



Life on the Verge - Biosphere Phase 2 Project Report July 2020

Background in brief

The Life on the Verge—Biosphere project (2016 to 2020) has been hosted by the Tarka Country Trust (TCT) in the area of North Devon known as the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Project coordination took place with 1.5 days a week of staff time and support from a steering group made up of TCT, North Devon AONB, Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC) and Devon County Council (DCC).

Phase 1: Starting in October 2016 with funding totalling £54,800, from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, North Devon Sustainable Development Fund and North Devon Biosphere, this three year trail project's aim was to establish a network of communities across the region who would identify, adopt and manage their roadside verges for the benefit of wildlife and people.

Phase 2: In November 2019 the project benefitted from a further £8,000 of funding from the Garfield Weston Foundation and the Tarka Country Trust, extending the project for a further nine months.

Gifts in kind and volunteer support

During phase 2, the project has received professional help and support from; Northam Burrows Rangers, Tarka Trail Staff, Local Environment Agency Team, DBRC and DCC. The estimated value of the support received is £2,350.

Likewise, volunteers have contributed to the success of phase 2, with 54 days of voluntary time donated to helping wildflower verges. The value of this time is estimated to be worth £2,310.

The 7 new groups that have been supported through phase 2 have been independently granted, or raised funds, to develop wildflower verges. The total raised by these groups is £3,185.

Life on the Verge—Biosphere project 2016 to 2020	
Total Grants	£62,800
Total gifts in kind	£4,960
Total volunteer days	206



Project area—North Devon Biosphere Reserve



Environment Agency help out for a day using specialist equipment to cut the steep bank at Fremington Cutting (Jan 2020).



Hard working volunteers rake-up and remove the cuttings at Fremington (Jan. 2020)



When plans were made to extend the Life on the Verge - Biosphere project the aim was to fund an additional two years of project time. Funding was secured from the Garfield Weston Foundation and the TCT which enabled the project to enter phase 2 and cover 9 months project work but not the 2 years originally hoped for. **The idea behind phase 2 was for two purposes:**

Purpose 1: Securing the future of verge management by existing community groups

During the evaluation process of phase 1 of the project it was clear that communities already engaged in the project would benefit from extended support to embed existing practices in the management of their local verges—many of these communities had only been through the cycle of verge management once and it was felt that they needed support and reassurance to ensure they could commit and continue these practices independently in the future.

Phase 2 Achievements—November 2019 to July 2020

15 out of the 16 phase 1 communities have continued to receive support during phase 2. All these groups have received project sign posts to install on their verges. 12 of these communities have ensured the autumn and winter management tasks have taken place to preserve wildflowers. During this phase, two of these groups identified and secured the management of additional wildflower verges. Monitoring and recording of the wildflowers will continue with volunteers submitting all future species records to DBRC so that they can be stored on the national database.

Purpose 2: To engage additional communities

As often occurs with three year projects, during the final year of phase 1 the project was in full flow with new groups making enquiries about becoming involved. It was felt that there would be great benefit to extending the life of the project to support these communities so they could manage their local verges for wildlife.

Phase 2 Achievements—November 2019 to July 2020

7 new groups have consolidated plans to manage their verges for wildflowers, plus one (Tawstock) wishing to start their plans in autumn 2020.

1. Love-Braunton volunteers have committed to a new stretch of verge in Velator Road with plans to add other verges over time. They have secured funding to help them with this project and will work alongside the Parish Council who have already committed to managing verges in the area for wildlife. Due to Covid-19 this group have delayed the start of their management tasks and seed sowing to autumn 2020.
2. Winkleigh community have identified a stretch of rural road verge that they will continue to monitor, they are actively promoting management of the village verges for wildflowers.



Northam Special Verge (Nov. 2019). This site is cut by the local Northam Burrows Rangers and raked-off and cleared by Life on the Verge—Biosphere volunteers.



May 2020, the results after 3 years of wildflower management has bought this verge back to its former beauty

A local resident commented: "I live in Westward Ho! I love seeing this lovely display when I plod up the hill on my bicycle. THANK YOU GUYS FOR YOUR HARD WORK YOU HAVE DONE A GRAND JOB!"



The new community group in South Molton take their first steps in managing a verge for wildflowers (March 2020).



3. Bideford—East-the-Water in Bloom has identified 4 verges that they will develop for wildflower. To help with this they have secured additional funding for wildflower seed and will work with the wider community to raise awareness of their wildflower project. Due to Covid-19 this group were unable to complete their spring seed sowing plans, this task will now take place in autumn 2020.
4. Dolton - here one verge, in the centre of the village, was successfully sown with wildflower seed in autumn 2019. Signage has been installed to raise awareness of this project. A second verge has been identified as a possible wildflower site but permission needs to be gained from the local housing organisation and residents before action is taken.
5. South Molton ‘Grace for Pollinators’ is a new volunteer group wishing to make a difference for wildlife in and around the Town. They have identified several verges with the potential to be managed for wildlife and have been working with the local council, honey farm and residents to raise awareness of verges as wildflowers habitats. In March 2020 they cut and cleared their first verge and sowed wildflower seed.
6. Buckland Filleigh is a very rural community where one stretch of verge has been managed for wildflowers with the cut and rake technique.
7. Berrynarbor in Bloom—this active group have raised funds for wildflower seed and plug plants, having identified a space suitable for planting and sowing their plans were put on hold due to the early drought and then Covid-19. They have spent the summer growing on the wildflower plug plants and plan to transfer them out with the seed in autumn 2020. They will manage their site from that point onwards for the wildflowers as well as raise awareness within their community of the value of wildflower verges.



