

WILDLIFE IN THE VALE OF LORTON:  
HEDGEROWS AND VERGES  
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Hedges and roadside verges are an important and varied habitat for a wide range of wildlife, being relatively undisturbed and providing food, shelter and host plants, as well as indispensable corridors between other sites. They are composed of a great variety of plants and are home to many insects, birds and mammals.

Especially notable among the plants is the May or hawthorn, with its masses of cream and cerise blossom in spring, the sight and scent of which is an annual delight. The blossom is a great attractant for a host of insects and the berries that follow are an invaluable source of food for birds.



Verges are often rich in wild flowers. Among the common white ones are the delicate inflorescences of hedge parsley, the more dense heads of sweet cicely, hemlock, with its purple-splashed stems, the coarser-leaved and larger-headed hogweed, the mauve-tinged angelica and even the diminutive earth nut or pig nut - all basically similar as members of the Umbelliferae. There is Jack-by-the-hedge, standing erect in serried ranks and there are snowdrops, ox-eye daisies, stitchworts and chickweeds.



There are pink flowers, too, such as herb Robert, foxgloves, the willowherbs and betony, and the inaccurately named 'red' campion. Yellow flowers include the celandines, coltsfoot, primroses and cowslips, creeping and meadow buttercups, nipplewort and, one of the most



common, wood avens. Where there is a damp area, there may be water avens also and, where the two occur, they are likely to cross. Wood avens has small yellow flowers, while the water avens has larger flesh-coloured flowers. The resulting hybrid has large yellow ones!



Among the blues and mauves are the speedwells, bugle, meadow cranesbill and the vetches - one of the most striking of which is the tufted vetch, a climber which festoons the hedgerow. There may even be the stately giant bellflower. Conversely, the flowers of some plants are very inconspicuous indeed, such as those of the stinging nettle, the town hall clock and dog's mercury.





Clearly, these are merely a few examples and there are many, many more, but they do perhaps serve to illustrate the fact that hedges and verges are well worth examining in detail. The habitat attracts a host of insects, which are especially noticeable in high summer. Close inspection will reveal many different species of aphids, hoverflies, beetles, moths and butterflies and often dragonflies patrolling for prey. The noon fly is to be found here too, a blue-bottle like fly with distinct tan-coloured patches on its flanks.



In view of all the insect activity and the abundance of nectar, it is hardly surprising that birds abound here too. Blackbirds, thrushes, wrens and sparrows, chaffinches, blue tits and great tits, to name but a few, constantly feeding and calling. In spring and autumn, hedges and trees



attract mixed flocks of hundreds of fieldfares and redwings, two colourful species of thrush, on migration which move away in great plumes with their excited chattering calls and giving that unmistakable "flash" of grey as they go.



There are mammals here too. Mice, voles, shrews, weasels, rabbits and others will adopt this comfortable home and small wonder their presence will attract the attentions of kestrels and sparrowhawks.

Hedges and verges - common enough - all around us, but highly profitable places to watch carefully for the 'hedgerow' community.

