

**A valuable wildlife resource
for future generations to enjoy**

Who is involved?

The Special Roadside Verges project team includes Essex Wildlife Trust, Essex County Council, Essex Field Club and local museums services.

Essex County Council is responsible for all roadside verges. They make sure that the Special Verges are safe for road users and that their contractors manage them correctly. They also keep current maps and fund the additional cuts on the Special Verges.

Farmers and landowners can often provide invaluable knowledge about the history and management of a site. They can help by managing boundaries and adjacent land sensitively, and in some cases they are contracted to cut the verges to maintain their condition.



Common century

Contact details

For further information about the Special Roadside Verges in your area please contact:

Essex County Council 01245 437655
email: environmental.management@essexcc.gov.uk or visit www.essexcc.org.uk

For general information about verges and their wildlife, please contact:

Essex Wildlife Trust 01621 862980
email: admin@essexwt.org.uk or visit www.essexwt.org.uk

if you would like this leaflet in an alternative format please contact us.



Essex County Council



Special Roadside Verges in Essex

**Their wildlife
importance and
management**



Essex County Council



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Special Roadside Verges

Picture an important area for plants and wildlife, a nature reserve, a wood, a pond – would you think of a roadside verge? *Probably not.*

However with sensitive management, road verges can support a wide variety of threatened and declining species; some nationally rare plants such as sulphur clover, crested cow-wheat, lesser calaminth and cowslip are now mainly restricted to verge sites.

Since the 1970's over 100 sites covering more than 44km of roadside habitat in Essex have been designated as Special Roadside Verges. Current management of these has been designed to ensure rare plant species are conserved and a wider variety of plants are able to thrive. In turn this benefits insects, butterflies, small mammals and birds, providing them with food and shelter. The Verges are also important in linking otherwise isolated areas of habitats becoming 'wildlife corridors' allowing species to move between them.

Bee orchid

The overall result is both the conservation of rare species and an overall increase in the richness and variety of wildlife species or the *biodiversity* of Essex.

The areas of Special Verge are reviewed annually and potential additions are assessed according to various biodiversity and safety criteria. Once designated, Special Verges are marked with wooden posts with warning plaques and arrows. These inform contractors not to dump materials on these sections and not to carry out unauthorised management.

Managing the Verges

The Verges are important for their wild flowers and grasses and regular cutting maintains this, ensuring that scrub and woodland species do not become established.

In May or June a one metre cut of all verges must be carried out for road safety along the carriage edge, this cut may be wider where sight lines or junctions require it.

Special Verges also receive additional cuts at other times of the year timed to benefit particular plants. It is difficult but essential to get the management balance right for the wildlife and the verges are monitored to ensure that they are reaching their full potential.

The timing of the cutting is planned to maximise the opportunities for the plants and grasses to flower and set seed, at the same time meeting the needs of invertebrate populations on the site.

Verges with late flowering plants and species rich verges need to be cut in early spring, whilst those with early flowering plants such as cowslips benefit from a late autumn cut.

Some species such as sulphur clover and crested cow-wheat benefit from cuts in *both* March and September.

Marjoram



Common blue butterfly



Greater knapweed



What can you do?

To protect these precious habitats, we can all help:

- Ask about Special Verges in your area and let us know if you see any intentional or accidental damage to them
- Leave cutting to authorised contractors
- Avoid planting trees and non-native plants such as bulbs and garden plants
- Neighbouring landowners can keep hedges/scrub under control
- Become a Verge Rep and help to monitor the verges
- Ensure Special Roadside Verges are protected from unwanted dumping
- Encourage local councillors and MPs to protect special roadside verges
- Enjoy the beauty of natural wild flowers and grasses and encourage others to do the same, so that future generations can enjoy them too.

New sites

If you know of an area that could become a Special Verge please contact the Conservation Manager at Essex Wildlife Trust (contact details are given overleaf).

Essex County Council Highways and Transportation and the Special Roadside Verges project will decide if it should be designated based on the type and variety of species found there, balanced against the management which would be required and road safety considerations.



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