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NATURAL HISTORY REPORTS
VASCULAR PLANT REPORT 2016

One of the strengths of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) is the regular publication of new volumes in its series of handbooks, which deal in depth with the identification of the more challenging groups of plants. The latest (sixteenth) in the series, by Murphy (2016), is devoted to a single genus, the evening-primroses (*Oenothera*), of which all the species occurring in Britain are 'alien' (i.e. non-native). Previous handbooks have covered roses (*Rosa*), sedges (*Carex*), willows and poplars (*Salix* and *Populus*), whitebeams (*Sorbus*), and dandelions (*Taraxacum*), amongst others, all of them difficult groups which many botanists tackle with trepidation. The BSBI has also published atlases of brambles (*Rubus*) and hawkweeds (*Hieracium*), both genera comprising hundreds of species. A handbook on eyebrights (*Euphrasia*) is currently in production. To guide and assist members with identification of such groups, the BSBI has a cohort of referees to whom specimens can be sent for naming. To many botanists, tackling any of these 'difficult' groups is too daunting and so they are often simply recorded as species aggregates; however in Somerset there appears to be increasing interest in getting to grips with them, as reflected in the popularity of the four-day Dandelion Workshop held in Somerset in 2016 (see pp 211-13). The Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG) is fortunate to count amongst its members three BSBI referees, including one of the national experts on brambles (*Rubus*). In addition, SRPG has members who are local experts on whitebeams (*Sorbus*), willows (*Salix*) and roses (*Rosa*), and many members are now taking up the challenge of learning to distinguish the constituent species in one or more of these troublesome genera.

Such species are often poorly recorded, so it is particularly pleasing that this year's list of interesting records includes taxa from several of these difficult genera. They include a *Euphrasia* hybrid new to Somerset, three others new to VC5 and one new to VC6, a species of bramble (*Rubus*) new to Somerset and a hawkweed (*Hieracium*) new to VC5. Other hawkweeds have been recorded in Somerset for the first time in decades. *Sorbus porrigentiformis* (Grey-leaved Whitebeam) was found at two new sites in VC6: two new hectad (10km square) records for this Nationally Scarce

species. A particular effort has also been made by some to understand the scaly male-ferns (*Dryopteris affinis* complex): a weekend visit to Somerset by members of the British Pteridological Society resulted in the identification of a puzzling plant as an attractive subspecies, *Dryopteris affinis* subsp. *paleaceolobata*, new to Somerset. Another species within that complex has been found at two new sites in VC6, making it locally Scarce (4-10 sites in a VC) rather than Rare (1-3 sites in a VC).

There have also been outstanding records of more easily recognisable species in 2016. Perhaps most thrilling is the rediscovery of a species believed to be long extinct. *Fallopia dumetorum* (Copse Bindweed) was discovered at Nailsea, the first record for Somerset since 1836 (Fig. 1), while



Fig. 1 Fallopia dumetorum on bracken, beside a track south of Nailsea

Chenopodium glaucum (Oak-leaved Goosefoot), last seen in Somerset in 1938, was found in the corner of a field near Pilton. These records are both significant at a national as well as local scale. *F. dumetorum* is a declining native species which is Vulnerable on both the GB and England Red Lists and is Nationally Scarce, which means it is present in GB in less than 100 hectads (10 x 10km squares); in fact it was only recorded in 23 hectads in the *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora* (Preston *et al.* 2002). *Chenopodium glaucum* is a dramatically declining archaeophyte (a species introduced by man before 1500AD) and is also Vulnerable on

both the GB and England Red Lists and Nationally Scarce, recorded in only 36 hectads in the *New Atlas*.

All records, whether for well-known or 'difficult', common or rare species, are of immense value, contributing to our understanding of species distributions in Somerset as well as towards the BSBI's next Atlas, due to be published in about four years' time. Nearly 80,000 records of vascular plants were made in Somerset in 2016, which is a phenomenal achievement. The most interesting records are summarised below. All those listed here are for 2016 unless otherwise stated, 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), or in those small parts of modern administrative Somerset which lie within neighbouring vice-counties), ie *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, ie *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 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.

Recorders and referees whose names appear more than once have been abbreviated as follows: British Pteridological Society (BPS); Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG); Helena Crouch (HJC); Ro FitzGerald (RFitzG); Dave Green (DEG); Libby Houston (LH); Graham Lavender (GL); Simon Leach (SJL); Clive Lovatt (CML); Liz McDonnell (EJMcD); Chris Metherell (CM); Steve Parker (SJP); John Poingdestre (JP); Mike Porter (MSP); Rob Randall (RDR); Gill Read (GHR); Tim Rich

(TGCR); Fred Rumsey (FJR); Ian Salmon (ITS); Jonathan Shanklin (JDS); Jeanne Webb (JW); Margaret Webster (MAW); Michael Wilcox (MPW).

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

**Aloe aristata* (Lace Aloe) – Castle Cary (ST64543250), 25 Sep, large clump 50cm across, in road outside on-street house at W end of Wyke Road. Householder said she had it as a houseplant on a windowsill and thinks a plantlet fell out of the window and rooted, now a substantial clump! HJC & SRPG, VC6. Second site in Britain.

**Ballota pseudodictamnus* (False Dittany) – Wellington (ST14202068), 24 Jul, one plant as street weed, SJP, VC5.

Calystegia x howittorum (*C. pulchra x silvatica*) – Three Ashes Lane (ST65244645), 27 Jul, large patch in hedge on N side of lane, extending for 8m, with large pink flowers, HJC & Val Graham, conf. Mark Carine, VC6.

Carex x boeninghausiana (*C. paniculata x remota*) – Trickey Warren (ST201147), May, 10-15 small tussocks in wet woodland with both parents, Conrad Barrowclough, conf. MSP, VC3 (S. Devon). [This is not a new record for VC3, but is new to modern administrative Somerset.]

**Cymbalaria pallida* (Italian Toadflax) – Bath (ST73836286), 30 Jun, few plants on old wall in Bloomfield Drive, DEG, VC6.

Dryopteris affinis subsp. *paleaceolobata* – Ebbor Gorge (ST52294841, ST52294842), 5 Jun, two plants on bank above path, HJC & BPS, det. Roger Golding, VC6.

**Eclipta prostrata* (False Daisy) – Bath (ST75426584), 24 Sep, one plant in flower in large tree planter outside 'Ripples' bathroom centre, RDR, det. Matthew Berry, VC6. Second post-1930 record for Britain.

Euphrasia arctica x confusa – Mole's Chamber (SS71953943), 18 Jul 2015, 150 plants on dry grass bank above flush/mire, GL, det. CM, VC5.

Juncus x kern-reichgeltii (*J. conglomeratus x effusus*) – Dunkery Hill (SS90494246), 16 Jul, MPW, VC5.

- **Lonicera henryi* (Henry's Honeysuckle) – Shepton Mallet (ST62614302), 15 Jan, large patch in scrub on S side of path along disused railway, HJC & FJR, VC6.
- **Mahonia japonica* (Japanese Mahonia) – Chew Magna (ST57886356), 9 Jun, one large shrub on bank of lane, perhaps bird-sown, HJC & MAW, VC6.
- **Miscanthus sinensis* (Chinese Silver-grass) – Evercreech (ST6438), 12 Jun, pavement weed seedling in The Drang, c.15cm high, presumably self-seeded from garden plant nearby, SRPG, VC6.
- Myosotis stolonifera* (Pale Forget-me-not) – Dunkery Hill (SS90124256), 16 Jul, in a flush, MPW, conf. David Welch, VC5.
- **Phyla nodiflora* var. *minor* (Frogfruit) – West Quantoxhead (ST10694182), early Sep, well established on a rough grass bank in Staple Lane outside a garden hedge, RFitzG, det. JW, with taxonomic assistance from FJR, VC5. Third record for Britain.
- Rubus scaber* – Kinsford Gate (SS73633693), 19 Aug, large patch on roadside, GL, ITS & RDR, VC5.
- **Spiraea alba* (Pale Bridewort) – Ellicombe (SS98844481), 31 Aug 2015, in lane, may have seeded from nearby garden, Alastair Stevenson, VC5.
- **Symphoricarpos orbicularis* (Coralberry) – Durborough Farm (ST19513542), 19 Jun, in hedge by gate, GHR, K. Jackson, Christine Loudon & RFitzG, VC5.
- **Verbena hastata* (American Vervain) – Wyke Champflower, SW of (ST65673401), 7 Aug, one plant in weedy area between field gate and R. Brue, just W of the bridge, JP, det. FJR, VC6.

