

Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 3 (Early April 2020)

Its been another wonderful wildlife filled week in the garden, with lots more spring arrivals to look out for.



Lots of people noticed the rather large House Spider hiding amongst the old Common Wasp nest in the last update.

This is the Zebra Spider – the most recognisable of the jumping spiders. It doesn't build a web like other spiders but instead stalks its prey before leaping on it. This one was found on some old oak beams I have in garden, but they also like walls, fences, and tree trunks.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

The first week of April saw the return of House Martins. I only saw the one passing over the house, but over the next few weeks more will arrive from Africa and hopefully nest close by.

They build their nest of mud under the eaves of houses. I have seen several nests in the valley over the years.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

House Martins collecting mud from the edge of a scrape. Scrapes are shallow ponds and are often much better for wildlife than larger ponds. This is because most of the life in a pond occurs within the first 30cm of water. So having a scrape, that dries up every now and then is good for wildlife – plus the mud helps our House Martins.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

You can also buy artificial House Martin Nests to put up on your house. We asked our builders (when re-rendering the house) to put this artificial nest up for us.

I didn't realise at the time but they had put the box on upside down. No bird in their right mind would lay an egg in there.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

We also saw another one of our spring migrants fly over the house. Swallows. Both Swallows and House Martin numbers are dwindling in the UK. Hopefully with this warm weather we are having they can get to us in good numbers.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



In total I recorded 38 bird species from the garden during the first week of April, but I wasn't lucky enough to get a Goldcrest like some of you. **Thanks for the photo.**

Goldcrests are our smallest breeding bird and are quite often associated with conifer and garden ornamental trees.

Photo John Maul

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Our Nuthatches have finally decided on their nest box at the top of the garden. They first started scoping this box back in January and only really committed to it just over a week ago – once they kicked out a pair of Great Tits.

The muddy footprints on the front of the nest box, suggests that the Nuthatch as been blocking up some gaps inside.





Siskins are also having a good year in the garden. We normally get Siskins in Winter, but numbers dwindle when it comes to the breeding season as they move away from gardens back to conifer trees to build their nests. But this year, so far they have stayed with us.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Sparrow

I noticed depressions in the veg patch so thought I would put the camera out to see what was making them.

Turned out to be our resident House Sparrows taking a dust bath. Dust baths are important for birds as the dust helps dislodge mites and parasites as well as makes preening a bit easier for them.

Plus it looks fun.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

As part of my attempt to find Dormice in the garden, I have made a small tunnel with the camera at one end and food at the other.

I tested it on the floor first to see if the camera would pick up on mice. It does and this is a lovely looking Wood Mouse.

I have now moved the tunnel up into the trees to find Dormice, but.....



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

The Nuthatch found all
the nuts first.

I need a new design.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



With all the sunny weather I have noticed a lot more Hoverflies in the Garden like this Common Hoverfly.

The species is one of several wasp-like hoverflies found in the UK.

Larvae can eat up to 50 aphids a day.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



It was also a treat to see this this Dark-edged Bee-fly. The long proboscis is used to drink nectar from spring flowers such as Primroses.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Given the warm and dry weather its important to have water available for birds in the garden. As well as for drinking, water is also used for washing and cleaning feathers. I placed an old bowl out in the garden and had Robin, Goldfinch and Bullfinch using it. In truth the bowl is a bit too steep for birds. They much prefer bigger vessels with shallower banks – such as a dustbin lid. So that will be my next project.

If you have something like a dust-bin lid at home - place it upside down on the ground, fill it with some gravel and then water, so only a little water is showing above the gravel.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

I have made a start on planting up some of the wildflower seeds we collected last year.

Before long, hopefully we will have lots of.....



