, microspecies, subspecies, variety or cultivar. Both native and introduced taxa are included, with those more recently introduced ('neophytes') being distinguished by an asterisk before the name. The third category is divided into two sections, to give prominence to records of *native* taxa; archaeophytes (long-established species introduced before AD 1500) are included with natives. Nomenclature follows Stace (2019) for all taxa included in that work. The vice-county is given for each record; the boundary between VC5 and VC6 follows the River Parrett/River Yeo/A303. As in previous years, new county/vice-county records of *Taraxacum* (Dandelion) species are reported separately (pp. 271-3).

Recorders and referees whose names appear more than once have been abbreviated as follows: Cam Valley Wildlife Group (CVWG); Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG); Helena Crouch (HJC); Ro FitzGerald (RFitzG); Roger Golding (RG); Dave Green (DEG); Rupert Higgins (RJH); Graham Lavender (GEL); Simon Leach (SJL); Liz McDonnell (EJMcd); Ellen McDouall (EllenMcD); Stephen Parker (SJP); John Poingdestre (JP); Rob Randall (RDR); Gill Read (GHR); Tim Rich (TGCR); Andrew Robinson (APR); Fred Rumsey

(FJR); Ian Salmon (ITS); Georgina Shuckburgh (GS); Paul Stanley (PDS); Jeanne Webb (JW).

Where mentioned in the following list, *The Atlas Flora of Somerset* (Green *et al.* 1997) is abbreviated as *AFS*.

### New Somerset records

- \**Argyranthemum frutescens* (White Marguerite) — Chilton Polden (ST 3790 3970), 1 May, in gutter, N side of road, JP, VC6.
- \**Cardamine occulta* — Gordano Services (M5) (ST 5098 7566), 6 Apr, five plants in planter at edge of car park, outside Starbucks, FJR; Clevedon, Nortons Wood Lane (ST 4239 7225), 6 Apr, eight plants in a tub outside 'Norwood', on S side of lane, FJR (conf. TCGR), VC6.
- Carex x boeninghausiana* (*C. paniculata* x *remota*) — The Drift, Chard (ST 3463 0821), 10 Oct, one large tussock, near both parents, in alder carr, JP (conf. Mike Porter), VC5.
- \**Cotoneaster microphyllus* (Small-leaved Cotoneaster) — Cross Quarry (ST 41 54), 9 Jul, several prostrate bushes on Cross Quarry cliff edges, EJMcd & Tony Robinson (conf. HJC), VC6.
- \**Cotula australis* (Annual Buttonweed) — Home Farm Holiday Centre (ST 1069 4294), 8 Mar, covering c. 20-30% of a grass strip 4m x 1.5m at Touring parking site No 13, RFitzG, GEL & ITS (conf. Eric Clement), VC5.
- \**Cotula coronopifolia* (Buttonweed) — Bath, Newton Park (ST 693 645), 31 Aug, by stream in pasture, RDR, VC6.
- Dryopteris lacunosa* — Clevedon, Nortons Wood Lane (ST 4245 7225), 6 Apr, one plant on bank on S side of lane, FJR (conf. RG); Bourton Combe (ST 5051 6872), 1 Jun, one plant at side of footpath, HJC (conf. Alison Evans, RG & FJR), VC6.
- \**Eryngium bourgatii* (Mediterranean Sea-holly) — Bristol Airport, A38 E of (ST 5128 6489), 20 Jul, one striking blue plant on the verge of A38, RJH, VC6.
- \**Francoa sonchifolia* (Bridal Wreath) — High Littleton (ST 6454 5874), 22 Feb, one plant at S edge of field to N of Sixpence, HJC & DEG, VC6.
- \**Geranium yeoi* (Greater Herb-Robert) — Weston-super-Mare, Worle (ST 3521 6304), 24 Jan, three plants, one in flower, at edge of alley between Pilgrims Way and Tormynton Road, HJC & FJR, VC6.
- \**Haloragis erecta* 'Wellington Bronze' (Erect Seaberry, Toatoa) — East Quantoxhead, Court House (ST 1369 4360), 30 Oct, one large bushy plant growing in timber yard, RFitzG, VC5.
- \**Helleborus niger* (Christmas-rose) — Huntworth Business Park (ST 3057 3487), 31 Jan, one plant on side of path, SJP, VC5.



Fig. 1 *Persicaria glabra* (Denseflower Knotweed) at Prior Park (Photo: Helena Crouch)

- \**Linum grandiflorum* (Crimson Flax) — Churchill Batch (ST 44 59), 16 Jul, several plants in disturbed area of the Crown Inn car park, probably from a seed packet, EJMcd & EllenMcD, VC6.
- \**Nothoscordum borbonicum* (Honeybells) — Bath, Walcot Parade (ST 752 657), 13 Sep, Pennant paving below railings, RDR, VC6.
- \**Persicaria glabra* (Denseflower Knotweed) — Bath, Prior Park (ST 7615 6345), 19 Aug, eight plants on waste ground by former tea shed, HJC & DEG (conf. John Akeroyd), VC6 (Fig. 1). Third record for Britain and first since 1984.
- \**Phymatosorus diversifolius* (now *Zealandia pustulata*) (Kangaroo Fern) — Tyntesfield (ST 5059 7118), 6 Sep, one plant on trunk of tree fern in sheltered courtyard at N corner of Kitchen Garden, HJC & FJR, VC6. Almost certainly arrived with the tree fern.
- Scutellaria* x *hybrida* (*S. galericulata* x *minor*) — Landacre (SS 8249 3600), 31 Jul, two plants in flower amongst many vegetative *Scutellaria* plants on S bank of river, c. 3m from edge, GEL, VC5.
- \**Sedum kimmachii* — Walton-in-Gordano, Farley (ST 428 745), 12 May, coast path near chalets, spread from local garden but rapidly taking over large areas, RDR, VC6.
- \**Sempervivum arachnoideum* (Cobweb House-leek) — Bath, Bloomfield Drive (ST 7384 6286), 12 Nov, few clumps on old wall at E end of road, HJC & DEG, VC6.

#### New vice-county records

- Crepis biennis* (Rough Hawk's-beard) — Holnicote Estate Office (SS 9121 4631), 14 Jun, 38 plants on grass verge opposite estate office turn, corner between A39 and Selworthy road, GEL (det. RFitzG), VC5.
- \**Griselinia littoralis* (New Zealand Broadleaf) — Weston-super-Mare, Kewstoke Road (ST 3505 6354), 24 Jan, one large shrub on bank on NE side of road, no other planted shrubs so may be self-sown, HJC & FJR, VC6.
- \**Knautia macedonica* (Macedonian Scabious) — Holford (ST 15 41), 11 Aug, one plant on lane verge close to houses, SRPG & Wild Flower Society, VC5.
- \**Lonicera henryi* (Henry's Honeysuckle) — Hawkcombe Woods (SS 8757 4582), 5 Jan, escaped from garden of long-empty house, now self-seeding on banks of stream, GEL, VC5.
- \**Luzula nivea* (Snow-white Wood-rush) — Bath, Victoria Bridge Moorings (ST 7422 6495), 29 Dec, one plant self-sown in stonework of quay, from plantings on nearby bank, HJC, VC6.
- Rosa* x *rothschildii* (*Rosa canina* x *sherrardii*) — Bratton (SS 9465 4621), 8 Oct, in hedge by stream, GEL, VC5.
- \**Sasaella ramosa* (Hairy Bamboo) — Forton, Blackland Lane (ST 3403 0685), 10 Oct, a clump on north side of short side lane leading to the ford, EJMcd & GHR, VC5.





Fig. 2 *Trifolium tomentosum* (Woolly Clover), in Taunton (Photo: Simon Leach)

\**Scilla peruviana* (Portuguese Squill) — Westbury Quarry (ST 505 504), 15 Jun, one plant in flower near rim of quarry and another, not in flower, a few feet away, Pat Steele, VC6.

\**Spiraea douglasii* (Steeple-bush) — Corston, W of (ST 68 65), 31 Aug, roadside from garden refuse, RDR, VC6.

\**Trifolium tomentosum* (Woolly Clover) — Taunton (ST 2359 2520), 21 May, one flowering/fruitlet plant on roadside bank in open short mown sward on droughty soil, with *Torilis nodosa*, *Plantago coronopus* and *Trifolium dubium*, SJL (conf. David Pearman, Chris Preston and HJC), VC5 (Fig. 2).

\**Zantedeschia aethiopica* (Altar-lily) — Blue Anchor, Marshwood Farm (ST 0234 4286), 28 Aug 2015, one plant in field ditch near farm, JW, VC5.

#### Other interesting records – native species and archaeophytes

*Adonis annua* (Pheasant's-eye) — Parchey Bridge (ST 3514 3787), 25 May, one plant with c. 100 flowers on W bank of ditch parallel to King's Sedgemoor Drain, N of car park, JP (Fig. 3). VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1938.

*Bupleurum tenuissimum* (Slender Hare's-ear) — Bridgwater, E of (ST 322 365), 28 Aug, many plants on both verges of A372, either side of M5 bridge, APR, VC6. First post-2000 record for ST33 and for an inland site.

