

**Amman Valley
Wildlife Update Number 8
(Early June 2020)**

**Happy
'Wales Nature Week'
Enjoy**



**MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU**



**INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU**

Exciting News.....

The Polytunnel is now up and running thanks to Kate Homer. As well as growing on the wildflowers, Kate is also keen to grow fruit and herbs for the community. Kate has set up a Polytunnel What's App group and if you want to be included, please do let me know and I can pass on your details to her.



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The roadside verges in Garnant are looking their best now. Hopefully they can be a good source of wildflower seed for grassland restoration projects locally.

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It's been a great few weeks for Marsh Fritillaries in the Valley. They only fly for a few weeks a year so dry, warm weather is what they like. They have recently been found (for the first time in ages) at Tairgwaith, thanks to Lizzie.

Thanks also to Margret Tasker and Jennifer Thomas for looking around Gwaun Cae Gurwen – Good Luck.



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Margaret also mentioned that she has seen Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) in the garden - first time in 20 years.

I don't think I have ever seen a Rabbit in the Amman Valley - so if you see any, please do let me know.



Rabbits are not a Native species to the UK. They originate from the Eastern Mediterranean and were brought to the UK in the 12th Century by the Normans for fur and food.

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The sighting inspired us to go looking for Rabbits and Brown Hares (*Lepus europaeus*) along the upland slopes and around the Golf Course.

But no luck this time.

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Rob Miller spotted a Tawny Owl and several Owlets. If you go for an evening wander through a woodland at this time of year – you might be able to hear the scratchy squeals of Owlets dotted over the woodland canopy.



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The Cwm Berach is a wonderful place for wildlife. During a walk of the valley we saw.....

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Tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*)

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Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*)
and....

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Stonechat (*Saxicola torquatus*)

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Its been a good few weeks in the garden as well. Lots of wildflowers about to flower in the lawn meadow and we even saw a Common Lizard and a Palmate Newt.

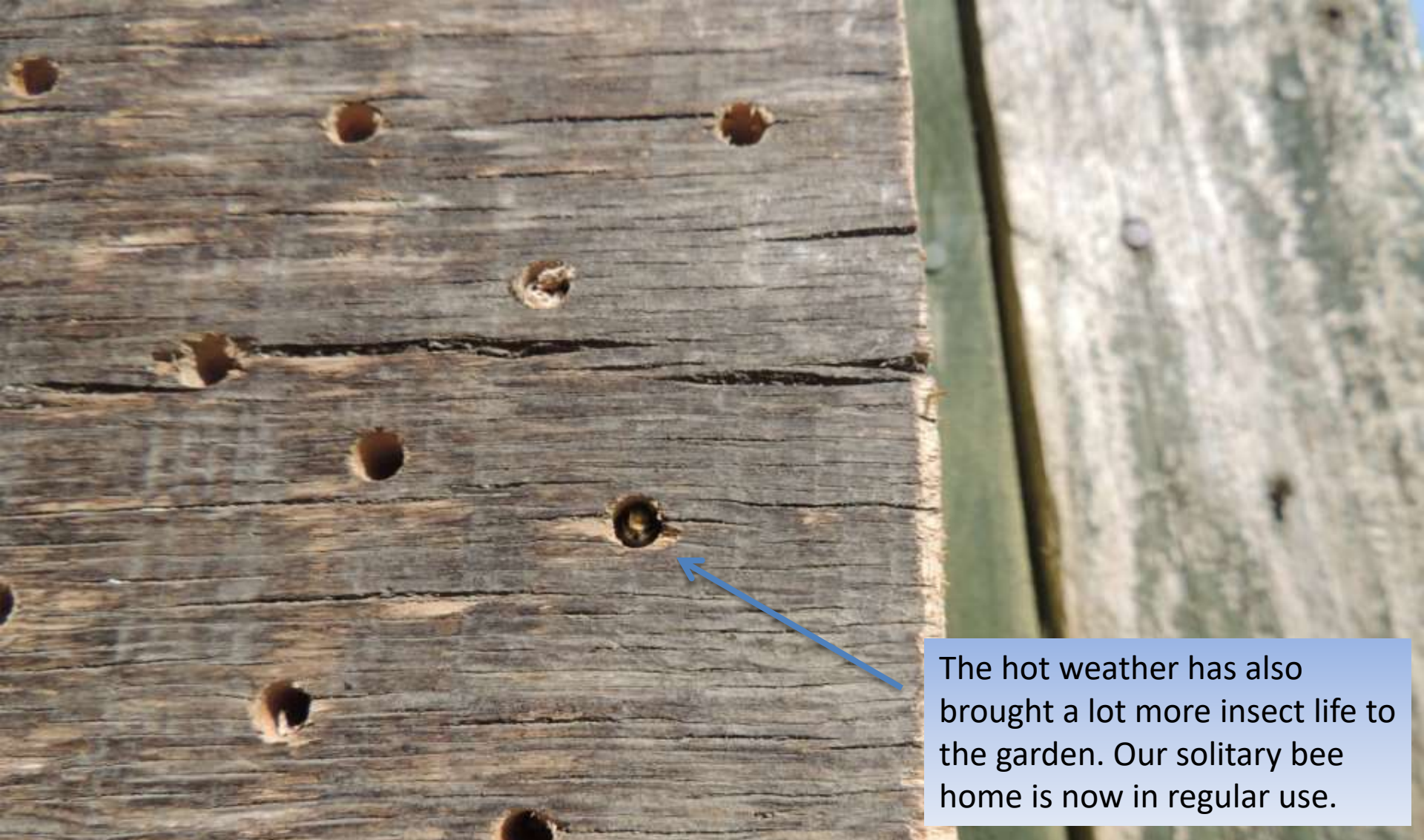
John Driver also saw a Palmate Newt in the garden. When newts are out of ponds, they go into a terrestrial phase and look quite different (a bit velvet looking) to normal. The hot dry weather is bad news for all amphibians – so please do try and create stone and log piles for them to hunt and shelter under. If you need any advice on creating amphibian habitat, please do let me know.