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Ragged Robin



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



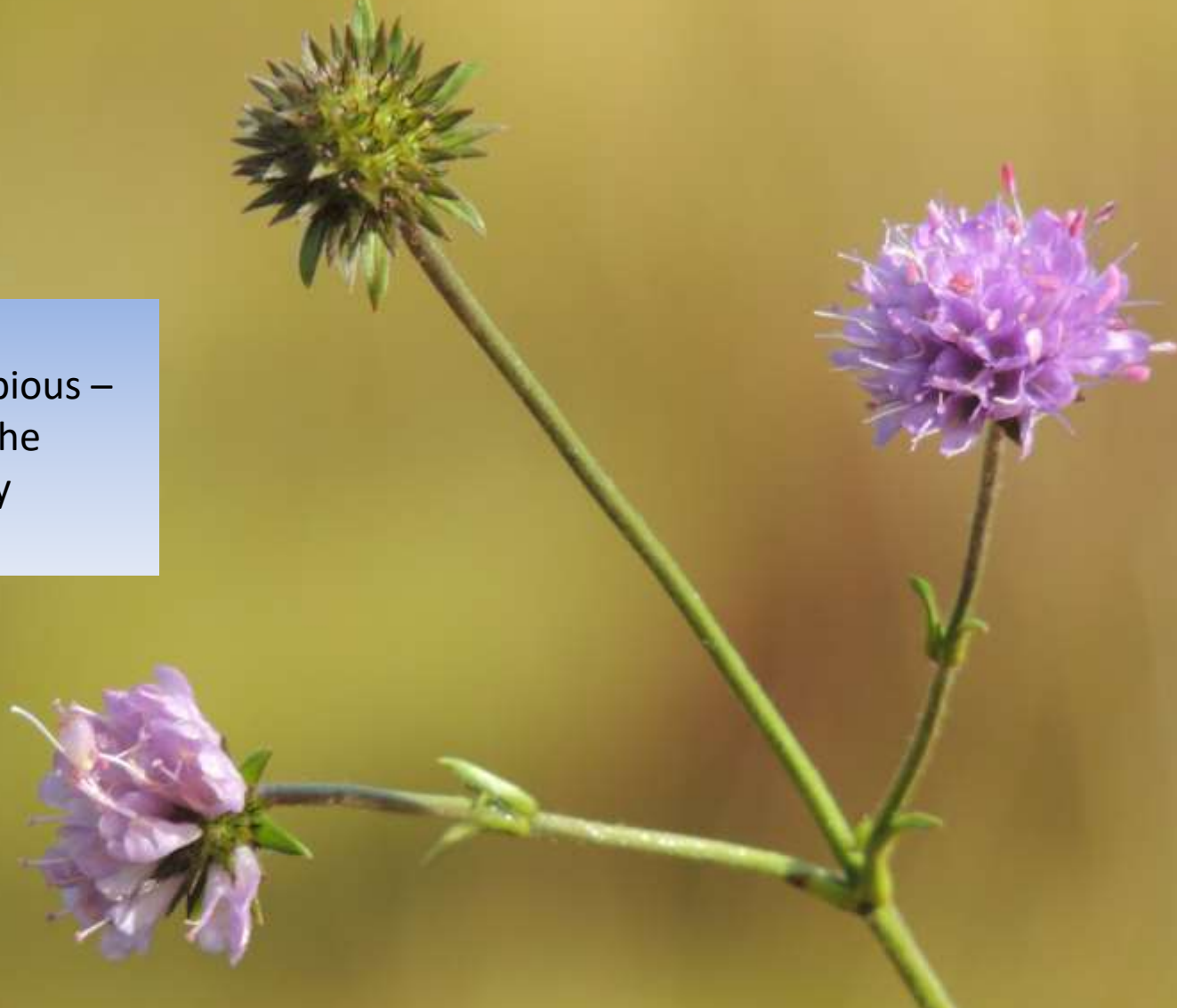
Marsh Ragwort

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

And
Devil's-bit Scabious –
food plant of the
Marsh Fritillary
butterfly.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Things to keep an eye out for over the coming week or so (apart from Swallows and House Martins) are Orange Tip Butterflies. Orange Tip butterflies lay their eggs on crucifers, particularly Cuckoo Flower. As well as having bright dazzling tips to their wings I think they have one of the most intricate underwing pattern of any of our butterfly species...



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Please do keep sending me your garden wildlife updates, questions and queries. Plus if you have taken any nice photos that I can show, please do forward them on to me.

rob.parry@incc.wales

Thank you and hope you are keeping safe.
Rob

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 4 (Mid April 2020)



Wood Mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) in nest box. This is one of the most common mammal species in the UK, with an estimated population of 38 million. They can be found in most habitats including gardens.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Amman Valley

Wildlife Update Number 4

(Late April 2020)

The Amman Valley is a fantastic place for wildlife. We have some of the rarest wildlife in Wales, and April is a great time of the year to see and hear it.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

The best news this month – Whilst out on my daily walk I came across this caterpillar. It's the caterpillar of the Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) butterfly. Its only a few weeks from pupating and transforming into its adult form.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

In August time - Marsh Fritillaries emerge from their eggs as small light brown caterpillars. They are quite easy to identify at this time of year because they come together to form webs around their food plant Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*).



