

## VASCULAR PLANT REPORT 2013

There are numerous reasons for making plant records and the focus of plant recording in Somerset can be as varied as the recorders. The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) has announced its intention to produce a new atlas of the British and Irish flora in 2020: for this, records for all species are equally important and good coverage of the county is essential. Meanwhile, Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG) remains dedicated to the production of a Rare Plant Register (RPR) for Somerset: updating of records of rare and threatened native species is ongoing and many excellent records were made for the RPR in 2013. More general recording is also undertaken by SRPG members and others, with the long-term aim of one day producing a new 'Atlas Flora' for the whole county. This report attempts to highlight some of the more unusual and interesting records arising from all this recording activity in 2013.

As usual, the majority of new county or vice-county records were for neophytes (species introduced by man since AD 1500, wittingly or unwittingly, and now naturalised in the wild) or for casual aliens (those introduced species which fail to persist more than five years). Just two *native* taxa were recorded new for Somerset: a hybrid rose and a hybrid between Wild Radish and Sea Radish. There were, however, many important records of native taxa made during the year, and details of these are given in the third section of the list below.

It is difficult to know when to brand a species as locally extinct and indeed use of the term 'extinct' for species which cannot be found is often criticised. For the Somerset RPR, the term is used for species which, despite several searches, have not been found in the last twenty years or so. This is a bold approach, intended to provoke intense search and rediscovery; it certainly did in 2013! Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) had been feared lost in VC6, and possibly Somerset, but in 2013 two plants were

found in flower at Hatch Hill, the first record for the county for 14 years and the first for VC6 in 21 years. Greater Dodder (*Cuscuta europaea*), a parasitic annual entirely dependent on its host plant – usually Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), occasionally Hop (*Humulus lupulus*) – had been declared extinct in VC5, last seen in 1963. In 2013, after an apparent absence of half a century, this species was found on the roadside at Muchelney. Another species believed to have been lost from VC5 was Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*), last seen in 1990 on waste ground by a chicken run at Perry Green; 23 years later it turned up again in a new location, on the outskirts of Taunton. In 2013, Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina* subsp. *canina*) was recorded in Somerset for the first time in 18 years: it had never really been feared extinct, but had presumably been overlooked for a while. Serendipity can play its part in perceived plant distributions.

Ten RPR species were discovered in new hectads (10km x 10km squares) in 2013. This is particularly pleasing for three species which are GB Red-listed (Cheffings and Farrell 2005). Common Cudweed (*Filago vulgaris*), found alongside a car park at Ham Hill, is listed as Near Threatened in GB, while Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), found at Porlock Weir, is listed as Vulnerable. Sea Barley (*Hordeum marinum*) is not only Vulnerable but also Nationally Scarce, occurring in fewer than 100 hectads in Britain. In 2013 this coastal species was found in a new 10km square, inland on the central reservation of the M5. Sea Barley was first found as a roadside halophyte in VC5 in 2012 (Crouch 2013), so may be spreading and is worth looking out for in this relatively new habitat. This species was also re-found in 2013 in a coastal hectad in which it had been feared lost, last seen in 1973. These are excellent records for a Nationally Scarce species; however, discovery of a rare plant in any new site is always thrilling, regardless of whether it is in a new 10km square. In 2013, the Vulnerable

little Mousetail (*Myosurus minimus*) was found in a gateway at only its fourth site ever in VC6.

