


Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 6 (Early May 2020)



**MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU**



**INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU**

A photograph of two Cuckoos perched on a thin wire against a clear blue sky. The bird on the right is larger and shown in profile, facing right. The bird on the left is smaller and shown from a three-quarter view, facing left.

Thank you to everyone for
sending in their records of
Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*).
I have managed to map
where some of the
Cuckoo calls are coming
from...

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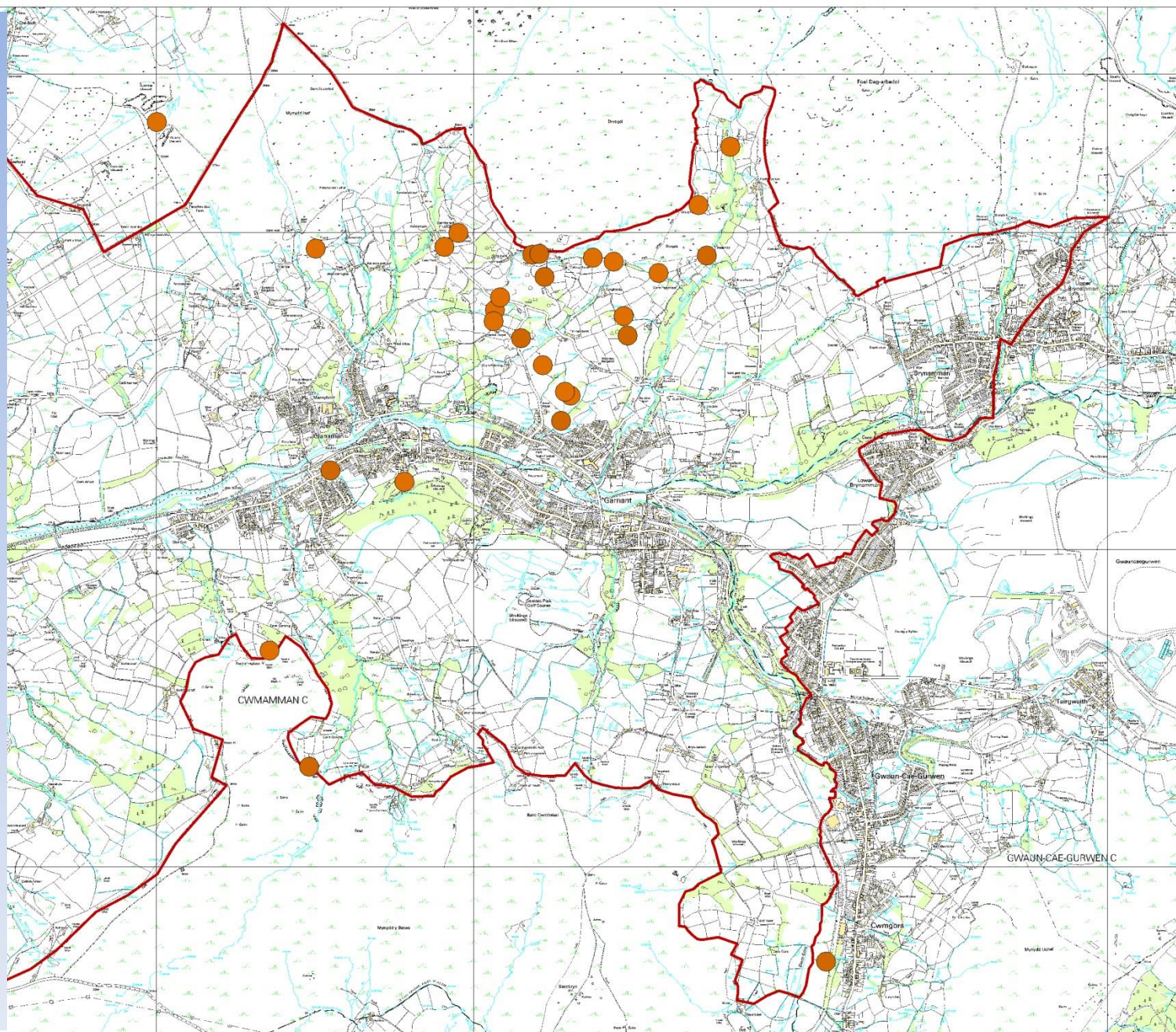


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This is the distribution map so far. Most of the records have been on the north of the valley among the mosaic of heather, grassland and woodland habitats.

