

Blooming mad!

Unusually large numbers of wild plants flowering in the middle of winter

As many members will have noticed, one of the effects of the exceptionally mild autumn and early winter has been the large number of summer-flowering plants still in bloom in December and January. And many spring-flowering species are making an unusually early appearance too.

Several SANHS members keep a record of wild flowers seen blooming in the winter months. In the Taunton area our total for December was 190 species, and the first week of January produced 118. In contrast, the total in December 2010 was just seventeen! Quite a few summer-flowering species have continued flowering at low levels right through the autumn and winter: hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), for example, are still conspicuous on many roadsides in Somerset, along with occasional flowers of cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), common cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*) and red clover (*Trifolium pratense*); brambles (*Rubus fruticosus*) too are still carrying a few blooms in many areas, allegedly encouraging one member to even attempt a spot of blackberry-picking on New Year's Day!

Added to these summer-flowering species, those normally coming into bloom in the spring are, yet again, making an unseasonably early appearance: in Thurlbear Wood in December, for example, early dog-violet (*Viola reichenbachiana*) was first seen in flower on the 1st, primrose on the 3rd, and spurge-laurel (*Daphne laureola*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*) all on the 29th – the last of these being more than ten weeks earlier than normal.