



Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership



Roadside verges Habitat Action Plan

Plan Lead Organisation	Stockton Council
Plan Coordinator	Andrea Elsworth
Action Group	Urban
Associated Plans	Hedgerows, unimproved grassland
Latest version	Published February 2009

Description

Roadside verges are defined as the strip of land between the roadside and a boundary feature such as a hedge, fence or wall. There are currently approximately 207,000ha of roadside in the UK, with an estimated 2% managed for their wildlife interest. Roadside verges provide food and shelter for invertebrates and small mammals which are preyed by birds of prey such as barn owl and kestrel. The wildlife value of roadside verges is related to the age of the verge and its management. Some verges, especially alongside ancient roads and green lanes, have remnants of grassland and heathland habitats that are becoming increasingly rare in an agricultural landscape. These can contain plants and insects that are associated with unimproved grasslands. These verges, along with hedgerows, can provide ecological corridors connecting otherwise isolated habitats.

The value of recently created verges varies depending on their management and substrate. Verges that are not sown with fast growing grass mixes on poor soils, can often be colonised by a colourful range of wildflowers, such as cowslip and oxeye daisy. Motorways, bypasses and main trunk roads usually have wide verges and banks, often with young trees, the result of tree planting programs carried out over the past 40 years, which are now linear woodlands. In most cases, roadside verge areas, especially in urban areas, consist of closely mown, single sward grasslands which have limited wildlife value. Some new verges have been sown with wildflower mixes as part of landscape restoration programmes.

Current factors causing loss and decline

- ◆ Inappropriate cutting practices with cutting too frequent and cuttings left in situ, preventing seed set of flowering herbs and nutrient build up of soil.
- ◆ Lack of management leading to encroachment by scrub and eventual loss of grassland habitat and associated plant species.
- ◆ Invasion by problem species, such a ragwort and giant hogweed.



- ◆ Inappropriate seeding and planting of new road schemes with little regard for local biodiversity.
- ◆ Inadvertent spreading of salt on vegetation.
- ◆ Perceptions of untidiness resulting in management that is inappropriate for biodiversity.

Conservation Status

No legal protection except where sites designated as SSSIs or Local Sites.

The Habitat in the Tees Valley

In the Tees Valley, there are four roadside verges in Stockton that have Local Site status. In Hartlepool, there are two verges that are remnants of species-rich magnesium grassland, and there are likely to be verges rich for wildflowers in the Redcar and Cleveland District that have yet to be documented.

Current Activity in the Tees Valley

The Wildflower Ark are noting the location of species rich or notable roadside verges whilst conducting their vegetation surveys as part of the Tees Valley Local Sites review and Cleveland Meadow project

Further Information

Spellerberg, I. F. and Gaywood, M.J. (1993) Linear features: Linear habitats and wildlife corridors. Research Report number 60. Natural England

Parr, T.W. and Way, J.M. (1988) Management of roadside vegetation: the long-term effects of cutting. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 25, 1073-1087.

Vision Statement

To identify the location of roadside verges that have conservation value and to protect and set in place long term management methods to retain or enhance their wildlife interest.

Targets

RV.T1 To Identify location of florally rich roadside verges in Tees Valley.

Goal: Produce an inventory of significant roadside verges (2010).

RV.T2 Maintain the current extent of roadside verges of high nature conservation value in

Goal: No loss in biodiversity of roadside verges of high nature conservation value.

RVT3 Improve biodiversity of roadside verge corridors in the Tees Valley by changes in management practices.

Goal: Improve the condition of 8 roadside verges.

Actions

Code	Action	Organisational lead	Action contact	Partners	End date
RV. A1	Collate existing information and knowledge on location and character of florally rich verges to create a Tees Valley database.	TVWT	Sue Antrobus	Wildflower Ark, Redcar and Cleveland BC, Stockton BC, Hartlepool BC	Dec 2009
RV .A2	Request information on species rich grassland from community groups and members of the public, parish councils, community groups and highway grass cutters.	Stockton BC	Andrea Elsworth	TVWT, Wildflower Ark, Redcar and Cleveland BC, Stockton BC, Hartlepool BC, Middlesbrough BC	Dec 2009
RV.A3	Ensure that biodiverse verges identified in data base have a management regime with land owners/ managers.	TVWT	Sue Antrobus	TVBP Urban Action Groups members	Dec 2010
RV.A4	Protect the most biodiverse verges through Local Sites designation where sites meet criteria.	TVWT	Jeremy Garside	TVWT, Wildflower Ark, Redcar and Cleveland BC, Stockton BC, Hartlepool BC, Middlesbrough BC	2012
RV.A5	Work with local authorities and Highways Agency to improve the wildlife potential of 8 roadside verges (2 in each local authority area) by developing a biodiversity sensitive road verge cutting programme.	Stockton BC	Andrea Elsworth	Highways Agency , Redcar and Cleveland BC, Stockton BC, Hartlepool BC, Middlesbrough BC	2012
RV. A6	Promote cutting regimes sensitive to wildlife to local and public authorities as a way of meeting their NERC duty through Tees Valley Biodiversity website and newsletters promoting best practice.	TVWT	Sue Antrobus	Redcar and Cleveland BC, Stockton BC, Hartlepool BC, Middlesbrough BC	Ongoing
RV. A7	Provide biodiversity management training for highways and roadside managers and operatives.	TVWT	Sue Antrobus	TVBP Urban Action Group members	2010
RV. A8	Increase understanding and acceptance of verge conservation management by general public through press work, public survey and TVBP website .	Stockton Council	Andrea Elsworth	TVBP Urban Action Group members	Ongoing
RV.A9	Ensure that all relevant habitat policy is included in local planning documents and supplementary planning guidance where relevant, to protect, enhance or create new landscape features of wildlife importance along transport corridors and to ensure that ecological surveys are undertaken prior to the determination of new transport schemes.	TVWT	Jeremy Garside	Joint Strategy Unit	Ongoing