Please do keep sending me your records.

Next year we can go out in groups to survey the whole of the valley.



This is what the Cuckoos are after. This is the nest of the Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*). The cuckoo will lay its egg in the nest and when the chick hatches, its first job is to eject all the other eggs in the nest.

I found this nest on the mountain so will keep an eye on it to see if the Cuckoos find it.



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Worried looking
Meadow Pipit



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Our House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) in the front of the house have been hard at work feeding their chicks.



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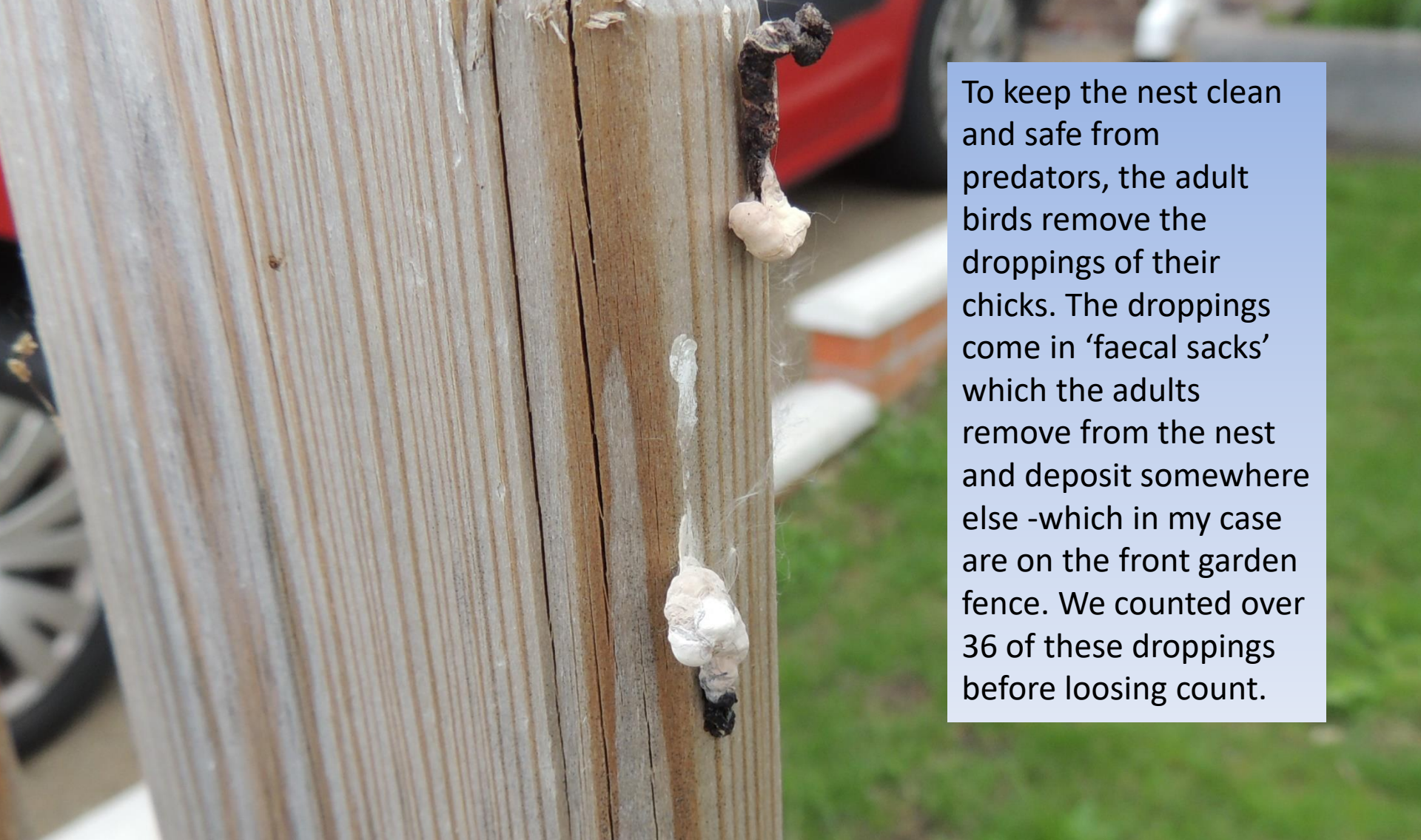
Both pairs (front house and pole box) are feeding chicks mainly on Crane flies (*Tipula oleracea*)



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To keep the nest clean and safe from predators, the adult birds remove the droppings of their chicks. The droppings come in 'faecal sacs' which the adults remove from the nest and deposit somewhere else -which in my case are on the front garden fence. We counted over 36 of these droppings before losing count.

