

NATURAL HISTORY REPORTS
VASCULAR PLANT REPORT 2014

Records included in this report, unless stated otherwise, were made in 2014 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, 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 broadly follows the River Parrett/River Ye0/A303.

The names of contributors not printed in full are abbreviated as follows: Helena Crouch (HJC); Ro FitzGerald (RFitzG); Dave Gibbs (DG); Ian Green (IPG); Paul Green (PRG); Simon Leach (SJL); Clive Lovatt (CML); David McCosh (DJMcC); Liz McDonnell (EJMcD); Chris Metherell (CM); Stephen Parker (SJP); John Poingdestre (JP); Tim Rich (TCGR); Fred Rumsey (FJR); Ian Salmon (IS); Margaret Webster (MAW); Bristol Naturalists' Society (BNS); Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG).

Where mentioned in the following list, the most recent Somerset Floras are abbreviated as *FBR* (*The Flora of the Bristol Region*) and *AFS* (*The Atlas Flora of Somerset*); see References for full details of these publications.

New county records

**Agrostis castellana* (Highland Bent) – Walton-in-Gordano (ST424741), 20 Jun, on roadside verge, CML & EJMcD (conf. Tom Cope), VC6.

**Calystegia sepium* subsp. *roseata* – Tarr's Farm (ST313548), 14 Sep, lots in roadside hedge just W of Tarr's Farm (also in at least one other location in the monad), PRG; Wick Road (ST319544), 20 Sep, large patch clambering up hedgerow on S side of road, at bend in road, HJC & FJR, both VC6.

**Dryopteris cycadina* (Shaggy Wood-fern) – Dulcote (ST56154445), 5 Dec, one mature plant in scrub on E side of junction between cycle route and lane, to S of A371, HJC & FJR, VC6.

**Dryopteris erythrosora* (Japanese Shield-fern) – Dulcote (ST56164445), 5 Dec, one plant in scrub by fence alongside cycle route, just S of bridge under A371, HJC & FJR, VC6.

**Dryopteris remota* (Scaly Buckler-fern) – Dulcote (ST56154445), 5 Dec, one mature plant in scrub on E side of junction between cycle route and lane, to S of A371, HJC & FJR, VC6. Growing with *Dryopteris cycadina* and therefore believed to be a garden escape. First record for England.

**Inula hookeri* (Hooker's Fleabane) – Westbury Quarry (ST505503), 15 Jul, large patch on pile of spoil near site office, HJC & MAW, VC6.

**Limonium platyphyllum* (Statice) – Street (ST48163702), 6 Jul, one plant at S edge of central reservation of A39 just E of traffic lights, HJC (conf. FJR), VC6.

**Pittosporum crassifolium* (Karo) – Shepton Beauchamp (ST40251725), 7 May, small plant between base of wall and pavement, JP, VC5.

**Sorbus richii* (Rich's Whitebeam) – Kilkenny Bay, Portishead (ST49777679), 15 Oct 2013, top of cliff above shore by Fisherman's Steps, TCGR, Libby Houston & CML, VC6. Type specimen of newly described species, first collected at Church Hill, Clevedon in 2001 but not formally identified at that time. See Rich *et al.* (2014).

**Symphytum* x *hidcotense* 'Hidcote Pink' – Hassage (ST75815609), 16 May, large patch at side of track, just S of Hassage Wood, HJC & FJR, VC6.

**Viburnum plicatum* (Japanese Snowball-bush) – Nunney Combe (ST7346), 23 Apr, one mature plant beside stream, HJC & Gillian H. Read, VC6.

New vice-county records

Atriplex x gustafssoniana (*A. longipes x prostrata*) – Sand Bay (ST33046577), 14 Sep, several plants with both parents, PRG, VC6.

Catapodium rigidum subsp. *majus* (Fern-grass) – Taunton (ST234241 to ST236242), 22 and 23 May, in pavement and along wall bases on N side of Holway Avenue; (ST236243), 22 May, South Street, by junction with Trinity Road, SJL, all VC5. Known from Holway Avenue for at least the last eight years, but only determined as this subspecies in 2014.

**Nassella tenuissima* (Argentine Needle-grass) – Minehead (SS97424637), 28 Dec, cracks in pavement close to railway station, CML & SRPG, VC5.

Oenothera x fallax (*O. glazioviana x biennis*) – Keyford Roundabout (ST554139), 12 Nov, E road bank and by pub, IPG, VC5.

Prunella x intermedia (*P. laciniata x vulgaris*) – Cadbury Castle (ST62972506, ST62972507, ST62982505 - ST62992506), 10 May, 15 plants on ramparts of castle, SRPG (spotted by Ellen McDouall and conf. in flower on 7 Jul by SJL when further colonies were found nearby, at least 50 plants in all); also in neighbouring monad (ST63592518), 10 May, a few plants, SRPG, VC5.

Salicornia fragilis (Yellow Glasswort) – Porlock Marsh (SS8847479) and West Porlock (SS87894749), 20 Sep, on saltmarsh, SRPG (det. FJR), VC5.

Other interesting Somerset records

Althaea officinalis (Marsh-mallow) – Woodspring Bay (ST38686970), 18 Jul, one plant with seven flowering stems, with *Oenanthe crocata*, at back of narrow strip of saltmarsh, CML & EJMCD, VC6. New site for Nationally Scarce plant.

**Anthemis tinctoria* (Yellow Chamomile) – Rhode Lane, Durleigh (ST26973521), 13 Oct, large well-established clump on grassy road verge away from houses, RFitzG, VC5. Fifth record for VC5 and first since *AFS*.

**Artemisia biennis* (Slender Mugwort) – B3227 E of Hillcommon (ST1626), 26 Oct, in gutter on S side of road, RFitzG & Christine Loudon, VC5. Fifth record for VC5 and second since *AFS*.

Arum italicum x maculatum – Portishead (ST44107589), 5 May, a clump between pavement and garden in Hillside Road, CML & EJMCD,

VC6. Second record for VC6 and fourth for Somerset.

Asplenium marinum (Sea Spleenwort) – Brean Down (ST29815897), 11 Jul, three plants in crevices high on W-facing cliff above slipped bedding planes, on N side of Brean Down, HJC & FJR, VC6. First record for Brean Down and hectad since before 1912.

Atriplex longipes (Long-stalked Orache) – Sand Bay (ST33046577), 14 Sep, one amongst vegetation on saltmarsh, PRG, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since *FBR* and *AFS*.

**Bidens frondosa* (Beggarticks) – Avon Towpath (ST548754), 24 Jul, one plant beside the towpath 100m beyond river light, CML, VC6. Second record for VC6.

Callitriche brutia (Pedunculate Water-starwort) – Yoxter Ranges (ST53035385), 2 Jun, in unfenced pond, EJMCD, VC6. Second record for VC6.

