

# Notified Road Verges in Nottinghamshire



**Nottinghamshire  
County Council**

## Introduction

The Notified Road Verge (NRV) scheme is run by Nottinghamshire County Council, and has been in existence since 1979. The scheme was introduced in recognition of the fact that verges have considerable potential for nature conservation. The aim of the NRV scheme is to manage some of our best verges in a favourable way, so as to maintain their interest and contribute to the biodiversity resource of the county.

## Why bother with verges?

Roadside verges occupy a significant area of the UK, extending to approximately 212,220ha. Historically, and until as recently as the 1960s, many verges were cut for hay, which served to maintain them as species-rich grasslands, and kept scrub and coarse grasses in check.

Nowadays, this traditional management no longer occurs, largely a result of economic considerations, and modern machinery is used to manage roadside verges. Rural verges are maintained by regular but infrequent cutting, primarily for road safety and amenity reasons. Cutting times are often at odds with the wildlife interest of verges, and cuttings are rarely removed, leaving a thick layer of mulch that smothers the flora beneath and can increase the nutrient status of the soil, favouring coarse and aggressive species. In some cases sections of verge are not cut at all, allowing the development of scrub.

As a result, the botanical quality of many verges has declined, and coarse grasses such as false oat-grass and tall herbs such as cow parsley, hogweed, creeping thistle and nettle, dominate. However, road verges represent the last remnants of unimproved semi-natural grasslands in our otherwise intensively farmed countryside, and a number do still retain important grassland communities, whilst some hold scarce or rare species that struggle to survive elsewhere.

In addition to plants, roadside verges provide habitat for mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, and invertebrates, including butterflies. They can also serve as a link between habitats that might otherwise be isolated, potentially allowing species to migrate and colonise, something that is increasingly important in the face of climate change.

## The Notified Road Verge scheme

As of August 2007, the total number of verges in the scheme stood at 24, although it is hoped that this number will be increased in the next few years. They are not evenly distributed across the county – Newark and Sherwood District has 16, Bassetlaw District holds four, and Rushcliffe Borough also has four.

The sites that have been selected as NRVs represent some of the best verges in the county. They either have a diverse or representative botanical community, or hold species that are generally very rare in the county. This means that the verges vary considerably in species

content and size. As an example, Colston Bassett Hose Lane NRV has had 90 plant species recorded from it although none of these are particularly rare or notable. In contrast, the Collingham Westfield Lane NRV holds fewer than 20 species, but this small number includes wild clary, a county rarity found at fewer than 10 other sites in Nottinghamshire. Similarly, the verges vary considerably in size. The largest, Colston Bassett, Hose Lane NRV, extends to 8235m<sup>2</sup>, whilst the smallest, Collingham, Westfield Lane NRV, covers just 168m<sup>2</sup>.

Most NRVs are also covered by a non-statutory county-level designation as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, or SINCs, which formally recognises their nature conservation value. In addition, three NRVs make up part of larger Sites of Special Scientific Interest (a national designation that provides these sites with legal protection). These are the verges at Eaton and Gamston, Ollerton Assarts at Budby, and the verges at Spalford Warren both of which are components of larger SSSIs.

## **Management**

NRVs are managed in isolation from the rest of the road verge network. They are marked on the ground by wooden finger posts at each end, which helps to ensure that they do not receive a standard cut. Instead, each receives a cut designed to maintain the nature conservation interest of the verge. Most are mown in September, whilst the SSSI verges at Eaton & Gamston get two cuts, one in July and a second in September (although from 2006 the July cut will be moved forward to March).

In all cases, it is of key importance that all the cuttings are removed, to prevent a build up of thatch and nutrients, which would favour coarse grasses at the expense of finer herbs. To this end, the majority of the verges are cut using a pedestrian mower and baler owned by the Sherwood Forest Trust. It is worth noting that up until 1996, all verges were cut twice a year, but the arisings were left in situ. This led to a build up of thatch and nutrients, and caused the deterioration of many of the verges. The new regime, whilst not ideal, is a significant improvement. If resources were available, however, it is likely that some of the verges, especially on richer soils, would be given a second, earlier cut, either in early spring or in late summer.

## **Threats to NRVs**

There are a number of threats to the NRV network.

1. Inappropriate management - despite NRV status, some of the verges are occasionally mismanaged. This has normally occurred due to a lack of awareness, which we are seeking to address. There is also the problem of private individuals treating verges as extensions of their gardens, and mowing them accordingly, as well as dumping garden waste into them.
2. Road maintenance – the digging of ditches, trenches, drainage grips, and installation of signs can damage verges. There are also problems relating to salt spray from gritting, which changes the vegetation.
3. Road upgrading - as an example, the Markham Moor NRV was recently lost as part of the A1 upgrading works (although it was translocated to an adjacent area).