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Photo – Doug Portman

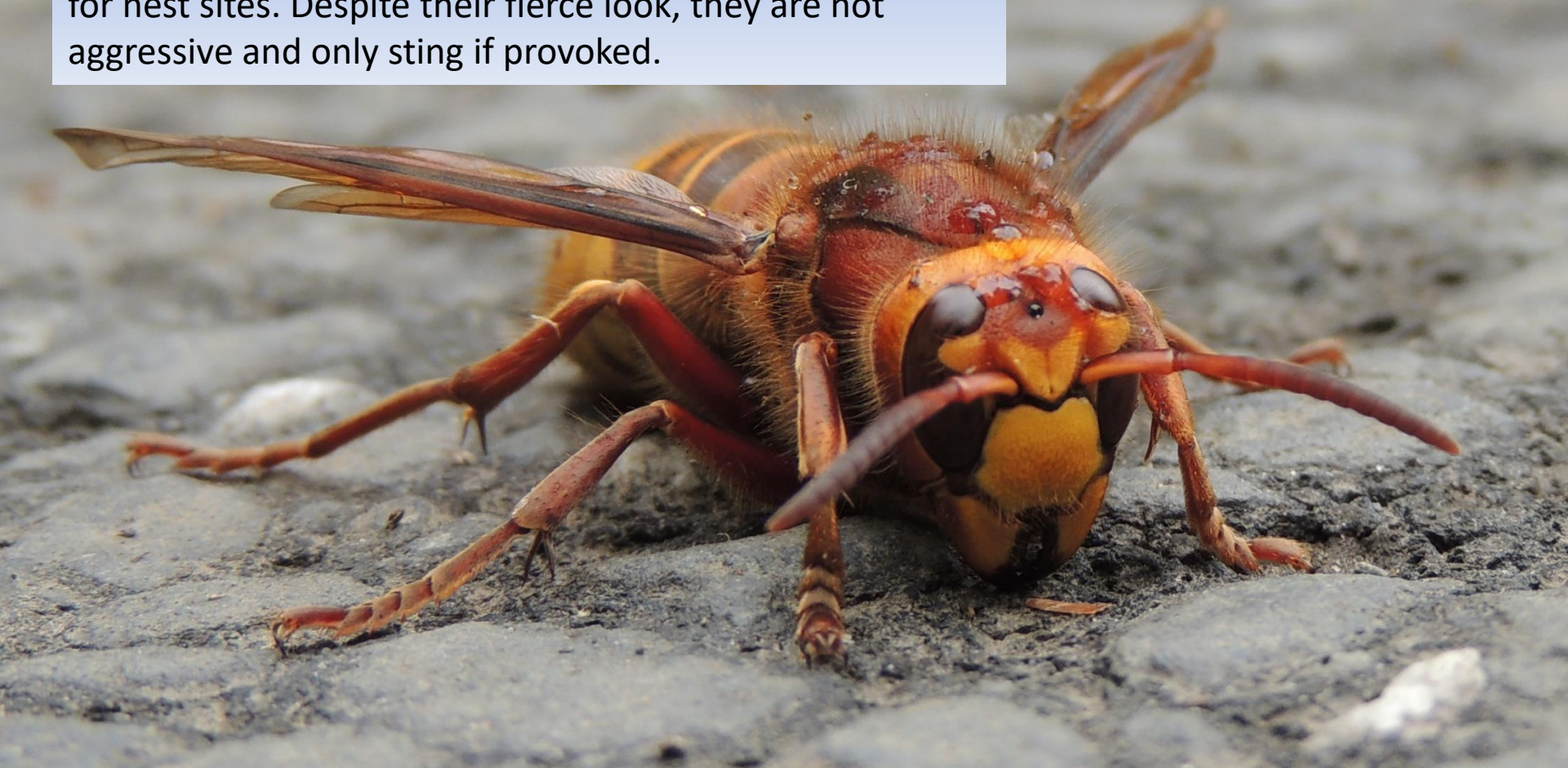
As well as faecal sacks, adult birds also remove discarded egg shell from the nests, like this House Sparrow shell.