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The hot weather has also brought a lot more insect life to the garden. Our solitary bee home is now in regular use.

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Its just an off-cut of old oak placed in a sunny location in the garden. Small holes are drilled in the wood at varying depths. The bees seem to like it.

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This is a Small Magpie (*Anania hortulata*) moth - a Micro Moth.


Butterflies, Macro Moths and Micro Moths are very closely related and they make up the Order Lepidoptera. Differentiating between the three groups is more about convenience rather than scientific classification as they are all Taxonomically similar.

However, all butterflies in the UK have 'clubbed' antennae, whereas most moths don't.

The exception being the Burnet Moths.....



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A close-up photograph of two 6-spot burnet moths (Zygaena filipendulae) on a pink thistle flower. The moth on the right is in focus, showing its black wings with six distinct red spots and a black body. The moth on the left is slightly out of focus. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

6 Spot Burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*).
It's a Macro Moth, but has a clubbed
Antennae like a butterfly. Its a
Common moth and should be seen
flying during the day later this month.

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Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*)
butterfly are abundant in the garden at
the moment. Notice the clubbed
antennae.



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A close-up photograph of a Poplar Hawk Moth (Laothoe populi) resting on a person's hand. The moth has large, dark brown wings with lighter, wavy lines and a scalloped edge. Its body is dark and fuzzy, and it has long, thin antennae. The person's hand is visible in the background, with a gold ring on one finger.

Its not all about size. This is a Poplar Hawk Moth (*Laothoe populi*). Its quite common and we are now seeing it in our moth trap in the garden.

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My favourite moth has also recently turned up in the moth trap. This is a Buff-tip (*Phalera bucephala*). Its camouflaged as a twig - and its just wonderful.

Buff-tip head on.

One of the most famous moths that we get in our garden is the Peppered Moth (*Biston betularia*). There are two forms of the Peppered Moth - the white with black markings (commonest form) and the rare dark colour form. The Peppered moth is a camouflage specialist and the mottled white and black allows the moth to merge into the trunks of trees to hide from predators. However during the industrial revolution the rarer dark form of the species was far more abundant due to the atmospheric air pollution settling on trees and making the trees darker. The whiter moths stood out more and the dark ones blended in more. A study conducted in the 1980s showed that the frequency of the dark form of the Peppered Moth was 60 – 80% higher in polluted cities such as London.



Dark Form

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Green Tiger Beetles (*Cicindela campestris*) can often be seen in gardens at this time of year. They are ferocious predators - fast and agile and prey on ants, beetles, caterpillars and more. They have been recorded running at 5mph, which is very fast for something 15mm in length.



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Fungi are among the most important organisms in the world. Most can be seen fruiting in the Autumn months but this Sulphur Polypore (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) is fruiting now in our woodlands. Its is an edible mushroom and also called 'Chicken of the Woods' due to its taste and texture of chicken – apparently.