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

In 2019 we found several 'larval webs' at a marshy grassland site near Cwm Gors. The caterpillars survive the winter hidden away under leaf litter in the grassland. In spring they emerge to feed up, ready for pupation and metamorphosing in to.....



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Adult Marshy Fritillary - one of the most beautiful things in nature.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Also seen high above the valley this month was one of the UK's rarest birds – the Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). The species is practically extinct in England with just 4 pairs. It is estimated that we only have approximately 35 pairs left in the whole of Wales. The decline has been caused by a combination of direct persecution and habitat loss.



The male Hen Harrier (seen in the photo) is easily recognisable by its black wing tips, which are absent in females.



Another bird to make its return to the valley this month is the Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*). I have heard 5 or 6 male Cuckoos calling over the past two weeks. In this photo the male Cuckoo (right) is being 'harassed' by the smaller Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) because it's the Meadow Pipits nest the Cuckoos are after.



The Cuckoos are found predominantly to the north side of the Valley amongst the Heather (*Calluna Vulgaris*) and marshy grassland fields. If you hear any Cuckoos where you are – please do let me know – It would be good to map their distribution.



Also found up high in the heathland are Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scotica*). Although all you normally see are.....

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU




Their droppings.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU




One of the problems for all wildlife up in the mountains at this time of year are the uncontrolled wildfires.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU


A close-up photograph of three long-horn moths (Adela reaumurella) perched on a green plant with serrated leaves. The moths have dark bodies and long, thin, white antennae. The background is a soft-focus green.

Whilst out and about I have come across some wonderful moths like these long-horn moths – (*Adela reaumurella*)

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



They can often be seen dancing around Oak (*Quercus spp*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*)

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Its been a good few weeks for
moths in the garden as well.
Including for this Herald
(*Scoliopteryx libatrix*)



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Small Phoenix (*Ecliptopera silaceata*)



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Nut-tree Tussock (*Colocasia coryli*)



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

We also found this wonderful
May Bug / Cockchafer
(*Melolontha melolontha*) in
the moth trap



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



It's also that time of year when Palmate Newts (*Lissotriton helveticus*) are laying their eggs. All three species of newt in the UK lay their eggs underneath the leaves of pond vegetation. The egg is coated in a sticky substance, and the newts use their back legs to fold the leaf over the egg for extra protection.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

This is the egg of the Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*). To my knowledge , we don't have Great Crested Newts in the valley.

Palmate Newt



Female Great
Crested Newt

Male Great Crested Newt

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Quiz

Newt bellies are like human finger prints – they are unique to that particular individual newt. When we are assessing population change within a particular population, if we know how to identify individuals then we can have greater confidence in whether that population as a whole is going up or down.

Therefore - can you spot the 3 matching pairs and the 1 odd pair of Great Crested Newt bellies from the photos below?





Mapping our remarkable Trees.
Over the coming weeks and months I would like to map our special trees in the Valley. Identifying and mapping those trees that are:

- Very old.
- Have splits crack and other interesting features for wildlife.
- Specimens of their species. Or are Uncommon species.

If you would like to add trees that you are aware of to the list, please do let me know. We can then arrange a Tree Walk at a later date taking in some of the identified trees.

