

Keep Wildlife ON the roads

Case Record



Location Highways Maintenance Area 19, Cumbria

Client Highways Agency

Main Contractor Carillion Highways Maintenance

A Biodiversity Action Plan for the country's motorways, trunk roads and associated landholdings is currently being prepared by staff at the Highways Agency. The document will provide guidance for companies, like Carillion, contracted to ensure the upkeep of the areas. Readers could be forgiven for wondering what this might have to do with biodiversity conservation, but implications for wildlife are surprisingly wide.

Environmental Initiatives

Biodiversity Part of the Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan

Donated road signs for the Osprey Watch Site.

Roads have many direct and indirect impacts on a broad range of species. Verges sown with wildflower mixes and cut on a reduced rotation can increase the diversity of flora. This encourages more diverse invertebrate fauna to use the verges and forms the basis of a much richer, more complex food chain.

Kestrels are a familiar sight hovering above roadside verges in search of their small mammal prey; a sure sign that the grassland is supporting a healthy ecosystem. Trees and hedgerows can be planted and managed in a sympathetic manner, not just to directly increase diversity, but to channel species out of the path of traffic. For example deflecting barn owls over the top of vehicles and reducing road kills. Other means of avoiding conflicts between animals and vehicles can also be considered; special tunnels under the carriageway for amphibians such as the rare natterjack toad or treetop rope bridges for red squirrels between blocks of woodland separated by busy roads. Installing eye-catching signs in wildlife accident blackspots to encourage motorists to slow down and watch out for creatures crossing the road.

Where roads are crossed by bridges or cross other roads the structures involved often provide nesting and roosting sites for birds and bats.

Workers carrying out essential repairs on bridges need to be aware of the legal constraints on disturbing nesting birds and roosting bats and should have access to guidance and practical advice on timing of work and on who to consult when in doubt about the impacts of their work.

Drainage from road surfaces can have direct impacts on water and soil quality on adjacent land, but can also, if properly planned and managed create wildlife opportunities. Where there is a likelihood of contamination from petrol, oil or road salt, channelling the flow through a reedbed can greatly improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat. Settling ponds created primarily to control storm water runoff from roads can also be designed with varying wildlife friendly depths and contours and planted with aquatic, emergent and marginal native plant species.

The Biodiversity Project, through its extensive partnerships, can work with willing companies like Carillion, Mouchel and organisations like the Highways Agency to further conservation objectives. The Biodiversity Project Officer from the Highways Agency has been invited to speak to company staff to raise awareness of biodiversity issues across all levels within Carillion. To convince managers alone of the value of such involvement, not just for wildlife but also for the company, is not sufficient. The person at the "sharp end" of company activities needs to fully appreciate why such an approach to the job is important. There is much to be gained, for all concerned, from a co-operative approach to biodiversity conservation.

See also - "Area 19 assist with Biodiversity" & "Area 19 Ospreys" case record for further information.