Camelina sativa (Gold-of-pleasure) – near Seavington St Michael (ST41501443), 23 Jul, on margin of flax field, JP (conf. TCGR), VC5, fourth record for VC5 and first since 1938; Pawlett (ST30294249), 23 Aug, one plant in flower/fruit beneath hedge on W side of A38, JP (conf. TCGR), VC6. Second post-2000 record for VC6.

**Carex comans* (New Zealand Hair-sedge) – Portishead (ST46237700), 7 Sep, one plant at edge of road beside a drain, self-seeded from adjacent garden, BNS & SRPG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset.

Catapodium rigidum subsp. *majus* (Fern-grass) – Burnham-on-Sea (ST3049), 5 Apr, PRG, CML & EJMCD; Anchor Head, Weston-super-Mare (ST30966227), 13 Apr, two plants in pavement and edge of municipal park, CML & EJMCD; Weston-super-Mare (ST32326196, ST32496166), 7 May, many large plants in pavement cracks, EJMCD, all VC6. Third and subsequent records for VC6.

Centunculus minimus (Chaffweed) – Walton-in-Gordano (ST42167394 and ST42217396), 21 Jun, many tiny plants in small flushes to the E and W (respectively) of footpath to the sea, SRPG & BNS (spotted by Mark A.R. Kitchen), VC6. First record for VC6 since 1951 and first for Somerset since *AFS*.

**Cotoneaster lacteus* (Late Cotoneaster) – Radstock (ST6954), 23 Aug, one shrub in fruit on disused railway sidings, DG, VC6. Second record for VC6.

- **Cyrtomium fortunei* (Fortune's Holly-fern) – Rode (ST80535394), 8 Mar, one plant down a drain in Nutts Lane, on W side of lane, HJC & Jim Crouch (conf. FJR); Portishead (ST4776), Apr, one plant on harbour wall, W side of marina, CML; Portishead (ST445759 and ST445760), 5 May, two small plants self-sown beside footpath steps in Kingsway, CML & EJMCD, VC6. Third, fourth and fifth records for VC6 and Somerset.
- **Echinochloa esculenta* (Japanese Millet) – Walton-in-Gordano (ST42697431), 24 Aug, one plant in waste ground, perhaps from bird seed, CML & EJMCD, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1984.
- **Echium pininana* (Giant Viper's-bugloss) – M5 Junction 20, Clevedon (ST407704), 27 Nov, a single plant on W side of central reservation opposite start of exit slip road, SJL, VC6. Second record for VC6.
- Epilobium x floridulum* (*E. parviflorum x ciliatum*) – Manor Farm, Langridge (ST74046995), 19 Jun, two plants in arable field with both parents, SRPG, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since AFS.
- Epilobium x limosum* (*E. parviflorum x montanum*) – Woodhill Bay, Portishead (ST46267707), 7 Sep, one plant growing from wall of esplanade, BNS & SRPG, VC6. First record for VC6 since AFS.
- Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *anglica x arctica* – Ashcott Plot (ST44183911, ST44213908), 29 Aug, in grazed grassland just inside gate and several tall plants in species-rich hay meadow to E, HJC & FJR (conf. CM, specimen in Herb. HJC), VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1956.
- Euphrasia arctica x nemorosa* – Stockhill (ST553509), 4 Jul 2012, many plants beside broad forest ride, HJC (det. CM, specimen in Herb. HJC); Manor Farm, Langridge (ST73877007), 19 Jun, FJR, VC6. First and second records for VC6 and Somerset since 1912.
- Gentianella anglica* (Early Gentian) – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST2720), 6 Jun 2006, Keith Gould, VC5. First record for VC5 and Somerset since 1999. [Record submitted following the statement in last year's report that the 2013 record from Hatch Hill (VC6) was the "first ... for Somerset since 1999". The Hatch Hill record was the first for VC6 since 1998 and the first for Somerset since 2006.]
- **Guizotia abyssinica* (Niger) – Minehead (SS97664615), 28 Dec, one plant in small area of rough ground on industrial estate, SRPG (det. CML), VC5. Fifth record for VC5.
- **Heuchera sanguinea* (Coralbells) – Redhill (ST513639), 21 May, one clump naturalised on top of wall in Kingdown Road opposite the Bungalow Inn, MAW, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since AFS.
- Hieracium prominentidens* (Large-toothed Hawkweed) – Radstock (ST69075468), 23 Aug, growing in an open site on disused railway sidings, DG (conf. DJMcC, specimen in Herb. HJC), VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1955, but tragically the site is now being developed.
- Hieracium vagum* (Glabrous-headed Hawkweed) – Midsomer Norton (ST66975426), 6 Sep 2011, frequent on summit of coal spoil tip, HJC (det. DJMcC, specimen in Herb. HJC); Midsomer Enterprise Park (ST672547), 25 Aug 2012, on steep bank at edge of waste ground beside industrial estate, HJC, VC6. First records for VC6 and Somerset since 1991.
- Hyoscyamus niger* (Henbane) – Williton (ST0740), 10 Sept 2013, on roadside, RFitzG, VC5. Third record for VC5 since AFS and new locality for a species listed as 'Vulnerable' in GB and England Red Lists (Cheffings and Farrell 2005; Stroh *et al.* 2014).
- **Iris latifolia* (English Iris) – Sand Bay (ST332649), 19 Apr, single plant in flower, DG, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first since AFS.
- **Malva x clementii* (Garden Tree-mallow) – Berrow Dunes (ST29395407), 5 Aug, one plant at edge of grassland beside road to beach, HJC & IS, VC6. Fourth record for VC6 and first since AFS. (Previously recorded as *Lavatera thuringiaca*, but the taxon is now resolved as this hybrid: *Malva olbia x thuringiaca*.)
- **Maurantheum paludosum* (Annual Marguerite) – South Cadbury (ST63232561), 10 May, one plant growing in road at base of wall of The Camelot pub, SRPG, VC5. Second record for VC5.
- **Narcissus x medioluteus* (*N. poeticus x tazetta*) – Sand Bay (ST330638), 19 Apr, DG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and first since AFS.
- Oenanthe fistulosa* (Tubular Water-dropwort) – Pawlett Hams (ST27524276), 2 Jul, at edges of wide rhyne for about 10m, JP, VC6. New to Pawlett Hams and a new hectad record for a species listed as 'Vulnerable' in GB and England Red Lists (Cheffings and Farrell 2005; Stroh *et al.* 2014).
- Orobanche elatior* (Knapweed Broomrape) – Manor Farm, Langridge (ST73807011), 19 Jun,