## **How you can help**

Another problem with the scheme being aware of what is happening on 24 widely scattered sites. This is where we need your help. Do you live near, or regularly pass, one of the NRVs? We are looking for a representative to keep an eye on each NRV, and inform us of any mismanagement of the verges. There may also be some role with regards to monitoring the species found in the verges. If you think you might be able to help, or would like further

information on the scheme or one of the NRVs, then please contact the Senior Nature Conservation Officer on 0115 977 4557, or email [nick.crouch@nottscc.gov.uk](mailto:nick.crouch@nottscc.gov.uk).

## Sites

- **Apleyhead NRV** (SK646773)

Verges backed by mixed plantation woodland, supporting unimproved neutral grasslands. **Common knapweed** and **sweet-vernal grass** are frequent, with locally rare sandland species such as **betony** and **basil thyme**. Areas of bare sand, with populations of **sheep's sorrel** occur adjacent to the woodland boundary. A distinctive spray zone community occurs on the roadside, with abundant **scurvy-grass** and **buck's-horn plantain** also present. The verge is regularly mown for visibility.

- **Gamston and Eaton SSSI NRV** (SK726771)

These verges are statutorily designated and are botanically amongst the richest in the county. The sward varies in character, some areas being dominated by **cock's-foot** and **false oat-grass**, others by **sheep's fescue** or **tor-grass**. The fescue and tor-grass swards have developed calcareous plant communities containing herbs such as **saw-wort**, **common knapweed**, **bird's-foot trefoil**, **pepper-saxifrage**, **dyer's greenweed**, **rock-rose** (not recorded in recent years), **great burnet-saxifrage**, **wild liquorice** and **common milkwort**. **Twayblade**, **greater butterfly** and **common spotted orchids** are also present. Other parts of the site are best treated as woodland edge, containing **dog's mercury**. The site suffers from disturbance and damage in places (especially fly-tipping), as well as encroachment by **bramble**.

- **Mattersey NRV** (SK690902)

A grassy verge between the road and pathway, disturbed in places, on keuper marl on the top of the hill, and on sand lower down. Notable species previously recorded include **viper's bugloss**, **hoary cinquefoil** and **sheep's-bit** (the latter two not recently recorded). **Greater knapweed** occurs in several places.

- **Upton NRV** (SK742766)

The sward supports a base-rich, well drained grassland with characteristic species including **cowslip**, **burnet-saxifrage**, and at the western end, **tor-grass**, as well as abundant **meadowsweet** and **meadow vetchling**.

- **Bleasby NRV** (SK703505)

Wide grass verges on the keuper marls, with a tall grass/herb community that may reflect the presence of permanent hayfields in the area prior to agricultural intensification. Species present include **Lady's bedstraw**, **common knapweed**, **greater burnet-saxifrage**, **agrimony** and **meadow vetchling**.

- **Budby A616 NRV** (SK628688)

A short section of acid grassland, dominated in places by **bracken**. The western end is more diverse, with **Lady's bedstraw**, **common knapweed** and **perforate St-John's wort**.

- **Budby Ollerton Assarts NRV** (SK627688)

An interesting area with a high degree of heterogeneity across the site, ranging from sparse acid grassland/grass heath, to denser (neutral?) grassland in places. The central and western areas seem to have the highest species diversity, with the northern section adjacent to the A616 being enriched and species poor. The site is particularly notable for the presence of **petty whin**, although this species is struggling at the site. Work was undertaken at the end of 2006 to facilitate the spread of heathland habitat at the site, through the removal of enriched soils on the site of a small car park, and the spreading of sand won as part of a nearby road scheme. This area was then treated with heather brush.

- **Collingham Westfield Lane NRV** (SK820616)

A narrow south facing bank on local light soils with a characteristic flora including a strong colony of county rare **wild clary** and local **wild onion** and **black horehound**.

- **Collingham Wheatley Hill NRV** (SK834601)

Two verges with a flora characteristic of neutral clays. Unimproved with a relic meadow flora including a strong population of **cowslips**, **greater burnet-saxifrage** and **wood sedge**.

- **Girton NRV** (SK827671)

A long verge of mixed quality, with dense, rank vegetation in places, and sparser grassland in others. Subject to mismanagement outside adjacent properties. A diverse meadow flora on calcareous clays includes **black horehound**, **common knapweed**, **yellow rattle**, **Lady's bedstraw**, **hare's-foot clover**, **harebell**, and notably, **sheep's-bit** (a county-rare species found at the northern end).