*Carduus* x *stangii* (*C. crispus* x *nutans*) — Bath, Odd Down Park & Ride (ST 7328 6132), 3 Jul, one plant on gravelly mound in 'mitigation area' S of car park, with both parents, HJC & CVWG; (ST 7319 6135),

10 Jul, several more tall plants nearby, HJC & DEG (conf. Tim Rayner), VC6. Fifth record for VC6 and first post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.

*Carex humilis* (Dwarf Sedge) — White Sheet Downs (ST 8062 3602), 23 Jun, 12 patches on SE-facing bank above track at N end of SSSI, SRPG (found by Mark Kitchen), VC6. First record for VC6 part of White Sheet Hill SSSI.

*Crassula tillaea* (Mossy Stonecrop) — Burnham-on-Sea (ST 3036 4829), Feb, scattered at Plots 21 and 28 of caravan park, PDS, VC5. New site for species previously only recorded in a few sites in the E of VC6.

*Eleoëton fluitans* (Floating Club-rush) — Stock Moor Bridgwater (ST 2923 3520), 7 Jul, a large colony 1m x 17m on edge of large pond, SJP, VC5. New hectad record for a VC5 Scarce species.

*Fumaria bastardii* (Tall Ramping-fumitory) — Brean (ST 296 585), 18 Apr, by car park, Jo Parmenter & David Lester (conf. TCGR), VC6. First record for VC6 since AFS.

*Fumaria purpurea* (Purple Ramping-fumitory) — Middlezoy, N of (ST 3750 3467), 15 May, two plants in grassy field on E bank of rhyne, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1903.

*Gymnocarpium robertianum* (Limestone Fern) — Mells, Colliers Way (ST 7350 5034), 5 Jun, three plants on damp N-facing buttress on E side of disused railway bridge along the Colliers Way cycle path, HJC & CVWG, VC6. Updates a pre-1896 hectad record for Nationally Scarce species.

*Linum radiola* (= *Radiola linoides*) (Allseed) — Pitney (ST 438 292), 5 Oct, in a garden pot filled with



Fig. 3 *Adonis annua* (Pheasant's-eye) at Parchey Bridge (Photo: Helena Crouch)

Bradford's Builders' Sand, presumably arrived as seed in the sand, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1960.

***Oxybasis glauca*** (= *Chenopodium glaucum*) (Oak-leaved Goosefoot) — Lipyate (ST 6877 5017, ST 6880 5015), 13 Aug, 11 plants on piles of dumped soil in field, HJC & Peter Watson, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset since 1938.

***Ranunculus arvensis*** (Corn Buttercup) - Somerton, S of (ST 49 26), 9 Jul, Alison Mitchell (Plantlife), VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.

***Rosa x dumetorum*** (*R. obtusifolia x canina*) — Barford Park (ST 2334 3626), Sep, in roadside hedge, GEL, VC5. Third record for VC5 and first since AFS.

***Rosa x rothschildii*** (*R. canina x sherardii*) — Luckwell Bridge (SS 9048 3827), 10 Oct, a short distance down footpath from Thorne Lane; Bossington Marsh (SS 8819 4768), 12 Oct, in hedge 12m past small bridge; Selworthy Great Wood (SS 9151 4628), 19 Oct, just before entering wood, GEL, VC5. Second, third and fourth records for VC5.

***Rosa x scabriuscula*** (*R. canina x tomentosa*) — Englishcombe, S of (ST 71 61), 3 Aug, trackside, RDR, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.

***Scutellaria x hybrida*** (*S. galericulata x minor*) — The Drift, Chard (ST 3463 0821), 10 Oct, frequent in alder-sallow carr, scrambling over adjoining plants, JP, VC5. Second record for VC5 and Somerset.

***Tragopogon x mirabilis*** (*T. porrifolius x pratensis*) — Longrun Meadow (ST 2151 2517), 30 May, with both parents, Keith Gould (conf. SJL & SJP), VC5. Third record for VC5 and first for VC5 and Somerset since AFS.

***Trifolium ornithopodioides*** (Bird's-foot Clover) — Podimore Services (ST 5378 2501), 16 Jun, 12 plants in fruit on edge of verge at W side of car park, FJR, VC6. First inland record in VC6 and a new hectad record for a VC6 Scarce species. Still present at the only other inland Somerset site, in Vivary Park, Taunton, where first found in 2010.

***Vulpia ciliata*** subsp. *ambigua* (Bearded Fescue) — Dunster Beach (SS 9972 4547, SS 9980 4532, ST 0024 4477), 12 Jul, locally frequent around path next to golf course and in front of chalets (seaward side), GEL, ITS, RFitzG & JW, VC5. First post-2000 records for VC5.

#### Other interesting records - neophytes

\****Abutilon theophrasti*** (Velvetleaf) — Herons Green (ST 55 59), 27 Aug, one plant, RJH, VC6. Second post-2000 record for Somerset.

\****Amaranthus caudatus*** (Love-lies-bleeding) — Avalon Marshes Centre (ST 426 414), 31 Aug, few plants on waste ground by tea shop (site of new classroom), SRPG; Street (ST477352), 15 Oct, self-seeding on roadside, APR, GS & Linda Everton, VC6. First

- post-2000 records for Somerset.
- \**Anchusa azurea* (Garden Anchusa) — Shapwick (ST 4112 3882), 9 Jun, one plant on farm dump, JP, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first for Somerset since *AFS*.
- \**Aster lanceolatus* (Narrow-leaved Michaelmas-daisy) — Bath, Odd Down (ST 730 616), 14 Sep, on road verge, RDR; Launcherley, Wellesley Farm (ST 557 438), 28 Sep, in weedy corner of field near houses, APR, GS, Fiona Davis & Hilary Brownnett, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.
- \**Capsella rubella* (Pink Shepherd's-purse) — Breaun (ST 300 554), Feb, in caravan park; Burnham-on-Sea (ST 3038 4831), Feb, many thousands, PDS, VC6. Third and fourth records for VC6 and Somerset.
- \**Cuscuta campestris* (Yellow Dodder) — Faulkland, Somerset Lavender Farm (ST 7404 5420), 4 Sep, abundant on Niger crop at SE edge of lavender field, HJC & DEG, VC6. Third site for VC6.
- \**Chenopodium giganteum* (Tree Spinach) — Bath, Walcot Street (ST 7508 6518), 1 Jan, many plants on a shallow bank between car park and access road, DEG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and fourth for Somerset.
- \**Cynara cardunculus* (Globe Artichoke) — Mark (ST 3689 4793), 5 Jul, three tall flowering plants on side of ditch at the side of a grassy drove, more than 100m from nearest house, EJMCD, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first since *AFS*.
- \**Euphorbia myrsinites* (Broad-leaved Glaucous-spurge) — Middlezoy (ST 3736 3269), 20 May, one plant at base of roadside wall, not sown or planted, JP, VC6. Second record for VC6.
- \**Euphorbia x pseudovirgata* (Twiggy Spurge) — Newton St Loe, Claysend Farm (ST 710 641), 7 Sep, on road verge, RDR, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.
- \**Genista hispanica* (Spanish Gorse) — Bridgwater (ST 3018 3656), 27 Oct, at least four seedlings/young plants established in hard tarmac surface adjoining shrubbery in which this species had been planted, SRPG, VC5. Second record for VC5 and first since *AFS*.
- \**Glebionis coronaria* (Crown Daisy) — Chilton Polden (ST 3790 3970), 1 May, one large plant at base of roadside wall behind telecoms pole, not planted, but outside a garden with a wide variety of plants, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1939.
- \**Iberis sempervirens* (Perennial Candytuft) — Churchill Batch (ST 44 59), 19 Feb, garden throw-out on scruffy area in car park of the Crown Inn, EJMCD & EllenMcD, VC6. Second site for VC6.
- \**Iris orientalis* (Turkish Iris) — Hengrove (ST 60 69), 4 Jun, RJH, VC6. Second site for VC6 and Somerset.
- \**Knautia macedonica* (Macedonian Scabious) — Bath, Sydney Buildings (ST 758 647), 15 Sep, self-sown in Pennant paving, RDR, VC6. Second record for VC6.
- \**Lappula squarrosa* (Bur Forget-me-not) - Cheddar Reservoir (ST 443 542), 2 Oct, one plant on shore of reservoir, RJH, VC6. Second post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.
- \**Lathraea clandestina* (Purple Toothwort) — Bath, Cedric Road (ST 7321 6572), 10 May, in garden which backs onto Gainsborough Gardens Woodland (where this was first found in 1954), Juliet Reid, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1998 at only known site.
- \**Malcolmia maritima* (Virginia Stock) — Bath, Widcombe (ST 752 636), 5 May, base of wall, RDR, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.
- \**Mauranthemum paludosum* (Annual Marguerite) — Batheaston (ST 781 674), 13 May, in paving at base of wall, RDR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first since 1871.
- \**Nicotiana glauca* (Sweet Tobacco) — Chilson Common (ST 33 04), 24 Oct, flowering on farm tip, JP, VC5. Second record for VC5.
- \**Oxalis dillenii* (Sussex Yellow-sorrel) — Langport (ST 4224 2674), 6 Oct, in paving at S side of church, SRPG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset.
- \* *Phedimus hybridus* (= *Sedum hybridum*) (Siberian Stonecrop) — Bridgwater, Rhode Lane (ST 301 360), 24 Oct, one young plant in pavement at base of garden wall ('parent' clump in adjoining garden), SJL, VC5. Second record for VC5 since *AFS*.
- \**Philadelphus coronarius* (Mock-orange) — Broomfield (ST 2225 3197), 3 Jun, lane-side hedge-bank in otherwise "natural" hedgerow vegetation, SJL, VC5. Second post-2000 record for VC5.
- \**Physalis peruviana* (Cape-gooseberry) — Oath (ST 3814 2771), 20 Sep, several plants about to flower on railway bridge embankment, JP, VC5. Fourth record for VC5 and second since *AFS*.
- \* *Pyracantha rogersiana* (Asian Firethorn) — Ford Farm Slopes LWS (ST 3646 3920), 30 Aug, self-seeded shrub, JP, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6 and Somerset.
- \**Zantedeschia aethiopica* (Altar-lily) — Taunton (ST 2241 2451), 21 Jun, next to stream behind Tower Lane/Willow Tree restaurant/Taunton Central Mosque, undoubtedly originally planted, but appears to be spreading into 'semi-wild', SJL, VC5. Second record for VC5.