Many of the species in the list below are aliens. It is important to record even seemingly casual occurrences, since species which appear to be transient and innocuous today may one day become a significant component of our flora, possibly with deleterious consequences. Species recorded new to an area often reflect changes in horticultural and culinary fashion. New Zealand Hair-sedge (*Carex comans*) and Argentine Needle-grass (*Nassella tenuissima*) have risen in popularity as components of low-maintenance or 'prairie' planting and may become increasingly common in the wild as street weeds: both were recorded new to Somerset in 2013. The attractive Witch-grass (*Panicum capillare*) discovered in Wellington is, however, rarely cultivated and more likely to have arisen from bird seed. Culinary crop species are inevitably found as casuals and also reflect changes in fashion. The reliable stalwart Spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) is found surprisingly rarely, turning up in 2013 in only its fourth VC6 site ever; yet the more recently available Tree Spinach (*Chenopodium giganteum*), a tall plant with splashes of shocking pink in the leaf buds, was found as a new casual alien in Somerset, first in Yeovil, then in Wells. Half the records held by the BSBI for this species have been made in the last few years, yet it is not a new addition to our flora: previously this native of India was occasionally recorded as a wool alien, illustrating the diverse routes a species might take to foreign lands.

Although most alien plants will probably not have a noticeable impact on our flora, there is a small minority which have become a serious problem, ecologically and economically. Around 40 plant species are listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which makes it an offence to introduce these to the wild. One of the more recent aquatic arrivals recorded in 2013 was Water-primrose (*Ludwigia grandiflora* subsp. *hexapetala*), found in a newly created ditch at Pawlett Hams (Fig. 1). This pretty plant, with showy yellow flowers, is extremely invasive: if left unchecked it can choke ditches and waterways, smothering native species. It was first recorded in the wild in Britain in 1998. Recent work by Armitage *et al.* (2013) showed that, as yet, this is the only Water-primrose naturalised in Britain; however a second species, *L. peploides*, is spreading rapidly in France and could soon make an appearance in southern Britain. For conservation purposes, it is important that records of these



Fig. 1 Water-primrose (*Ludwigia grandiflora* subsp. *hexapetala*) in a ditch at Pawlett Hams (Photo: S. J. Parker)

and other invasive alien species are passed to the relevant authorities – usually the Environment Agency or Natural England – so that, if necessary, appropriate action can be quickly taken to halt their spread.

Unless stated otherwise, records included in this report were made in 2013 and 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)), ie a *new county record*
- A taxon recorded for the first time in the wild in one of the vice-counties, either VC5 or VC6, ie a *new vice-county record*
- Other records of particular interest, for example second or third vice-county records, species re-found after a long absence, or newly discovered populations of nationally rare or threatened species.

Within each category, records are listed alphabetically by 'taxon', which may be a species, microspecies, subspecies hybrid, variety or cultivar. Both native and introduced species are included, with more recently introduced taxa ('neophytes') being distinguished by an asterisk before the name. Nomenclature follows Stace (2010) 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.

The names of contributors not printed in full are abbreviated as follows: Helena Crouch (HJC);

Ian Green (IPG); Paul Green (PRG); Simon Leach (S JL); Clive Lovatt (CML); Liz McDonnell (EJMcD); James McGill (JMcG); Stephen Parker (SJP); John Poingdestre (JP); Tim Rich (TCGR); Fred Rumsey (FJR); Margaret Webster (MAW); Bristol Naturalists' Society (BNS); Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG).

#### New county records

\**Carex comans* (New Zealand Hair-sedge) – Portishead (ST46907667 & ST46897665), 15 Sept, two self-sown bronze tufts in paved footpath from Harbour Road to Waitrose, CML & EJMcD (discovered previously by CML); also Uphill (ST321583), 13 Oct, self-seeded from dry garden on roundabout into crack in paving, CML & EJMcD, VC6.

\**Chenopodium giganteum* (Tree Spinach) – Park Lane, Yeovil (ST555161), 10 Jul, lots on small area of waste ground, PRG, VC5.

\**Nassella tenuissima* (Argentine Needle-grass) – Portishead Dock (ST47107682), 11 Aug, self-sown on path on edge of harbour, CML & EJMcD; also 15 Sept, a big tussock on harbour wall below where previously seen outside flower bed, CML & BNS, VC6.

*Raphanus raphanistrum* subsp. *maritimus* × subsp. *raphanistrum* – Portishead (ST457768), 15 Oct, at foot of Fisherman's Steps with both parents, TCGR, VC6.