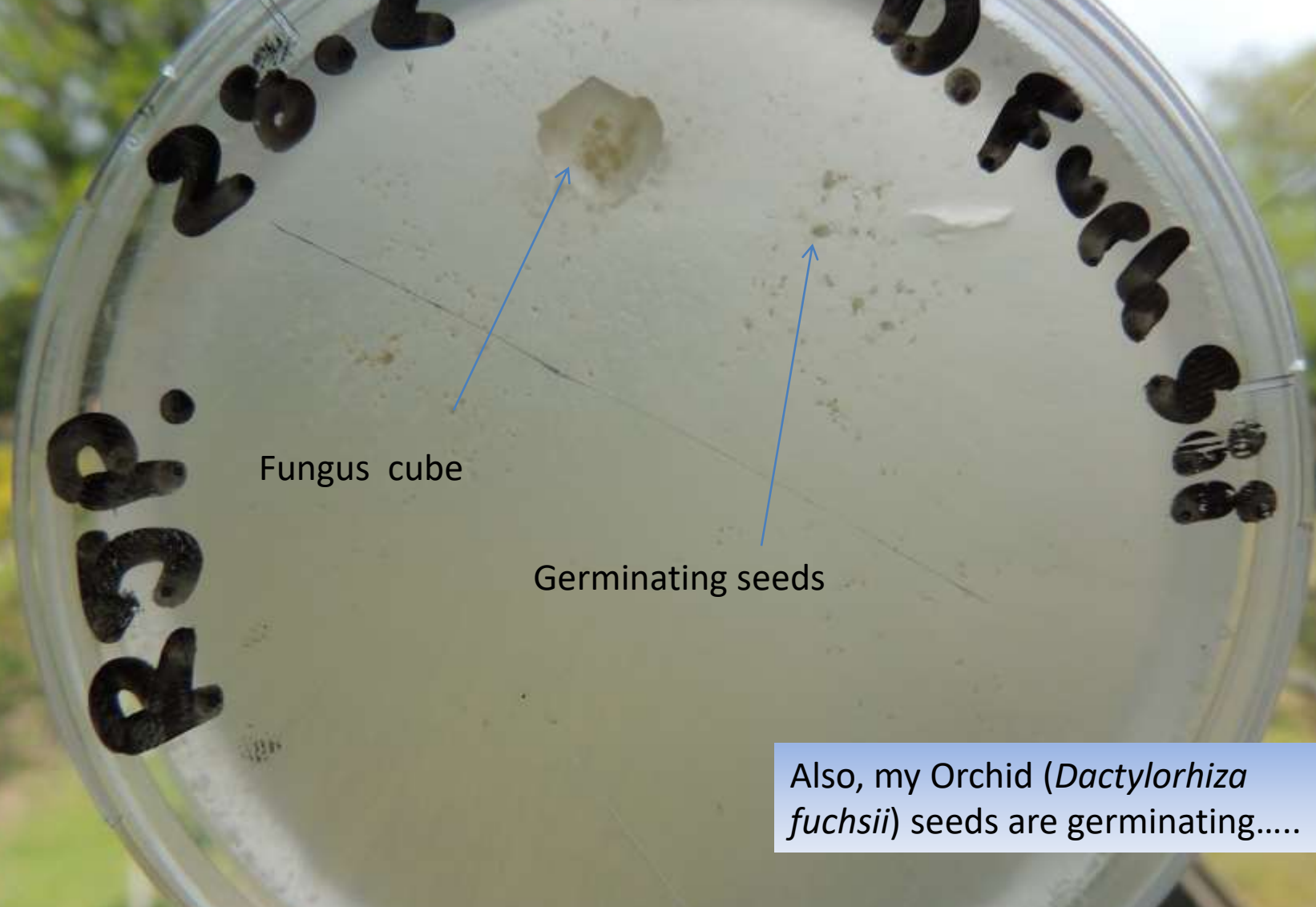
MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Most of my wildflower seeds are now germinating and I have been able to sow a few more trays.





Also, my Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) seeds are germinating.....

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

And finally.....

