

## Road Verges are very vulnerable

Sandwiched between modern agricultural practices and heavy traffic, road verges are under threat. Damage to verges is caused by:

- Vehicles - driving over, parking on or scraping the surface, especially large lorries and farm vehicles.
- Pollution from vehicle emissions and salt spray
- Inappropriate planting - eg. bulbs or Leylandii
- Fly tipping
- Herbicide/pesticide drift from adjacent farmland



Knapweed broomrape - Copyright English Nature



Musk thistle - Copyright Tony Coultiss

- Inappropriate management - eg. cutting at the wrong time or too frequently; failure to remove cuttings or to control invasive species.
- Road widening



Fragrant orchid - Copyright Tony Coultiss



Common spotted orchid - Copyright Tony Coultiss

## What you can do!

Everyone can help to look after our road verges by:

- Applying to the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre to become a volunteer road verge monitor - contact [brc@wiltshirewildlife.org](mailto:brc@wiltshirewildlife.org)
- Discouraging the planting of trees, bulbs and garden plants on road verges.
- Leaving management of protected road verges to the authorised contractors.
- Not parking on, or driving over protected road verges.
- Slowing down! Most of the animals killed on roads are crossing from one verge to the other (and 60% of known barn owl deaths occur on roads).
- Not leaving garden clippings on verges or in hedges.
- Reporting any tipping to the Environment Agency  
Tel: **0800 80 70 60**
- Reporting damage to protected verges to the Wiltshire County Council Clarence Line  
Tel: **0800 23 23 23**.  
Website: [www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk)



Glowworm - Copyright David Godwin



Knoll Down



Common Hill, Ford



# Protected Road Verges in Wiltshire



Verge Protected for Wildlife sign



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## Verges Rich in Wildlife

Many road verges are home to a remarkable variety of wildlife. Some are remnants of ancient pastureland, rich in rare plants and insects. Other verges support ancient woodland flora with colourful displays of bluebells, wood anemones and wild garlic in the spring. These verges are now valuable miniature nature reserves and have been designated to receive special management so these rich habitats are not lost.

Bee orchid - Copyright English Nature



## Rare Species

Some of the protected road verges provide the last remaining refuges for rare species such as adonis blue butterflies and juniper. Fingered sedge is a nationally rare plant and is only found in two locations in Wiltshire, both of which are protected road verges. A verge near Chittoe supports the only tower mustard in the county, continually recorded there since 1670.

Adonis blue butterfly - Copyright English Nature



A420 East of Fovd (Protected Road Verges)



## Species-rich Communities

Roadside verges strewn with wild flowers, on chalk downland and limestone grassland, are one of the distinctive aspects of the Wiltshire countryside. Typical species-rich communities found on the chalk and limestone verges support pyramidal and bee orchids, field scabious, rock-rose and fairy flax. These verges also support rich invertebrate communities including glow-worms and many species of butterfly such as marbled white.

Verges on clay soils support a varied neutral meadow flora including species such as adder's tongue fern, nettle-leaved bell flower and Bath asparagus. Ancient woodland verges in the Cotswolds in particular support a spectacular ground flora in the spring including species such as solomon's seal and fly orchid.

## Roads, Roots and Refuges

### Ancient roads

Road verges are part of our history dating back thousands of years to stone age tracks. Drove roads and green lanes, with verges broad enough for grazing, were used to move sheep and cattle around the countryside.

Hawkeridge Link Road pond



### Safe Refuges and Corridors

Verges and their associated hedges and ditches provide valuable refuges for a range of birds, small mammals and insects. Verges are also important wildlife corridors for these animals to move through the countryside. More recently, road building has created areas which provide important new habitats and wildlife corridors. Such areas include permanent water bodies and wide verges with extensive planting of hedgerows, trees, shrubs and wildflowers.

Pyramidal orchid - Copyright Tony Couliss



### Deep Roots

Wild flower communities on some of our verges have been around for centuries and cannot be recreated once lost. Much of the wildflower-rich grassland that originally covered wide tracts of Wiltshire countryside has now been lost due to the impacts of modern intensive agriculture. The remnants of species-rich habitat on road verges are therefore valuable and it is important to conserve them for the long-term.

Marbled white on musk thistle



### Biodiversity Action Plan

The national decline of many of the important habitats and species listed in this leaflet means that they are included as priorities within the UK and Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plans. Conservation of Protected Road Verges thus contributes to national and local efforts to halt the decline in these habitats and species - see [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)

## Partners in Action

Wiltshire County Council, their contractor Mouchel Parkman and the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre work in partnership to protect and care for Protected Road Verges.

Partners in Action



Verge Protected for Wildlife sign



scrub, coarse grasses and coarse herbs such as nettle and bracken can become dominant. This will shade out the verge and means that more desirable species cannot compete. Management for protected road verges is aimed at controlling this invasion by regular cutting and removal.

### Protected Road Verge Monitors

There is a volunteer who monitors each verge, giving vital assistance to the Partners in Action. They keep a check on the condition of their verge and are responsible for monitoring the botanical/biological interest. Reports from all the monitors are collated annually and used as a basis for ongoing management of the verge.

Verge maintenance