Dolton wildflower verge with information sign (May 2020).

Sown with wildflower seed in autumn 2019.

A volunteer said “I have gained and learnt so much through my involvement. I would certainly like to continue with the surveying. Thank you very much indeed for all your help, organising and guidance.”



Volunteers in South Molton learn how to use the scythes. (March 2020)



Undergraduate student from Petroc College learn how to use and maintain various hand tools and how to install posts at an Instow verge work party. (Jan 2020)

Achieving our goals

During phase 2, verge management tasks took place across the region with the project coordinator overseeing tasks at Northam, Fremington, Instow and South Molton. As a result of these work tasks an additional 28 volunteers have become involved with the project. Many of them receiving training and learning new skills, all of them gaining an understanding of the processes involved with verge management and a raised awareness about wildlife verges.

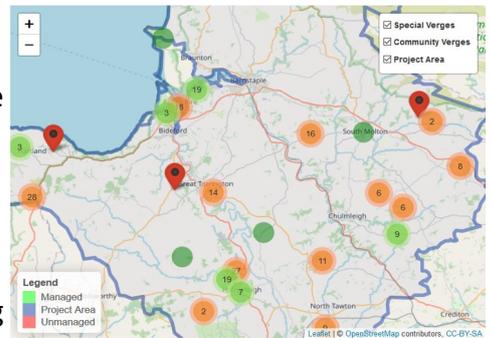
Life on the Verge—Biosphere project 2016 to 2020

Communities supported by the project	22
Number of community verges managed for wildlife	30
Number of volunteers actively involved with the project	161

Surveys and Signage

Throughout the project, volunteers have carried out wildflower surveys with a focus on species used as indicators of good habitat. During phase 2, DBRC have collated this data on a visual map. One of the legacies of this project will be the baseline of information gathered about roadside verges and their botanical diversity (little information was previously available for this type of habitat). Communities continuing to manage their wildflowers verges will be able to monitor the improvements being made by resurveying and comparing results.

Each of the 16 designated Special Verges in the Biosphere Reserve have now been re-signed. This along with the community verge signs has made a real impact, both passers by and verge cutting contractors are made aware that these verges are managed for wildlife.



Using wildflower survey data generated by volunteers DBRC developed an interactive project map. This can be found on the project website:

www.tarkacountrytrust.org.uk/love-b.html

Life on the Verge—Biosphere project 2016 to 2020

Number of wildflower verge surveys submitted to DBRC	85
Number of verges in the Biosphere Reserve with project signage	42

Sharing information and awareness raising events

A total of 8 conservation organisations, Parish Councils and community groups across Devon asked for advice and information about practices learnt during this project. Senior staff at Natural England’s Mental Health & Countryside department requested a copy of our guide “Wildflower Verges-Getting Started” so that it could be used as an example of how communities can engage with nature.

During phase 2, two events were attended by the project coordinator to represent the project. During spring a further three events were due to be attended but with Covid-19 these events did not take place.

An end of project celebration event was planned but with Covid-19 restrictions this was replaced with an end of project celebration video that was circulated to all project contacts, this can be viewed at:

www.tarkacountrytrust.org.uk/love-b.html.



“This verge is managed for wildlife”
Signs are installed across the region.

Legacy of the Life on the Verge—Biosphere project

Tools and safety equipment will continue to be available for groups to use for verge management tasks.

Wildflower verge survey guidance and safety information will remain available, via the website, for volunteers to continue to survey and for new people to get started if they wish to.

DBRC will continue to store and collate all verges wildlife records submitted to them.

Wildflower Verges—Getting Started guide will remain available to organisations and individuals to download from the website.

DCC will continue to promote verge management by communities across Devon and will continue to host the eLearning safety training course developed for the Life on the Verge volunteers.



Hartland—Norton Verge (May 2020).
Southern Marsh Orchids





Life on the Verge - Biosphere Phase 2 Budget Summary

Budget = £8000		
Professional fees	£6,385	
Equipment and materials	£567	Portable bailer. Memory drive . Post driver .
Volunteers Travel	£26	
Staff Travel	£379	Events and delivering posts to communities.
Publicity and promotion materials	£485	Banner with logos for outside events . Pull-up banner, indoor events. Film maker. Printed promotional leaflet .
Printing and Learning materials	£13	
Training for staff	£144	Outdoor—first aid training.
Total spent	£7,999	



Indoor banner and promotional leaflets have been produced using the same design. DCC will continue to promote Life on the Verge across Devon at local shows and events.

