

Management and restoration of verges along A19



Durham Wildlife Trust has been working with Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd. on the section of the A19 that runs through Durham, Sunderland and South Tyneside. McAlpine operate the contract to manage this stretch of the A19.

The A19 in this area cuts through much of the magnesian limestone escarpment. As a result, many SSSI's and Local Wildlife Sites are threatened by the A19 network infrastructure.

These sites are important for the rare calcareous grassland habitats typically found on magnesian limestone which support a range of rare or threatened flora and invertebrates. Many of the short cut verges, though dominated by short cut false-oat grass, give opportunity to species such as eye-bright and fairy flax.

However, impacts arising from the A19 network threaten these habitats, such as the influence of salt from application of grit to the road surface which has resulted in the presence of more coastal species along the road verges.

Around 4 years ago, Durham Wildlife Trust was approached to provide some advice to McAlpine on how best to manage the verge network for its grassland interest.

This work initially involved supplying locally harvested seed to McAlpine's to restore some grassland areas, but over the past two years the Trust has worked as independent auditors to review the work undertaken by McAlpine and provide recommendations for further restoration.

McAlpine continues its commitment to restore areas of mag-lime grassland along the A19 and the partnership with Durham Wildlife Trust sees key areas of the A19 network being linked up. Current management of the grassland habitats along the network include:

- Regular mowing of a 1-metre grassland strip along the kerb/road edge.
- Areas with identified grassland interest are mown annually in the autumn. The arisings are then removed and composted in adjoining woodland and scrub.
- Areas of ranker grassland are flailed to remove ranker species.
- Areas of scrub have been removed where there is encroachment over areas of grassland interest.

The grass cutting has also helped create habitat piles and animal refuges. These might look like an untidy stack of branches but make excellent homes for a diverse range of small animals.

"We are pleased to be working in partnership on a scheme bringing benefits to such a nationally important habitat as the Magnesian Limestone grassland.

This project has connected and restored valuable wildlife sites and unearthed what is a truly special resource of plants and insects which are benefiting under Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd. and Highways England's stewardship."

Mark Dinning, Head of Conservation,
from Durham Wildlife Trust

To find out more about this project,
contact Mark Dinning, Head of
Conservation. Durham Wildlife Trust
mdinning@durhamwt.co.uk

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England

