



Caru Gwenyn
Bee Friendly



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Case Studies

Woodland Skills Centre

Denbighshire Roadside Verge Wildflower Restoration Project

Background

Roadside verges have the potential to be an amazing environmental resource providing season-long flowers for pollinating insects; nesting habitat for bumblebees and solitary bees; cover for small mammals; habitat for many invertebrates; a link, specially when backed by a well-established and managed hedge, between other habitats such as woodlands, wetlands, water courses, heath and moorland.

Over the last few decades the regime for our local authority grass cutting of roadside verges has been for a first cut in May, before most wild flowers have had time to flower and set seed.

The situation has been exacerbated by the actions of some householders in “adopting” the verge outside their houses (part of the highway) and turning them into a lawn extension of their garden by repeated mowing.

Where some verges have been left uncut there have often been complaints to the local authority that they look untidy.



In the last few years there have been increasing efforts by various individuals and conservation organisations and also by officers of the Local Authority to change the way that roadside verges, particularly on the minor roads, are managed in the hope that, if the first cut is delayed, then there will be a recovery of native wildflowers.

This led to the creation of an informal group “Life on the Verge” involving officers of the Authority, the North Wales Wildlife Trust and interested individuals.





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As a result the Local Authority introduced a new management plan for roadside verges starting with a few selected areas and then covering the whole County.



This new programme involves leaving the verges on the minor roads uncut till August except where mowing is necessary for road safety.



Whereas some roadside verges have responded positively to the new mowing regimes which avoid the early cuts and allow plants to flower and set seed, some verges have been degraded to the point where it is unlikely that a wide range of flora will return.

These verges tend to be dominated by plants such as coarse grasses, docks, nettles, brambles, hemlock etc.



It was therefore suggested that there should be a programme to reintroduce plants and engage a wide range of people from the community.

The Local Authority had already identified a few verges which were still species rich and had designated these as Roadside Nature Reserves with their own management plans and it was decided to use seed from these for a reintroduction programme.



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The programme has the following elements:

1. Staff from North Wales Wildlife Trust and Denbighshire Countryside Services to continue to survey roadside verges to establish the areas which have good flora and which could be suitable for seed harvesting.
2. Volunteer groups under the direction of staff from the North Wales Wildlife Trust and Denbighshire Countryside Services collect seed at the appropriate times. All seed to be marked with species, site and date.
3. Seed to be sent to the Woodland Skills Centre who will store it appropriately.
4. Woodland Skills Centre to sow the seed at the correct time in seed trays in their polytunnel and, once the plants are of a suitable size, to plant them on into plugs, cells or pots.
5. Once the plants are established they will be made available free of charge to local schools, community councils, community groups etc.
6. These groups will grow on the plants and seek to collect seed and grow more plants or pass on the seed to other groups.
7. These groups will then liaise with the Highways Department and other bodies to determine where the plants could be planted out and then plant them.

Outcomes:

1. To reintroduce plants onto local roadside verges using locally collected seed.
2. To involve the local community as much as possible through: NWWT volunteers collecting seed; adults with a range of disabilities who work at the Woodland Skills Centre sowing seeds and looking after the plants; schools and community groups taking the plants to grow on; local communities adopting verges in their area and reintroducing the wildflowers.

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