- one flowering spike parasitic on *Centaurea nigra*, SRPG, VC6. First record for the Bath area since 1941.
- **Persicaria capitata* (Pink-headed Persicaria) – Mill Lane, Wedmore (ST4447), 6 Jul, self-seeded from hanging basket, EJMCD; Highbridge (ST31804750), 28 Aug, two plants between base of wall and pavement, JP, VC6. Fourth and fifth records for VC6.
- Poa infirma* (Early Meadow-grass) – Bagley Green, near Wellington (ST123196), 16 Mar, small patch on roadside, SJP, VC5. Third locality, and first inland record, for VC5.
- Polygonum oxyspermum* subsp. *raii* – Sand Bay (ST32886342), 27 Jun, one smart plant at top of beach, HJC & FJR, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1998.
- Polygonum rurivagum* (Cornfield Knotgrass) – Thornfalcon (ST288229, ST288231), 25 Jun, several plants in barley field on N side of road, scattered along edge of ploughed/cultivated area, SJL, VC5. First records for VC5 since AFS.
- Potamogeton obtusifolius* (Blunt-leaved Pondweed) – Garstone Lane, Merriott (ST4413), 29 Aug, JP, VC5. Fifth site for VC5 and first record for VC5 since 2003. Also Decoy Lake and Noah's Lake, Shapwick Heath (ST4239, ST4339, ST4240, ST4340), 26 Sep, in several sites within these lakes, HJC & SJP, VC6. This species was reported as new to VC6 when found by James McGill at Ham Wall in 2010, but was actually first found at Ham Wall in 2007 by James Cadbury & Sally Mills and was also recorded at Ham Wall by Mark Gurney in 2008. This year's records add four new monads and a new hectad to the known distribution of this rare pondweed in VC6.
- **Prunella laciniata* (Cut-leaved Selfheal) – Manor Farm, Langridge (ST73257003, ST73267003), 19 Jun, six plants in glorious grassland on S-facing slope, SRPG, VC6. A new site and hectad record for this 'Rare Plant Register' species; first found at this locality in 2000 by Donald MacIntyre.
- Prunella* x *intermedia* (*P. laciniata* x *vulgaris*) – Manor Farm, Langridge (ST73257003, ST73277004) 19 Jun, five plants in glorious grassland on S-facing slope, SRPG, VC6. A new site and hectad record for this 'Rare Plant Register' taxon.
- **Rostraria cristata* (Mediterranean Hair-grass) – Royal Portbury Docks (ST50227811), 10 Sep, several plants in gravel under a lorry in a vehicle parking lot at the docks, HJC, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1930.
- Rubus ulmifolius* x *vestita* – Leigh Woods and Towpath (ST54737587), 16 Sep 2012, beside towpath, BNS (det. CML); Walton-in-Gordano (ST42167415), 24 Aug, on sea cliffs below Gorse, CML & EJMCD, VC6. First and second records for VC6 and Somerset since FBR.
- Ruppia maritima* (Beaked Tasselweed) – Burnham-on-Sea (ST308475, ST309474), 5 Sep, abundant in brackish pools between Brue Pill and the sea wall, HJC & IS, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1991 and a new hectad record.
- **Senecio inaequidens* (Narrow-leaved Ragwort) – Taunton (ST240254), Aug, on central reservation of the Toneway, SJL; Yeovil (ST5516), 7 Nov, one on edge of pavement in Sidney Gardens, PRG, VC5. Second and third records for VC5.
- **Solanum rostratum* (Buffalo-bur) – Norton Fitzwarren (ST204260), 3 Sep 2009, Disturbed ground by new roundabout, growing with native ruderals and Himalayan Balsam, Frances Waddy; Chilton Trinity (ST301391), 5 Aug, in pasture on former brickworks site, restored many years ago, where a patch of ground was recently disturbed, John Andrews, VC5. Third and fourth records for VC5 and first for Somerset since AFS.
- **Stratiotes aloides* (Water-soldier) – Bower Hinton (ST453170), 4 May, in farm pond, origin unknown, JP, VC5. Third record for VC5.
- Symphytum tuberosum* (Tuberous Comfrey) – Camp Hill (ST52571455), 7 Jun, a single six square-metre patch beneath alders in SE corner of Rookery Copse, JP, VC5. Third record for VC5, all of them since AFS.
- Taraxacum cordatum* (Entire-lobed Dandelion) – Yeovil (ST55071642), 6 May 2013, garden weed, PRG (det. A.J. Richards), VC5. First record for VC5 since 1978.
- Trifolium squamosum* (Sea Clover) – Hucker's Bow (ST34756615), 13 Jun, c. 50 plants at SE end of NT car park, in seasonally damp area, HJC & MAW, VC6. New site for a Nationally Scarce species and first record for this monad.
- Typha* x *glauca* (*T. angustifolia* x *latifolia*) – Long Run Meadow (ST21272518), 18 Sep 2013, small stand in seasonal pond, SJP & SJL, VC5. Second locality for VC5.
- Viola canina* subsp. *canina* (Heath Dog-violet) – near Hardington Marsh (ST51390943, ST51390940), 14 May, three plants in flower in species-rich meadow, HJC & IPG, VC5. First record for VC5 since AFS.

**Yucca gloriosa* (Spanish-dagger) – Midsomer Norton (ST67245487), 13 Mar, one large plant beside stile into field, at end of service road of Midsomer Enterprise Park, HJC & MAW, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.

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.

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]

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HELENA J. CROUCH

FIRST FLOWERING DATES 2014

In 2014 I once again recorded first flowering dates (FFDs) in the Taunton area for 339 vascular plant species, continuing a study begun in 2008 to compare FFDs today with 'average first flowering times' recorded in Somerset by Walter Watson in the first half of the 20th century (Watson 1949; Leach 2011 *et seq.*). Recording methods and sites visited in 2014 were the same as in previous years.

A summary is given here of FFDs recorded, along with the main features of the weather in winter (December-February), spring (March-May) and summer (June-August), based on my own observations and regional (S.W. England and S. Wales) data and analyses available on the Met Office website (<http://metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/>). Records of snowfall, snow lying and air or ground frosts were from my back garden in Taunton.

The weather

The winter period was mild throughout, with daily mean temperatures 1.5°C above the long-

term (1961-1990) average in December, and 1.8°C and 2.0°C above average in January and February respectively. There was a notable paucity of winter frosts – six in December, eight in January and two in February. The lowest recorded overnight temperature in my back garden was -1°C. Sleet or snow was observed falling (but not lying) on just one morning. Mild it may have been, but the positioning of the jet stream and the strong westerly air flow led to it also being an exceptionally stormy winter (the stormiest period for at least 20 years), with rainfall totals in S.W. England about double the long-term average; it was the wettest winter in England and Wales since at least 1766, with widespread (and much-publicised) flooding. On the Somerset Levels, settlements like Fordgate, Moorland and Muchelney suffered prolonged periods under water between January and March. The railway line between Taunton and Bridgwater was flooded for a while, as was the A351 between East Lyng and Burrow Bridge which became impassable in early January and remained closed until mid March.