The BSBI vice-county recorders in Somerset are: Stephen Parker and Simon Leach in VC5, and Helena Crouch and Liz McDonnell in VC6. There is also an active recording group, the Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG), which holds an annual programme of field meetings, winter talks and identification workshops. Further information on the SRPG and the list of taxa included in the Somerset Rare Plant Register can be found at [www.somersetrareplantsgroup.org.uk](http://www.somersetrareplantsgroup.org.uk).

We would be delighted to receive records for possible inclusion in future reports; these should be submitted to one of the ‘receiving recorders’, as follows:

- VC5 Stephen Parker, The Old Coach House,  
Newton Road, North Petherton, Bridgwater,  
TA6 6SN
- VC6 Helena Crouch, Bronwen, Farrington Road,  
Paulton, Bristol, BS39 7LP

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HELENA J. CROUCH

## FIRST FLOWERING DATES 2019

In 2019 I once again kept a note of first flowering dates (FFDs) in the Taunton area, this time for 323 (95.3%) of the 339 species covered by the decade-long study undertaken between 2008 and 2017 (Leach 2011 *et seq.*). A summary is given here of FFDs recorded, along with the main features of the weather in meteorological winter (December-February), spring (March-May) and summer (June-August), based as usual on my own observations and regional (S.W. England and S. Wales) values available on the Met Office website. Records of snowfall, snow lying and air and ground frosts were from my back garden in Taunton.

### The weather in 2019

Daily mean temperatures were above the long-term (1961-1990) average in every month between December and August, and 2 to 3°C above in December, February and March. Nationally, it was the warmest February on record, with the warmest February days ever recorded being on the 25<sup>th</sup> (20.6°C) and 26<sup>th</sup> (21.2°C); in the back garden, daily maximum temperatures were 16°C or above from the 23<sup>rd</sup> onwards, peaking at 20°C on the 27<sup>th</sup>. In comparison with the 2008-2017 decadal averages, daily mean temperatures were 2°C above average in December and February, while January was 0.2°C below. In an otherwise mild winter, January was relatively chilly yet was still 0.5°C warmer than the long-term average. A wet and rather overcast December contrasted with generally drier and sunnier conditions in January and February. There were just two named winter storms, ‘Deirdre’ in mid-December and ‘Erik’ in the second week of February.

Meteorological spring carried on where February left off, with temperatures 2.2°C above the long-term average in March, 1.7°C above in April and 1.3°C above in May. March and April were typically mixed, with many days

of ‘sunshine and showers’. May was more settled, and much drier and sunnier; indeed, it was the driest May in our region since the start of this study in 2008. There were three named storms, ‘Freya’ in early March, ‘Gareth’ in mid-March, and ‘Hannah’ in the last week of April.

It was another warm, record-breaking summer. July and August were especially hot, with daily mean temperatures 1.7°C and 1.4°C above long-term average. 25<sup>th</sup> July proved to be the hottest day ever recorded in the UK – 38.7°C in Cambridge – while the weekend of 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> August was the hottest on record for an August Bank Holiday. July was also particularly dry; in comparison, June was a rather indifferent month weather-wise – especially the first three weeks – with more rain and less sunshine than later in the summer and temperatures within a whisker of the long-term average.

Over the nine-month period sleet or snow was observed falling on just three days (two in January, one in February), and snow was lying on four mornings (one in January, three in February), which included 15cm settling overnight on 31<sup>st</sup> Jan-1<sup>st</sup> Feb. Air or ground frosts were recorded on 30 days – three in December, 12 in January, nine in February, two in March and four in April.

### First flowering dates

As in 2018, FFDs in 2019 are here compared, for the most part, with average FFDs for the decade 2008-2017 (*SANH* 162, 115-9) rather than the dates given by Walter Watson from the first half of the last century (Watson 1949). This approach is designed to produce a clearer picture of how dates in any particular year, in this case 2019, deviate (or not) from the ‘modern baseline’.

For the 323 species recorded, the comparison between 2019 FFDs and 2008-2017 ‘decadal average’ FFDs is



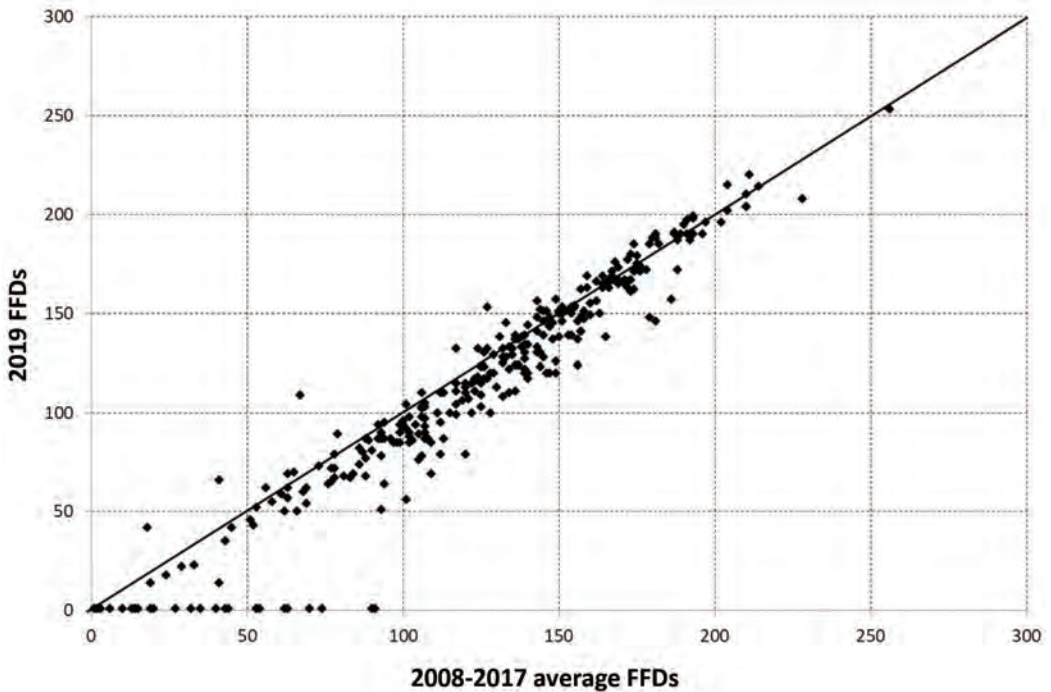


Fig. 1 First flowering dates (FFDs) for 323 species in 2019, plotted against average FFDs for the decade 2008-2017. Dates are shown as day numbers (day 1 = 1<sup>st</sup> January). The diagonal line marks the line along which data-points would lie if 2019 FFDs were identical to the decadal average FFDs; above the line the 2019 date is later than the decadal average, below the line the 2019 date is earlier

shown in Fig. 1. As in 2018, the relatively mild December produced a large crop of New Year's Day FFDs. Of course, amongst these early flowerers were many that are invariably in bloom at the start of the year: Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Annual Meadow-grass (*Poa annua*), Red Dead-nettle (*Lamium purpureum*), Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*) and Common Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), for example, are species that even Watson in the 1930s would have half-expected to see blooming on the first day of the year. Others, though, he would have found more surprising: White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*), Hairy Bitter-cress (*Cardamine hirsuta*), Petty Spurge (*Euphorbia peplus*) and Thale-cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*) he would usually not have seen until February or March, while Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), Field Forget-me-not (*Myosotis arvensis*) and Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica*) would have been in April or May. One or two species really do appear to be behaving quite differently now to how they behaved in Watson's day or even, for that matter, ten years ago. Pellitory-of-the-wall, with a 'Watsonian' FFD of 23<sup>rd</sup> April – and a decadal average FFD of 15<sup>th</sup> March – now seems to be routinely flowering right through the winter. Indeed, this is the fifth year in a row that it was found to be

already flowering on New Year's Day.

Most of these are plants of urban waste ground, flowerbeds and pavements. But in 2019 there were many woodland species, too, with remarkably early FFDs. Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) and Spurge-laurel (*Daphne laureola*) were both flowering on New Year's Day, two to three weeks earlier than their decadal average. This same margin of 'earliness' was evident also amongst many of those coming into bloom in February or March: for example Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*) and Southern Wood-rush (*Luzula forsteri*) were, respectively, 12, 15, 16 and 20 days earlier than their decadal average FFDs.