New vice-county records

- **Calystegia silvatica* subsp. *silvatica* (Large Bindweed) – Cold Harbour, Brendon Hill (ST0135), 19 Jul 2013, recorded as var. *silvatica*, JW, VC5.
- Euphrasia arctica* x *confusa* – Ubley Warren (ST50475536), 4 Jul, abundant in short species-rich turf, HJC, det. CM, VC6.
- Euphrasia arctica* x *nemorosa* – County Gate (SS79514857), 15 Jul 2015, 100+ plants at edge of path E of car park, GL, det. CM, VC5.
- Euphrasia nemorosa* x *confusa* – Pennycombe Water (SS83433780), 28 Jul, fairly extensive on grassy slope, GL, det. CM, VC5.

- Euphrasia officinalis* subsp. *anglica* x *arctica* – Goat Hill (SS73254003), 7 Jul, very tall specimens over 30cm with long glandular hairs, GL, det. CM, VC5.
- **Hieracium exotericum* (Jordan's Hawkweed) – Twelve Acre Post (SS88312509), 16 Jul, on N side of road opposite layby and cottages, Bob Hodgson, VC5.
- Lotus subbiflorus* (Hairy Bird's-foot-trefoil) – Taunton (ST228253), 29 Jul, 30+ plants, mostly fruiting, in open ground on recently remodelled road verge, on S side of Taunton station, growing with *Trifolium glomeratum*, SJL, VC5.
- Montia fontana* subsp. *fontana* (Blinks) – Emmetts Grange (SS754366), 12 Jun, in flush at gate entrance, GL, det. MPW, VC5.
- **Symphoricarpos* x *chenaultii* (Pink Snowberry) – Bath (ST75106345), 9 Dec 2015, small patch on S side of Lyncombe Vale Road, HJC & DEG, VC6.

Other interesting records

- **Acanthus spinosus* (Spiny Bear's-breech) – Long Ashton (ST53967054), 17 Jul, outside the Spice Inn, SRPG, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.
- **Anemone ranunculoides* (Yellow Anemone) – Laverton (ST78045305), 14 Apr, ten large clumps on N bank of Henhambridge Brook nr bridge, HJC & DEG, VC6. Third record for VC6 and first since *AFS*.
- **Anthemis punctata* subsp. *cupaniana* (Sicilian Chamomile) – Weston-super-Mare (ST32426226), 6 Aug, in gutter and at base of wall in Cecil Road, Dave Gibbs, VC6. Second record for VC6 and first since *AFS*.
- **Berberis julianae* (Chinese Barberry) – Shepton Mallet (ST62744364), 15 Jan, large stand over 2m tall by footpath just W of viaduct, HJC & FJR; Bath, Lansdown Hill (ST73286773), 7 Dec, one small plant on waste ground at edge of playing field, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second and third records for VC6.
- **Bergenia crassifolia* (Elephant-ears) – Fifty Acre Wood, Abbots Leigh (ST53547212), 11 Aug, garden throw-out on road verge, EJMcd & CML, VC6. Third record for VC6.
- **Calystegia pulchra* (Hairy Bindweed) – East Pennard (ST596374), 22 Aug, in hedge by footpath W of church, JDS, VC6. First record for VC6 since *AFS/FBR*.

- **Calystegia silvatica* subsp. *silvatica* (Large Bindweed) – North Petherton (ST2832), 27 Aug, HJC, GHR & JW, VC5. Second record of this subspecies for VC5.
- Calystegia* x *lucana* (*C. sepium* x *silvatica*) – Ditcheat churchyard (ST625363), 22 Aug, JDS, VC6. First VC6 record since 1999.
- Camelina sativa* (Gold-of-Pleasure) – Forche's Cross (ST064318), 23 Sep, frequent in arable field / set-aside, GL & ITS, det. TCGR, VC5. Fifth record for this Nationally Scarce species in VC5.
- Campanula glomerata* (Clustered Bellflower) – Maperton, Quarry Plantation (ST66902522), 23 Jul, eight plants on species-rich bank close to hedge, E of road, JP, VC5. Second record for VC5 since *AFS*, for species which now has only two known sites in VC5.
- Carex divulsa* subsp. *leersii* (Leers' Sedge) – Lower Monkton Farm / Steyning Farm (ST21934264), 20 Sep, two clumps in roadside hedge, RFitzG, conf. David Pearman, VC5; Odd Down (ST72466179), 21 Jul, one plant in clearing in Middle Wood, HJC & DEG, conf. MSP, VC6. Second record for VC5 and first since 1987; third post-2000 record for VC6.
- Chenopodium glaucum* (Oak-leaved Goosefoot) – Steanbow, S of (ST57043953), 4 Sep, c.40 plants on former manure heap in corner of field, JP, VC6. First record for VC6 and Somerset since 1938.
- **Clematis montana* (Himalayan Clematis) – Horsington, W of (ST6992363), 17 May, scrambling through shrubs along A357, JP, VC5. Third record for VC5 and Somerset.
- **Clematis viticella* (Purple Clematis) – Congresbury (ST43416392), 23 Aug, in hedge at edge of cycle path, JDS, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.
- **Cotoneaster hjelmqvistii* (Hjelmqvist's Cotoneaster) – Nailsea & Backwell Station (ST476691), 19 Jul, one low shrub on road verge by station, EJMCD & CML, det. FJR, VC6. Third record for VC6 and Somerset.
- Dryopteris cambrensis* (Narrow Male-fern) – Highbury (ST68924997), 18 Mar, one plant on bank of stream in wooded valley, HJC & FJR; Stockhill, Mendip (ST55695164), 4 Jun, one large plant on N side of E-W track in NE part of wood, Alison Paul and BPS, VC6. Third and fourth records for VC6.
- Dryopteris* x *complexa* (*D. filix-mas* x *D. affinis sens. str.*) – Ham Woods (ST60044491), 14 Feb 2013, one plant on S side of track, HJC & FJR; Castle Orchard (ST77003196), 11 May 2014, one large plant on W bank of River Stour, in woodland, HJC & FJR; Ebbor Gorge (ST52154851, ST52154852), 5 Jun, two plants beside flush on N side of path from car park down through wood, BPS, VC6. Third, fourth and fifth records for VC6.
- Dryopteris* x *deweveri* (*D. carthusiana* x *dilatata*) – Shapwick Heath (ST42444080), 5 Jun, large clump beside bridge along Sweet Track path, BPS, conf. FJR, VC6. Fourth record for VC6 and Somerset.
- Euphrasia arctica* x *confusa* – Pinkery (SS72404049), 19 Jul, road verge on entrance to Pinkery, GL, conf. CM, VC5; Ubley Warren (ST50565540), 20 Jul, in grassland nr W end of The Rakes, HJC, det. CM; Cheddar Gorge, S side (ST47655416), 26 Jul, in short grassland along grassy track in field, HJC & MAW, det. CM; Cheddar Gorge, N side (ST46915432), 18 Aug, frequent on steep grassland slope above Landslip Quarry, HJC, det. CM, VC6. Second record for VC5 and second, third and fourth records for VC6.
- Euphrasia arctica* x *nemorosa* – Culbone Hill (SS83414727), 12 Jul; North Common (SS81794744), 28 Jul; Yenworthy Farm (SS80224861), 2 Aug, GL, conf. CM, VC5. Second, third and fourth records for VC5.
- Euphrasia confusa* (Confused Eyebright) – Kittuck Mead (SS80834301), 9 Jul 2015, small patch on grassy bank nr gate, GL det. CM, VC5. First record for VC5 since pre-2000. [Record reported in 2015 as first since pre-2000 was in fact the second]. Recorded in 2016 by GL at a further ten sites on Exmoor.
- Euphrasia nemorosa* x *confusa* – Yenworthy Farm (SS80224828), 2 Aug; Kinsford Gate (SS73983664), 7 Aug; Pinkworthy (SS72174183), 10 Aug, in short unimproved grassland; Holcombe (SS76373554), 16 Aug, beside road in short grass; all GL, det. CM, VC5. Ubley Warren (ST50375538), 29 Jul 2014, in short turf, HJC, det. FJR; Cheddar Gorge, N side (ST46875417), 8 Jul, at base of cliff above road, HJC, conf. CM; Redhill, N of (ST496641), 11 Jul, on limestone grassland slope, MAW, det. CM; Ubley Warren (ST50565543), 20 Jul, in heathland, HJC, conf. CM, all VC6. Second and subsequent records for VC5 and for VC6.
- Fallopia dumetorum* (Copse Bindweed) – Nailsea (ST46576948, ST46586948), 30 Aug, five patches