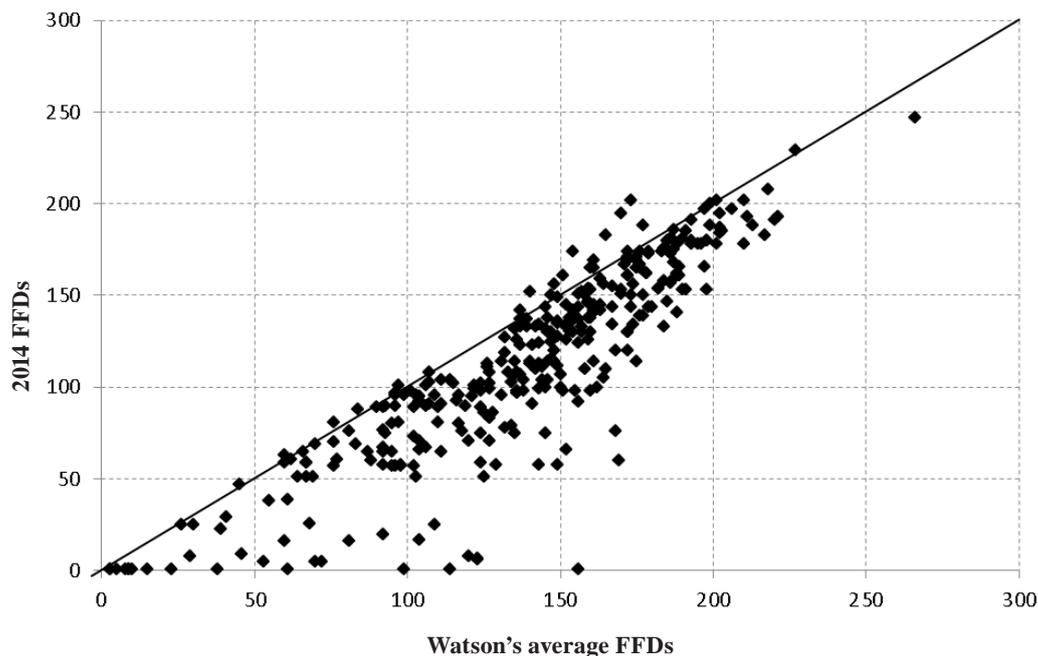


Fig. 1 First flowering dates (FFDs) for 339 species in 2014, plotted against 'average first flowering times' given by Watson. Dates are shown as day numbers (day 1 = 1st January). The diagonal line marks the line along which the data-points would lie if 2014 FFDs were identical to those given by Watson; above the line the 2014 date is later than Watson's date, below the line is earlier

The mild, wet winter was followed by an equally mild – but thankfully not *quite* so wet – spring. Temperatures were 1.7°C, 2.1°C and 1.3°C above average in the period March-May. It was, with 2007, the equal-second warmest spring in the UK since records began (1910) – only spring 2011 was warmer – and about 3°C warmer than in 2013. Overnight temperatures were especially mild, with just three frosts observed in March, and none in April or May – quite a contrast to the 28 recorded over the same period in 2013.

It was also a pleasantly warm summer, about 1°C above average overall. July was particularly fine, with a mean daily temperature 1.8°C above the long-term average, and with sunshine 133% and rainfall just 61% of the normal July totals. In contrast, August was a much cooler and wetter month; it was the sixth 'wet' month since December 2013, only March, June and July having had rainfall totals below the long-term average.

First flowering dates

FFDs recorded in 2014 are compared with Watson's

FFDs in Fig. 1, and with both Watson's dates and those recorded by me between 2008 and 2013 in Table 1. Species making up the monthly groups in Table 1 are determined by Watson's dates; so, for example, the 'April' group comprises 55 species for which Watson's FFDs fell in the month of April, i.e. between days 92 and 122.

It is remarkable how few species are 'above the line' in Fig. 1. Indeed, only 24 species (7.1%) had FFDs later than the dates recorded by Watson – the lowest number in any year since the start of the study. In all, 264 species (77.9%) were at least one week earlier in 2014 than Watson's dates. As can be seen in Table 1, the (relatively small) January and February groups were not particularly early in comparison with previous years – and a few species, for example Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) and Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), were actually later in 2014 than in 2013. From March onwards, however, the monthly groups were invariably more than three weeks earlier than Watson's dates; although, perhaps surprisingly given the mild weather, only the April and May groups recorded their earliest values since recording began in 2008.

TABLE 1 – DEVIATION (IN DAYS) BETWEEN MONTHLY AVERAGE FFDs 2008-14 AND THOSE CALCULATED FROM WATSON’S DATES. NEGATIVE VALUES INDICATE EARLIER FLOWERING THAN WATSON’S DATES, POSITIVE VALUES LATER FLOWERING. NO. OF SPECIES (n) IN EACH MONTHLY GROUP SHOWN IN RIGHT-HAND COLUMN. AVERAGE DEVIATION EACH YEAR FROM WATSON’S DATES, FOR ALL SPECIES COMBINED, GIVEN IN BOTTOM ROW

Month	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	n
Jan	-10.5	+0.1	+7.5	-1.7	-12.5	-12.4	-8.6	12
Feb	-17.9	-17.6	+1.7	-18.4	-32.3	-35.6	-18.6	7
Mar	-14.8	-8.0	+14.8	-10.1	-27.2	-12.9	-22.5	27
Apr	-21.4	-10.8	+3.3	-13.3	-24.5	-8.4	-28.6	55
May	-11.4	-16.5	-3.7	-28.1	-18.7	-3.3	-29.8	89
Jun	-9.6	-13.5	-7.0	-23.1	-13.5	-3.6	-22.9	93
Jul	-6.9	-13.7	-11.2	-20.1	-5.3	-6.6	-18.4	49
Aug	-8.0	-10.3	-11.3	-21.9	-6.1	-7.1	-20.4	7
Overall	-12.2	-12.9	-2.7	-20.3	-16.8	-6.5	-24.2	339

Taking all species combined, FFDs in 2014 were an average of 24.2 days earlier than those recorded by Watson; that’s 3.9 days earlier than the previous earliest (in 2011) and 12.3 days earlier than the overall ‘running average’ for the period 2008-13. Across the study as a whole, 87 species had their earliest recorded FFDs in 2014 – the largest number in any single year – while a further 24 had their equal-earliest.

Two species will suffice to illustrate the remarkably early flowering of so many species in 2014. Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), traditionally known as ‘May’ on account of its month of peak flowering, began to flower in 2014 on 6th March, about four weeks earlier than its ‘usual’ FFD of early April. Watson’s average FFD for Hawthorn was 21st April. Unusually, in 2014 Hawthorn came into flower so early that it coincided with the first blossoming of Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*); in a ‘typical’ year, one would

expect several weeks to separate these two species. Later in the year, the first Stemless Thistle (*Cirsium acaule*) in flower was at Thurlbear Quarrylands on 2nd June: a notably early date for a species which in previous years commenced flowering more than a month later than that, between 7th and 16th July (average 10th July). Watson’s average FFD for Stemless Thistle was 17th July.