As usual though, there were a few notable exceptions to this general trend toward extreme earliness. Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) didn't start flowering until 12<sup>th</sup> February, 24 days later than my decadal average, and 16 days later than Watson's date. Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), too, with a decadal average FFD of 10<sup>th</sup> February, had one of its latest FFDs in recent years, not being seen in flower until 7<sup>th</sup> March.

As can be seen from Fig. 1, most spring- and

summer-flowering species continued the general pattern of early FFDs in comparison with their decadal averages. However, amongst 'dry grassland' species there was a suggestion that while those with decadal FFDs in late June/early July were generally 'early', a few of those usually flowering later in July were 'late'. For example, Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*) and Betony (*Betonica officinalis*) were in flower by 28<sup>th</sup> May and 6<sup>th</sup> June respectively, a full month earlier than their decadal average FFDs. In contrast, Burnet-saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*) and Woolly Thistle (*Cirsium eriophorum*), with FFDs of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> August, were actually 11 and 16 days *later* than their decadal averages. Watson's time interval between average FFDs of Betony and Burnet-saxifrage was 15 days – even my own decadal figure was just 18 days – but the interval between these two species in 2019 was 58 days. Might the heatwave and generally dry weather in July have had a delaying effect on the FFDs of some of these later-flowering species? Maybe so, but then, determined to buck this trend, Autumn Felwort (*Gentianella amarella*) achieved its earliest FFD since the start of the study. It was in bloom at Thurlbear on 27<sup>th</sup> July, almost three weeks

earlier than both my own and Watson's average FFDs.

If the above examples tell us anything it is that it never pays to generalise, and that an early season for one species doesn't mean that it won't be a late season for another. Nevertheless, for all 323 species combined, 2019 produced the second-earliest set of FFDs since 2008, being an average of 8.7 days earlier than the mean of the averages for the period 2008-2017. Only 2014 was earlier – by just one day – and, unsurprisingly, that was another year with above-average temperatures in every month from December to August (*SANH* 158, 257-9).

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SIMON J. LEACH

## BRYOPHYTES IN SOMERSET 2018-19

This account summarises new and first recent (= post-1960) records of bryophyte species for the vice-counties of South Somerset (VC5) and North Somerset (VC6) between January 2018 and December 2019. All such records have been formally verified by the British Bryological Society Recorders for Mosses or Liverworts. Species are presented in alphabetical order, with hornworts first, followed by liverworts and then mosses.

### Hornworts

*Phaeoceros laevis* (L.) Prosk. (Smooth Hornwort) – Aisholt Common (ST 1788 3488), Feb 2019, A. Branson & S. Pilkington; first recent record for VC5. *P. laevis* is a frequent dioecious hornwort of damp or flushed acid ground in SW England and Wales but it has rarely been found in Somerset. This extensive mixed population of male and female plants (with immature sporophytes) growing in damp, poached ground on the bank of a small valley stream represents the first verified collection in VC5 for more than 60 years (Fig. 1).

### Liverworts

*Heteroscyphus fissistipus* (Hook.f. & Taylor) Schiffn. (Square-cut Yokewort) – Tyntesfield Estate (ST 5059 7118), Sep 2019, F. J. Rumsey; first record for

VC6, Somerset and GB. A native of Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii. It was found, introduced to Ireland, in 1999 in a garden in Kerry. Until now it had not been reported from elsewhere in Ireland or in Britain. At Tyntesfield, it was growing around the base of one or more tree-ferns planted at this National Trust property, where it seemed to be thriving.

*Ricciocarpos natans* (L.) Corda (Fringed Heartwort) – Nailsea Moor (ST 4450 6993), Apr 2019, S. Pilkington; first recent record for VC6. An aquatic thalloid liverwort of unpredictable occurrence. It is a declining Nationally Scarce species and is most frequent in the fens of eastern England. Although it has been recorded a few times before on the Somerset Levels, this find represents the first verified sighting in Somerset since 1959. Thousands of floating thalli were discovered in several small connected rhynes on part of Tickenham, Nailsea and Kenn Moor SSSI, during a survey for rare aquatic flora (Fig. 2).

### Mosses

*Habrodon perpusillus* (De Not.) Lindb. (Lesser Squirrel-tail Moss) – Leigh on Mendip (ST 6792 4797), May 2018, S. Pilkington; first recent record for VC6. Although a common species on the continent, *H. perpusillus* always appears to have been a rarity in the



Fig. 1 *Phaeoceros laevis* (Photo: Sharon Pilkington)

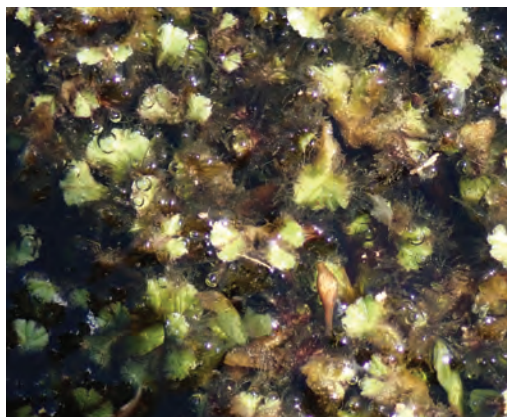


Fig. 2 *Ricciocarpos natans* (Photo: Sharon Pilkington)

British Isles, dwindling to a mere eight populations by 2013. It had not been seen in VC6 since 1886, when it was known near Wells. The latest find was of several small healthy-looking patches of about 100cm<sup>2</sup> total area on the trunk of a single *Acer pseudoplatanus* (Sycamore) tree in Hurdlestone Wood.

***Hygroamblystegium fluviatile*** (Hedw.) Loeske (Brookside Feathermoss) – Kilmersdon (ST 6913 5161), Jan 2019, S. Pilkington; first record for VC6. An aquatic or semi-aquatic moss that is most characteristic of fast-flowing, base-poor watercourses in western and northern Britain. In Somerset it is almost always replaced by *H. tenax* (Fountain Feathermoss). This population of relatively robust *H. fluviatile* was found anchored to bedrock and stones in a cascading sandstone stream just outside Kilmersdon.

***Racomitrium fasciculare*** (Hedw.) Brid. (Green Mountain Fringemoss) – West Harptree (ST 5601 5690), Feb 2018, S. Pilkington; first recent record for VC6. Though a common species of hard acid rocks throughout northern and western Britain, *R. fasciculare* has not been found on natural occurrences of bedrock in VC6 because of the vice-county's unsuitable geology. This population comprised a few

tufts on a weathered sandstone headstone in a church graveyard.

***Tortula vahliana*** (Schultz) Mont. (Chalk Screw Moss) – Panborough (ST 4709 4568), Mar 2019, S. Pilkington; first record for VC6. A Nationally Scarce moss known mainly from chalk habitats in East Anglia, it has been reported twice before in VC5, near Bridgwater, but had not previously been known from VC6. A population of scattered plants with near-mature sporophytes was found on a steep roadside bank of blue lias and clay near houses in Panborough.

***Ulota crispa*** (Hedw.) Brid. sensu stricto – North Widcombe (ST 571 577), Feb 2018, S. Pilkington; first record of *U. crispa* s.s. for VC6. A few tufts of *U. crispa* were found on a decumbent branch of *Salix cinerea* (Grey Willow) in wet woodland near Herriotts Mill Pool. In 2017, British and Irish *U. crispa* was segregated into three species, one of which is *U. crispa* s. s. The two other segregates (*U. crispula* and *U. intermedia*) have not yet been found in VC6, but *U. crispa* s.s. appears to be relatively common.

SHARON PILKINGTON  
British Bryological Society

## ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS TO THE LIST OF SOMERSET BEETLES 2014-19

The last report on beetles in this journal was for the year 2013 (McGill 2014), so a further update is now long overdue. The present note gives details of all beetle species added to the Somerset list between 2014 and 2019. The following records were reported by Keith Alexander, David Boyce (DCB), Bob Fleetwood (BF), Mark Gurney (MG), James McGill (JM), and Marion

and Alan Rayner. Records listed below are unchecked, unless explicitly determined or confirmed by a relevant expert. It should be noted that *Taphrorychus bicolor*, which was reported as new to the county fauna by Alexander (2017b), is not included here on account of it having already been recorded in Somerset in 2010 (Boyce and McGill 2011).