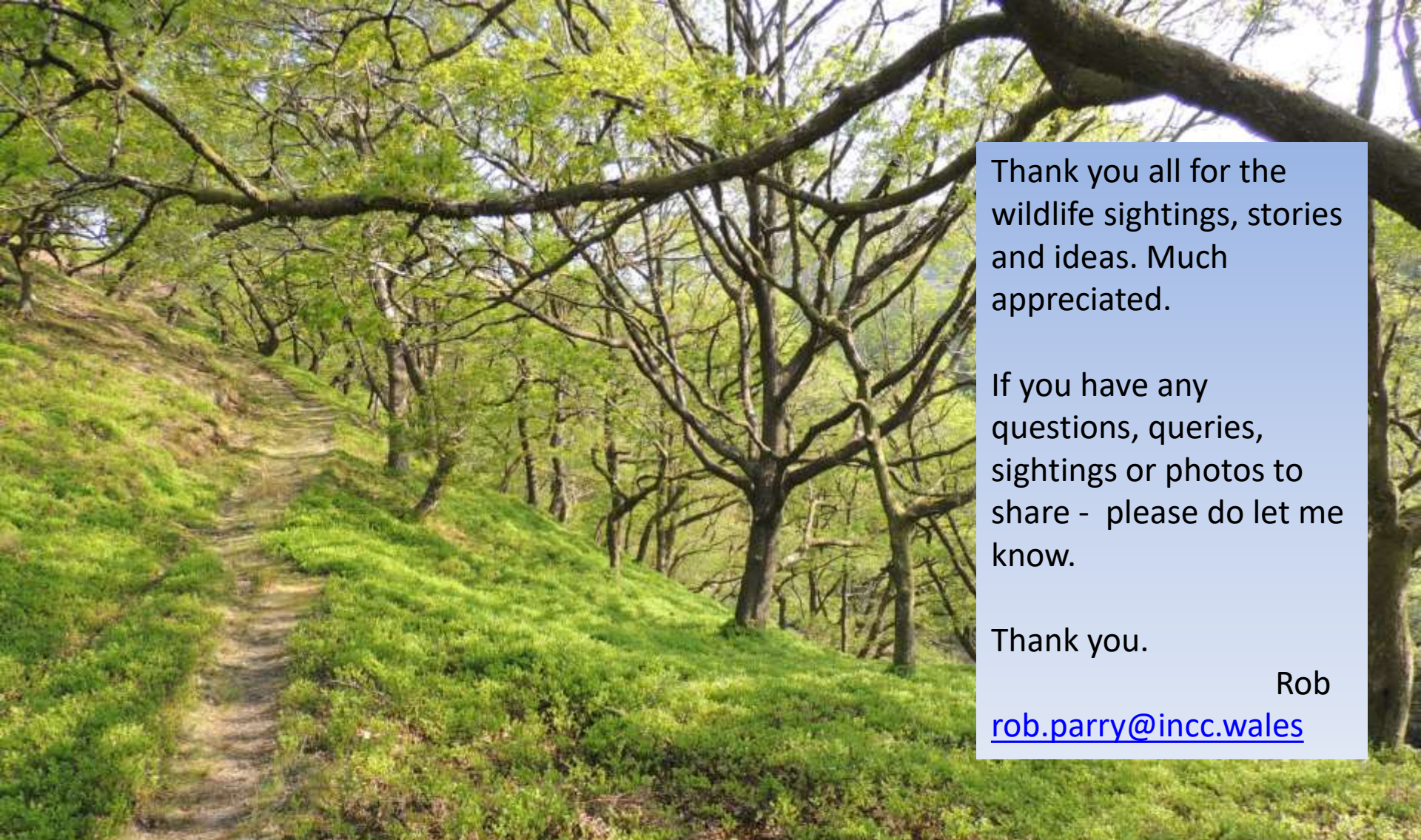
Thank you to Sylvia for sharing her story of the hedgehog that spent the winter hibernating, curled up in a ball of fleece in her shed. It sounds a very comfy way to spend the winter.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Thank you all for the wildlife sightings, stories and ideas. Much appreciated.

If you have any questions, queries, sightings or photos to share - please do let me know.

Thank you.

Rob

rob.parry@incc.wales

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) on the other hand are quite rare - showing a long-term decline in population.

Only around 14,000 pairs of Herring Gull now breed in Wales.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) aren't fairing much better either - with a total population in Wales of just over 20,000 pairs.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



To put that into perspective, there are over 20,000 pairs of Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*) breeding in Pembrokeshire alone.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

You can tell the difference between the two species of Gull by looking at their wings. Herring Gulls have a very light grey wing and Lesser Black-backed Gulls have a dark grey wing. The chicks however are almost identical.



The good news is that in the Amman Valley we have both Lesser Black-backed Gull & Herring Gull. Hopefully they are breeding in the area, perhaps on a factory roof which is often a good substitute. We also get Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) – but no Puffins.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

It's the breeding season for most of our wildlife including Toads (*Bufo bufo*). Toads have started mating and spawning in the pond.

Toad spawn is very different to Frog (*Rana temporaria*) spawn. It is in long strands wrapped around pond vegetation.

Male Toads are smaller than females and can often be found at this time of year clinging to the larger female.



