

ROAD VERGES HABITAT ACTION PLAN



Introduction



Flower-rich road verge: Stuart West

There are few semi-natural grasslands in the district of Hambleton, and in this intensively agricultural landscape road verges assume particular significance as representatives of semi-natural grassland and as wildlife corridors.

There are UK Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP's) for 'Lowland calcareous grassland' and 'Lowland dry acid grassland'. Other minor habitats associated with road verges include hedges, ditches and scrub.

Status

National

Grass verges are recognised as contributing to the grassland resource.

Regional

Neutral, calcareous and acidic grassland occurs in the region but has a scattered distribution and is never extensive.

Road verges, therefore, make an important contribution to the regional distribution of these grassland habitats.

Lowland calcareous grassland and Lowland dry acid grassland are characteristic habitats of the Vales of York and Mowbray Natural Area.

Local

The Hambleton audit gives the following totals for unimproved or semi-improved grassland:

- neutral - 709 hectares
- marshy – 16 hectares
- acidic – 4 hectares
- calcareous – 3 hectares

It is estimated that there are approximately 1,070km roads throughout the Action Plan area. Only about 25km within the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty have been surveyed for their botanical interest.

Verge ownership is complicated. Some are owned by North Yorkshire County Council, while others originated with Hedgerow Enclosure Acts and are in private ownership.

The existing management of verges lies largely with the highways authority, North Yorkshire County Council, which concentrates on cutting main road verges and minor roads where road safety is an issue. The county of North Yorkshire is divided into seven divisional offices each managing its own verge cutting programme. Most cutting is contracted out. North Yorkshire County Council also undertakes salt storage and spreading as appropriate.

Hambleton Priority Species

- Cowslip (*Primula veris*)
- Orchids (*Orchidaceae*)
- Tower mustard (*Turritis glabra*) (UK BAP)

Other Species

- Barn owl
- Common lizard
- Cinnabar moth

Status of Priority Species

The cowslip (*Primula veris*) is a locally valued plant. It is a reliable indicator of verges that may be of higher quality.

Several species of orchid grow on verges, including twayblade (*Listera ovata*), common spotted (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), early purple (*Orchis mascula*), northern marsh (*Dactylorhiza purpurella*) and pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*). There is also the possibility of rarer species such as fragrant (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and bee orchids (*Ophrys apifera*).

Tower mustard (*Turritis glabra*) is a UK BAP priority species that was last recorded in the district at Catton in 1972. It is now thought to be extinct in Northern England. It should be looked for during appropriately timed survey work.

Cowslip (*Primula veris*) and orchids will benefit from target 3. If tower mustard (*Turritis glabra*) is rediscovered (target 4) then targets and actions will be prepared and added to the BAP.

Requirements

- Road verge survey to assess resource.
- Targeted management of notable sites.
- Marking of boundaries of notable sites with permanent and visible pegs.
- Mosaics of long and short grass.
- Timing of cuts to benefit conservation.
- Cuttings to be left for a few days to enable seeds to ripen and fall.
- Cuttings to be removed to reduce fertility.
- Manage minor habitats associated with verges, including ditches, hedges and scrub.
- Mitigation after engineering works.
- Secure containers for salted grit.
- Ensuring that contractors have plans showing location of managed sites.
- Retention of common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) where populations of cinnabar moth occur.