The format of the list is the same as that adopted by Duff (1993) and Duff and Boyce (2010): for each record I give 10-km square, site name, date/s (month/s and year, with the month/s shown in roman numerals as was the convention in Duff (1993) and subsequent updates), and recorder's initials. The emboldened Red Data Book and 'Notable'/Nationally Rare/Scarce categories given in square brackets after the species names refer to the most recent available assessments of national threat and/or rarity status. Various families within the order Coleoptera have been assessed at different times and with slightly differing date cut-offs, threat/rarity criteria and categories. The list below includes reference to the following categories:

- RDB1** – Red Data Book, Category 1 – Endangered. A taxon recorded from 15 or fewer 10-km squares of the GB National Grid and which is decreasing, with the likelihood of becoming Critically Endangered or Extinct in the near future if the factors causing their decline continue operating.
- RDB2** – Red Data Book, Category 2 – Vulnerable. A taxon recorded from 15 or fewer 10-km squares in GB and which is decreasing, with the likelihood of becoming Endangered in the near future if the factors causing their decline continue operating.
- RDB3** – Red Data Book, Category 3 – Nationally Rare. A taxon recorded from 15 or fewer 10-km squares in GB, but which is considered to be neither Vulnerable nor Endangered.
- RDBK** – Red Data Book, Category K – Insufficiently known. A taxon suspected of belonging to one of the other RDB categories listed above, but for which there is currently a lack of information.
- Na** – Notable, Category A. Nationally Scarce taxa which are thought to occur in 16-30 10-km squares in GB.
- Nb** – Notable, Category B. Nationally Scarce taxa which are thought to occur in 31-100 10-km squares in GB.
- NR** – Nationally Rare. A taxon recorded from 15 or fewer 10-km squares in GB.
- NS** – Nationally Scarce. A taxon recorded from 16-100 10-km squares in GB.

## Order COLEOPTERA

*Leiodes gyllenhali* Stephens

**ST 57:** Tyntesfield, vii 2016 (BF conf. Jon Cooter)

*Dropephylla devillei* Bernhauer

**ST 46:** Bullock Farm Lakes, viii-ix 2016 (BF conf. Roger Booth)

**ST 57:** Tyntesfield, vi 2016 (BF)

*Euplectus brunneus* Grimmer [**RDB1**]

**ST 57:** Leigh Woods, viii-ix 2019 (BF det. Roger Booth)

*Tachyporus transversalis* Gravenhorst

**ST 21:** Yarty Moor, xii 2018 (JM)

*Philhygra terminalis* (Gravenhorst) [**RDBK**]

**ST 32:** West Sedgemoor, iii-vi 2019 (JM)

*Oxyporus rufus* (Linnaeus)

**ST 32:** North Moor, iii-vi 2019 (JM)

*Aulonothroscus brevicollis* (de Bonvouloir) [**RDB3**]

**ST 57:** Tyntesfield, 2016 (Alexander 2017b)

*Procræus tibialis* (Boisduval & Lacordaire) [**RDB3**]

**ST 57:** Tyntesfield, 2016 (Alexander 2017b)

*Malthodes crassicornis* (Mäklin) [**NR**]

**ST 57:** Leigh Woods v-vi 2016 (Alexander 2017a)

*Dorcatoma substriata* Hummel [**Na**]

**ST 57:** Tyntesfield, 2016 (Alexander 2017b)

*Stethorus punctillum* (Weise)

**ST 43:** Charity Farm, iii-vi 2019 (JM)

*Strigocis bicornis* (Melié) [**Nb**]

**ST 57:** Leigh Woods, v-vi 2019 (BF conf. Glenda Orlidge)

*Abdera biflexuosa* (Curtis) [**NS**]

**ST 23:** Barford Park, vii 2014 (DCB)

*Scaptia testacea* Allen [**NS**]

**ST 57:** Leigh Woods, 2016 (Alexander 2017a); Tyntesfield, 2016 (Alexander 2017b)

*Anaspis thoracica* (Linnaeus) [**NS**]

**ST 57:** Tyntesfield, 2016 (Alexander 2017b)

*Squamapion cineraceum* (Wencker) [**Na**]

**ST 22:** Thurlbear Quarrylands, viii 2017 (JM)

*Hemitrichapion waltoni* (Stephens)

**ST 73:** White Sheet Downs, vi 2019 (JM)

*Isochnus sequensi* (Stierlin) [**RDBK**]

**ST 32:** Athelney, iii-v 2019 (JM); North Moor, iii-vi 2019 (JM); West Sedgemoor, iii-vi 2019 (JM)

**ST 43:** Charity Farm, iii-vi 2019 (JM)

*Sibinia arenaria* Stephens [**Nb**]

**ST 24:** Wall Common, viii 2019 (BF)



*Ceutorhynchus hirtulus* Germar [Nb]  
**ST 25:** Brean Down, iv 2019 (BF, MG)

*Pelenomus zumpti* (Wagner) [Na]  
**ST 36:** Channel View, iv 2016 (BF conf. Peter Hodge)

*Leiosoma oblongulum* (Boheman) [Nb]  
**ST 43:** Worley Hill, xi 2018 (JM)

In addition to these new county records, the following two species were listed in Duff (1993) on the strength of subfossil records only, but are now known to be extant in the county:

*Agelastica alni* (Linnaeus) [NR]  
**ST 43:** Ham Wall, ix 2019 (BF)  
**ST 76:** Monkton Combe, vi 2019 (Marion & Alan Rayner, det. Rob Randall)  
 This species has undergone a recent dramatic expansion of range in GB, but the published assessment, for now, remains as NR.

*Xyleborus dryographus* (Ratzeburg) [Nb]  
**ST 57:** Leigh Woods, v-vi 2019 (BF)

With the above additions, the list of Somerset beetles now stands at 2,504 species of Coleoptera and three species of Strepsiptera recorded in the last two centuries, plus 70 species of Coleoptera only recorded in the county as subfossils.

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JAMES A. MCGILL

BUTTERFLIES IN SOMERSET 2019 — THE YEAR OF THE PAINTED LADY

The UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme results showed that 2019 was the best year for butterflies since 1997, with just over half of UK butterfly species showing higher population levels in 2019 than in 2018, making it the eighth-best year out of the 44-year series. In many (but not all) ways this reflected our experience in Somerset. Another hot, dry summer followed a mild and relatively dry spring, and our butterflies prospered accordingly. The information in this article is based on the records from 1,401 walks on 67 transects during which 125,484 butterflies were recorded, an average of 90 butterflies per walk. Forty-two species of butterfly were recorded, of which 16 increased in number over 2018 and 26 declined, although some of the variations were marginal.

Undoubtedly the highlight of the year was an invasion of Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) (Fig. 1). Such invasions occur roughly every ten years and the previous one was, indeed, in 2009. The Painted Lady is a 'summer migrant', normally arriving in the UK in small numbers from N. Africa and S. Europe in spring/early summer, then breeding here before attempting a return migration southwards in late summer/autumn. Although some adults have been recorded as overwintering in Cornwall,

in the UK the species effectively dies out in the winter. In 2019 vast numbers arrived, with 1,855 recorded on the county's transects compared with 126 in 2018, an increase of 1,472%.

There were other unusual sightings: a Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) at Priddy, and two more at Carymoor, where they had not been recorded for more than ten years; a Purple Emperor (*Apatura iris*) near Frome; two Adonis Blues (*Polyommatus bellargus*) at Bannerdown; a Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus argus*) at Collard Hill; and a Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) at Yeovil. Also recorded in 2019 was Geranium Bronze (*Cacyreus marshalli*) (Fig. 2), a native of South Africa which arrived in Europe in 1987 and has since spread rapidly with the first UK records being in 1997. Single specimens were recorded at Weston-super-Mare and North Curry, raising the question as to whether these are genuine wild-bred or immigrant butterflies, or else captive-bred specimens released by a breeder.

Turning to more common species, Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*) was again the most numerous, with 39,256 records, representing just over 31% of the total. In fact, the top ten species accounted for 83% of all



Fig. 1 Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*), a species seen in large numbers in 2019 (Photo: Julian Rawlins)

the butterflies recorded, with the Browns taking the top five places. Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) was the second most numerous, followed by Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*) — also known as Hedge Brown — and Marbled White (*Melanargia galathea*), both of which increased in number by over 50% compared with 2018. Although Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*) declined by nearly 50% it nevertheless was the next most abundant. All the so-called 'cabbage whites' declined by nearly 50% but they still came within the top ten. Tenth place was taken by the Peacock (*Inachis io*) which was up by about 60%. Although scarce, the Grayling (*Hipparchia semele*) made a notable gain of some 250%.

At the other end of the scale, no Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*) were recorded, and it is feared that they may have become extinct in the county, despite efforts to improve habitat for them in several areas. All the Hairstreaks had a bad year, decreasing by around 50% and in the case of the White-letter Hairstreak (*Satyrrium w-album*) by over 70%. Despite the hot summer and the sightings in UK of scarce migrants, Clouded Yellows (*Colias croceus*) appeared in smaller numbers than in 2018. Rather surprisingly, too, all our fritillaries were down in number, the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria selene*) declining by 64%; and the scarcer skippers, Dingy (*Erynnis tages*) and Grizzled (*Pyrgus malvae*) Skippers down by 40% and 53% respectively. The Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), which has been causing concern over a number of years, held its own last year.

No account of butterflies in Somerset would be complete without mention of the Large Blue (*Maculinea arion*), of which some 75% of the UK



Fig. 2 Geranium Bronze (*Cacyreus marshalli*), two examples of which were recorded in 2019 in Somerset (Photo: Julian Rawlins)

population is found in the Polden Hills. Jenny Plackett, BC's South West Regional Conservation Manager, said: "Populations did fall in 2019 but 2018 was an extraordinary year and many of the core populations were at carrying capacity so a drop was expected. 2019 was still the second-best year on record for Large Blues with the butterfly flying on nine of the project sites, including one re-colonisation within the Poldens landscape".

