

Road Verges of Ecological Importance (RVEI) in Hampshire

Introduction

The objective of the Road Verges of Ecological Importance (RVEI) project is to identify the location and management requirements of ecologically important road verges in Hampshire, and for the HCC Highways Department and their contractors to implement the correct management.

Verges are often the only remaining semi-natural habitat in a farmed or urban landscape. This means they have had no artificial inputs of pesticides or fertilisers and have not been ploughed or re-seeded and can support a rich and varied range of plants. Many verges are remnants of ancient meadows and woodlands still supporting some of the species that have vanished elsewhere in the countryside. This botanical diversity in turn provides a haven for insects, butterflies, small mammals and a feeding ground for birds. Road Verges also provide important connecting links for wildlife, joining isolated areas of grassland with other valuable wildlife habitats enabling plants and animals to move as they need, to cope with disturbance and adapt to climate change. The most ecologically important verges within Hampshire have been included in the RVEI project.

Identifying RVEI sites

A wide range of data has been used to identify appropriate sites since the 1980's. This has included an ongoing botanical survey programme co-ordinated by Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, species lists from conservation organisations, individual botanists, members of the public and Town and Parish Councils.

There are no strict criteria for determining which sites are listed as special sites. In general terms the sites selected either:

- Support (or used to support) one or more 'notable' species (as defined in the Hampshire SINC criteria); or
- Support a good quality fragment of unimproved grassland habitat (no thresholds for indicators are defined but sites could fall below SINC quality and still qualify as special sites).

Some of these RVEI sites are afforded further protection as they are of sufficient interest to be designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). The SINC criteria can be found by clicking on this link: [SINC Criteria](#)

The only exception to this is where there is public interest or concern for a road verge, or the local community is aware of an interesting verge or involved in management. These sites have been added into the RVEI project on the basis of 'community interest'.

Management of RVEI sites

So that plants can survive and reproduce they need to remain uncut throughout their flowering and seeding seasons. Conventional cutting that takes place throughout the summer can be very destructive and when carried out in consecutive years can result in plant extinctions. This means that most RVEI verges will be cut in April or September instead of the routine management taking place.

This will help to ensure the survival of rare species and/or species rich grassland, as it avoids cutting during the flowering times of key species and allows the plants time to set seed (flowering times as defined in *A Wildflower Key* by Francis Rose¹).

Each RVEI site is allocated to one of four cutting regimes:

Cutting Regime
Routine cut the standard routine cutting regime outlined earlier is the most appropriate for maintaining their ecological interest.
Early cut only (<i>during the second half of April</i>) for verges with species, which would still be in flower in September.
Late cut only (<i>during the second half of September</i>) for verges with species, which would be in flower during the April cutting period.
Both cuts (<i>late April and late September</i>) for verges with species flowering and setting seed between May and mid September

Contact Details

For further information about verge cutting, verge signs or the RVEI project in general please contact :

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For further information on the plants found on a verge or to report important plant sightings please contact:

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On 01962 832324 or enquiries.hbic@hants.gov.uk

¹Rose, Francis (2006) *The Wildflower Key – How to identify wild flowers, trees and shrubs in Britain and Ireland (Revised and expanded edition)*, Penguin Book Limited, London