- scrambling over bracken and scrub, EJMcd & CML, VC6. First record for VC6 since 1836 and a new hectad for this Red-listed (Vulnerable) and Nationally Scarce species (Fig. 1).
- Gaudinia fragilis*** (French Oat-grass) – Old Wood, Pylle (ST60423915), 7 May, small colony in open woodland, JP, conf, Tom Cope, VC6. New hectad record for this Nationally Scarce species.
- Helianthemum x sulphureum*** (*H. nummularium x apenninum*) – Sand Point (ST32846593), 12 Jun, two plants in patchy scrub at base of steep S-facing cliff-slope, about 4m up from shore, SJL, SJP & Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society, VC6. A new locality for this extremely rare hybrid.
- Hieracium eminentiforme*** (Exmoor Hawkweed) – Honeymead Two Gates (SS80193924), 19 Jun, 14 plants on narrow road verge; Drybridge Combe (SS76013835), 19 Jun, 24 plants on roadside bank, GL, det. TCGR, VC5. First records for VC5 and Somerset since AFS. Subsequently found by GL at six further sites on Exmoor, three with TCGR, all conf. TCGR.
- Hieracium glevense*** (Gloucester Hawkweed) – Leigh Woods (ST561739, ST562737), 30 May, at bottom of Quarry 4 and on grassy slopes by Quarry 5, TCGR, VC6. First confirmed records for VC6 and Somerset since 1980, when a specimen was collected by CML in Leigh Woods (ST562735), at N end of saltmarsh beside the towpath, and determined as this species by David McCosh in 2012.
- Hieracium schmidtii*** (Schmidt's Hawkweed) – Cheddar Gorge, N side (ST47855460), 27 May, one plant on cliffs above road; Cheddar Gorge, S side (ST46955421), 14 Jun, one plant in flower 4m up rock face, on nose of bend between top two car parks, HJC & TCGR, det. TCGR, VC6. First records for VC6 and Somerset since AFS. Ten further plants subsequently found in Cheddar Gorge by HJC, conf. TCGR from photographs.
- Lathyrus aphaca*** (Yellow Vetchling) – Wedmore Allotments (ST44024785), 16 Jun, one plant in vegetable plot, appeared spontaneously, EJMcd, VC6. New hectad record for this Red-listed (Vulnerable) and Nationally Scarce species.
- **Melilotus indicus*** (Small Melilot) – Highridge Common (ST56406849), 31 Jul, one plant on disturbed verge at E edge of common, HJC & CML, VC6. First post-2000 record for VC6.
- Oenanthe fistulosa*** (Tubular Water-dropwort) – Moormill Bridge (ST731223), 19 Aug, five small patches in damp meadow, HJC & FJR, VC5. New hectad for this Red-listed (Vulnerable) species.
- Oenothera x fallax*** (*O. glazioviana x biennis*) – Long Ashton (ST53627027), 17 Jul, one plant in Keeds Lane, SRPG, VC6. Fourth site for VC6 for this 'neonative', a spontaneously occurring hybrid between two alien taxa.
- Ornithopus perpusillus*** (Bird's-foot) – Nailsea, West End (ST44766952), 30 Sep, one large rosette on bare soil on edge of rubbish heap by stables, EJMcd & CML, VC6. New site for species which has only one other known post-2000 site in VC6.
- **Oxalis dillenii*** (Sussex Yellow-sorrel) – Congresbury (ST435637), 26 Jun, in churchyard, EJMcd & RFitzG, VC6. Second record for VC6 and Somerset.
- Polystichum x bicknellii*** (*P. aculeatum x setiferum*) – West Wood (ST69982155), 24 Apr, a single plant in hedgebank on N side of road; Lattiford (ST697926040), 20 May, one plant in recently cleared shady ditch, JP, VC5. Second and third records for VC5.
- **Potentilla recta*** (Sulphur Cinquefoil) – Weston-super-Mare (ST343623), 2016, Jean Webb, VC6. First record for VC6 since AFS/FBR.
- Prunella x intermedia*** (*P. laciniata x vulgaris*) – Sutton Montis (ST62832496), 19 May, spread over many square metres, JP, VC5. Third site for VC5.
- Rorippa islandica*** (Northern Yellow-cress) – Nailsea, West End (ST44796904), 30 Sep, several small sprawling plants in cracks of concrete forecourt of cottage, EJMcd & CML, det. TCGR; Blagdon Lake (ST509597, ST509606), 4 Nov, on drawdown zone, Rupert Higgins & Nigel Milbourne, VC6. Third and fourth sites for VC6.
- **Rosa multiflora*** (Many-flowered Rose) – Lambridge, Bath (ST766665), 14 May 2011, mature bush, bird/mammal-sown, beside footpath through grassland, RDR; Highbury (ST692495), 15 Jul 2015, one shrub along fence line on W side of road, HJC & Cam Valley Wildlife Group; Congresbury (ST43886379), 26 Jun, scrambling high in hedge nr River Yeo, EJMcd & RFitzG, VC6. Second, third and fourth records for VC6.
- Rosa x dumetorum*** (*Rosa canina x obtusifolia*) – Lambridge, Bath (ST766664), 28 May 2011, one bush in remnant of abandoned pasture beside footpath, RDR; Frome, Rodden Manor (ST79964762), 13 Oct, several plants in

hedgerow by Rodden Brook, SE of church, HJC & GHR, det. Roger Maskew, VC6. First and second record for VC6 and Somerset since *AFS/FBR*.

Rubus scaber – Ashcombe Plantation (SS77483977), 19 Aug, GL, ITS & RDR, det. RDR, VC5. Second record for VC5.

Salix* x *forbyana (*S. cinerea* x *purpurea* x *viminalis*) – East Huntspill (ST32814403), 29 Aug, one large bushy shrub/tree by roadside nr Huntspill River, EJMcd, det. JW, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.

Scandix pecten-veneris (Shepherd's-needle) – Pitcombe (ST67753235), 29 May, five plants along disused railway, unusually in closed turf with *Rhinanthus minor*, *Briza media*, etc community, on flat centre of track, JP, VC6. New hectad record for this species which is Critically Endangered on the GB Red List and Endangered on the England Red List.

Solanum physalifolium (Green Nightshade) – Backwell Common (ST48656979), 30 Sep, several plants on heap of top soil, EJMcd & CML, VC6. Third record for VC6 and first since *AFS/FBR*.

Sorbus porrigentiformis (Grey-leaved Whitebeam) – Ubley Warren (ST50765532, ST50775531), 11 Aug, one multistemmed tree 3m tall, in fruit, growing from edge of low cliff, and two small trees (maybe only one plant) in fruit, growing from side of low cliff with one small tree growing from nearby rock outcrop, DEG, det. TCGR & LH; Ebbor Gorge (ST52574857, ST52604859, ST52614859), 14 Sep, four plants in fruit growing out sideways from below cliff top, TCGR, LH & HJC, VC6. New hectad records for Nationally Scarce species.