The Somerset and Bristol branch of Butterfly Conservation continues to expand and again supported the 'Munching Caterpillars in Bristol' project, which aims to introduce children from inner-city areas to butterflies and moths and to inspire an interest in nature. The Branch also funded and contributed to research work into the numbers of, and suitable habitat for, Small Pearl-bordered and Marsh Fritillaries in the Blackdown Hills. This work will form the basis for further conservation work in 2020.

Visit our website <http://www.somersetbutterflies.org.uk/> for further information about butterflies in Somerset or follow us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/BCSomerset](https://www.facebook.com/BCSomerset) or Twitter @BCSomerset.

JULIAN RAWLINS  
Somerset and Bristol Branch, Butterfly Conservation

## ARACHNIDS IN SOMERSET 2019

Last year I reported the hope that the Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*), newly recorded in Yeovil Country Park, would establish a population there. The Country Park wardens arranged a count of the species in early autumn 2019 and recorded over 400 individuals. I also received reports of several hundred of the species at two separate sites at Crewkerne, and singletons have been turning up in several locations in the north of the County. I predict that with a strong base apparently established, this striking spider will be seen in numerous new places this coming autumn.

With a full year of recording James McGill has again contributed greatly to our knowledge of the distribution of spiders in Somerset, adding over 5000 records. All these, plus additional records from myself and others, have been input to the Spider Recording Scheme ([srs.britishtspiders.org.uk](http://srs.britishtspiders.org.uk)) which currently covers spiders and harvestmen. The Scheme is managed by fellow British Arachnological Society member Peter Harvey, with records able to be viewed on the database very soon after they have been submitted. In 2019 James found 16 species not previously recorded from Somerset, plus many more that are new to one or other of our vice-counties. For my part I managed to find just one species, a linyphiid (money spider), not previously recorded from Somerset — or so I thought! As I write this during the coronavirus lockdown and we are all more or less confined to home (and, if we

have one, garden), it is worth noting that this species, *Megalephyphantes* sp. near *collinus* (Fig. 1), was found in our garden (in VC6) where it is quite numerous, making its web under various objects including an inverted tin bath. The species in question was first recorded on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent in 1999 and although it has spread in the south-east its appearance in Somerset is surprising. It is sufficiently distinctive to suggest it is a new species, but it hasn't as yet been officially described, hence its curious scientific name which refers to *M. collinus*, the species it most closely resembles. My discovery led to James McGill re-examining a spider that he had caught in 2016, indoors at home in Taunton (VC5). It hadn't seemed to fit the descriptions of the usual native species, and, sure enough, it was *Megalephyphantes* sp. near *collinus* — although James has not found it since in his home or garden and suspects it might have been a 'one-off' that had come home with him from London. However, in 2019 he found a population of the species in west Bridgwater, so it clearly occurs in VC5.

Two of the new Somerset records found by James are recently naturalised aliens, *Cryptachaea blattea* and *Mermessus trilobatus*. *C. blattea* originates from Africa and was first recorded in Britain in 2015. It is a theridiid spider and makes a typical scaffolding web on or under vegetation or objects in shady places, and never more



Fig. 1 *Megalephyphantes* sp. near *collinus* (Photo: Francis Farr-Cox)

than a couple of feet above ground level. In these days when plastic is often seen as 'material non grata' it is worth noting that *C. blattea* has a penchant for plastic, being often found under plastic garden furniture, playhouses and garden rubbish! *Mermessus trilobatus* is a North American species which was first found in Europe in Germany where it is thought possibly to have arrived with American troops. It has spread all over Europe and was first recorded in Britain in 2007. It is a linyphiid and has been found in a wide range of habitats, normally at ground level.

Some of the new county records could be said to be filling a gap as the species, though scarce, are otherwise widely recorded from other parts of Britain where their preferred habitat occurs. *Parapelecopsis nemoralioides* (a linyphiid), *Zelotes electus* (a gnaphosid) and *Halorates reprobus* (another linyphiid) are three such examples from the coast, the first two being sand dune inhabitants and the last living on the high tide line or in saltmarsh. Apart from the aliens and the undescribed species all the new records are of species assessed as being at least 'Nationally Scarce' in Britain. Several, however, are much more restricted. *Trichoncus saxicola* is a linyphiid species of calcareous grassland, in this instance recorded from White Sheet Downs, on the border with Wiltshire, and listed as 'Vulnerable' and 'Nationally Rare' in Britain. *Dipoena erythropus*, a theridiid recorded from Thurlbear Quarrylands, and *Iberina candida*, a hahniid from Brean Down, are also 'Vulnerable' and 'Nationally Rare'. *I. candida* is one of those small pale species, mentioned in a previous report, that are probably partly subterranean living in cracks in soil. The linyphiid *Centromerus serratus*, recorded from Orchard Wood, is regarded as 'Endangered' and 'Nationally Rare'. It is worth noting that a number of the new county records and some of the rarer species have been recorded from sites such as Thurlbear Quarrylands and Orchard Wood which lie within the probable bounds of the former Royal Forest of Neroche. Other pockets of non-agricultural habitat surviving within the former Forest area now perhaps deserve more attention. In the Neroche area, as well as discrete sites which already enjoy some recognition it would be interesting to see what lurks within the wooded corridors of the Broughton Brook, River Rag (Fivehead River) and the River Ding, and in some of the old hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

One of the challenges facing the amateur arachnologist is keeping up to date with changes in nomenclature arising from scientific work on taxonomy. In this respect 2019 has been particularly taxing (!) as new checklists of the spiders, harvestmen and pseudoscorpions of Great Britain and Ireland were published in *Arachnology* (the Journal of the British Arachnological Society). Various species have had name changes and, in some cases, have been allocated

to different families. Often the name change is relatively undramatic when a species is assigned to a new or different genus. An example of this amongst the latest batch of county records is the spider which started the year as *Agraeocina striata* and ended it as *Liocranoeca striata*. *Pelecopsis nemoralioides* suffered less, becoming *Parapelecopsis nemoralioides*, although twelve syllables perhaps ought to be the limit! Spiders with names that change completely are much more problematic because, unless you keep a rigorous eye on the changes, they can appear to disappear altogether. Amongst this year's new Somerset species one such victim is *Ceratinopsis stativa* which is now to be known as *Styloctetor compar*. There are of course many reasons for these changes in taxonomy which reflect work by experts across the world, not just in Britain. Some taxonomic changes occur when a species is re-examined and it is decided that it should no longer be regarded as a single species but is in fact two or more separate taxa. Two examples of this materialised in Somerset in 2019. The first concerns the clubionid spider *Clubiona neglecta* which is now considered to be two separate species, *Clubiona neglecta* sensu stricto ('in the strict sense') and *C. pseudoneglecta*. Older records of the species recorded prior to the split which could be either species have to be noted as *Clubiona neglecta* sensu lato ('in the broad sense'). If the specimens still exist they can be reassessed. In 2019 James McGill recorded *Clubiona neglecta* s. s. apparently for the first time in Somerset. It prompted me to examine my preserved specimens of *C. neglecta* s. l. from 1990 which showed they were also *C. neglecta* s. s.!

Another split reported late in 2019, which postdates the latest national checklist, concerned the ant-mimic gnaphosid *Micaria pulicaria*. Christoph Muster and Peter Michalik (Muster and Michalik 2019) used a variety of techniques which embraced ecology, morphology, genital anatomy and analysis of mitochondrial DNA to decide that two separate species were involved which they named *Micaria pulicaria* s. s. and *Micaria micans*. Where I think these two authors deserve particular credit is that they didn't just examine the species in the light of modern studies and techniques, they also looked at records and notes from naturalists in the past. They report that several of the well-known arachnologists of the 19th century considered that there were two species involved, although they hadn't generally found consistently reliable diagnostic characters. They suggest that the forgotten knowledge of early naturalists may provide useful information with regard to the natural history of organisms and can stimulate our own observations. Fresh from this paper I re-examined a specimen of *Micaria pulicaria* from my reference collection and, as a result, at the time of writing I have the earliest record of the species *Micaria micans* in Britain as I collected it near Cannington in 1983, 37 years before it was named!



Records of new spider species are summarised below. Unless stated otherwise, dates are for 2019 and the recorder was J. A. McGill. In the case of *Parapelecopsis nemoralioides* the species was caught in 2018 but not identified until 2019, which is why it was not included in last year's report. I am particularly grateful for James's input which has put so many arachnids on the Somerset map.

With 16 new species found in 2019 there are now 422 spider species recorded in Somerset (VC5 and VC6). VC5 has 384 species (28 new in 2019) and VC6 has 363 species (22 new in 2019).