References

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SIMON J. LEACH

HOVERFLY REPORT 2014

Once again, our garden in Yeovil provided a sizeable proportion of our records, although in 2014 we also managed to record hoverflies from more than 40 sites across the county. In all, we made (or received) records of 74 species during the year, a

substantial improvement on the previous year. We would like to thank Barrie Widden, Robin Williams and Tony Parsons for their detailed lists; also reports were received from Robert Bond, Pete Akers and Bill Urwin. No new species were added

to the county list in 2014. However, Bill Urwin's sighting (and photographing) of the rare vagrant *Callicera aurata* at Hurlstone Point (Fig. 1) was particularly exciting – the only previous record of this species in Somerset came from Dunster, in 1916. It is a woodland species, with its distribution in the UK centred on the New Forest and the Home Counties.



Fig. 1 *Callicera aurata* at Hurlstone Point
(Photo: Bill Urwin)

In addition to the more interesting records for 2014 summarised below, Tony Parsons recently sent us a comprehensive list for Steep Holm, with records made up to and including the year 2009. It lists 51 species for the island, the most noteworthy being *Eupeodes bucculatus* [as *E. latilunulatus*] and *Scaeva selenitica* (both 28 August 2000), *Melangyna labiatarum* (22 May 2004), *Helophilus trivittatus* [as *H. parallelus*] (25 September 2008), and *Volucella zonaria* (July 2009).

Chrysotoxum cautum – Long Sutton, 17 May; Sternbridge, 26 May; Yeovil garden, 3 June to 1 July; Chiselborough, 24 June. A striking wasp mimic. Widely distributed in England mainly to the south and east of a line between the Severn and the Humber.

Chrysotoxum festivum – Yeovil garden, 17 May.

Dasysyrphus tricinctus – Yeovil garden, 20 June. Scarce in Somerset; generally associated with woodland rides and clearings, and unusual as a garden species.

Epistrophe nitidicollis – Yeovil garden, 17 and 25 May; Ashington Wood, 31 May; Catcott Heath, 18 June.

Ischyrosyrphus laternarius (= *Leucozona laternaria*) – Walton Heath, 13 May; Ham Hill, 1 July.

Platycheirus ambiguus (= *Pachysphyria ambiguus*) – Yeovil garden, 4 May (two or three individuals). A very local spring-flying species, often to be found visiting Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) blossom.

Platycheirus rosarum (= *Pyrophaena rosarum*) – Hollow Marsh, 28 May; Sutton Bingham, 7 June. A widespread wetland species, generally associated with damp grassland, fen-meadows and woodland clearings.

Scaeva selenitica – Chilton Moor, 8 June; Yeovil garden, 1 August.

Xanthandrus comtus – Yeovil garden, 30 September. Nationally this hoverfly of scrub and woodland edges became viewed as a real rarity following a period of decline, but in the last 15-20 years it has recovered and is now well distributed across S. England, although still a scarce and notable species in our county.

Anasimyia contracta – Chilton Moor, 26 May; Meare Heath, 9 June. Only relatively recently separated from the next species (Stubbs 1981); probably widespread in suitable wetland habitats in the Levels and Moors, especially in places with plenty of Reed-mace (*Typha latifolia*).

Anasimyia transfuga – Ham Wall, 3 May; Glastonbury Heath, 3 May. Nationally this is the scarcest of the three widespread *Anasimyia* species; it is associated, like the last species, with wetland marginal vegetation, in particular stands of Common Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*).

Arctophila superbiens – Ham Hill, 4 September. A striking bumble-bee mimic that could be easily mistaken for Common Carder-bee (*Bombus pascuorum*), with a distribution mainly to the north and west of Britain. In Somerset, mostly recorded in the south and west.

Callicera aurata – Hurlstone Point, Bossington, 14 September (Fig. 1).

Criorhina berberina – Yeovil garden, 9 May. Another bumble-bee mimic; probably the commonest member of this genus, both nationally and within Somerset.

Helophilus hybridus – Meare Heath, 9 June. A wetland species, the larvae usually associated with decaying vegetation in ditches and ponds.

Parhelophilus frutetorum – Tadham Moor, 5 June. In Somerset, a rather local hoverfly of freshwater and brackish marshes, ditches and ponds; its centre of distribution is in S.E. England, E. Anglia and the Midlands, with the Somerset

Levels and Moors close to the western limit of its 'core' distribution in the UK.

Volucella inanis – Yeovil garden, 8 August; Stoke sub Hamdon, 10 September; also an additional earlier record from Great Breech Wood, 26 July 2012. A wasp mimic, scarce and local in Somerset.

Volucella inflata – Pit Wood, Ham Hill, 7 June; Kyntons Mead, 25 June.

Volucella zonaria – Stoke sub Hamdon, 10 September; Yeovil garden, 9 June, 30 July and 22 September. Yet more records of this hornet mimic, an impressive species that was once considered rare in Somerset, but which now

seems to be recorded annually in small numbers (see recent reports in this series).

Reference

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E.T. & D.A. LEVY

DRAGONFLIES IN SOMERSET 2014

This was a reasonable year for dragonflies in Somerset, which were seemingly unperturbed by the extensive flooding that affected large parts of the county in the early part of the year. The mild conditions led to the early emergence of many species, if not on the whole as early as in 2013. Most species did fairly well, although both Banded Demoiselle (*Calopteryx splendens*) and Beautiful Demoiselle (*C. virgo*) seemed to be present in lower numbers than usual this year; a likely explanation is that the eggs that gave rise to this year's adults would have been laid in the wet and relatively cool 'summer' of 2012.

Nigel Cottle carried out a survey of the Bridgwater-Taunton Canal, which was last seriously explored in the 1950s. During the interval the canal has increased in species richness, mainly due to a number of taxa recently colonising the area on the back of national range expansions that may be linked, at least in part, to climate change. The Brown Hawker (*Aeshna grandis*) and Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma najas*), both extending their distributions westwards, arrived in the Bridgwater area around 1990. The Brown Hawker has spread very slowly up the canal and the River Tone and has yet to reach the outskirts of Taunton, but the Red-eyed Damselfly has moved faster, having now reached some little way beyond

the town, this being its current westerly limit in the county. The Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*E. viridulum*) is an even more recent arrival, the first British records having been in Essex in 1999. Its rate of spread nationally has been remarkable; from its 'core' area in south-east England its breeding range now extends westwards as far as Devon and northwards to north Yorkshire. Records of Small Red-eyed Damselfly in 2014 from the River Tone at Roughmoor and Norton Fitzwarren mark new western outposts in the county, and it has now caught up its larger cousin. It has also reached the Bristol Channel coast at Berrow.

Online recording continues to change our ideas of the distribution of Golden-ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*) in Somerset. Records have come in from its usual haunts in the Quantocks and the hills around Taunton, but also a few from the Yeovil district and from wooded areas along the Wiltshire border south of Frome. One photographed at Walton Moor in the Gordano valley was most likely a wanderer, perhaps from the Welsh hills just across the estuary.