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At this time of year keep an eye out for these beautiful Hornets (*Vespa crabro*) which are now flying and looking for nest sites. Despite their fierce look, they are not aggressive and only sting if provoked.



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Also seen out and about recently are the caterpillars of the Drinker Moth (*Euthrix potatoria*).



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And the Dingy Skipper (*Erynnis tages*) – a species of butterfly found in the valley.



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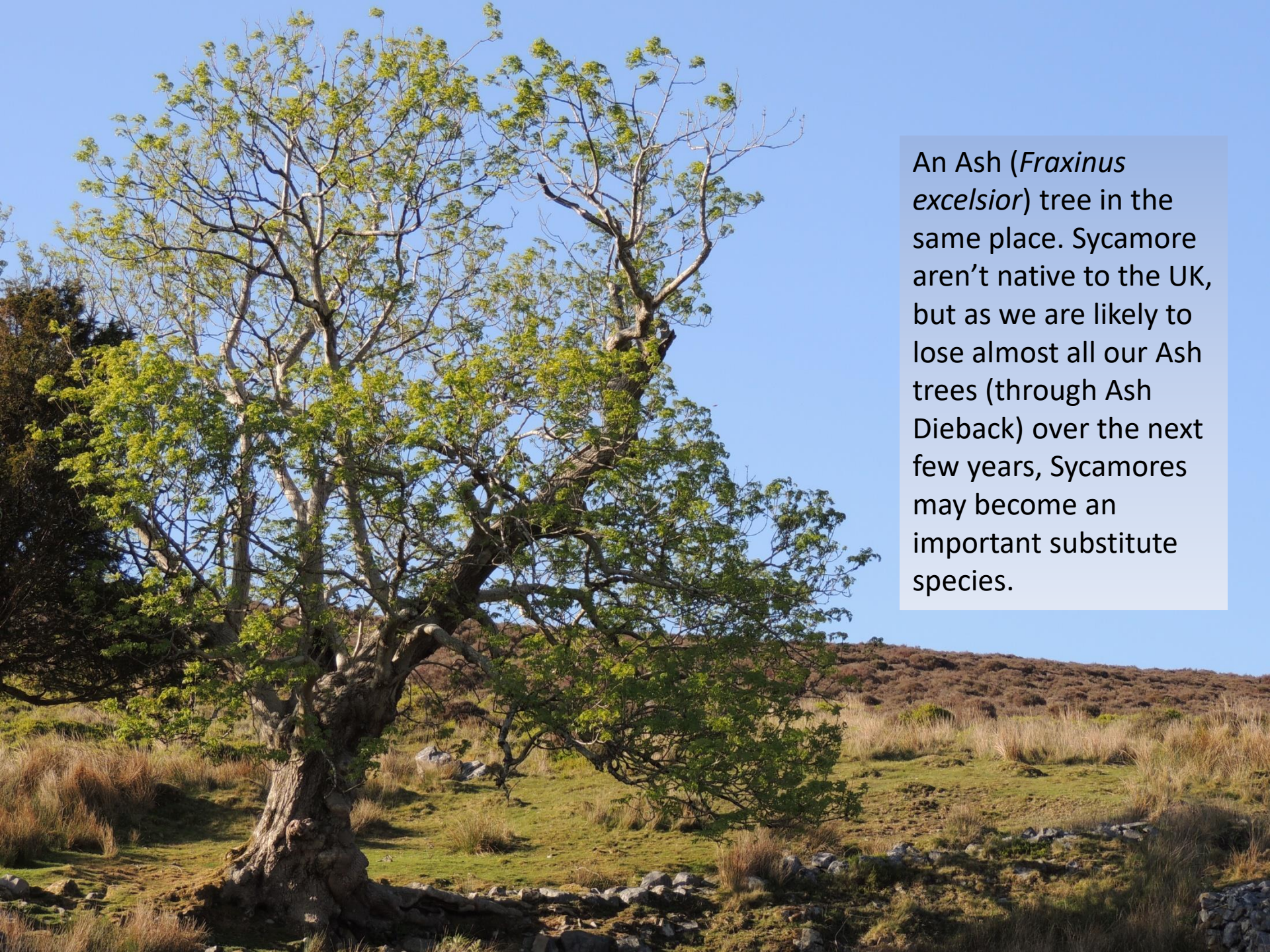
Thank you for all the suggestion for the remarkable trees of the Amman Valley. I am trying to take photos and map them. Your suggestions have been very welcome.

