



Rank Grassland- Happy Insects!

Caroline Uff

UK road verges span approximately **500,000 km** and cover an area larger than the Lake District National Park.

They may be tightly mown, tall and flowery, on sandy disturbed soils, or wet ditches.

Many of our verges may be better described as **rank grassland**. i.e. areas dominated by tall, coarse grasses and herbs, grown without regular cutting or grazing. They often form dense, tussocky, and sometimes species-poor communities.



What do insects need?

**Food
Shelter
Connectivity**



Food:

- Pollen and nectar
- Foliage and stems

Keys Plants:

- Daisy family e.g. thistle, ragwort, dandelion, dog daisy.
- Carrot family



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Ashy mining bee



Cinnabar caterpillars



Swollen-thighed beetle

Food:

- **Pollen and nectar**
- Foliage and stems

Keys Plants:

- Daisy family
- **Carrot family (Umbellifers)**
hogweed, cow parsley,
angelica



Common red soldier beetles on hogweed

Soldier beetle



2-banded longhorn



Black & yellow longhorn



6-banded longhorn



Malachite beetle © NP Jones



Food:

- Pollen and nectar
- **Foliage and stems**

Key Plants:

- **Umbellifers e.g. hogweed**
- Coarse grasses



Celery leaf beetle© Janet Graham



Golden-bloomed grey longhorn

Food:

- Pollen and nectar
- **Foliage and stems**

Key Plants:

- Umbellifers
- **Coarse grasses e.g. cock's-foot, Yorkshire fog**



Grass moth



Ringlet butterfly

Shelter

- **Structural diversity:** Hiding places, temperature regulation, scaffolding
- **Breeding sites:** Stems and tussocks
- **Overwintering:** Hollow stems, seed heads, base of grass tussocks





Roesel's bush-cricket © David Williams



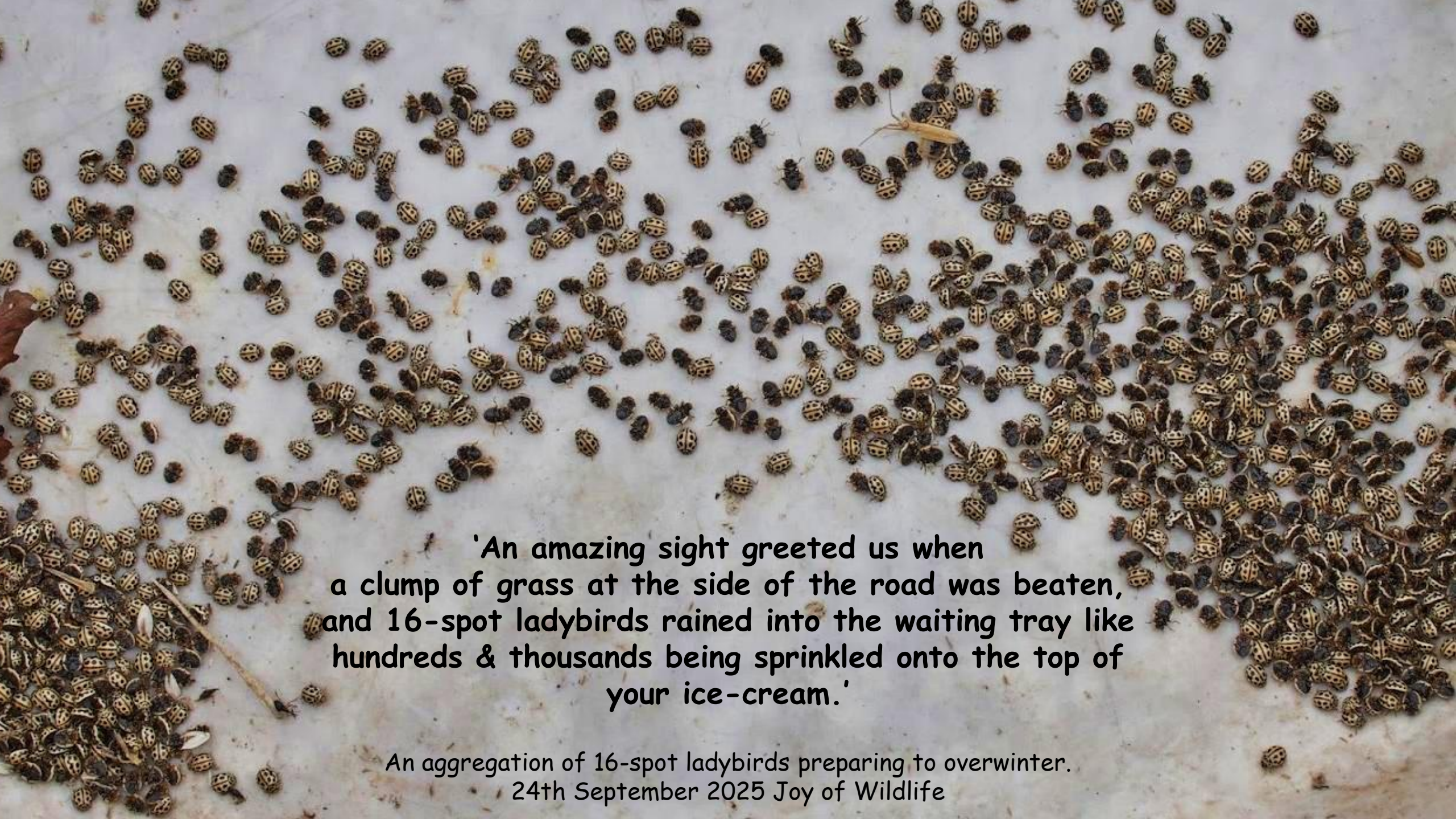
Roesel's bush-cricket © David Williams

Many grasshoppers and crickets require vegetation with varied grass heights

Some lay their eggs in stems of coarse grasses



Long-winged conehead © David Williams



'An amazing sight greeted us when a clump of grass at the side of the road was beaten, and 16-spot ladybirds rained into the waiting tray like hundreds & thousands being sprinkled onto the top of your ice-cream.'

An aggregation of 16-spot ladybirds preparing to overwinter.
24th September 2025 Joy of Wildlife

Connectivity

- Verges act as **linear corridors** that link isolated habitat patches.
- This helps maintain **genetic diversity** and make populations more resilient to environmental changes.
- Verges can provide a continuous **sequence of flowering** plants for insects to feed on.
- Specific features along verges can support different insect **life stages**.

Management: Rotating uncut areas ensures some cover is always available for overwintering.



HOGWEED



Heracleum sphondylium
Contains approximately 50 seeds

CREeping THISTLE



Cirsium arvense
Contains approximately 50 seeds

RAGWORT



Senecio jacobaea
Contains approximately 50 seeds