Its that time of year for birds as well.

We have placed some Cuttlefish (*Sepiida spp*) shell in the garden for our nesting birds. Cuttlefish shell is high in calcium and all birds need calcium for laying eggs. Birds however cant store calcium like we can, so they need to gorge themselves on a calcium rich diet before and during egg laying.

This shell has already had a good few pecks out of it, so hopefully its doing the trick.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

The calcium is definitely needed for our House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) in the pole box. They are close to finishing nest building and are now starting to mate and hopefully lay the first of their 3-7 eggs.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Even a pair of Robins
(*Erithacus rubecula*)
have decided to nest in
the garden.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Its not always bliss mind you.

These Bullfinches (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) are breeding in the scrub habitat in the field behind the garden, but I think they might be having second thoughts.



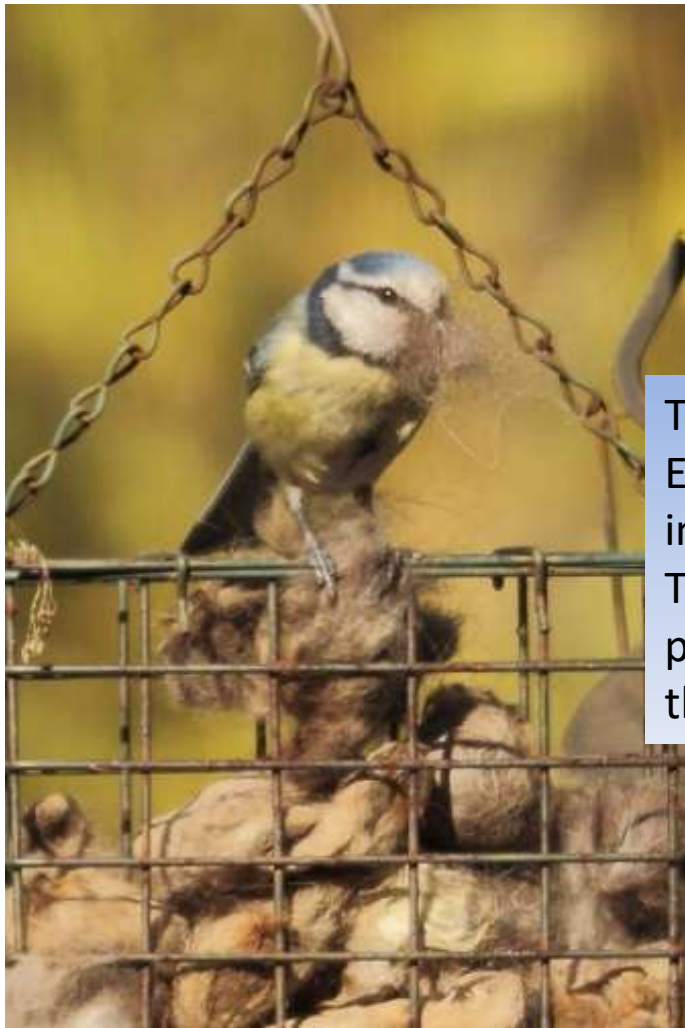
MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

As birds are making the final touches to their nest, now is a good time to put out some extra lining for them such as fur from a cat or dog.





Thanks to John and Elaine Maul for sending in these photos of a Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) plucking dog fur from their feeder.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Some birds don't
mind harvesting
from some animals
directly.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Thanks also to John Driver for this wonderful photo of a Rustic Wolf Spider (*Trochosa ruricola*) seen in the garden.

