



# The Importance of Transport Corridors for Pollinators

Transport corridors include roads, railways, canals and cycle paths. The range of pollinator-friendly habitats they can provide within the 'soft estate' (e.g. road verges, railway edge land and canal towpaths) can be impressive, even within a short stretch of a single corridor.

## How Pollinators Use Transport Corridors

- Flower visiting—Transport corridors can provide a good variety and high local density of flowers between spring and autumn, providing nectar and pollen for many species. These flowers can also serve pollinators that don't breed on site. The presence of spring-blossoming shrubs and other species at field margins can substantially increase the quantity and diversity of pollinators in the landscape and improve the resilience of their populations.
- Larval development—Transport corridors can provide a variety of places for pollinators to reproduce and supports many larval food plants.
- Overwintering—Farmland often supports dense vegetation which provides places for a variety of pollinators to overwinter.
- As a wildlife corridor— Flower rich transport corridors can play an important role in connecting areas of semi-natural habitats. Transport corridors can also form part of a wider landscape-scale habitat mosaic.



## Some Scarce Pollinators Known to Occur in Transport Corridors

Bees: Big headed mining bee (*Andrena bucephala*), the great yellow bumblebee (*Bombus distinguendus*)

Butterflies: Adonis blue, Brown hairstreak, Chalkhill blue, Dingy skipper, Duke of Burgundy, Grizzled skipper,

Flies: Long horned general (*Stratiomys longicornis*)

## Managing Grassland Transport Corridors for Pollinators

- Avoid pictorial roadside meadows—These can attract many generalist pollinators and prettify the environment, however pollinator diversity is often higher under more semi-natural flowery conditions, and there are also risks associated with introducing non-native plants or foreign provenance strains of native plants.
- Cutting regimes should attempt to find a balance between safety, amenity and the needs of pollinators/biodiversity. Any cutting before September can negatively impact pollinator foraging. Along wider road verges and towpaths, it is usually possible to employ differential cutting regimes that ensure that whilst some areas may be regularly mown others areas can be cut once per year or even left uncut on cycles of several years to allow some scrub and bramble development and diversify the vegetation structure.

### The Important Features of Transport Corridors and their Management

- Grassland and tall herb — The best verges are typically those with a broad swathe of abundant and diverse flowering plants and a long-flowering season. Less fertile soils often produce high quality habitat for pollinators from the natural seed bank.
- Hedgerows—Hedges provide food and shelter for a wide variety of pollinator species. Try to rotate the cutting of individual hedges on a 3+ year basis, to allow some stretches to produce more blossom and include a variety of woody species within a hedgerow.
- Scrub and woodland— Like hedges, these are a major source of blossom, shelter, shade etc. If unmanaged, it can displace valuable earlier successional habitats but as a managed component it can be extremely valuable. Rotational management is the best approach, ensuring that a variety of scrub species are encouraged to blossom each year.
- Larger trees and shrubs—These are a strong feature of urban streets in particular and typically feature a mix of native and exotic species, many of which produce flowers attractive to pollinators.
- Wet features—Canals and balancing pools with marginal swamp, also road or rail-side ditches, can provide a valuable source of resources for pollinators.



- Topography—Transport corridors set within cuttings or raised on embankment often offer a more substantial offer for pollinators than those which occur on the flat, and often support better quality semi-natural habitats.
- Invasive plants, shrubs and trees—Transport corridors are particularly prone to colonisation by invasive non-native plant, shrub and tree species. Some of these plants are well naturalised and can be much used by pollinators and may even improve the floweriness of a transport corridor. Problems arise when alien plants become over-dominant and out-compete other valuable flowers that pollinators need.

### Creating new pollinator-friendly corridors

- Low quality soil is best— high fertility will not sustain the long-term presence of high quality grassland,
- Use local provenance seeds and green hay where possible. However, when in chalk, limestone or sandy areas, it is strongly recommended that seed mixes and top soil are avoided and natural regeneration is encouraged. This can result in the formation of high quality flowery grassland that reflects the geographic and ecological context of the site.
- If a surplus of low fertility spoil is available during a major project, it is worth capping any fertile former agricultural soils and other patches of ground with such spoil and allowing natural regeneration. This can be a cheap and easy way of creating new areas of high quality semi-natural grassland that is easy to manage.



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