- Agyneta affinis* [formerly *Meioneta beata*] – Ash Priors Common (ST 151 289), 25 Jun; first record for VC5.
- Agyneta mossica* [formerly *Meioneta mossica*] – Squallacombe (SS 722 386), 6 Jul; first record for VC5 and Somerset.
- Arctosa perita* – Steart (ST 265 457), 21 Jun; first record for VC5.
- Aphileta misera* – Priddy Mineries (ST 546 516), 27 Oct; first record for VC6.
- Baryphyma pratense* – Black Smock Pond (ST 380 282), 13 Apr; first record for VC5.
- Centromerus serratus* – Orchard Wood (ST 249 200), 5 Oct; first record for VC5 and Somerset.
- Clubiona subtilis* – Britty Common (ST 259 154), 1 Jun; first record for VC5.
- Crustulina guttata* – Cleeve Hill (ST 057 427), 13 Jul; first record for VC5.
- Cryptachaea blattea* – Bowlish (ST 610 440), 8 Oct; first record for VC6 and Somerset. Also Staplegrove (ST 215 262), 20 Dec; first record for VC5.
- Dipoena erythropus* – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST 273 210), 14 Aug; first record for VC5 and Somerset.
- Drassyllus praeficus* – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST 273 209), 14 Jun; first record for VC5.
- Drepanotylus uncatus* – Priddy Mineries (ST 546 516), 27 Oct; first record for VC6.
- Enoplognatha mordax* – Wall Common (ST 259 454) 20 Apr; first record for VC5.
- Erigone longipalpis* – Brean Saltings (ST 302 587), 13 Jan; first record for VC6.
- Erigonella ignobilis* – Shapwick Heath (ST 423 409), 10 Mar; first record for VC6.
- Gongylidiellum latebricola* – Orchard Wood (ST 251 200), 1 Jul; first record for VC5.
- Hahnina pusilla* – Boon's Copse (ST 281 198), 30 Nov; first record for VC5 and Somerset.
- Halorates reprobus* – Brean Saltings (ST 303 586), 13 Jan; first record for VC6 and Somerset.
- Hypomma fulvum* – Steart (ST 271 461), 18 May; first record for VC5 and Somerset.
- Iberina candida* [formerly *Hahnina candida*] – Brean

- Down (ST 285 589), 13 Jan; first record for VC6 and Somerset.
- Iberina montana* [formerly *Hahnina montana*] – Draycott Sleights (ST 487 514), 7 Apr; first record for VC6.
- Liocranoeca striata* [formerly *Agraecina striata*] – Bickenhall Wood (ST 285 198), 24 Nov; first record for VC5 and Somerset.
- Megalephyphantes* sp. near *collinus* – Burnham-on-Sea (ST 311 493), 14 Aug, F. Farr-Cox; first record for VC6. [Fig. 1]
- Mermessus trilobatus* – Broomfield Hill (ST 214 334), 12 Jul; first record for VC5 and Somerset. Also Bartlett's Quarry (ST 724 458), 11 Dec; first record for VC6.
- Notioscopus sarcinatus* – Yarty Moor (ST 235 158), 22 Apr; first record for VC5 and Somerset.
- Ozyptila brevipes* – Green Down (ST 518 289), 13 Apr; first record for VC6.
- Ozyptila praticola* – Fivehead Wood (ST 349 240), 10 Aug; first record for VC5.
- Ozyptila sanctuaria* – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST 273 210), 14 Aug; first record for VC5.
- Parapelecopsis nemoralioides* [formerly *Pelecopsis nemoralioides*] – Hurlstone Combe (SS 902 482), 14 Nov 2018; first record for VC5 and Somerset and Brean Down (ST 285 589), 13 Jan; first record for VC6.
- Phycosoma inornatum* [formerly *Dipoena inornata*] – Bossington Hill (SS 903 482), 31 Dec; first record for VC5.
- Prinerigone vagans* – Bartlett's Quarry (ST 724 458), 11 Dec; first record for VC6.
- Robertus arundineti* – Priddy Mineries (ST 546 516), 27 Oct; first record for VC6.
- Sibianor aurocinctus* – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST 272 210), 22 Apr: first record for VC5 and Somerset.
- Silometopus elegans* – Shapwick Heath (ST 424 409), 14 Apr; first record for VC6.
- Styloctetor compar* – [formerly *Ceratinopsis stativa*] – Shapwick Heath (ST 423 409), 14 Apr; first record for VC6 and Somerset. Also Ash Priors Common (ST 154 288), 25 Jun: first record for VC5.
- Syedra gracilis* – Brean Down (ST 302 589), 5 July; first record for VC6 and Somerset and Orchard Wood (ST 248 204), 24 Nov; first record for VC5.
- Talavera aequipes* – Crook Peak (ST 393 551), 7 Apr; first record for VC6.
- Theonoe minutissima* – Priddy Mineries (ST 546 516), 27 Oct; first record for VC6.
- Tibellus oblongus* – Yarty Moor (ST 235 161), 5 Oct; first record for VC5.
- Trichoncus saxicola* – White Sheet Downs (ST 800 351), 23 Jun; first record for VC6 and Somerset.
- Trichopternoides thorelli* – Yarty Moor (ST 235 161),

22 Apr; first record for VC5.

*Typhochrestus digitatus* – Bartlett's Quarry (ST 724 458), 11 Dec; first record for VC6.

*Walckenaeria vigilax* – River Parrett Willow Farm (ST 375 290), 9 Feb; first record for VC6.

*Xerolycosa miniata* – Wall Common (ST 262 455), 24 Jun; first record for VC5.

*Xysticus ulmi* – Haddon Hill (SS 979 286), 6 May; first record for VC5.

*Zelotes electus* – Wall Common (ST 261 455), 6 May; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

James McGill also recorded a new vice-county record for a harvestman:

*Homalenotus quadridentatus* – Orchard Wood (ST 251 201), 1 July; first record for VC5.

## REFERENCE

Muster, C. and Michalik, P., 2020. 'Cryptic diversity in ant-mimic *Micaria* spiders (Araneae, Gnaphodidae) and a tribute to early naturalists', *Zoologica Scripta* 49, 197-209.

Correction: In last year's report the species name *Trematocephalus cristatus* should replace *Walckenaeria furcillata* which was named in error (SANH 162, 122). The other details were appropriate so the record for 2018 should read:

*Trematocephalus cristatus* – Horner Wood (SS 895 447), 15 May; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

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British Arachnological Society

## PLANT GALLS IN SOMERSET 2019

Listed below are records of plant galls that we believe to be 'firsts' for VC5 (S. Somerset) and/or VC6 (N. Somerset). For the most part, these are caused by species for which we know there are no records for our area in either the British Plant Gall (BPGS) database or datasets accessible online through the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas.

Species are arranged alphabetically, with brief details of each record's significance, notes on host plants, location, date, recorder, etc. For those featured in Michael Chinery's photographic guide (Chinery 2011) we give the page numbers on which they are illustrated. Species names follow Redfern and Shirley (2011).

Thanks to all those submitting records during the year, especially Helena Crouch and Liz McDonnell in VC6; and thanks also to Simon Haarder, Keith Harris and Chris Preston for help in determining or confirming the identity of several species. In the list below, records made by us are denoted by initials SJL and/or SJP. Names of other recorders are given in full. Dates refer to 2019 throughout.

*Aceria tenuis* (gall mite causing disfigured spikelets on BROMES, *Bromopsis* and *Bromus* spp) – Lodge Hill (ST 49 48), 7 Aug, on *Bromopsis erecta* in S-facing species-rich grassland, E. J. McDonnell, conf. SJL; Walton Hill (ST 466 350), 23 Aug, on *B. erecta*, E. J. McDonnell. First and second records for VC6 and Somerset.

*Aculus rubiae* (gall mite inducing upward leaf-rolling and curling on WILD MADDER, *Rubia peregrina*) – presumably this species galling *Rubia* at Thurlbear (ST 273 213; ST 2655 2111), 20 Jul, in lane-side hedge and on churchyard wall, SJL; Corfe, Mill Lane (ST 2323 1970), 26 Oct, on churchyard wall, SJL. First and

subsequent records for VC5 and Somerset. A chiefly Mediterranean species, first reported from Britain and Ireland in 1999, in Ireland (O'Connor 2005), and then more recently in Cornwall and Dorset (online records); thought likely to be spreading in S.W. England, so its occurrence in Somerset is unsurprising.

*Brachycolus stellariae* (aphid gall on leaves of STITCHWORTS, *Stellaria graminea* and *S. holostea*) – Cook's Farm, North Brewham (ST 73 36), 6 Jun, on *Stellaria holostea*, SJL; possibly first record for VC6, and second for Somerset (see SANH 162, 124). No other records for Somerset on BPGS database or NBN Atlas.

*Contarinia acerplicans* (midge inducing blood-red 'pleat' galls on leaves of SYCAMORE, *Acer pseudoplatanus*) – Hedgecock Hill Wood (ST 48 16), 28 Apr, many galls on a single tree (Fig. 1), SJL, SJP & Somerset Rare Plants Group, conf. from photos by Keith Harris, "Yes, these are galls of *C. acerplicans*, seldom recorded in the UK...", and Simon Haarder, "*C. acerplicans* for sure. I have found it a handful of times in Denmark, where it was first recorded in 1996..." (emails dated 30 Apr); first record for VC5 and Somerset of a species which appears to be a real rarity in Britain, but evidently widespread in mainland Europe (Roskam 2019, Vol. 1, 11-12). No records for UK on NBN Atlas.

*Cryptosiphum artemisiae* (aphid causing leaf-thickening and curling in MUGWORT, *Artemisia vulgaris*; Chinery 2011, 82) – Taunton, Longrun Meadow (ST 212 252), 10 Nov, several bright reddish-purple leaf rolls with aphids enclosed, SJL; possibly first record for VC5, but almost certainly under-recorded.