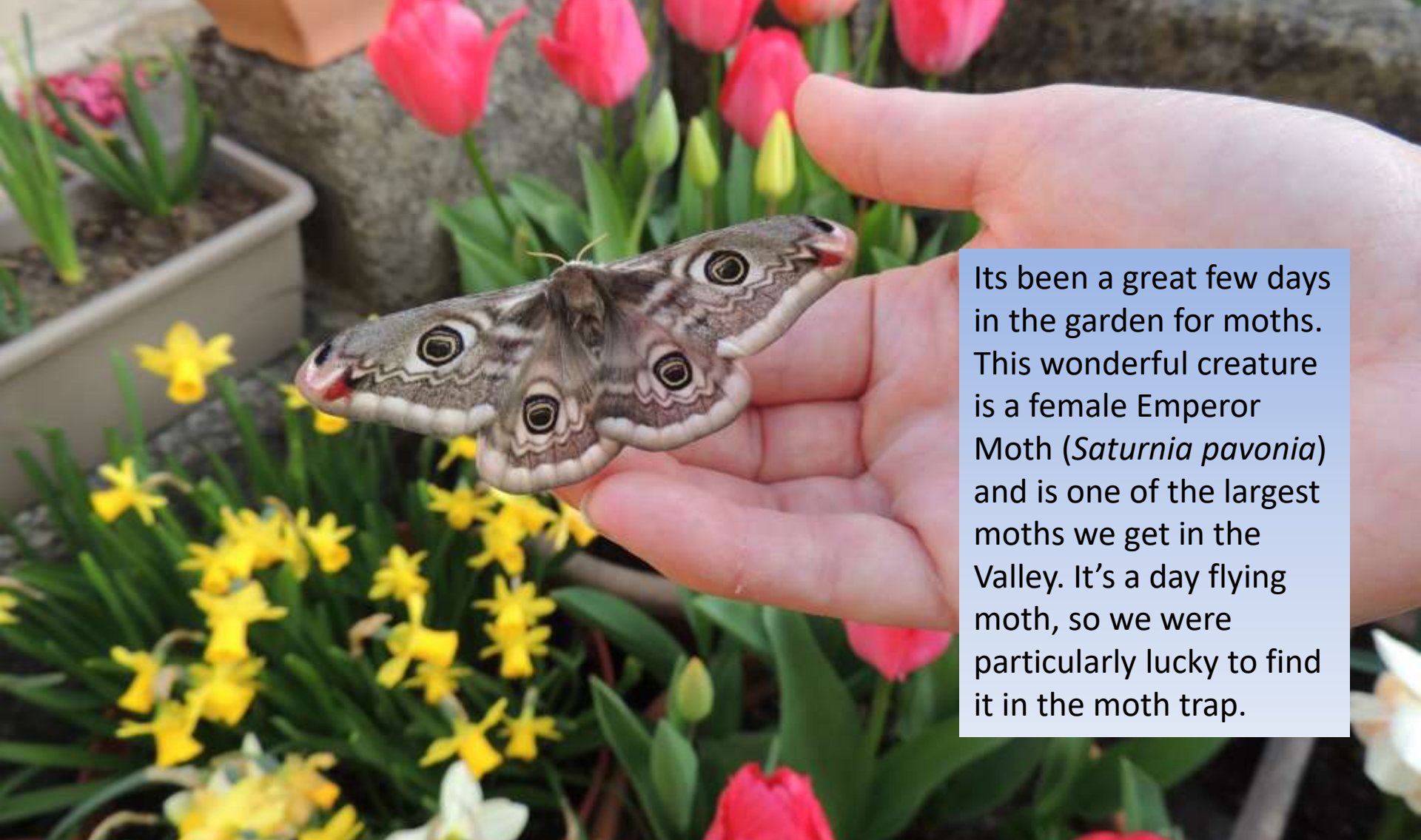


And for this Garden Orb Spider (*Araneus diadematus*)

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



It's been a great few days in the garden for moths. This wonderful creature is a female Emperor Moth (*Saturnia pavonia*) and is one of the largest moths we get in the Valley. It's a day flying moth, so we were particularly lucky to find it in the moth trap.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATURE CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



This is a Common Plume (*Emmelina monodactyla*) Moth. Although not as colourful and big as the Emperor, it goes to show how wonderfully varied moths can be.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



This moth is called a Purple Thorn (*Selenia tetralunaria*) and is definitely one of the most colourful and striking moths out at the moment.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



It's not all about standing out mind you. This Brindled Beauty (*Lycia hirtaria*) is one of the commoner moths at the moment. Their camouflage means that they can rest on tree trunks during the daytime.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Thank you to everyone for sending in their species records. I have finally seen Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*) butterflies in the garden.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