CHRISTOPHER ILES
British Dragonfly Society

BUTTERFLIES IN SOMERSET 2014

In 2014 Butterfly Conservation members in Somerset and Bristol undertook weekly counts from April to September at 61 sites across the county. The data obtained from these 'monitoring transects' feed into the national butterfly monitoring programme which in turn contributes to long term national climate change studies. The findings also guide our efforts to maintain declining species locally, not least through informing the work of the two Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust and other sympathetic bodies. Here in Somerset the information is analysed for us by Adrian Dexter and it is from his report that the following is derived.

Forty-two species were recorded on transects in 2014 compared with 45 in 2013. No Glanville Fritillaries (*Melitaea cinxia*), Wood Whites (*Leptidea sinapis*) or Pale Clouded Yellows (*Colias hyale*) were noted. In comparison with 2013, the largest increases were of Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) (+95%) and Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*) (+90%). Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) (+76%), Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*) (+63%), Large Skipper (*Ochlodes sylvanus*) (+62%) and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria selene*) (+53%) also showed considerable increases. The greatest decreases were of Large White (*Pieris brassicae*) and Small White (*P. rapae*) (both -75%), and Small Heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*) (-54%). However, such changes are not very informative because butterfly populations can respond dramatically to short-term environmental factors (often weather-related) which, in the case of long-distance migrants like Red Admiral and the Large and Small Whites, may not be operating within our area.

We examine with more interest and concern the longer term trends. Over the last decade Holly Blue (*Celastrina argiolus*), Small Heath, Gatekeeper (*Pyronis tithonus*) and Dark Green Fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*) have all shown a steep declines

in abundance, while moderate declines have taken place in Small Skipper, Large White, Green Hairstreak (*Callphryus rubi*), Common Blue, Marbled White (*Melanargia galathea*), Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtinia*), Comma (*Polygonia c-album*) and Silver-washed Fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*).

Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) is one species showing a pleasing increase after a very worrying spell of decline. The causes of change in the abundance of a given species are often hard or impossible to establish, not least because several factors may be involved. In the case of the Small Tortoiseshell it is conjectured that numbers may have declined due to climatic warming leading to the colonisation of England by *Sturmia bella*, a fly that parasitises Small Tortoiseshell larvae; but if this is so, there is (as yet) no explanation for the recovery in numbers now occurring nationally.

A big shortcoming of the monitoring transects is that they often fail to obtain enough information about the rarer species. For example, in 2014 only 20 Small Blues (*Cupido minimus*), 11 Large Blues (*Maculinea arion*), 38 White Admirals (*Leminitis camilla*), six Duke of Burgundy Fritillaries (*Hamearis lucina*) and no Wood Whites were counted. We are now striving to get focussed surveys for these UK Biodiversity Action Plan 'Priority Species' and would welcome help from anyone able to check a known or former site at the critical season. The spread of sites is from the Mendips to Exmoor and points between. Guidance on identification, timing and method will be given and results, nil returns included, will be of great value.

JOHN ANDREWS
Butterfly Conservation,
Somerset & Bristol Branch

PLANT GALLS IN SOMERSET 2014

We summarise below records made during 2014 of plant galls that, for the most part, appear to be 'firsts' for VC5 and/or VC6 on the British Plant Gall Society's (BPGS) national database.

The records are arranged in alphabetical order and include brief details of their significance, notes on host plants, location, date, recorder, etc. As last year, for those galls featured in Michael

Chinery's excellent photographic guide (Chinery 2011) we give the page numbers on which they are illustrated. It is particularly heartening this year to see more records being contributed by others. As you may notice, 2014 proved to be an exceptionally good year for fungal galls, with rusts of the genus *Puccinia* featuring prominently in the list below.

Aceria drabae (a gall mite on various 'crucifers', Brassicaceae) (Fig. 1) – Trinity St, Taunton (ST2324), on HAIRY BITTER-CRESS *Cardamine hirsuta*, 4 May, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.



Fig. 1 Galled leaves and inflorescence of Hairy Bitter-cress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) caused by the gall mite *Aceria drabae*

Aculus craspedobius (a gall mite on WILLOWS) – Shapwick Heath (ST4241), on *Salix alba*, 3 Aug, SJP; possibly first record for VC6 and Somerset.

Ametrodiplosis thalictricola (a gall midge on COMMON MEADOW-RUE, *Thalictrum flavum*) – Southlake Moor (ST3630), 17 Jul, Wild Flower Society & SJP; possibly first record for VC6 and Somerset.

Cecidophyes nudus (a gall midge on WOOD AVENS and WATER AVENS, *Geum* spp) – Westdown Quarry (ST7146), on *Geum urbanum*, 24 Oct, SJL; possibly first record for VC6, and first record for Somerset since 2012 when it was recorded on a garden *Geum* in Wellington, SJP. [Chinery, p. 70.]

Dasineura auritae (a gall midge causing leaf-roll gall on WILLOWS, *Salix* spp) – Muchelney (ST4224), on *Salix fragilis*, 7 May, SJP & A.J. Serjeant; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Dasineura odoratae (a gall midge causing leaf-roll galls on SWEET VIOLET, *Viola odorata*) – SANHS member's garden in Galmington, Taunton (ST2123), 25 Sep, SJL & V. Fairfax-Ross; first record for VC5 and Somerset, apparently a rare or under-recorded taxon, restricted in the UK to S. Britain and absent from Ireland. [Chinery, p. 89.]

Dasineura sisymbrii (a gall midge causing distinctive 'cuckoo-spit' gall in inflorescence of WATER-CRESS, *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum* and other *Rorippa* spp) (Fig. 2) – Creech Castle, Taunton, beside R. Tone (ST2425), on *Rorippa sylvestris*, 21 May, SJL, VC5; Godney (ST4841), on *R. sylvestris*, 21 May, SJP, VC6; first records for VC5, VC6 and Somerset on the BPGS database. Also on bank of R. Parrett (ST3530), 10 Jul, SJP; second record for VC6.



Fig. 2 'Cuckoo-spit' gall on Marsh Yellow-cress (*Rorippa sylvestris*) caused by the gall midge *Dasineura sisymbrii*

Entyloma microsporum (a gall-causing smut fungus on BUTTERCUPS, *Ranunculus* spp) – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST2721), on *Ranunculus repens*, 25 Oct, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset, but inconspicuous and doubtless overlooked. Subsequently located in a further three 1-km squares in the Taunton area (ST1927, ST2220 and ST2520), all on *R. repens*, SJL.

Epitrimerus coactus (= *Leipothrix coacta*) (a gall mite on RIBWORT PLANTAIN, *Plantago lanceolata*) – Ashcott Plot (ST4439), 16 Jun, and Ivythorn Hill (ST4834), 30 Jun, SJP; possibly

first records for VC6 and Somerset, but easily overlooked.

Eriophyes leiosoma (= *Phytoptus leiosoma*) (a gall mite on LIME, *Tilia* spp) – Calway Ave, Taunton (ST2323), on *Tilia x europaea*, 24 May, SJL; possibly first record for VC5, subsequently found in a further six 1-km squares in VC5 – clearly widespread but under-recorded.