This is an old Sycamore tree to the north of the Valley.

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An Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) tree in the same place. Sycamores aren't native to the UK, but as we are likely to lose almost all our Ash trees (through Ash Dieback) over the next few years, Sycamores may become an important substitute species.



We are blessed with so many old and important trees in the Amman Valley so thank you for helping me to map them. Please do keep sending me your suggestions.

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A few people have also reported seeing Slow Worms (*Anguis fragilis*) in the garden over the past few weeks.

The Slow Worm is one of only three species of lizard found in the UK.



Like the newt's belly, a Slow Worm's chin pattern is unique to that individual – like our finger print.

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Photo – Hywel Gethin

More of our meadow flowers are starting to show now, like this Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*).

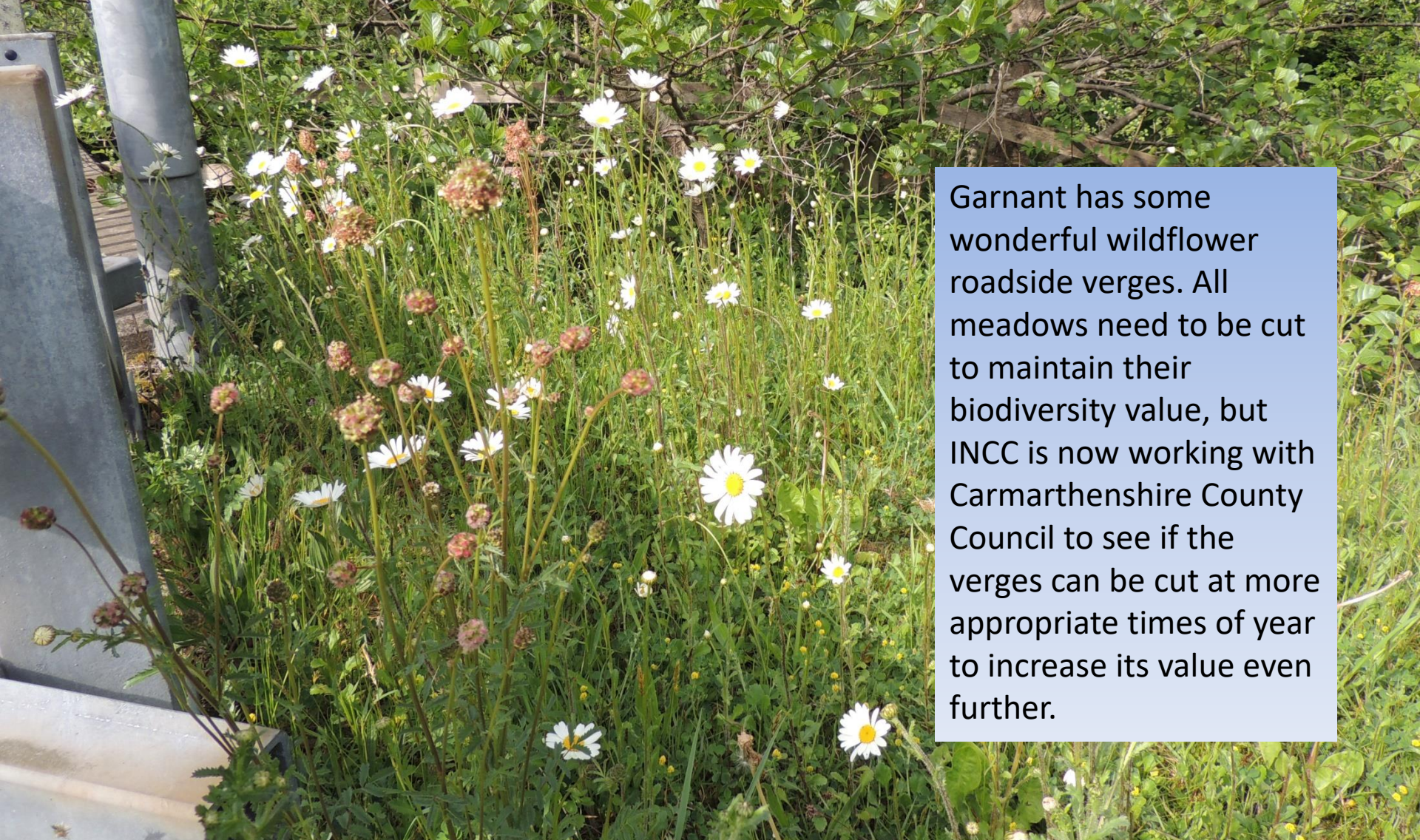
Yellow rattle are key to wildflower meadows because they actually parasitize grasses which reduces the vigour of grass and allows more wildflowers to take hold.