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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.

Please also let me know if you would like to be added to the Polytunnel WhatsApp Group.

Thank You

Rob

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Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 9 (Mid June 2020)



View down the Grenig Valley



Thank you to everyone who filled me in on the distribution of Rabbits in the valley. I still haven't seen one, but obviously lots of you have, which is good news. It seems like they have been absent for a while and have started to make a comeback in the last year or two.

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The wildflower meadow at Golwg yr Amman is looking beautiful at the moment with lots of wildflowers in full bloom.

Although wildflowers get all the attention, grasses, particularly long grass is really important for lots of wildlife too.

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The UK's smallest rodent, the Harvest Mouse (*Micromys minutus*) needs grassy habitats to live. They spend much of their time during the summer months foraging along the tops of long grasses (stalk zone) and other plants in search of seeds, fruits and insects.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews

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They build small nests of grass in amongst long grass, no bigger than a tennis ball. There can be between 3-8 pups in a litter and they can have up to 3 litters in a year. Not bad for an animal that only lives for around 18 months.

This is a harvest mouse nest found in the Autumn. The nest was found in an abandoned field with lots of long grass and scrub – the best habitat for Harvest mice.

Unfortunately long grass is not always appreciated and is quite often cut to make it look 'tidier'



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You can survey for Harvest mice by looking for their nests in the Autumn (toward the end of the breeding season). However, I prefer to use food bait stations placed in the stalk zone with a motion sensitive camera. Its much easier and enjoyable.

There are no records of Harvest Mice in the Valley so we can hopefully have a look for them later in the year.



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Grassland habitats are also very important for invertebrates. The Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) butterfly has only been flying for the past week or two and is a wonderful addition to our grassland fauna.



Photo: Lizzie Wilberforce

The hillsides are in full colour at the moment. As well as colour, Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) are very important for insects.



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If you do venture up to the heathland habitats of the Amman Valley at this time of year, you will notice a lot more Wood Pigeons (*Columba palumbus*). They head up to the mountains to gorge themselves on Bilberries (I call them Wimberries) – (*Vaccinium myrtillus*). Although it's a treat for them, it does bring them closer to.....



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Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus*). These birds of prey are the fastest animal on Earth and are quite often seen hunting over the valley.

The UK population plummeted during the war because orders were given to kill Peregrines so that messenger pigeons had a safer journey to and from the battle field. Persecution from Pigeon fanciers, harmful agricultural chemicals and egg collectors have all meant that the bird is still at risk.



Whilst in Norway studying Eurasian Beavers (*Castor fiber*), I was lucky enough to get involved with a Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) reintroduction to Ireland.

Norwegian Sea Eagle nests with three chicks were being used for the reintroduction - as the third chick never survives in the wild.


There are ongoing studies to look into the feasibility of reintroducing Sea Eagles to Wales. They are doing well in Scotland.



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From one of the largest birds in the UK to one of the smallest. There are lots of fledgling wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) out there at the moment, scrambling around in the hedges and dense scrub found dotted around the valley.

Photo: Lizzie Wilberforce

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One surprise bird seen on the River Amman in June was a female Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*) and her ducklings.

It's a very rare sighting for Carmarthenshire. These ducks are a non-native species, brought to the UK from China as ornamental additions to estate ponds and lakes – but they escaped and spread. The male Mandarin is very colourful.....



Photo: Lizzie Winterforce

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Another non-native bird, which is much less welcome to wildlife is the Pheasant. Pheasants are voracious predators and eat insects, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals and birds eggs as well as seeds and berries.

Between 35 – 50 million pheasants are reared and released into the wild each year in the UK. Those that survive the 'shoot' go on to breed, feed and make more pheasants.





It seems like its been a good year for birds so far. The garden is full of fledgling birds at the moment.

As well as gardens, houses and buildings can be crucial places for breeding birds. The back of New Bethel Chapel in Glanaman has at least 4 House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) nests and 3 Swift (*Apus apus*) nests at the moment. The loss of old buildings can have a huge impact on breeding birds and several species of bat, which is why they often need protection.

Photo: Lizzie Wilberforce

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The Polytunnel is taking shape thanks to Kate and we now have over 300 Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) plants waiting to help feed up Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) caterpillars when the time comes.



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The Marsh Fritillary breeding season is now coming to an end. You may still be able to see the odd one flying about, but most have bred and laid their eggs. The next thing to look out for will be the caterpillars and their larval webs.



