

CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

ROADSIDE VERGES



Conservation objectives

* Secure the sympathetic management of all road verges in Carmarthenshire where this does not compromise the safety of road users.

What you can do to help:

* Send in records of species-rich roadside verges to the local Biodiversity Officer

Further information:

www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.wales.gov.uk/subitransport/content/trebap/index-e.htm

Verges originated when improved road construction and repair meant that roads became narrower – before that roads could get very wide as vehicles dodged muddy potholes and hazards. The strip of ground left over was colonized by plants and became the verge!



Habitat description

Roadside verges can be very important for wildlife. Verges are often remnants of more natural habitats that have become less common within the modern farmed countryside. They provide wildlife corridors linking habitats across the county and provide shelter and a source of food for wildlife. Verges often occur alongside other habitats important for biodiversity such as hedgerows and ditches. Even recently constructed roads may have a good display of flowers through planting and natural colonisation. However invasive foreign plants such as Japanese knotweed can be a problem.

Woodland (e.g. bluebells), meadow (e.g. orchids), moorland (e.g. heather) and wetland (e.g. meadowsweet) plants can all be found on our verges. The seeds and insects in our verges provide a vital food source for many birds, while birds of prey such as kestrels and barn owls hunt for the small mammals that use the verges.

Obviously the more varied the verge habitat in structure and plant species the more birds, mammals and insects it will host: longer grass is great cover for small mammals and ground-nesting birds, providing shelter against predation; sparsely vegetated areas are good for basking reptiles.

The Highway Authorities, however, have a statutory duty to maintain the highway in a safe condition for all road users so careful management of the verges must take place.

Distribution in Carmarthenshire

There are more than 6000 km of verge in Carmarthenshire. Many are of wildlife interest, and there is an increasing awareness of the need to manage these verges more sympathetically wherever possible.

What are the threats?

- * Inappropriate verge cutting: timing and frequency of mowing.
- * Inappropriate use of herbicides.
- * Spread of invasive species such as Japanese knotweed.

What is being done locally

- * Road Verge Maintenance Policy has been developed by Carmarthenshire County Council.
- * Advice is given during the consultation period when new road schemes are proposed and constructed.
- * Postcard survey being carried out by Carmarthenshire Biodiversity Partnership to identify species-rich verges.
- * Biodiversity talks have been given to road maintenance teams and contractors.
- * A Trunk Road Estate Biodiversity Action Plan has been written by the Welsh Assembly Government.