Symphoricarpos* x *chenaultii (Pink Snowberry) – Frome (ST76674858), 23 Feb, small patch on S side of A362 by gate, HJC & GHR; Frome (ST78834572), 25 Oct, large stand along E side of Feltham Lane, spread from overgrown garden, HJC & GHR; Sedgemoor Services, southbound (ST359527), 22 Dec, amongst scrub on N bank of road, Ian Green, VC6. Second, third and fourth records for VC6.

Trachystemon orientalis (Abraham-Isaac-Jacob) – North Cadbury, N of (ST63762821), 20 Mar, small clump on W side of stream, probably washed downstream from a garden but in wild situation, JP, VC6. Fourth record for VC6.

Vicia villosa (Fodder Vetch) – Pipehouse (ST77635985), 4 Nov, several plants in border



outside new housing development, HJC & DEG, VC6. Second post-2000 site for VC6 (Fig. 2).

Vinca difformis (Intermediate Periwinkle) – Edbrook, Cannington (ST238403), Mar 2014, hedge W of Upper Horn Hill, RFitzG; Hawkcombe (SS8845), 2014, GL; Porlock Community Allotments (SS8846), 2 Oct, in hedges around allotments, GL, VC5. Third, fourth and fifth records for VC5.

Viola canina subsp. *canina* (Heath Dog-violet) – Ebbor Gorge NNR (ST52934875), 6 May, 12 plants in flower by footpath (West Mendip Way) through scrubby grassland at E edge of site, HJC & FJR, VC6. Second record for VC6 and third for Somerset since *AFS/FBR*.

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,

VC6 Helena Crouch,

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HELENA J. CROUCH

FIRST FLOWERING DATES 2016

In 2016 I again recorded first flowering dates (FFDs) for 339 vascular plant species, the ninth year of a 10-year study to compare FFDs today with the 'average first flowering times' recorded in Somerset by Walter Watson in the first half of the last century (Watson 1949; Leach 2011 *et seq.*). Recording methods were the same as in previous years.

A summary is given here of FFDs recorded, along with 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 Wales) data and analyses available on the Met Office website (<http://metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk>). Records of snowfall, snow lying and air and ground frosts were from my back garden in Taunton.

The weather

Cast your mind back to winter 2010–11 and you will remember that we endured the coldest December for more than a century. December 2015 was record-breaking for the opposite reason, being the mildest since records began in 1659. Regional daily mean temperatures were 4.9°C above the long-term (1961–1990) average; and, for the first time in living memory, December in Taunton was frost-free. January and February were cooler, but were still, respectively, 1.9°C and 1.1°C above average.

As usual, along with the mildness came the wind and the wet. A new initiative to give storms names produced nine named storms during the late autumn/winter, beginning with 'Abigail', and two in spring, 'Jake' and 'Katie'. Overall, it was the third-warmest and second-wettest winter

since 1910, and the warmest since the start of this study in 2008. Rainfall during the winter period was about 150% of the 1961–1990 average. Floods were again widespread across the UK, particularly in northern England in December in the wake of storms 'Desmond', 'Eve' and 'Frank'; but flooding in Somerset, unlike in 2014, was generally fairly localised and short-lived.

Spring temperatures were much nearer the long-term average: within 0.1°C in March and April, and 1.7°C above average in May. Rainfall was also close to the seasonal norm. The summer period had above-average temperatures (overall, about 1°C above average), and was the second-warmest since 2008. June was especially wet, with 162% of the average rainfall for that month, while July was dry, with just 55%.

Unsurprisingly, sleet or 'wet snow' was observed falling, but not settling, on just one day (in February). Air or ground frosts were recorded on 34 days – eight in January, 11 in February, nine in March and six in April.

First flowering dates

FFDs recorded in 2016 are compared with Watson's FFDs in Fig. 1, and with both Watson's dates and those recorded by me between 2008 and 2015 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.

December's mildness led to a remarkable flush of early FFDs, and on a scale quite unlike anything seen in previous years. A few examples

TABLE 1 – DEVIATION (IN DAYS) BETWEEN MONTHLY AVERAGE FFDs 2008-2016 AND THOSE CALCULATED FROM WATSON'S DATES, NEGATIVE VALUES INDICATE EARLIER FLOWERING THAN WATSON'S DATES, POSITIVE VALUES LATER FLOWERING. n = NO. OF SPECIES IN EACH MONTHLY GROUP

Month	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2008-16	n
Jan	-10.5	0.1	7.5	-1.7	-12.5	-12.4	-8.6	-11.6	-13.2	-6.9	12
Feb	-17.9	-17.6	1.7	-18.4	-32.3	-35.6	-18.6	-44.7	-39.1	-24.7	7
Mar	-14.8	-8.0	14.8	-10.1	-27.2	-12.9	-22.5	-16.0	-38.7	-15.0	27
Apr	-21.4	-10.8	3.3	-13.3	-24.5	-8.4	-28.6	-14.5	-27.9	-16.2	55
May	-11.4	-16.5	-3.7	-28.1	-18.7	-3.3	-29.8	-17.8	-16.2	-16.2	89
Jun	-9.6	-13.5	-7.0	-23.1	-13.5	-3.6	-22.9	-11.9	-8.5	-12.6	93
Jul	-6.9	-13.7	-11.2	-20.1	-5.3	-6.6	-18.4	-11.2	-8.0	-11.3	49
Aug*	-8.0	-10.3	-11.3	-21.9	-6.1	-7.1	-20.4	-16.0	-8.4	-12.2	7
Overall	-12.2	-12.9	-2.7	-20.3	-16.8	-6.5	-24.2	-14.8	-16.8	-14.1	339

*The August group includes one species, Ivy (*Hedera helix*), for which the 'Watsonian' FFD lies in September

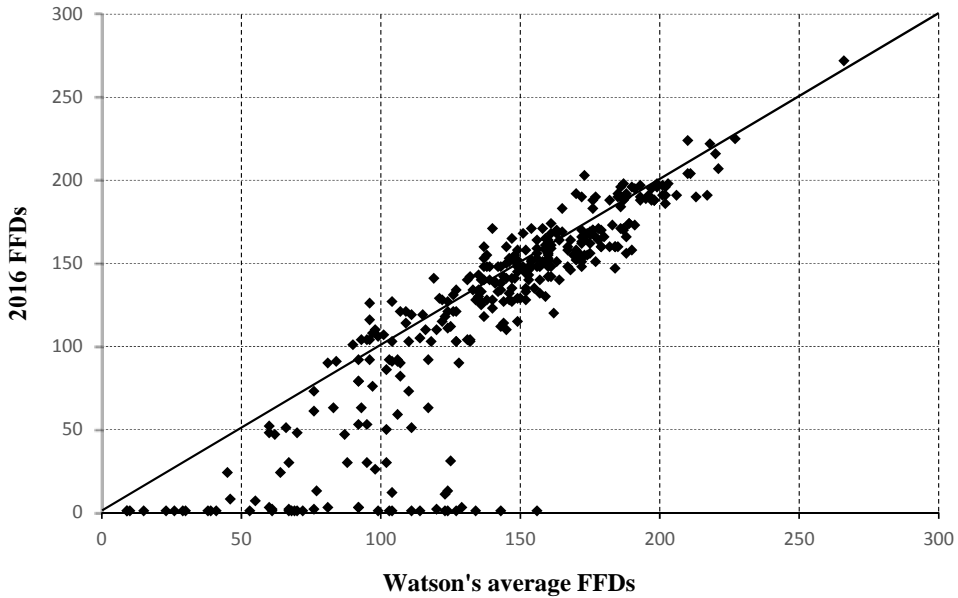


Fig. 1 First flowering dates (FFDs) for 339 species in 2016, plotted against 'average first flowering times' given by Watson. Dates are shown as day numbers (day 1 = 1st January). The diagonal line marks the line along which data-points would lie if 2016 FFDs were identical to those given by Watson; above the line the 2016 date is later than Watson's date, below the line is earlier

will have to suffice. Several woodland herbs, such as Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*), Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) and Early Dog-violet (*Viola reichenbachiana*), were, for the first time since 2008, already in flower on New Year's Day, some 4-10 weeks earlier than Watson's dates. Dog's Mercury had, in fact, been in flower in the Trull/Poundisford area since late November! Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) started coming into bloom in Thurlbear Wood on 19th February; my previous earliest was 8th March, while Watson's average FFD for Bluebell was 12th April. Ground-ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) (Fig. 2) was in flower, in Priorswood, on 2nd January, 74 days earlier than Watson's FFD and two months ahead of my previous earliest date. Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) catkins were open and liberating pollen at Firepool Weir on the R. Tone on 24th January: almost six weeks earlier than Watson's FFD, and my first record of it flowering in January. In woodland above West Monkton, Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) was flowering on 30th January – 30 days earlier than its previous earliest FFD, 58 days earlier than Watson's date, and at a location well away from Taunton's urban 'heat island'.