*Rosa* × *nitidula* (*Rosa rubiginosa* × *canina*) – Cadbury Camp (ST453720), 27 Jul, very robust bush by footpath to camp, not far from gardens, Rob D. Randall, VC6.

\**Sasaella ramosa* (Hairy Bamboo) – Camerton Batch (ST685581), 24 Apr, huge patch at NW corner of coal mining spoil heap, Cam Valley Wildlife Group (det. HJC), VC6.

\**Silene italica* (Italian Catchfly) – Wain's Hill, Clevedon (ST39237080), 26 Jun, two plants under trees alongside churchyard wall, in the Glebe Field nature reserve, HJC & Dee Holladay (discovered previously by DH, det. HJC), VC6.

#### New vice-county records

\**Chenopodium giganteum* (Tree Spinach) – Wells (ST55464612), 5 Oct, one plant on pavement against wall of 47 St Thomas Street, CML & EJMcD, VC6.

\**Helleborus argutifolius* (Corsican Hellebore) – Spring Gardens, Frome (ST77414982), 5 Apr, two small plants at edge of road, self-sown from adjacent garden, HJC & Gillian H. Read, VC6.

\**Mauranthemum paludosum* (Annual Marguerite) – Park Lane, Yeovil (ST555161), 10 Jul, one flowering on small area of waste ground, PRG, VC5.

\**Verbena* × *hybrida* – Chilton Polden (ST38004231), 2 Sept, on pile of dumped spoil, on track linking bend in Chilton Road to disused railway, HJC & Chris Lampshire, VC6.

#### Other interesting Somerset records

\**Ailanthus altissima* (Tree-of-heaven) – Iford (ST79855878), 6 Oct, suckering along verge of lane from tree in adjacent garden, HJC & FJR, VC6. Fifth record for VC6 and first for Somerset since 1998.

*Allium ampeloprasum* var. *ampeloprasum* (Wild Leek) – Sand Bay (ST33086570), 5 Jun, one plant with a flower bud and three non-flowering shoots on dunes, later observed in flower, confirming it as var. *ampeloprasum*, MAW, VC6. New 10km square for Nationally Scarce species and the third site for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Artemisia biennis* (Slender Mugwort) – Taunton (ST21882632), 16 Sept, open ground in *Miscanthus* (Giant Silver-grass/Elephant-grass) field E of Taunton Vale Sports Club / Gipsy Lane, JMcG, VC5. First record for VC5 since 1993.

*Atriplex portulacoides* (Sea-purslane) – Clevedon (ST39607110), 6 Oct, one small plant below viewing point, CML & EJMcD, VC6. New 10km square for VC6 Scarce species.

\**Berberis glaucocarpa* (Great Barberry) – Pennard Hill (ST570381), 9 Sept, S side of road, Edward Pratt, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1996 in only known site in VC6.

*Brassica oleracea* (Wild Cabbage) – Kilve (ST1427644360), 12 May, one plant on low cliff, SJP (conf. TCGR from photo), VC5. Second record for VC5.

*Catapodium rigidum* subsp. *majus* (a Fern-grass) – Portishead (ST47527725), 15 Sept, in raised amenity flower bed near Harbourmaster's office, CML & BNS, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1940.

***Chenopodium hybridum*** (Maple-leaved Goosefoot) – Cannington (ST259389), 3 Aug, one plant on verge of by-pass, CML & EJMcD; also Taunton (ST22342471), 18 Sept, one large plant in amenity flower bed in Clarence Street, a bird-seed alien, JMcG, VC5. Third and fourth records for VC5.

***Coeloglossum viride*** (Frog Orchid) – Stout Hill (ST677207, ST677208, ST677209 and ST678209), 22 Jun, a total of 57 flowering plants scattered across the hill, SRPG, VC5. First record for VC5 since publication of Atlas Flora of Somerset at the only known site in VC5.