Gymnosporangium fuscum (= *G. sabiniae*) (a rust fungus causing distinctive ‘barnacle’ galls on underside of leaf on PEARS, *Pyrus* sp.) – Vivary Park, Taunton (ST2224), on ornamental pears planted at northern end of park near bowling club, 4 Sep, SJL & SJP, during SANHS field meeting; surprisingly this appears to be the first record for VC5 and Somerset on the BPGS database. [Chinery, p. 53.]

Melampsora caprearum (a gall-causing rust fungus on WILLOWS, *Salix* spp) – Taunton (ST2224), on young *Salix caprea* growing on waste ground at edge of Wood Street car-park, 27 Oct, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset, but doubtless overlooked and under-recorded.

Melampsora epitea (a gall-causing rust fungus on various ORCHID spp, also on SPINDLE, *Euonymus europaeus*) – Godney (ST4841), on *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, 22 May, SJP; possibly first record for VC6 and Somerset.

Mompha bradleyi (a micro-moth causing ‘spindle’ galls on side-shoots of GREAT WILLOWHERB, *Epilobium hirsutum*) (Fig. 3) – Bathpool, Bridgwater-Taunton Canal (ST2526), 13 Jul, SJL; possibly first record of gall in VC5 and Somerset, although micro-moth already known to occur (map on Somerset Moth Group website shows three records and describes the species as ‘local and rare’). Subsequently recorded in a further 13 1-km squares in the, mainly Taunton area, so seemingly far more widespread and abundant than previously thought. Identification was checked by collecting galls and breeding out the adults which were then confirmed as this species by expert lepidopterists. [At least two other *Mompha* spp cause spindle-shaped stem galls on *Epilobium* spp or ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB, *Chamerion angustifolium*, but *M. bradleyi* galls are readily identifiable in that they are found only on *E. hirsutum* and tend to occur on side-shoots just below the flowers rather than on main stem.]

Myzus ligustri (an aphid causing leaf-roll galls on PRIVET, *Ligustrum* spp) – Watchet (ST0743), on *Ligustrum ovalifolium* at edge of station car-



Fig. 3 ‘Spindle’ gall on Great Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) caused by the micro-moth *Mompha bradleyi*

park, 9 Nov, SJP; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Neuroterus saliens (a gall wasp, the sexual generation causing acorn-cup ‘sea-anemone’ galls on TURKEY OAK, *Quercus cerris*) – nr entrance driveway to Jordans, N of Horton Cross (ST3315), 17 May, SJL & SJP, during field trip following SANHS AGM; possibly the first confirmed record for VC5 and Somerset, two previous records in 2012-13 need to be checked. Known in Britain only since 2004, but apparently already well established in the London area and the Thames valley. [Chinery, p. 26.]

Peronospora farinosa (a fungal gall on FATHEN and GOOSEFOOT, *Chenopodium* spp) – Wimbleball Lake (SS9731), on *Chenopodium polyspermum*, 16 Aug, SJP, during field meeting of Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Protomyces macrosporus (a fungal gall on a number of ‘umbellifers’ including *Aegopodium*, *Angelica*, *Anthriscus* and *Berula*) – Catcott (ST4041), on *Angelica sylvestris*, 18 Jul, Wild Flower Society & SJP; possibly first record for VC6 and Somerset. Also Wellington (ST1420), on *A. sylvestris*, 7 Aug, SJP, and Otterford Lakes (ST2213), on *Aegopodium podagraria*, 9 Oct, SJL; possibly first and second records for VC5. [Chinery, p. 78.]

Puccinia albescens (a rust gall on MOSCHATEL, *Adoxa moschatellina*) – Broomfield (ST2231), 10 Mar, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset. Also Cothelstone Hill (ST1932) and Otterhead Lakes (ST2213), both 21 Mar, SJL,

and Holme Moor (ST0926), 13 Jun, SJL, SJP, I. Salmon & R. Penny; second, third and fourth records for VC5 and Somerset on the BPGS database – yet to be recorded from VC6.

Puccinia circaea (a rust gall on ENCHANTER'S NIGHTSHADE, *Circaea lutetiana*) – Norton Manor Camp (ST1827), 25 Jul, SJL, SJP & I. Salmon; possibly second record for VC5 and Somerset, following its discovery in 2012 at Crowcombe Heathfield (ST1334), SJP & SJL. The host plant is common in Somerset, but the rust appears to be rare.

Puccinia distincta (a rust gall on DAISY, *Bellis perennis*) – South Cadbury (ST6325), 10 May, SJP & SJL, during SANHS/Somerset Rare Plants Group field meeting; first record for VC5 and Somerset. Subsequently noted in a further ten 1-km squares in VC5, so clearly widespread and increasing. Bridgwater (ST3037), on road verge near bus station, 17 Oct, SJL; possibly first record for VC6. Originally from Australia and New Zealand, 'daisy rust' was first reported in the wild in the UK in about 1997 and has been spreading dramatically ever since.

Puccinia glechomatis (a rust gall on GROUND-IVY, *Glechoma hederacea*) – Staplehay (ST2221), S of Amberd House in hedge bottom at edge of field, 17 Oct, SJL, and Taunton (ST2323), hedgerow between Sherford Bridge Farm and Pool Farm, 20 Oct, SJL; possibly first and second records for VC5. [Chinery, p. 78.]

Puccinia lapsanae (a rust gall on NIPPLEWORT, *Lapsana communis*) – Midsomer Norton (ST6754), on verge of A362, 13 Mar, H.J. Crouch & M.A. Webster; possibly first record for VC6 and Somerset. Also Shapwick (ST4241), on road verge near visitor centre, 15 Mar, SJL & H.J. Crouch, and Paulton (ST6456), 16 Mar, H.J. Crouch; second and third records for VC6. Also Holway Ave, Taunton (ST2324), 21 Mar, SJL; possibly first record for VC5. [Chinery, p. 83.]

Puccinia magnusiana (a rust gall on CREEPING BUTTERCUP, *Ranunculus repens*) – Holme Moor (ST0925 and ST0926), SJL, SJP, I. Salmon & R. Penny; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Puccinia urticata* var. *urticata (a rust gall on COMMON NETTLE, *Urtica dioica*) – between Broadway and Ilton (ST3316), near where lane crosses the A358, 17 May, SJL & SJP, during field trip following SANHS AGM; possibly first record for VC5 of this strikingly beautiful, bright orange gall. Other stages in the life cycle

of this rust may be found on sedges, *Carex* spp. [Chinery, p. 86.]

Puccinia veronicae (a rust gall on WOOD SPEEDWELL, *Veronica montana*) – Wellington (ST1318), 5 Oct, SJP, and Thurlbear Wood (ST2721), 6 Oct, SJL; possibly first and second records for VC5 and Somerset. Also Otterhead Woods (ST2213), 28 Oct, SJL. Easily overlooked and doubtless under-recorded.

Puccinia violae (a rust gall on VIOLETS, *Viola* spp.) – Thurlbear Wood (ST2720), on *Viola reichenbachiana*, 18 Apr, SJL; possibly first record for VC5, and second record for Somerset.