Fig. 2 Ground-ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*), one of many spring-flowering species having exceptionally early FFDs in 2016

If anyone doubts these unusually early FFDs, I should stress that none were 'rogue' dates; in every case they represented the start of the main flowering period for the species concerned. Another notable feature was the number of species that in 2015–16 bloomed right through the autumn-winter-spring period. We are used to seeing such

plants as White Dead-nettle (*Lamium album*) and Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) flowering more or less continuously from one year to the next, but in 2016 many species that usually have a mid-winter 'lull' exhibited this capacity for year-round flowering, including Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), Common Mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*), Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica*), Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*), Oxford Ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*) and Smooth Sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*).

If Walter Watson could have been here to witness all of this, he would have been amazed. A few spring-flowering species, especially some of those normally coming into bloom later in the spring, did keep to a timetable that Watson would have found reassuringly familiar. But Watson, like myself, would have been surprised by the relative lateness of Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), which didn't start flowering in Thurlbear Wood until 6th May – just over three weeks later than Watson's average FFD, and a week later than my own previous-latest date. This serves as a useful reminder about the dangers of generalisation: yes, it was, unquestionably, an 'early' spring in 2016, but amongst all that earliness there were still some plants that managed to turn up late! My observations echo the national findings of the UK Phenological Network (Sparks *et al.* 2017) which indicated a rather mixed response to the unprecedentedly mild December.

The FFDs for 'Watsonian' monthly groups June to August were, on average, earlier than Watson's by

about eight days, in contrast to the 'early' summers of 2011 and 2014 (Table 1). This was a surprise, given that summer 2016 was, overall, the second-warmest of the last nine years. Many summer-flowering species in 2016 were no earlier, and some were actually slightly later, than in previous years. Hoary Ragwort (*Senecio erucifolius*) and Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) were, as usual, 3-4 weeks later than in Watson's day, but a few late-spring/early-summer flowerers otherwise not renowned for their lateness were also inexplicably delayed in 2016. Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*), for example, was 31 days later than Watson's average FFD, and ten days later than my own latest date. Hairy Tare (*Vicia hirsuta*), too, was delayed, coming into flower a week later than my previous-latest FFD.

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SIMON J. LEACH

SOMERSET BUTTERFLIES IN 2016

The Somerset and Bristol Branch of Butterfly Conservation prospers. Our membership has increased, the number of sites covered by transect walkers has increased from 70 to 72, and following a successful nationwide funding appeal for £120,000 – which included one particularly generous donation – Butterfly Conservation was able to purchase the Westbury Beacon site (ST5050), which in September 2015 became our Branch's fourth reserve. It is home to Chalkhill Blue (*Polyommatus coridon*) (Fig. 1), Dark Green Fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*) and Wall (*Lasiommata megera*), amongst the 34 species that have been recorded there.



Fig. 1 Chalkhill Blue (*Polyommatus coridon*)

Would that the butterflies had prospered equally! Sadly, an analysis of the 2016 transect data shows that it was a very poor year for butterflies. The average number of butterflies recorded per transect-walk fell from 99 (2015) to 83 (-16%), while the average total butterfly sightings per site fell from 1744 (2015) to 1331 (-24%). No Marsh Fritillaries (*Euphydryas aurinia*) were recorded 'on transect' in Somerset in 2016. These figures mirror nationwide trends, and were probably connected, in part, to poor weather conditions at critical times; especially noteworthy was the above-average rainfall in winter and early spring and an exceptionally wet June. However, other factors, such as the use of neonicotinoid pesticides, have been cited and further research into their longer term effects is urgently needed.

Of the 42 species recorded, 29 (69.0%) declined in numbers when compared with the previous year, some of them quite considerably, while nine (21.4%) increased and four (9.5%) showed no change. Worst affected were the Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) which showed a 54% decline in comparison with 2015, closely followed by the Silver-washed Fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*) which had declined by 53%. Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*), Chalkhill Blue, Comma (*Polygonia c-album*), Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*), Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*), Large Skipper (*Ochlodes sylvanus*), Peacock (*Inachis io*) and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria selene*) all showed declines of more than 40% from 2015. While a decline from one year to the next is not in itself of great concern, it is noteworthy that all these species had suffered a decline in the previous year as well, many of them of a similar magnitude. For at least two of these species, the Comma and Gatekeeper, recent declines are indicative of a longer-term downward trend.



Fig. 2 Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*)

Of the nine species that fared well in 2016, two increased considerably in comparison with 2015: Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) was up by 110%, following a dip in 2015, while Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*) (Fig. 2) was up by 96%, a significant increase for the second year running. Other increases were more modest, although Somerset's iconic butterfly, the Large Blue (*Maculinea arion*), continued to thrive on existing sites and had a record year in terms of estimated egg count. Other sites are being managed specifically to encourage this butterfly. The Large Blue is fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and in March 2017 a man was found guilty of capturing and killing Large Blues taken from Collard Hill and from a site in Gloucestershire (in 2015) and mounting them for a wall display. He was given a six-month suspended prison sentence and a five-year criminal behaviour order banning him from visiting three nature reserves where the Large Blue is found.

J. R. S. RAWLINS
Butterfly Conservation

MOTHS IN SOMERSET 2016

'Macro' moths – residents

The early part of 2016 provided a discouraging start to the 'mothing' year with generally few species and poor numbers of during January-April. It is likely that the relatively mild wet winter had an adverse effect on overwintering larvae and pupae – fungal disease may have taken its toll.

May started with an overnight minimum temperature of 2°C in Butleigh and 1.8°C in Wiveliscombe, but after that there was a jump into double figures and numbers of moths trapped started to improve. A species which is widespread in the county but rarely seen is the Emperor Moth (*Saturnia pavonia*). In May, males

were ‘assembled’ to females (Tony Liebert was successful on the Quantocks and Mendips) and attracted to pheromone lures (John Connolly on Lydeard Hill). A very unusual record was a Buttoned Snout (*Hypena rostralis*) taken by Ben Bond in Wellington. This is a rare and local species in Somerset, the only previous records having been from the Minehead and Bristol/Bath areas.

June and July brought some good sightings including a Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth (*Hemaris tityus*) – a nationally threatened species which is now very rare in the county and whose larvae feed on Devil’s-Bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) – and Six-belted Clearwings (*Bembecia ichneumoniformis*) which were attracted to lures used by Will Langdon on the cliffs at Blue Anchor and near Milverton. The latter species has larvae that feed in the roots of Common Bird’s-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and Kidney-vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*).

Other summer highlights included a Horse Chestnut (*Pachynemis hippocastanea*) at an



Fig. 1 Merveille du Jour (*Griposia aprilina*)
(photo © John Bebbington)

outside light in Crewkerne, and a Crescent Striped (*Apamea oblonga*) – a local and occasional species confined to the coast – at Wall Common, Steart. There were also many reports of Jersey Tiger (*Euplagia quadripunctaria*), a species which has spread dramatically in recent years and, as it flies by day, is often mistaken for a butterfly.

In the autumn the usual seasonal species were recorded; the beautiful Merveille du Jour (*Griposia aprilina*), although a widespread species, is always eagerly awaited, with its stunning lichen camouflage (Fig. 1).

The year ended with good numbers of the aptly-named December Moth (*Poecilocampa populi*), Winter Moth (*Opherophtera brumata*) and Mottled Umber (*Erannis defoliaria*). Both these latter species have wingless females that lay eggs high up on the food-plants, the larvae then being dispersed on the wind.