The more yellow rattle the better the health of our meadows.

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Garnant has some wonderful wildflower roadside verges. All meadows need to be cut to maintain their biodiversity value, but INCC is now working with Carmarthenshire County Council to see if the verges can be cut at more appropriate times of year to increase its value even further.

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Orchids have now started growing again in the park thanks to the way it is being managed by Cwmaman Town Council.

Photo – Sarah Martin

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If you are able to venture up to the mountain areas you will be able to see brilliant displays of Cotton Grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*).

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Thank you again for helping with the update and for photos and records – it is very much appreciated. Stay safe and happy wildlife watching.

Rob

Any queries, please do contact me

Rob.parry@incc.wales

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Amman Valley

Wildlife Update Number 7

(Mid May 2020)

Cwm Pedol in the Amman Valley
– a fantastic place for Wildlife

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It's been a wonderful few weeks for wildlife in the Amman Valley.

A male Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*) using one of our nest boxes from last year

This occupied box is a new nesting site for Pied Flycatchers so it's even more exciting.

We definitely need to make metal hole guards to put on the boxes for next year's breeding season.



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This is the nest and eggs of the Pied Flycatcher. They can lay between 5 and 9 eggs in the nest. The nest is made of various materials but is woven together with the bark of honeysuckle.

The Upland Oak woodlands of the Amman Valley are becoming increasingly important for them.

This photo was taken many years ago whilst in Norway studying Beavers for the Welsh Beaver reintroduction.



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Also to make its return to the valley in May is the adult Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) butterfly. They spend the winter hibernating in long grass, then in spring the caterpillars emerge to have a quick nibble on some Devil's-bit Scabious leaves before pupating and eventually transforming into this beautiful creature.



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I think the warm weather over the past few weeks has encouraged Marsh Fritillaries to emerge sooner than they normally do. I normally see them in early June in the Amman Valley.

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It's been a great time for lots of butterflies and moths, including the Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*). Green Hairstreaks are found in more of the upland habitats in the Valley and can often be seen around Gorse and Willow scrub.

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The garden has had some lovely new moths too, including this Pale Tussock (*Calliteara pudibunda*).



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And this Campion moth
(*Sideridis rivularis*)

