

Researchers make unexpected discovery about commonly overlooked strips of land: 'The most surprising result'



The Cool Down

By Kate Saxton

A recently released study shows that a bit of biodiversity can go a long way. Researchers in Singapore [surveyed](#) roadside flower gardens and found that the narrow strips of vegetation were feeding dozens of [butterfly](#) species.

The researchers focused on 101 road verges, strips of land situated along the sides of roads, across the island nation. They found that 56 species of butterflies fed on nectar from 96 flowering plant species. All but six of the flowers were nonnative, showing that plants, no matter their origin, can serve as a habitat. This is true even in locations as inhospitable as strips of land along roadsides.

"The most surprising result was seeing how effective even narrow and artificially planted road verges can be in supporting butterfly communities when managed well," co-authors Tharaka S. Priyadarshana and Eleanor M. Slade of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore [said](#) in a statement.

The study showed the resilience of [pollinators](#) to survive. Butterflies in particular are struggling. Aside from declines in individual species, butterfly populations as a whole [decreased](#) about 22% from 2000 to 2020. Singapore, especially, is experiencing a drop, reporting nearly half of its butterflies have [disappeared](#) over the last 160 years.

The study also revealed what the researchers called "a cost-effective and space-efficient way to support urban [pollinators](#) without the need to have very wide strips of vegetation." While many cities cut down flowering plants, the study proves there are benefits to well-managed vegetation.

The average person can create a pollinator-friendly yard using the same process as those who established the roadside gardens in Singapore. [Rewilding](#) your property is a great place to start, as is [upgrading](#) to a natural lawn of clover or buffalo grass. Supporting pollinator populations helps protect food supplies and is part of the push toward a cleaner future for all.

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