‘Macro’ moths – migrants

The Dark Sword Grass (*Agrotis ipsilon*) began to appear in early May, with records from Wellington, Wiveliscombe and Merriott. Larger numbers of migrants appeared in June and July, including the Gem (*Nycterosea obstipata*), Humming-bird Hawkmoth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*), Four-spotted Footman (*Lithosia quadra*), Bordered Straw (*Heliothis peltigera*), Scarce Bordered Straw (*Helicoverpa armigera*), and Silver Y (*Autographa gamma*). Perhaps the star specimen was a Gypsy Moth (*Lymantria dispar*) taken in Wellington on 20th July by Ben Bond. This is only the second Somerset record.

August and September saw an influx of Vestal (*Rhodometra sacraria*) including 17 trapped at Halsway Manor in a single night; two Clifden Nonpareil (*Catocala fraxini*) occurred, one at Burnham-on-Sea, the other at Wiveliscombe. The spectacular Convolvulus Hawkmoth (*Agrius convolvuli*) was recorded from several locations, both resting by day and nectaring on *Nicotiana* flowers in the evening. John Bebbington was fortunate to have three nectaring simultaneously in his Langport garden – like many keen ‘mothers’ he grows *Nicotiana* each year in the hope of attracting this magnificent species.

‘Micro’ moths – residents

A very poor start to the year continued well into May with few micros being recorded, especially



Fig. 2 Diamond-back Moths (*Plutella xylostella*) on daisy flower-heads (photo © John Bebbington)

the more common hibernating species we normally see. However there were a few standout records including Sundew Plume (*Buckleria paludum*) from Westhay, taken by Robin Clatworthy and Liz Marsden, and again by Paul Bowyer and Dave Gibbs; as its English name suggests, the larvae feed on the leaves of Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). The coastal resident and migrant species *Sitochroa palealis* was noted at Brean Down by Nigel Cottle – the first record of this species in the county for several years.

Many of our resident ‘micro’ moths can only be identified as adults by genital dissection, but in some cases the larval leaf mines are distinctive and specific. Almost everyone recognises the blotch mines of the Horse-chestnut Leaf Miner (*Cameraria ohridella*) which was first noted in London in 2002 and has since spread dramatically across southern Britain, including Somerset.

‘Micro’ moths – migrants and adventives

In May the BBC reported on an imminent ‘Biblical’ influx of Diamond-back Moths (*Plutella xylostella*) (Fig. 2) from the European mainland, stating that tens of millions were expected to arrive in the UK with devastating effects for growers of brassicas. In reality, and while 2016 will certainly be remembered as ‘the year of the Diamond-back’ with some Somerset Moth Group members recording over 500 specimens in their trap in one night, the anticipated ruination of Britain’s brassica crops did not materialise, with only fairly ‘normal’ numbers of second-generation moths being recorded.

The adventive *Diplostepus perieresalis* was recorded from Frome by Jenny Vickers in May and again in August. The May specimen was initially identified by John Langmaid and subsequently confirmed by dissection. The first record for Britain was in 2001; the species is from the Far East and Australia and the food-plant is thought to be sedges (*Carex* spp). Another adventive, *Metalampra italic*, was taken in May at Weston-super-Mare by David Agassiz. This was only the second known record for Somerset. The larva feeds on fungi.

During August the Tortricid *Cydia amplana* (Fig. 3) was noted from Pen Elm (near Taunton) by Steve Chapple, and from Langport by John Bebbington. This species may well now be resident in S. Dorset and S. Devon.



Fig. 3 *Cydia amplana* (photo: © John Bebbington)

Acknowledgements

Apologies to those who have not been named above. I am again grateful to them and to everyone who sent in records during 2016. All the 'macro' records have been submitted to Butterfly Conservation for inclusion in the 2018 National Moth Atlas.

Further information

As always the Somerset Moth Group website has a 'latest sightings' page and distribution maps for all our Somerset species at <http://www.somersetmothgroup.org.uk/portal>

JOHN BEBBINGTON
Somerset Moth Group

SOMERSET DRAGONFLIES 2016

Although an improvement on a dismal 2015, numbers of dragonflies were a shade below normal in 2016. The common lowland species were present where and when they should have been in fair numbers, and in the case of the Variable Damselfly (*Coenagrion pulchellum*) on the Levels numbers were quite encouraging. Some of the less common species did not appear to do quite so well: only one record was received for the Scarce Chaser (*Libellula fulva*), two for the Hairy Dragonfly (*Brachytron pratense*) and very few for the White-legged Damselfly (*Platycnemis pennipes*). For the second successive year, the Ruddy Darter (*Sympetrum sanguineum*) was not reported at all.

Coverage from upland areas was sparse, although more records than usual were made of Keeled Skimmers (*Orthetrum coerulescens*). It was particularly pleasing to record this species from a new site, at Winsford Hill on Exmoor. There must surely be more colonies of this species to be found in upland Somerset.

At Tyntesfield House (National Trust), a week-long event was organised by Steve White. A small ornamental pond at the centre of the kitchen garden served as the centrepiece for the Emperor Dragonflies (*Anax imperator*) emerging in some numbers from it. The actual emergences took place at night, so the adult dragonflies were rarely seen, but the exuviae (cast-off larval skins) drew visitors' attention, and the larvae themselves could be seen under the water, prowling around the stone walling of the pond. Adult dragonflies visiting the pond consisted of Azure Damselflies (*Coenagrion puella*) and Broad-bodied Chasers (*Libellula depressa*); on occasion the females of the latter were mistaken for hornets.

CHRISTOPHER ILES
British Dragonfly Society

PLANT GALLS IN SOMERSET 2016

We summarise below records 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) database. Species are arranged in alphabetical order with brief details of each record's significance, notes on host plants, location, date, recorder, etc. As in previous reports, for those galls featured in Michael Chinery's photographic guide (Chinery 2011) we give page numbers on which they are illustrated.

As last year, it is satisfying to note an ever-increasing number of observers submitting records. For a few of us cecidology (the study of plant galls) may have become a bit of an obsession but, in Somerset as elsewhere in Britain, galls are also gaining popularity more generally amongst field botanists. Many records in 2016 were made during SANHS or Somerset Rare Plants Group field meetings; one meeting, to Shapwick Heath NNR in September, was very much focussed on plant galls.

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 2016 unless otherwise stated. In all, we report here on 33 plant galls that appear to be county and/or vice-county 'firsts' according to the BPGS database, although examination of maps on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway (on 15 March 2017) showed that at least eight of these had already been recorded in the county or relevant vice-county.

Aceria geranii (a mite causing leaf rolls on CRANE'S-BILLS, *Geranium* spp) – on *Geranium lucidum*, in municipal flower-bed at SE end of Winchester Str, Taunton (ST2324), 31 Oct, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Aceria nervisequa (= *Eriophyes nervisequus*) (a mite causing felt-like galls on BEECH, *Fagus sylvatica*) – Fairfield estate (ST1842), 18 Jun, SJL, SJP & Somerset Rare Plants Group; possibly first record for VC5. [Chinery, p. 35.]

Adaina microdactyla (a plume moth causing swellings in stems of HEMP-AGRIMONY, *Eupatorium cannabinum*) – Shapwick Heath NNR/Ashcott Corner (ST4439 & ST4440), 10 Sep, Bill Kelly, SJP & SANHS; first record for VC6 and Somerset on the BPGS database, but clearly being overlooked as Somerset Moth Group website gives this species as 'occasional and local' in the county, with 34 tetrad records since 1990. [Chinery, p. 80.]

Brachycolus cerastii (an aphid gall on *Cerastium* spp) – Sand Point (ST3265), on COMMON MOUSE-EAR (*Cerastium fontanum*), 18 Apr, J.J. Day, during BSBI/Somerset Rare Plants Group meeting; first record for VC6, following its discovery by E.J. McDonnell in VC5 in 2015 (Leach and Parker 2016). A scarce and mainly coastal species in Britain.