Photo: Vaughn Matthews

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Its been a good few weeks for moths in the garden including this White Ermine (*Spilosoma lubricipeda*).

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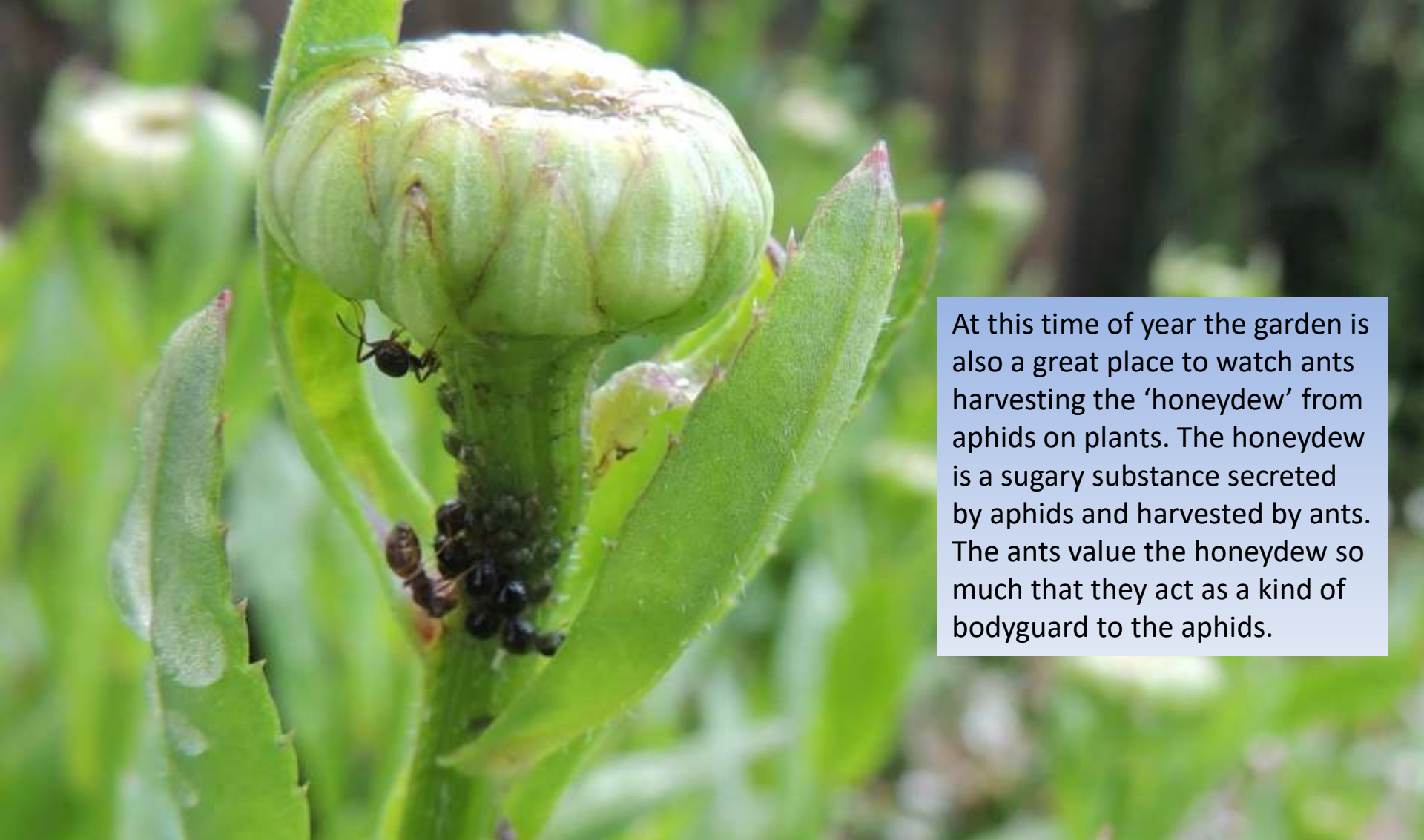


And this Phoenix (*Eulithis prunata*) moth.

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At this time of year the garden is also a great place to watch ants harvesting the 'honeydew' from aphids on plants. The honeydew is a sugary substance secreted by aphids and harvested by ants. The ants value the honeydew so much that they act as a kind of bodyguard to the aphids.

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John Maul had a badger in the garden over the past few weeks.

