

Road verges are one of the most important, best loved and frequently viewed habitats in the country...

So why are they still being destroyed?

Immediate release

A new Plantlife study shows that Britain's road verges are home to 703 species of wild plants, more than in any other part of our landscape, and 87 of them are either threatened with extinction or heading that way. In addition, 88% of these wild plants provide nectar and pollen for bees and other insects, making road verges essential refuges for insect life; bird's-foot trefoil alone is a food plant for 132 species of insect.

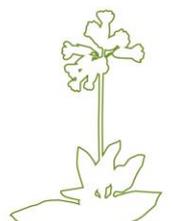
In addition, 21 of the 25 Nation's Favourite Wildflowers grow on road verges. From cowslips and bluebells in spring to swathes of cow parsley and ox-eye daisies in early summer, our verges are home to most of the 25 favourite wild flowers as voted for by the public. And with 30 million drivers in the UK, they're the most frequently viewed habitat too, providing many people with their only regular daily contact with nature.

But in much of Britain road verges are still being needlessly cut down in full flower threatening the wildflowers and the wildlife that depend on them. Many councils have already started cutting verges - much too early in the year for flowers to be able set seed, and greatly reducing one of the most important food banks for our ailing bees and other pollinators.

Dr Trevor Dines, Plantlife's Botanical Specialist, explains, "Over 97% of meadows have been destroyed in England since the 1930s. In many areas, rural road verges are the last remaining stretches of natural habitat for our wildlife. Road safety is the absolute priority, but we know that verges can be managed better for wildlife whilst remaining safe for motorists. This means adopting some simple changes to management - like a delay in cutting to allow seed to be set - so that wildflowers can thrive".

Plantlife has produced new management guidelines and is urging the public to sign a petition asking local councils to adopt them. Some councils are leading the way. Trials in Dorset, for example, are investigating how to combat the over-vigorous growth of grass on fertile verges (which is both detrimental to wildflowers and obscures driver sight-lines), by stripping turf, using semi-parasitic yellow rattle to stunt grass growth and even grazing verges with sheep. Plantlife is helping to showcase the work of councils like Dorset to show others that it can be done. Our guidelines are being currently being applied to 11,700 km of verge covering 2,300 hectares of verges - that's equivalent to 2.5 times the area of remaining upland hay meadow in the UK - and with the public's support we can do even more.

Dr Dines adds, "If we just give them a chance, wildflowers can return. Meadow crane's-bill was once widespread in meadows - hence its name - but is now more commonly found on road verges. It spreads readily when cutting is delayed and it's allowed to set seed. Maybe it's time to change its name to "verge crane's-bill".



For more information and for stunning images, please contact:

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Notes

1. **Plantlife** is the organisation speaking up for the nation's wild plants. We work hard to protect wild plants on the ground and to build understanding of the vital role they play in everyone's lives. Plantlife carries out practical conservation work across the UK, manages nature reserves, influences policy and legislation, runs events and activities that connect people with their local wild plants and works with others to promote the conservation of wild plants for the benefit of all.
2. Visit www.plantlife.org.uk/roadvergecampaign to sign the petition.