**\**Conyza bonariensis*** (Argentine Fleabane) – Portishead (ST46897664), 15 Sept, one plant in flower tub outside Waitrose, CML & EJMcD; also Saltford Lock (ST688669), 26 Sept, few plants around the lock, HJC & FJR, VC6. Third and fourth records for VC6 and first for VC6 and Somerset since 1992.

***Cuscuta europaea*** (Greater Dodder) – Muchelney (ST42812521), 2 Aug, on W side of Muchelney – Langport road, along 20m of roadside reeds and nettles, JP, VC5. First record for VC5 since 1963.

***Dryopteris cambrensis*** (Narrow Male-fern) – Great Gains Wood (ST67324579), 10 Jan, one plant on W side of track in wood, 30m S of car park, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second record for VC6.

**\**Eccremocarpus scaber*** (Chilean Glory-flower) – Taunton (ST23092480), 28 Jun, in pavement and at base of wall in St Augustine Street, between Laburnum Street and Stephen Street, SJL, VC5; Bath (ST749654), 12 Oct 2008, self-sown on steps of 9 Oxford Row, Lansdown Road, SRPG, VC6. Second record for each VC.

***Filago vulgaris*** (Common Cudweed) – Yeovil (ST5516), 3 Jul, one in pavement crack in Swallowcliffe Gardens, PRG; also Ham Hill (ST47991637, ST48011638 and ST48021638), 18 Aug, thousands of plants in gravel by Lime Kiln car park, SRPG, VC5. First record for Yeovil since 1896 and first record for ST41 for this Near Threatened species.

***Fumaria officinalis*** subsp. ***wirtgenii*** (a Common Fumitory) – Taunton (ST224245), 30 Dec, one plant on reseeded roadside bank, Castle Street, SJL, VC5. Second record for VC5.

***Galium parisiense*** (Wall Bedstraw) – Wells (ST54774527), 27 Oct, two plants at edge of paving on N side of supermarket, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second confirmed record for VC6 and first since 1999.

***Galium* × *pomeranicum*** (***G. verum* × *album***) – Dundry (ST55496654), 7 Jul, small patch on wall on west side of Downs Road, with both parents, HJC, Libby Houston, CML & MAW, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 2000.

***Gentianella anglica*** (Early Gentian) – Hatch Hill (ST49973337 & ST49983336), 29 May, two plants in flower on SW-facing slope, below path along ridge, HJC, Paul Guest, EJMcD & SJP (found by Paul Guest a few days previously), VC6. First record for VC6 since 1992 and for Somerset since 1999.

***Hordeum marinum*** (Sea Barley) – Watchet Harbour (ST070434), 30 Jun, hundreds of plants at W end of harbour behind the London Inn, CML & EJMcD, VC5. First record for this Vulnerable, Nationally Scarce species in this 10km square since 1973. Also near Creech St Michael (ST2726), 17 Aug, on central reservation of M5, PRG, VC5. First record in this 10km square and third inland record for this coastal species in VC5 (all of them from the M5).

***Hyoscyamus niger*** (Henbane) – Porlock Weir (SS8647), 2012, in front of boat house, Nigel Phillips, VC5. New 10km square for this Vulnerable species.

***Juncus compressus*** (Round-fruited Rush) – Kelston (ST69296647 & ST69306647), 26 Sept, several plants in fruit on S edge of long linear pond in field, HJC & FJR, VC6. First record for this Near Threatened species in this 10km square since 1965.

**\**Ludwigia grandiflora*** subsp. ***hexapetala*** (Water-primrose) – Pawlett Hams (ST27104264), 23 Sept, spreading along ditches, Ian Salmon, VC6. Third site for non-native invasive *Ludwigia* in VC6 and Somerset. [Although previous records were for *Ludwigia peploides*, recent research has shown that only *Ludwigia grandiflora* subsp. *hexapetala* is present in Britain.]

