



Roadside Verges

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Ecology

What is a roadside verge?

Roadside verges are defined as the strip of land between the roadside and the fence, hedge or wall adjacent to it. Many roadside verges have become smaller or have been removed altogether due to road widening and placing footpaths next to roads. Where verges are left to grow wild they often support now uncommon hay meadow and arable weed species important for invertebrates.



Roadside verges, along with hedgerow, are important ecological corridors connecting otherwise isolated habitat patches.

Why are roadside verges important?

Roadside verges provide food and shelter for many species of invertebrates such as grasshoppers, butterflies, moths, wasps and bees and small mammals such as shrews and voles. The small mammals then provide the food for the larger mammals, such as weasels and birds of prey such as kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) barn owls (*Tyto alba*).

Current status

The 3,200 kilometres of roads in the Cheshire region provide a valuable wildlife resource and contribute to the wildlife corridor network. A small proportion have retained fragments of unique habitat from an earlier period whilst new verges have provided the opportunity for both created and pioneering plant communities.

In 1973 a survey of verges identified 80 sites of nature conservation interest with 8 sites listed as of



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national importance. Presently 4 roadside verges are included in the County Council register of Sites of Biological Importance (SBI).

In a 1995 Cheshire Roadside Verge Survey 115 sites were included, with a number of previously unrecorded sites being identified in Chester City Council's Nature Conservation Audit.

Of the 8 sites listed in 1973 one has been largely lost to abuse/ fly tipping; at another three sites the unique flora was not traced; at two sites the extent of meadow cranesbill is still evident and the remaining two sites retain a locally diverse flora. Of the 85 sites surveyed in 1995, 30 sites may be considered for SBI status. In addition there are 33 SBIs adjacent to roads where a survey of the verge would be appropriate.

All road verges are maintained to a minimum standard to comply with safety requirements. In 2002 Cheshire County Council will take over responsibility for Trunk Roads, currently maintained by the Highways Agency. Ragwort is dealt with by hand pulling in areas where a particular problem is identified.

Of these 18 sites with an area greater than 1ha, 15 have SSSI status and so are managed by an association between individual landowners and English Nature. In addition, the Dee Estuary and a smaller area of reedbed (Frodsham Marsh) have held international and European status, being designated as RAMSAR sites since December 1995, and Special Protection Areas under the 1979 EC Habitats Directive, respectively.

Bound by the EC Directive the government is required to take special measures to conserve the habitat of rare, vulnerable and/or regularly migrating species.

Threats

- * The timing of cutting which may prevent the setting of seed.
- * Cuttings being left in situ, which may increase soil nitrate and encourage coarser species.
- * Erosion caused by vehicle intrusion.
- * Tipping.
- * Inappropriate/unsympathetic reinstatement.
- * Scrub invasion on wider verges leading to a loss in biodiversity.
- * Invasion of problem species (ragwort, giant hogweed).
- * Planting of non-native species.
- * Inadvertent spreading of road salt onto verges
- * Inappropriate use of herbicides.



How are we helping to conserve roadside verges in the Cheshire region?

- * In rural areas, verges are cut to one swathe width adjacent to the carriageway, twice per annum, with allowance for visibility splays as necessary.
- * In urban areas, verges are cut more frequently to maintain a sward height between 12 - 75mm, and cuttings are generally removed.
- * Allowance for cutting around street furniture, cutting embankments to alleviate fire risk, cutting adjacent to footpaths etc. is included in the maintenance schedule.
- * District Highways Engineers are responsible for the maintenance schedule for rural verges and can vary this as appropriate on a verge by verge basis.
- * Appropriate verge treatment is taken into consideration in new Cheshire County Council Highways Schemes

Objectives, targets and actions

Objectives, targets and actions to help conserve roadside verge habitat in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

Contact details

LBAP Chair

References and Glossary

HMSO (1995): Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, Volume 1: Meeting the Rio Challenge, London.

HMSO (1995): Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, Volume 2: Action Plans, London.