Fig. 1 'Pleat' galls on Sycamore caused by the gall-midge *Contarinia acerplicans* (Photo: Simon Leach)



Fig. 2 Galls of the sexual generation of the gall-wasp *Plagiotrochus quercusilicis* on Evergreen Oak (Photo: Simon Leach)

*Dasineura gleditchiae* (midge causing leaflets of HONEY LOCUST, *Gleditsia triacanthos*, to curl up and form pod-like galls; Chinery 2011, 46) – Taunton (ST 228 245), 15 Aug, abundant on tree in St Mary's Churchyard, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset, but likely that we are overlooking it elsewhere.

*Harmandiola tremulae* (midge causing spherical galls on leaves of ASPEN, *Populus tremula*; Chinery 2011, 53) – Broomfield (ST 223 323), 3 Jun, on suckering stems at edge of steeply-sloping field to N. of Fyne Court, on S. side of The Dell, SJL; first record for VC5 and Somerset.

*Melampsora amygdaline* (rust gall on ALMOND WILLOW, *Salix triandra*, and related species and hybrids) – probably this species on a Willow, Roughmoor (ST 209 254), 7 Jun, SJL, conf. Chris Preston; if correct, this would be a first record for VC5 and Somerset.

*Microbotryum stellariae* (a smut fungus causing enlarged anthers and deformed petals on flowers of STITCHWORTS, *Stellaria* spp) – Fyne Court, Broomfield (ST223 321), 3 Jun, SJL; Cook's Farm, North Brewham (ST 73 36), 6 Jun, SJL & M. J. Leach; Otterhead Lakes (ST 224 137), 19 Jun, SJL & V. J. Fairfax-Ross. First and second records for VC5 (Fyne Court and Otterhead) and first record for VC6 (Cook's Farm), all on *Stellaria graminea*. No doubt under-recorded, but 2019 seemed to be a particularly good year for it.

*Pemphigus gairi* (woolly aphid causing midrib pouch-galls on POPLARS, *Populus* spp) – either this species, or possibly *P. phenax*, on hybrid Black Poplar, Taunton (ST 24 25), 14 Jun, SJL; likely to be first record for VC5 and Somerset. Galls of *Pemphigus phenax* and *P. gairi* are impossible to separate, but *P. phenax* aphids have a 'bluish

green' body colour while *P. gairi* are 'yellow green' (Redfern and Shirley 2011). Aphids examined were yellowish green, with no hint of blue.

*Perofascia lepidii* (fungal gall on SWINE-CRESS, *Lepidium coronopus*) – Taunton, Cotlake Hill (ST 225 225), 11 Jul, on many plants growing in arable field-border, SJL; Moorlinch (ST 392 367), 3 Aug, trackway on W. side of village, SJL & V. J. Fairfax-Ross. First records for VC5, VC6 and Somerset, probably quite frequent but overlooked.

*Phragmidium violaceum* (rust on BRAMBLES, *Rubus* spp) – Moorlinch (ST 39 36), 3 Aug, common on *Rubus ulmifolius*, SJL; first record on BPGS database for VC6, but many records for VC6 on NBN Atlas. A common rust in Somerset.

*Plagiotrochus quercusilicis* (gall-wasp, sexual generation induces red, ovoid galls on leaves of EVERGREEN OAK, *Quercus ilex*) – Watchet (ST 0734 4335), 23 May, in line of trees beside footpath nr railway station, SJL & A. Houlders; first record for VC5 and Somerset. A quite striking and unmistakable gall, affected leaves often much reduced in size, the gall then taking up more or less the whole leaf blade (Fig. 2). A Mediterranean/southern European species, first recorded in Britain in 2004 (Cornwall) and now spreading.

*Puccinia vincae* (rust on shoots and leaves of GREATER PERIWINKLE, *Vinca major*) – Greenham (ST 077 202), 2 Jun, SJP, SJL & Somerset Rare Plants Group; Fyne Court (ST 222 321), 13 Jun, SJL; first and second records for VC5 and probably Somerset.

*Rhopalomyia foliorum* (midge causing tiny egg-shaped galls on leaves of MUGWORT, *Artemisia vulgaris*) – Blue Anchor (ST 00 44; ST 01 43), 4 Oct, frequent alongside coastal footpath between Blue Anchor and Dunster beach, SJL & A. Houlders, det. Keith Harris &

Simon Haarder; Taunton, Longrun Meadow (ST 2127 2524), 9 Oct, SJL, conf. Keith Harris; West Monkton (ST 260 273), 24 Oct, verge of A3259 nr Monkton Elms garden centre, SJL. First and subsequent records for VC5. Galls are hard to see, but affected shoots are characteristically stunted, their leaves crowded to form an untidy 'mop head' which can be teased open to reveal the bright orange midge larvae.

***Tetramesa brevicornis*** (gall-wasp causing stem galls on RED and SHEEP'S FESCUES, *Festuca rubra* and *F. ovina*) – Churchill Batch (ST 44 59), 19 Feb, on *Festuca rubra* in species-rich grassland in old quarry area, E. J. McDonnell, conf. SJL; first record for VC6 and Somerset. A tiny gall, easily overlooked.

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- O'Connor, J. P., 2005. 'Aculus rubiae (Roivainen) (Acari: Eriophyidae), a gall-mite new to Ireland', *Entomologists' Monthly Magazine* 141, 249-50.
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SIMON J. LEACH and STEPHEN J. PARKER

## SOMERSET BIRDS 2018

Overall, 2018 was a disappointing year. March was an exceptionally cold month, with severe blizzards during the first week and low-pressure systems dominating the remainder. The cold weather persisted with little relief into May and inevitably led to a poor breeding season for many species. Nor was it a good year for rarities with only a Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*) at Ham Wall and Shapwick, and two Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*), one at Steart the other at Catcott Lows, to trouble the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC).

Some breeding species did do well. Although neither Little Bitterns (*Ixobrychus minutus*) nor Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) bred this year, 55 booming Great Bitterns (*Botaurus stellaris*) were located, all but five within the Avalon Marshes.



Fig. 1 Red-footed falcon (*Falco vespertinus*) at Isle Brewers (Photo: Brian Hill)

One pair of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) bred, and another two may have done so. A total of 19 Great White Egrets (*Ardea alba*) fledged and 25 Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) nests were found in the established heronry at West Huntspill. Three pairs of Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) were successful, and other pairs were seen at favoured sites. It seems likely that a pair of Red Kites (*Milvus milvus*) bred in the east of the county and Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) again did well, raising a minimum of 18 young.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) is a difficult species to census but an estimate of 423 breeding pairs exceeded all expectations. Two Spotted Crakes (*Porzana porzana*) were singing in suitable habitat south of the Poldens but there was no proof of breeding. On the debit side Grey Partridges (*Perdix perdix*) retain a tenuous foothold in the county but seem likely to follow Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) into extinction. There was only one possible breeding record of the latter species, a bird singing on Mells Down in July. Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) fared badly, doubtless due to the cold weather. Snowfall and icy conditions in early spring severely affected our vulnerable Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*) population on the higher ground, and the warmer coastal strip now seems essential to their future survival. Two other high ground species, Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*) and Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), also suffered heavy mortality during the March cold spell. Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*), our only other resident warbler, seems better able to cope with icy conditions, if these are not prolonged, and fared much better in its core areas.

The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dryobates minor*) population appears stable on the Quantocks



although there were few records from Exmoor and, indeed, elsewhere. Nightingales (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) continue to hang on at seven sites. One migrant passerine, Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*), bucked the general trend with many successful nests in the monitored Quantock and Exmoor nestboxes.

BBRC rarities may have been few, but there were nevertheless many significant scarce birds in 2018. Best of these was a Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*), the first since 1993, at West Huntspill on 28<sup>th</sup> September, although a first-summer Red-footed Falcon (*Falco vespertinus*) at Isle Brewers in late May was another excellent find (Fig. 1). There was an influx of Cattle Egrets in early spring and flocks of up to 45 persisted throughout the year, mostly in the Avalon Marshes. A Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) was seen on one day in May.

‘Grey Geese’ were scarce, so a Tundra Bean Goose (*Anser serrirostris*) at Hinkley Point on 21<sup>st</sup> March was a surprise. Other wildfowl included a long-staying American Wigeon (*Mareca americana*) on Minehead Marshes. Two Montagu’s Harriers

(*Circus pygargus*) passed through the county in spring but, typically, did not linger. On the sea, a Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) was seen off Hurlstone Point in June, and two Little Auks (*Alle alle*) were recorded on consecutive days in December after strong westerlies. Remarkably five Rose-coloured Starlings (*Pastor roseus*) were recorded during the year, four of these being attractive adults.

Comprehensive analysis of 2018 records can be found in the annual report of the Somerset Ornithological Society, *Somerset Birds 2018*. Visit [www.somersetbirding.org.uk](http://www.somersetbirding.org.uk) for details or contact the Recorder, Brian Gibbs on 01823 274887.

Readers should be aware that, unlike other natural history reports which cover the whole of vice-counties 5 and 6 (more or less equivalent to the old historical county of Somerset), in this report — as in previous recent bird reports — the terms ‘Somerset’ and ‘county’ here refer to the modern administrative county of Somerset only.

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