

RESTORING SHROPSHIRE'S VERGES PROJECT

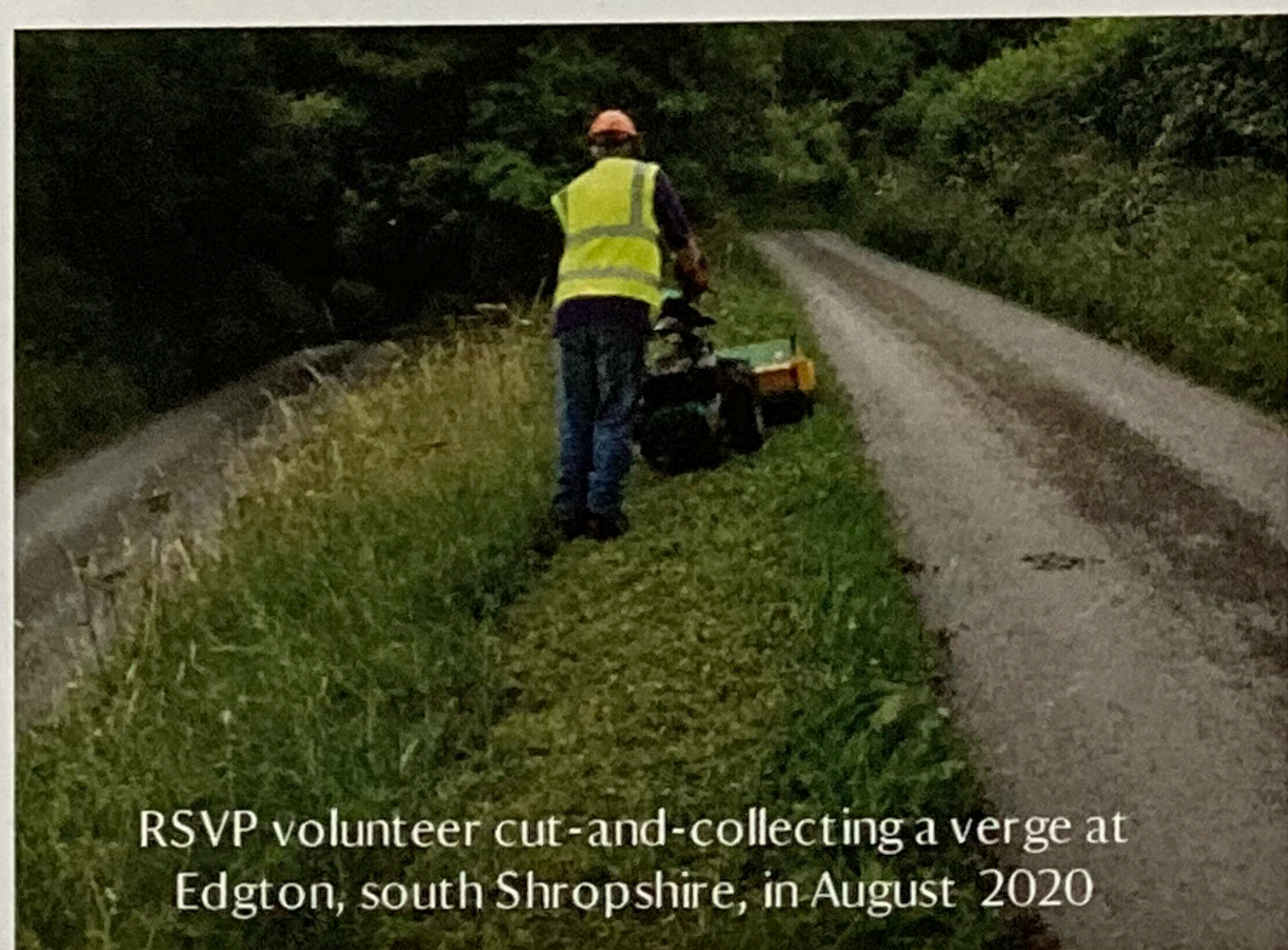


Why are road verges important?

We have lost 97% of our wildflower meadows over the last 100 years. This has had a devastating impact on wildlife – there are now more priority species for conservation associated with meadows than with any other habitat. Road verges have huge potential to provide important areas of wildflower meadows and, crucially, to act as corridors which link together remaining fragments of meadow and other habitats.

Unfortunately, many verges are cut too early in the year, sometimes several times, with the cuttings left to rot down. This type of management removes food sources for pollinators and destroys most finer grasses and wildflowers, leaving the verges to become dominated by 'rank' vegetation such as coarse grass, hogweed and nettles.

Instead, managing verges as mini-hay meadows would store carbon, replenish the seed bank, restore floral diversity, save the Council money, create habitat and provide nectar and pollen.



RSVP volunteer cut-and-collecting a verge at Edgton, south Shropshire, in August 2020

What are we doing?

The Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project (RSVP) is made up of volunteers, supported by the National Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and Caring for God's Acre. RSVP have

purchased verge management equipment such as a two-wheeled tractor-mower (below left). Volunteers have now taken on the management of many verges, restoring them to strips of species-rich wildflower meadow.



One of the RSVP demo verges in Edgton

RSVP is also working with Shropshire Council to discuss a sustainable and economically viable policy for verge management. We are working up a pilot project to see if cuttings from the verges can be used in a local bio-digester. Cutting verges (at the right time of year!) and collecting the clippings is essential for their management as wildflower meadows. It would be win-win for carbon and biodiversity if these cuttings were used in local renewable energy generation.

What has been achieved so far?

- RSVP has formed a committee and become a constituted group, and is increasing in profile locally with various media and press appearances (including a joint press release with Shropshire Council in May 2021);
- Sub-groups have been formed e.g. in Ludlow, All Stretton and Condover, reflecting local interest and energy;
- Over 10km of verges have been surveyed and their condition assessed;
- Drones used to film key stretches of road verges to monitor their progress.
- Shropshire Council have agreed to leave our demo verges un-mown until August each year;
- Ongoing management including mowing and application of yellow rattle and green hay on 'demonstration' verges.