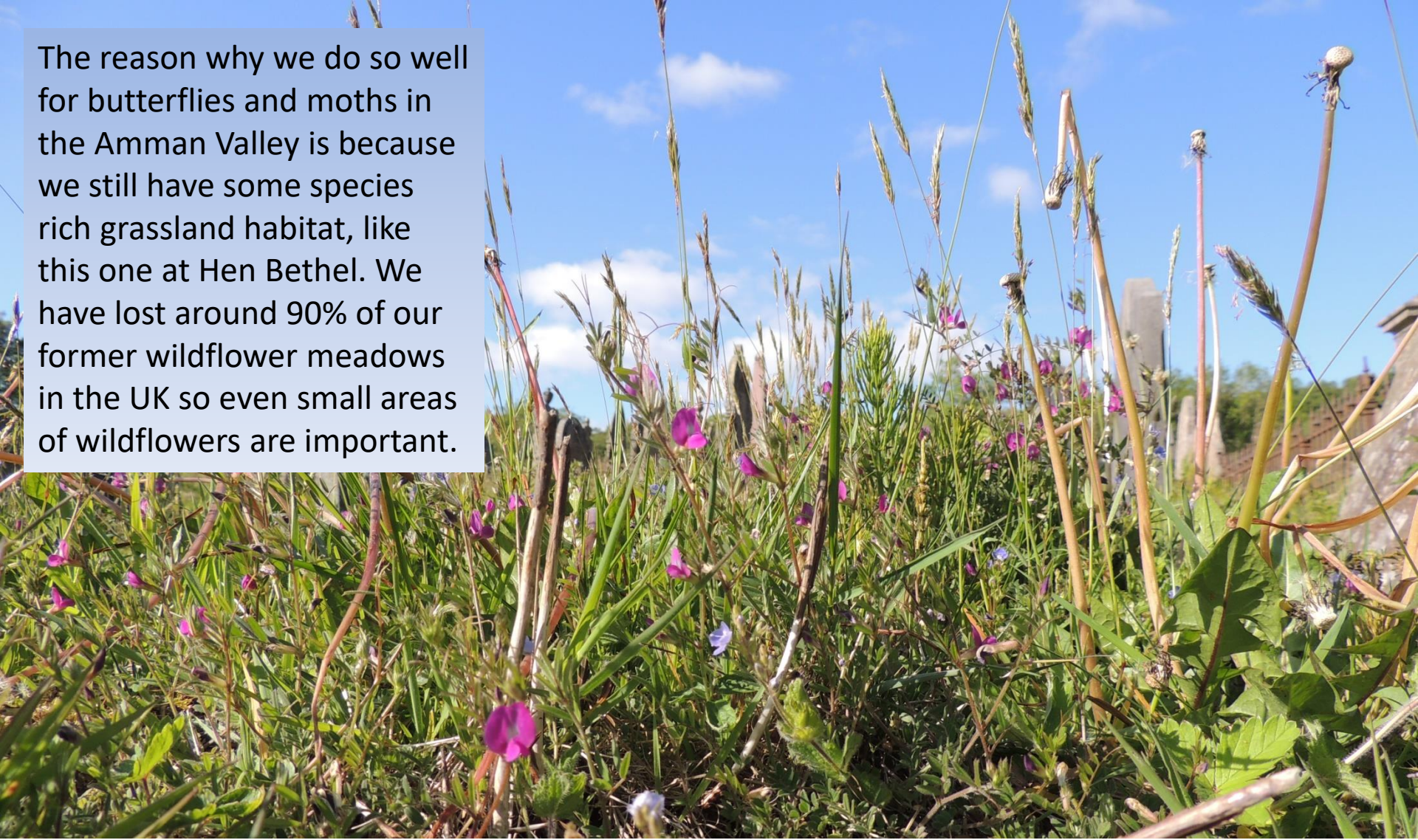


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The reason why we do so well for butterflies and moths in the Amman Valley is because we still have some species rich grassland habitat, like this one at Hen Bethel. We have lost around 90% of our former wildflower meadows in the UK so even small areas of wildflowers are important.



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Wildflowers are essential for insects. As well as nectar and pollen, larvae of different insects (especially butterfly and moths) will only eat a specific species of plant and nothing else.

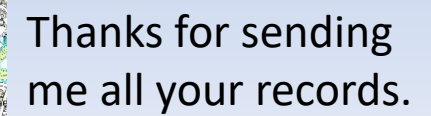
So the more wildflowers in the landscape the more wildlife you have.




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It's not all good news mind you. Last week there was a significant pollution incident on the River Amman. This one was reported to the authorities.

If anyone ever comes across overly muddy or grey rivers and streams please call Natural Resources Wales on:

0300 065 3000.