**\**Mimulus* × *hybridus*** – Portishead (ST47197690), 15 Sept, self-sown on steps outside house by harbour, CML & BNS, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

***Myosurus minimus*** (Mousetail) – Othery (ST39083205), 29 Mar, 12 plants in gateway leading to Bennett's Farm, near gatepost, JP, VC6. New site for this Vulnerable species and only fourth site ever in VC6.

**\**Panicum capillare*** (Witch-grass) – Wellington (ST13482063), 6 Oct, several plants in flower bed, probably bird-seed alien, SJP, VC5. Second record for VC5.

\**Persicaria capitata* (Pink-headed Persicaria) – Portishead Dock (ST47237695), 11 Aug, on harbour wall, CML & EJMcd, VC6. Second record for VC6.

\**Physalis peruviana* (Cape-gooseberry) – Saltford (ST69586847), 31 Oct, six non-flowering plants on silt under alders on W bank of River Avon, HJC & FJR, VC6. Third record for VC6.

*Poa bulbosa* (Bulbous Meadow-grass) – Brean Down (ST29485888), 26 May, several plants on edge of gravelly pathway, SJL, VC6. New location for this Nationally Scarce species in VC6.

*Polypodium × mantoniae* (*P. vulgare* × *interjectum*) – Penselwood (ST75463138), 4 Apr, large patch on SW-facing bank of lane at SW edge of hamlet, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second record for VC6.

*Polypogon monspeliensis* (Annual Beard-grass) – Milborne Port (ST681189 & ST680190), 28 Jun, a few clumps as weed at Wheathill Garden Centre, PRG, VC5; also Wells (ST54764528), 27 Oct, one clump in shrubbery to NW of new pond by supermarket, HJC & FJR, VC6. New 10km squares for a species which is Nationally Scarce as a native, although an introduction at these sites.

*Potentilla argentea* (Hoary Cinquefoil) – Roughmoor (ST21272517), 3 Sept, in grassland at edge of small pond, JMcG, VC5. Second record for VC5 and first since 1990.

*Ranunculus sardous* (Hairy Buttercup) – Taunton (ST2124), 18 Sept, two plants in rough grassland (12 seen earlier in the year), JMcG, VC5. New 10km record for a locally Scarce species.

*Rorippa islandica* (Northern Yellow-cress) – Durleigh Reservoir (ST27363613), 19 Sept, two plants in drawdown zone, SRPG, VC5. A new locality in VC5 for this Nationally Scarce species.

\**Rubus cockburnianus* (White-stemmed Bramble) – Bath Spa Station (ST75266434), 27 Jul, one plant on stonework of old steps beside footbridge over the River Avon, HJC, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

\**Senecio inaequidens* (Narrow-leaved Ragwort) – Yeovil (ST54991558), 26 Jun, three plants by fence at edge of waste ground on N side of West Hendford and a few further plants on waste ground, IPG, VC5. Second record for VC5 and first since 1961.

*Senecio vulgaris* subsp. *vulgaris* var. *hibernicus* (Rayed Groundsel) – Redhill (ST498632 & ST498633), 8 May, lots on edge of pavement at junction of Church Road and A38, IPG & PRG,

VC6. First record for Somerset since publication of Atlas Flora of Somerset (Green *et al.* 1997).

\**Spinacia oleracea* (Spinach) – Pawlett (ST2942), 19 Aug, two plants in weedy field of barley, near Brickyard Farm, EJMcd & Ro FitzGerald, VC6. Third record for VC6 and first since 1987-1999.

*Viola canina* subsp. *canina* (Heath Dog-violet) – Goblin Combe (ST477652), 8 May, many plants scattered in limestone heath grassland at top of N side of combe, HJC & PRG (conf. IPG), VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1995.

The BSBI vice-county recorders in Somerset are: Stephen Parker and Simon Leach in VC5, and Helena Crouch and Rob Randall in VC6. There is also an active recording group, the Somerset Rare Plants Group, which holds an annual programme of field meetings, winter talks and identification workshops. Further information on the Group and the list of species 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, [redacted]  
 VC6 Helena Crouch, [redacted]

**References**

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