

Chillerton and Gatcombe parish verge survey 2020

Hemlock water dropwort

The dasterdly flower of the month for June



This plant has become a very invasive and conspicuous presence in our verges, especially in those that border damp ditches. It comes from the large group of umbellifer plants, which are very common in June. Our verge surveyors have also found yarrow, cow parsley and hogweed (also known as cow parsnip). Umbellifers are fairly easy to identify in flower because they have flat umbrella-like heads.

Early in the season the hemlock water dropwort (photograph on the left by surveyor Roger Hall) starts to colonise damp areas and in some areas such as the north facing side of Berry Lane it takes over, growing in large clumps and clogging the ditches. The next stage is when it comes into flower and by the end of June it is dying back.

Its stems are hollow and can grow to 1.5 metres. The name dropwort comes from the oval tubers attached to the roots at the base. The plant smells like parsley but is NOT edible, being VERY POISONOUS.

On a more positive note the flowers are attractive to insects. Butterflies have been seen on them, beetles and flies (including hoverflies) are especially keen.