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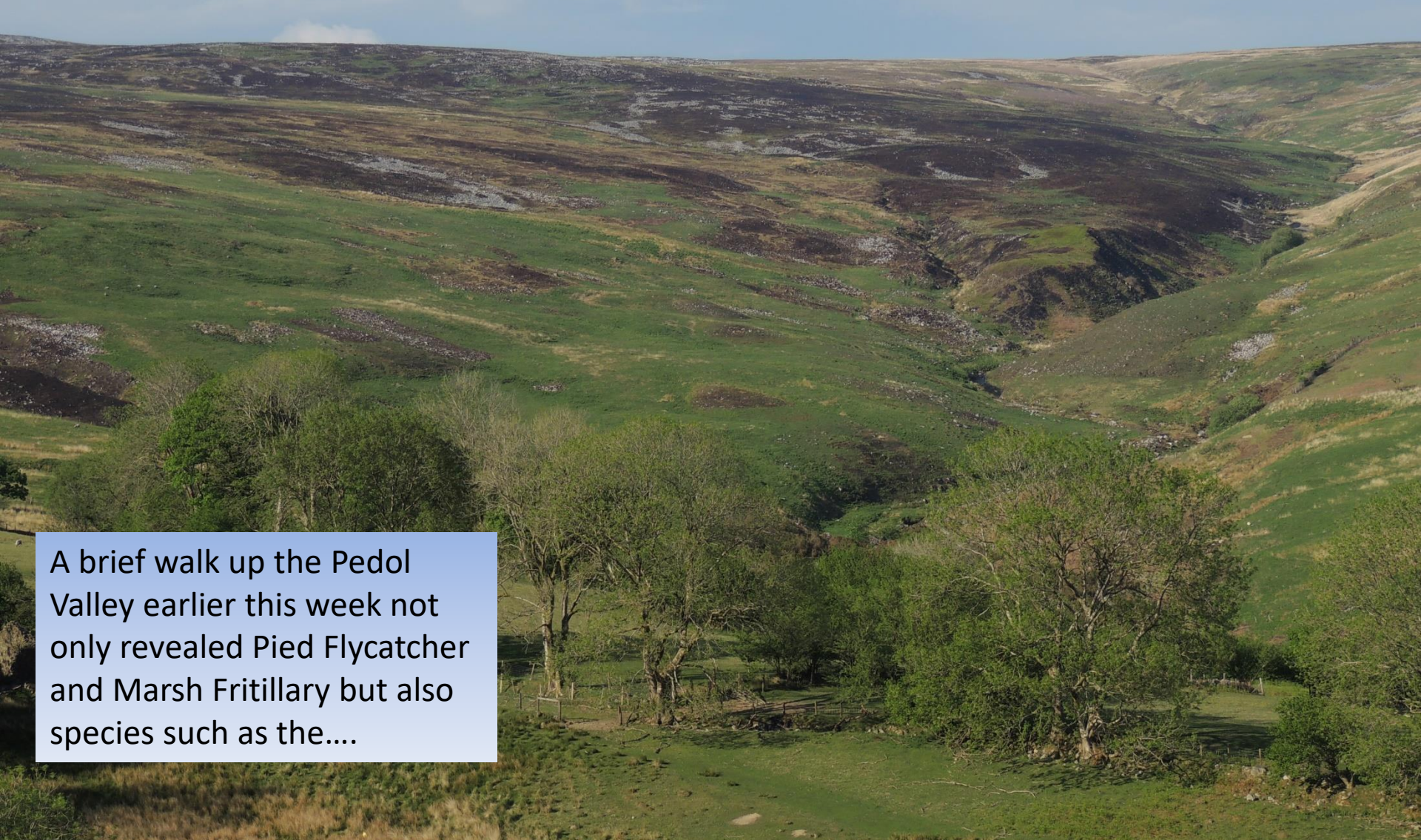


But most of our rivers, like the
Nant Pedol are very clean

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A brief walk up the Pedol Valley earlier this week not only revealed Pied Flycatcher and Marsh Fritillary but also species such as the....

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Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*).


The Wood Warbler is another summer migrant and one that has a very powerful song.

Photo: Jeff Slocomb

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Large Red Damselflies
(*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*)
seen mating and laying
eggs in small bog pool.

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Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*).

This one had lost its tail. Lizards can detach their tail in a process called Autotomy. It is for self-defence, as the detached tail often wiggles around for some time, allowing the Lizard to escape whilst the predator concentrates on the tail.

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And this wonderfully named
Fleabane Tortoise Beetle
(*Cassida murraea*).

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We even accidentally flushed a Skylark from its nest.



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Our House Sparrows in the pole box have not only fledged their young but have mated and laying more eggs already. House Sparrows can have up to 5 broods in a year .



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It's that time of year where
eggs are hatching and chicks
are starting to fledge.

This is a male Chaffinch
(*Fringilla coelebs*) feeding its
chick on the garden path.



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Thanks again for all the photos, feedback and records – they are much appreciated. If you have any queries, please do let me know.

Thank You

Rob

Rob.parry@incc.wales

p.s.

Lichens are wildlife too.

This one is *Xanthoria parietina*

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