Coleosporium tussilaginis (a rust gall of RAGWORTS, *Senecio* spp, but also occurs, apparently without causing galls, on COLT'S-FOOT, *Tussilago farfara*, and SMOOTH SOW-THISTLE, *Sonchus oleraceus*) – Obridge (ST2425), covering leaves of *Tussilago farfara* although not inducing galls, 7 Oct, SJL; first record for VC5 on BPGS database. Although not gall-causing in this instance, we report the rust here to publicise the fact that it is present in the county.

Contarinia cracca (a midge causing 'lantern' galls on TUFTED VETCH, *Vicia cracca*) –

Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST2720), 22 Jul, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset. Whitefield nature reserve, Butleigh (ST528330), 26 Jul, E.J. McDonnell; possibly first record for VC6. An attractive gall, flower buds becoming swollen and hanging down like Chinese lanterns [Chinery, p. 88].

Contarinia jacobaeae (a midge inducing swollen flower heads on RAGWORTS, *Senecio* spp) – beside stream in field E of Fyne Court (ST2232), on *Senecio aquaticus*, orange jumping midge larvae noted, 9 Aug, SJL and V.J. Fairfax-Ross; first record for VC5 on BPGS database (but NBN Gateway shows one hectad record for VC5).

Dasineura auritae (a gall midge inducing leaf-roll galls on WILLOWS, *Salix* spp) – Shapwick Heath NNR/Ashcott Corner (ST4339 & ST4439), on *Salix cinerea* subsp *oleifolia*, 10 Sep, SJP, SJL & SANHS; possibly first records for VC6, although doubtless overlooked and under-recorded.

Dasineura kiefferiana (gall midge producing leaf-roll galls on ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB, *Chamerion angustifolium*) – Cothelstone Hill (ST1932), 31 Aug, SJL; first record for VC5 on BPGS database, second for Somerset (but NBN Gateway shows two hectad records for VC5). [Chinery, p. 91.]

Dasineura serotina (gall midge on ST. JOHN'S-WORT, *Hypericum* spp) – probably this species found to be galling leaves of *Hypericum perforatum*, in rough grassland at Roughmoor, Taunton, adjoining the Silk Mills Park-and-Ride car park (ST2025), 9 Jul, SJL, SJP & SANHS; first record for VC5. Galls of this species are extremely difficult to separate from those of *D. hyperici*, but galled leaves were reddened which seems to indicate that *D. serotina* was the more likely gall-causer.

Dasineura viciae (gall midge causing 'leaf-pod' galls on VETCHES, *Vicia* spp) – grassy bank on E side of Orchard Wood, beside the herepath (ST2520), on *Vicia sativa*, 17 Jun, SJL; also in grassland above Otterhead Lakes (ST2213), on *Vicia sepium*, 16 Jul, SJL; first and second records for VC5 on BPGS database (but NBN Gateway shows one, possibly two, records for VC5). [Chinery, p. 88.]

Eriophyes arianus (gall mite on WHITEBEAMS, *Sorbus* spp) – Embelle Wood, between Glenthorne and Culbone, on *Sorbus rupicola* (SS81304931) and *Sorbus margaretae* (SS81494931), 30 Aug, J. Webb, conf. SJL, from

leaves collected by S. Webb; first records for VC5 and Somerset. The shoots were collected to establish the identity of the Whitebeams, rather than because the leaves had galls on them! The specimens now reside in the SANHS herbarium at the Somerset Heritage Centre (TTN).

Gymnosporangium clavariiforme or ***G. confusum*** (a rust causing miniature ‘barnacle’ galls on HAWTHORN, *Crataegus monogyna*) – one or other of these species on *C. monogyna*, scrubby bank, Upper Holway Recreation Area, Taunton (ST2423), 2 Jun, SJL; also Roughmoor (ST2025), 13 Jun, SJL; possibly first records for VC5 and Somerset. (Alternate hosts for this species are JUNIPERS, *Juniperus* spp: *G. clavariiforme* also occurs on the native *J. communis*, *G. confusum* on the introduced *J. sabina*.)

Myopites inulaedysentericae (a tiny fruit fly inducing flower-head ‘pepper pot’ galls on COMMON FLEABANE, *Pulicaria dysenterica*) – Thurlbear Quarrylands (ST2720), 27 May, SJL; first record for VC5 of this nationally uncommon species. [Illustrated in *SANH* 159, p. 287.]

Phragmidium sanguisorbae (a rust gall on SALAD BURNET, *Poterium sanguisorba*) – Sand Point (ST3265 & ST3266), in species-rich limestone grassland, 12 Jun, SJP, SJL & SANHS; first records on the BPGS database for VC6, although subsequently reported as having been seen here and elsewhere in VC6 in previous years by E.J. McDonnell & H.J. Crouch (and there are several records for VC6 on NBN Gateway).

Phytoptus tetratrichus (mite causing leaf-roll galls on LIMES, *Tilia* spp) – E side of Orchard Wood (ST2520), on *Tilia cordata*, 14 Jul, SJL; possibly first record for VC5, second or third for Somerset. The only other records for Somerset on the BPGS database are from Leigh Woods, VC6, on *Tilia platyphyllos*. [Chinery, p. 49.]

Pontania bridgmanii (a sawfly causing small ‘kidney-bean’ galls on leaves of SALLOW, *Salix cinerea*) – Shapwick Heath NNR (ST4439), 10 Sep, SJP, SJL & SANHS; possibly first record for VC6. [Chinery, p.65.]

Puccinia annularis (a fungal gall on WOOD SAGE, *Teucrium scorodonia*) – N side of Cothelstone Hill (ST1932), 31 Aug, SJL; Lydeard Hill (ST1734), 9 Oct, SJL; hillside to SE of Triscombe Stone (ST1635), 15 Oct, SJL, SJP & SANHS; possibly first records for VC5 and Somerset. [Chinery, p. 92.]

Puccinia circaeae (afungal gall on ENCHANTER’S NIGHTSHADE, *Circaea lutetiana*) – Meare Heath (ST4440), 10 Sep, SJP, SJL & SANHS; first record for VC6 on BPGS database (but several records for VC6 on NBN Gateway).

Puccinia hystereum (a fungal gall on GOAT’S-BEARD, *Tragopogon pratensis*) – grassy verge, Silk Mills Road, Taunton (ST207251), plants looking sickly and distorted, 9 Jul, SJP & SANHS; possibly first record for VC5.

Puccinia phragmitis (a rust gall on DOCKS, *Rumex* spp, the purple blister-like swellings earning it the nickname locally of ‘Baldrick’s Rash’, after the character in the BBC television series *Blackadder*) – Roughmoor (ST2125), on *Rumex sanguineus*, 30 May, SJL; lane verge, N side of Thurlbear Wood (ST2721), on the same host, 9 Jun, SJL; first records for VC5 on BPGS database (but there are already several records for VC5 on NBN Gateway). Also: Carymoor (ST6130), on *R. sanguineus*, 7 May, SJL, SJP & SANHS; Catcott Lows (ST4041), on CURLED DOCK, *Rumex crispus*, 13 May, SJP; second and third records for VC6 (first record reported in *SANH* 159, p. 288). [Fig. 1]



Fig. 1 *Puccinia phragmitis* (‘Baldrick’s Rash’) on leaf of *Rumex sanguineus*, Carymoor, May 2016 (Photo: SJL)

Puccinia pulverulenta (a rust fungus on WILLOWHERBS, *Epilobium* spp) – Carymoor (ST6131), on *Epilobium hirsutum*, 8 May, SJP & SANHS; seemingly the first record for VC6 and Somerset on BPGS database (but there are several records, for both VC6 and VC5, on NBN Gateway).

Puccinia smyrnii (a rust gall on ALEXANDERS, *Smyrnum olusatrum*) – Sand Point (ST3265), 18 Apr, J.J. Day, during BSBI/Somerset Rare Plants Group meeting; first record for VC6 on the BPGS database (but there is also one VC6 record from Bristol on NBN Gateway). [Chinery, p. 70.]

Rabdophaga marginemtorquens (= *Dasineura marginemtorquens*) (a gall midge causing distinctive leaf-roll galls on OSIER, *Salix viminalis*) – W of Roughmoor and Silk Mills Road, beside the Norton Brook (ST2025), 31 Jul, SJL; also alongside Roughmoor pond and R. Tone/Long Run Meadow (ST2125, ST2325 & ST2425), 3 Oct, 4 Nov, SJL; possibly first records for VC5. [Chinery, p. 64.]