Rhopalomyia ptarmicae (a gall midge on SNEEZEWORD, *Achillea ptarmica*) (Fig. 4) – Norton Manor Camp (ST1826), beside lake, locally abundant, 25 Jul, SJP, SJL & I. Salmon; first record for VC5 and Somerset. A particularly striking gall, forming a white spongy mass around shoot tips and flower buds. This appears to be quite a rarity; it is, for instance, listed as a 'Red Data Book' species in Cornwall where it is restricted to a handful of sites on the Lizard.



Fig. 4 Galled flower-head of Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*) at Norton Manor Camp, induced by the gall midge *Rhopalomyia ptarmicae*

Synchytrium aureum (a gall-causing fungus on a wide range of hosts including *Angelica*, *Apium*, *Bellis* and *Galium*) – Taunton (ST2324), in stream beside Gwynne Lane, on *Apium nodiflorum*, 31 May, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset. Subsequently located in a further five 1-km squares, all in the Taunton area, and all on *A. nodiflorum*, SJL; probably widespread elsewhere and on other host species, but hitherto overlooked.

Synchytrium erieum (a gall-causing fungus on RIBWORT PLANTAIN, *Plantago lanceolata*) – Ivythorn Hill (ST4734) and Collard Hill (ST4834), 30 May, SJP; first and second records for VC6 and Somerset. Noted by Redfern *et al.* (2011) as ‘rare’ in Britain.

Taphrina tosquinetii (a fungal gall on ALDER, *Alnus glutinosa*) – Holme Moor (ST0926), 13 Jun, SJL, SJP, I. Salmon & R. Penny, and Norton Manor Camp (ST1827), 25 Jul, SJL, SJP & I. Salmon; second and third records for VC5 on the BPGS database, and only a single record for VC6. [Chinery, p. 32.]

Taphrina ulmi (a fungal gall on ENGLISH ELM, *Ulmus procera*) – Bathpool, Taunton (ST2526), 24 Oct, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset, subsequently found in further two 1-km squares in the Taunton area – almost certainly overlooked and under-recorded.

Tetramesa hyalipennis (a chalcid wasp causing ‘cigar’ galls on COUCH-GRASS, *Elytrigia repens* and *E. juncea*) – Latcham (ST4447), in allotment gardens on *E. repens*, 6 Jul, E.J. McDonnell; first record for VC6 and Somerset. Holway Hill, Taunton (ST2323), in neglected vegetable patch on *E. repens*, 9 Oct, SJL; first record for VC5. Subsequently recorded in a further three 1-km squares in VC5 and two in VC6, the latter including one record on *E. juncea*, Stert Island (ST2948), 11 Sep, SJP.

Trioza alacris (a psyllid bug causing leaf-roll galls

on BAY, *Laurus nobilis*) – three further records in the Taunton area, at Holway Hill (ST2323) and Trinity Street (ST2324), both SJL, and in the SANHS-owned gardens of the Castle Hotel (ST2224), SJL & SJP; second, third and fourth records for VC5 on the BPGS database.

Trioza centranthi (a psyllid bug causing leaf-roll galls on RED VALERIAN, *Centranthus ruber*) – Trinity St, Taunton (ST2324), 8 Oct, SJL; possibly first record for VC5, also recorded from Uphill in VC6. Listed as ‘widespread but rare’ in Britain by Redfern *et al.* (2011).

Vasates quadripedes (a gall mite on MAPLES, *Acer* spp) – Victoria Park, Taunton (ST2324 and ST2325), on *Acer saccharinum*, 3 Jun, SJL; a second VC5 record for this recent colonist, following its discovery in Somerset in 2013 (Parker and Leach 2014).

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SIMON J. LEACH and STEPHEN J. PARKER

SOMERSET BIRDS 2013

In a year when there were few rarities there were two new birds for the County. The first was a Pied-billed Grebe at Ham Wall from 15 February to 5 May, although it may have been present earlier. There was a long-staying bird at the Bristol Reservoirs from 1963 to 1968 (the first for Britain) so there was every expectation that our bird would tarry and it came as something of a surprise when it disappeared. Speculation as I write is that a Pied-billed Grebe at Sharpness (Gloucs), and the following day at Leighton Moss (Lancs) in April 2015 could be the same wandering bird, undetected in the intervening period.

The Grebe was viewed by many, but not so a White-throated Sparrow, another American visitor,

which frequented a garden near Churchstanton between late January and early March. Other rarities, and scarcities, during 2013 included Green-winged Teal, at least two Ring-necked Ducks, Ferruginous Duck, Cattle Egret, White Stork, Glossy Ibis, Stone Curlew, Black-winged Stilt, Temminck's Stint, Little Auk, Whiskered Tern, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, Hoopoe, Great Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, Red-throated Pipit and Little Bunting. All these records are documented in the Annual Report *Somerset Birds 2013*.

Rarities apart, Somerset had a good share in the 2012-13 Waxwing invasion, and it was an excellent year for wintering Hawfinches too, although there were only small numbers of Bramblings.

Great White Egrets and Bitterns continue to consolidate on the Avalon Marshes, and Little Bitterns bred again. Possible future colonists, Night Heron and Spoonbill, were also noted during spring.

Marsh Harriers continue to increase although it was seemingly a poor year for another impressive raptor, the Goshawk; this is a difficult species to observe, however.

Although Avocets failed to breed this year, wintering numbers continue to increase significantly, and there is every hope they may nest again.

A family party of Grey Partridges was seen near Combwich – a welcome record of this now rare game bird.

Clement summer weather helped Dartford Warblers which, after two harsh winters, have suffered a setback and are now confined to the Exmoor coastal fringe. Cetti's Warblers too staged a modest recovery.

Some breeding species are now giving real cause for concern. Wood Warblers are seen in decreasing numbers at their regular sites, and Lesser-Spotted Woodpeckers – apart from isolated records elsewhere – are becoming increasingly confined to the Quantock combes. Tree Sparrows continue to survive in small pockets in the east of the county, although it is possible that some are being overlooked elsewhere.

Heavy rainfall and unprecedented flooding during 2013 had a devastating effect on Barn Owls, which had a very poor breeding season, and only one pair of breeding Long-eared Owls was reported. However, Barn Owls are capable of strong recovery and Long-eared Owls are not easy to find. Little Owls, once a familiar farmland bird, are becoming increasingly difficult to locate.

Conversely, some species are clearly doing well. Goldfinches continue to increase, doubtless aided by garden feeding stations. Siskins and Greenfinches use these too, and the decrease of the latter due to disease seems to have been arrested. Feeding stations across the county now attract birds that were once very unusual visitors; these include Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap and Reed Bunting. It is unlikely that the White-throated Sparrow mentioned above would have been seen without such an attraction; the appearance of this extreme rarity on a run-of-the-mill bird table gives every incentive for regularly feeding birds, not only in winter but throughout the year.

BRIAN HILL
Somerset Ornithological Society