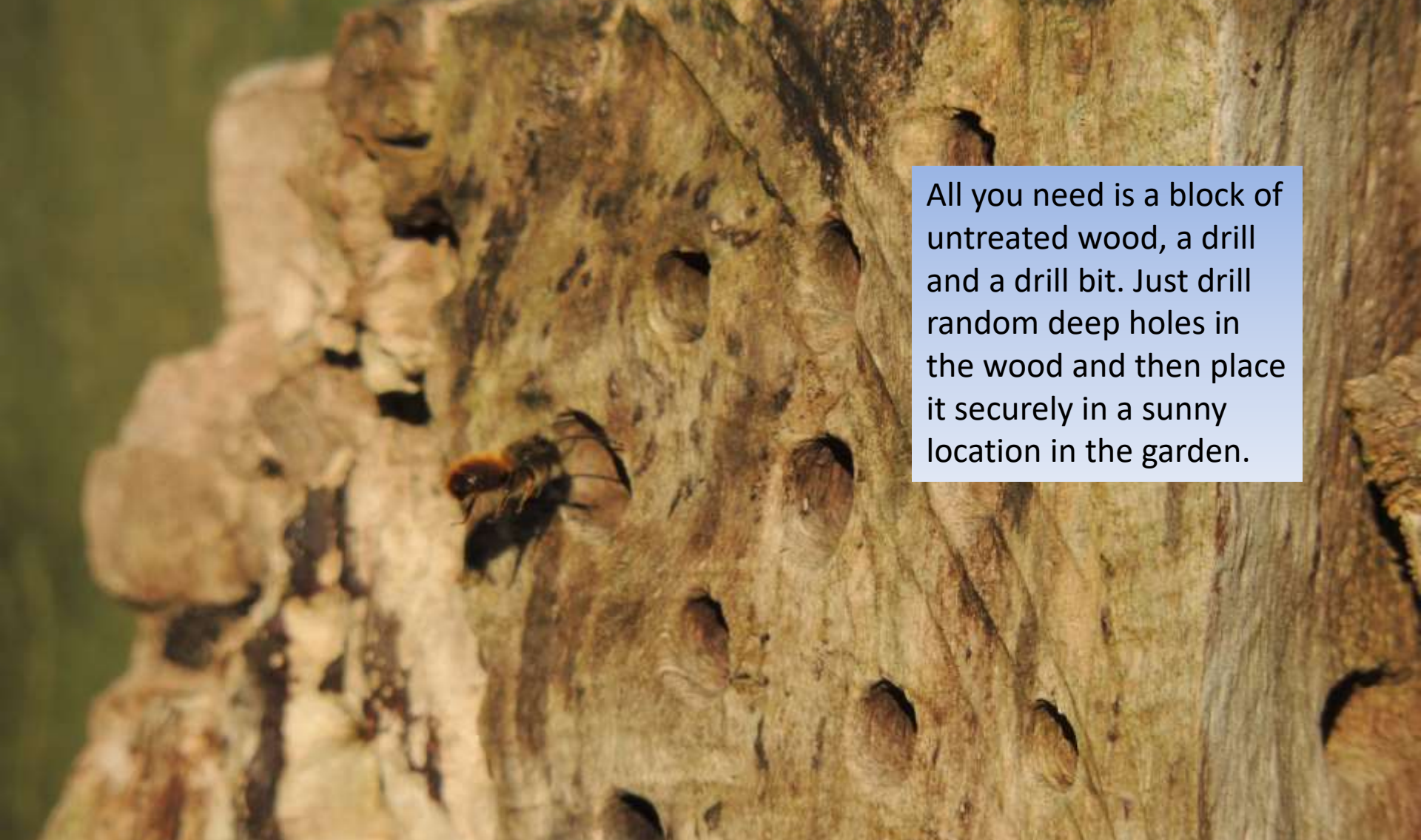
A few years ago I drilled some holes in a bit of wood I had in the garden and this year it looks like it is going to be used by the Tawny Mining Bee (*Andrena fulva*).



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



All you need is a block of untreated wood, a drill and a drill bit. Just drill random deep holes in the wood and then place it securely in a sunny location in the garden.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

My wildflower seeds haven't germinated yet, but hopefully soon.

I now have some envelopes and stamps, so if anybody wants to have a go at growing some Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) – please do get in touch and I can put some seeds in the post for you.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

I hope you are having as peaceful a time as possible and that you are able to enjoy the wildlife near you.

If you have any questions, queries, sightings or photos to share - please do let me know.

Thank you.

Rob

rob.parry@incc.wales



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU