



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about ROADSIDE VEGETATION



We hope you notice and appreciate the vegetation along roadside verges that adds much to the overall vision of the countryside. The species present will vary throughout the seasons and reflect the underlying geology and cutting regime of a particular stretch of verge. For road safety reasons, some verges are close-mown but these may be speckled with the flower heads of Common Daisy, Dandelion and other species which thrive under such treatment. On busier roads, often only the first metre is cut on a regular basis, allowing taller wild flowers to survive further back.

During early summer our verges are dominated by swathes of the white frothy flowers of Cow Parsley (as in the photo above) or the chunkier white flowers of Hogweed. Both are members of the Carrot family and, perhaps surprisingly, thrive on the extra nutrients released by car exhausts. Although many species of insects visit their flowers, their tendency to shade out smaller plants reduces the overall variety of wayside flowers and potential food for other insects. Similarly, increased roadside nutrient levels encourage Docks and Stinging Nettles which also overshadow delicate species including blue-flowered Speedwells.

Splashes of pink are provided by clumps of Red Campion; and blue or purple by Vetches and several species of Geranium. Thistles and scarlet Poppies appear where bare soil is exposed.

The presence of a large expanse of Ox-eye daisy, with its white petals and yellow centre, is usually due to its inclusion in seed mixes sown alongside newer roads.

Roadside hedgerows seem to burst into life in springtime, first with the white blossom of the blackthorn whose flowers appear before the leaves. Slightly later, the hawthorn's white blossom appears after its leaves. Hopefully, there will be sufficient insects to pollinate the blackthorn's flowers to enable a good crop of sloes later on.

A number of verges have been identified as Special Roadside Verges or Roadside Nature Reserves. These are recognized for their floristic diversity or for the presence of rare species. The plants in these roadside reserves are surveyed annually by volunteers from the county Wildlife Trusts.

Roadside Nature Reserves are marked with a small sign like the one pictured here.



Please also see our articles on Woodland and on Trees and hedgerows.

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Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What's On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.