Rabdophaga rosaria (gall midge inducing ‘rosette’ or ‘artichoke’ galls on WILLOWS, *Salix* spp) – Otterhead Lakes (ST2213), on *Salix cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*, 22 Aug, SJL; possibly first record for VC5. [Chinery, p. 64.]

Rhinusa antirrhini (a weevil causing swollen flowers/fruits in COMMON TOADFLAX, *Linaria vulgaris*) – Oakfield (ST1425), 26 Aug, SJP; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset. Shapwick Heath NNR (ST4439 & ST4440), 10 Sep, SJP & SANHS; possibly first record for VC6.

Rhopalomyia baccarum (a midge causing globular galls in leaf axils of MUGWORT, *Artemisia vulgaris*) – Shapwick Heath NNR (ST4439 & ST4440), 10 Sep, SJP & SANHS; first records for VC6 and Somerset of this scarce and local species.

Rhopalomyia ptarmicae (a gall midge on SNEEZEWORD, *Achillea ptarmica*) – W of East Woodlands, beside ditch (ST785443), 13 Oct 2015, H.J. Crouch and G.H. Read, conf. SJL; first record for VC6 of this scarce and rather striking gall. [Illustrated in *SANH* 158, p. 265.]

Sphenella marginata (a tiny fruit fly causing swollen flower-heads on RAGWORTS, *Senecio* spp) – Fairfield estate, in arable field border (ST1943), on *Senecio vulgaris*, 18 Jun, SJL, C. Shelswell, E.J. McDonnell & Somerset Rare Plants Group; possibly first record for VC5. [Illustrated in *SANH* 159, p. 288, on *Senecio erucifolius*.]

Synchytrium taraxaci (a rust gall on DANDELIONS, *Taraxacum officinale* agg.) – Carymoor (ST6130), 7 May, SJL, SJP & SANHS; possibly first record for VC6, but undoubtedly overlooked and under-recorded.

Also found in 2016 in a further four monads in VC5. [Illustrated in *SANH* 159, p. 288.]

Thecabius affinis (woolly aphid causing grossly distorted and bulging discoloured leaves of POPLARS, *Populus* spp) – Butleigh (ST5232), 26 Jul, E.J. McDonnell; possibly first record for VC6.

Trioza centranthi (a psyllid bug causing leaf-roll galls on RED VALERIAN, *Centranthus ruber*) – following its reported first occurrence in VC5 in 2014 (*SANH* 158, p. 266), it has been recorded from further sites, as follows: Blue Anchor, on coastal shingle (ST0143), 28 Oct 2015, and on road verge (ST0243), 8 Jan 2017, both records SJL; Watchet harbour (ST0743), 28 Oct, SJL; Taunton, Sherford (ST2223), 5 Dec, and Staplegrove (ST2126), 10 Jan 2017, both records SJL. Thus, as at 15 March 2017, we have records of it from six 1-km squares in VC5. This adds significantly to the single unlocalised report of it occurring in Exmoor National Park (Hollier 1988), and cited by Brian Spooner in the second of his two notes reviewing its status in Britain (Spooner 2016a, 2016b). We do not know whether any of the ‘Exmoor’ records relate to VC5; it would be surprising if this gall were not present in or around Minehead, or along the Somerset coast to the west, but we have yet to find it there. [Fig. 2]



Fig. 2 *Trioza centranthi* leaf-roll gall on Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), Taunton, April 2017 (Photo: SJL)

Urocystis violae (smut fungus causing distortions to leaves and petioles of VIOLETS, *Viola* spp) – Orchard Wood (ST2520), on *Viola riviniana*, 6 May, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 [Chinery, p. 89].

Uromyces muscari (rust fungus galling the leaves of BLUEBELLS, *Hyacinthoides* spp) – Wellington, garden of 26 Laburnum Rd, on *Hyacinthoides x massartiana*, 9 May, SJP; possibly first record for VC5.

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SIMON J. LEACH and STEPHEN J. PARKER

SOMERSET BIRDS 2015

For many, the outstanding bird of 2015 was the female Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) discovered on the Meare Heath scrape on the evening of 24 April. Although it disappeared for a few days, its relatively long stay enabled visitors from all over the country to see it. When the diagnostic features are seen well, this is not a difficult species to confirm, but finding it within large godwit flocks presents a problem, and some must go unnoticed. This was the third British record.



Fig. 1 Surf Scoter, Blue Anchor
(Photo: Brian Gibbs)

Less unexpected but also very rare was a Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*) on the sea off Blue Anchor from 15 to 25 November (Fig. 1). Although a first for Somerset, winter records of this species are increasing. Other rarities were a long-staying Dusky Warbler (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*)

at Ham Wall in December, and a Pallas's Warbler (*P. proregulus*) at Brean on 25 October. Both were second county records. At least three Savi's Warblers (*Locustella luscinioides*) were singing on the Levels, and breeding may have occurred.

Scarcer species seen in 2015 included Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*), Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*), Ferruginous Duck (*A. nyroca*), Green-winged Teal (*Anas carolinensis*), Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) and Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*) – the last of these, at Catsford Common in May, being a third county record. Single Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*) and Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*) were also recorded.

A worrying number of breeding and passage species continue to decline. Wintering Whooper Swans (*Cygnus Cygnus*) now outnumber Bewick's (*C. columbianus*), formerly the most common 'yellow-billed' Swan. Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) is probably extinct, while Cuckoos (*Cuculus canorus*) are now extremely rare on lowland farmland. Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) last bred successfully in 1999 and, although always a very rare breeder, there are now few summer records from Exmoor. Once common species such as Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*) (Fig. 2) are giving real concern; the latter is now extremely local. Spotted Flycatchers (*Muscicapa striata*), Wood Warblers (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*) and Willow Warblers (*P. trochilus*) are seen in fewer numbers year on year.



Fig. 2 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
(Photo: Brian Gibbs)

Not all, however, is gloom. As a group, the herons in particular continue to flourish, due in no small part to habitat creation in the Avalon Marshes and elsewhere. Although there was no confirmed breeding in 2015, Little Bitterns (*Ixobrychus minutus*) are now annual, and the number of booming Great Bitterns (*Botaurus stellaris*) exceeds 40. Great White Egrets (*Ardea alba*) have bred since 2012 and Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) have become common and ubiquitous within the last 30 years. There is good news for some other species too: Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*) breed at two sites, albeit in very low numbers; Avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) are also now regular breeders, while wintering flocks in the Parrett Estuary exceed 500 in early winter, reinforcing the national importance of this site.

Firecrests (*Regulus ignicapilla*) are increasing

in the east of the county and are almost certainly overlooked elsewhere. Tree Sparrows (*Passer montanus*) continue to hang on in the 'far east' and greater observer coverage might reveal new colonies.

Dartford Warblers (*Sylvia undata*) live precariously in Britain, and heavy snowfall can eliminate established populations in a matter of hours. It seems that the generally snow-free coast of Exmoor might well be their salvation locally. Certainly they appear to survive harsh weather here and, because they are prolific breeders, suitable sites on higher Exmoor, the Quantocks and Mendips are soon recolonised. Time may prove Somerset to be an important reservoir county for this attractive *Sylvia* warbler, the only resident member of this genus in Britain.

As I write (in March 2017), nationally a large influx of Cattle Egrets is underway, with several flocks in double figures. After a similar, but smaller, influx in 2008, Cattle Egrets bred in Britain for the first time at two sites in Somerset. There were high hopes of colonisation but these were not realised, probably because Cattle Egrets appear less well equipped to deal with cold weather than Little Egrets. Some birds from the current influx have already reached the county and history could well repeat itself. It could be worth paying close attention to suitable sites this year. Doubtless there will be news either way in a future report.

Comprehensive analysis of 2015 can be found in the annual report, *Somerset Birds*. Visit www.somersetbirding.co.uk for details or contact the Recorder, Brian Gibbs [REDACTED]

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