- **Halam NRV** (SK661545)

An excellent verge with a diverse meadow flora on calcareous clays. Species present include **common spotted** and **pyramidal orchid**, **common twayblade**, **yellow rattle**, **adderstongue fern** (not recently recorded), **common knapweed**, **greater burnet-saxifrage** and **pepper-saxifrage**.

- **Halloughton NRV** (SK95513)

A species rich verge on the keuper marls, with a markedly calcareous flora and the salt tolerant grass **reflexed saltmarsh grass** by the road. Other species present include **agrimony**, **lady's bedstraw**, **greater burnet-saxifrage**, **meadow vetchling**, **field scabious** and **common knapweed**. Species rich old hedgerows with many native shrubs back the wide verges.

- **Harby NRV** (SK885728)

A species-rich verge, although its interest appears to be declining. **Great burnet**, **Lady's bedstraw**, **agrimony**, **common knapweed**, **meadow vetchling** and **meadowsweet** are present.

- **Kneesall NRV** (SK723643)

An area of damp, species-rich verge with abundant forbs in the sward. The northern part is similar to Laxton NRV, with frequent **meadowsweet**, whilst the southern section is less dominated by tall vegetation, with populations of **spiny restharrow**, **pepper-saxifrage**, **burnet-saxifrage**, **Lady's bedstraw**, **tufted vetch** and **red bartsia**.

- **Laxton NRV** (SK722648)

A varied section of verge reflecting the proximity of two ancient woodlands. Consequently, parts of the verge contain woodland species such as **dog's mercury** and **enchanter's nightshade**. Elsewhere, **meadowsweet** is abundant, and vegetation growth is dense, but **common knapweed**, **meadow vetchling**, **agrimony** and **early purple orchid** can be found.

- **South Clifton NRV** (SK830 698)

A verge in a road cutting with an apparently markedly calcareous association. Species present include **wild onion**, **burnet-saxifrage**, **common** and **greater knapweed**, **field scabious** and **wild liquorice**.

- **Spalford 1 NRV** (SK831689)

Verges on light soils of the blown sand supporting a large colony of county-rare **star-of-Bethlehem**. However, this verge appears to have been inappropriately managed in recent years, and the status of all species at the site is unknown. **Wild liquorice** and **hare's-foot clover** can still be found.

- **Spalford 2 NRV** (SK829686)

A wide verge with some elements characteristic of the blown sand, such as **hare's-foot clover**, **harebell**, **sand spurrey** and **wild onion**, whilst others are suggestive of the Trentside meadow flora (developed on neutral alluvium), with **Lady's bedstraw**, **meadow vetchling** and **common knapweed** present. It is thus an interesting intermediate type and a refuge for meadow flora now marginalised in this area.

- **Spalford 3 NRV** (SK828681)

A wide verge grass verge on the north west edge of Spalford Warren SSSI. Notable for a range of ruderal species, including **common whitlow-grass**, as well as **wild onion**. However, increasingly **bracken** dominated, and losing its interest – careful management works are required to rectify this.

- **Spalford Warren NRV** (SK827678)

A verge adjacent to Spalford Warren SSSI, typical of the blown sand flora. County-rare **sand sedge** is present. **Bur chervil** and **harebell** can also be found. The majority of this verge is now managed by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust as part of their Spalford Warren reserve.

- **Colston Bassett Hose Lane NRV** (SK714315)

Verges of varied sward type with a rich unimproved meadow flora. The north west section has a wet ditch (**great willowherb** is abundant) with **meadowsweet** and **tufted hair-grass** suggesting waterlogged conditions. The mid- and southern verges have a mesotrophic flora suggestive of drier conditions. Flora includes **spiny restharrow** and **yellow rattle**. Backed by rich hedges with large oak and ash trees.

- **Colston Bassett Langar Lane NRV** (SK713340)

A section of verge backed by a tall-grown species-rich hedge. A large population of **common knapweed** and **agrimony** is present. Amongst other frequent herbs are **spiny restharrow**, **ribwort plantain** and **red clover**, and a few **cowslips**.

- **Hickling NRV** (SK678286)

A wide verge with a tussocky sward and a relic meadow flora characteristic of neutral clays. It is unimproved and backed by a dry ditch and a cut, species rich hedge with trees. Poached by horses – this seems to have a good effect, breaking up the thatch and allowing herbs (notably **yellow rattle** and **meadow buttercup**) to produce many seedlings.

- **Widmerpool NRV** (SK633282)

Notable calcareous verges where a range of grasses occur, including **tor grass**, **rough meadow-grass**, **false oat-grass** and occasionally **crested dogstail**. The bank section contains **cowslip** and **salad burnet**.