Photo: John Maul

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Photo: John Driverl

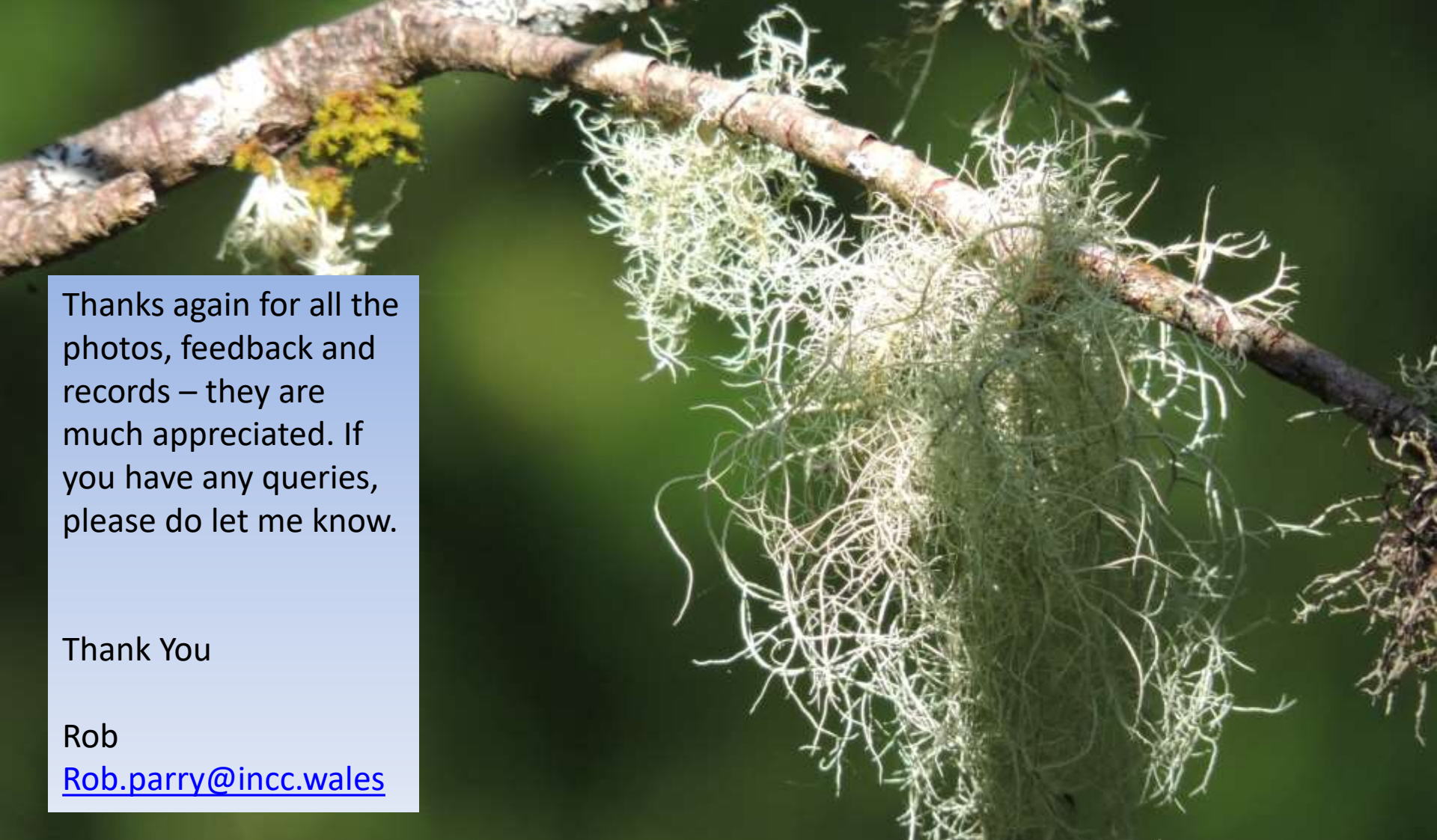
Though I think the best photo has to go to John Driver who has Solitary bees using the holes in his Parasol in the garden.

Clever bees.



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As far as wildlife goes, the winner of the group that gets the least attention is..... Rusts and Smuts. This is the Nettle Rust (*Puccinia urticata*), which develops on the leaves and stem of Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*). This one was found at Golwg yr Amman.



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

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Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 10 (Late June 2020)

Hen Bethel – the small chapel on the north of the valley is a wonderful place for wildlife. The old grassland among the grave stones are full of wildflowers.

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We undertook a survey of Hen Bethel last week and recorded 140 different species of plant, invertebrate and bird in just four hours.



Including this Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*).

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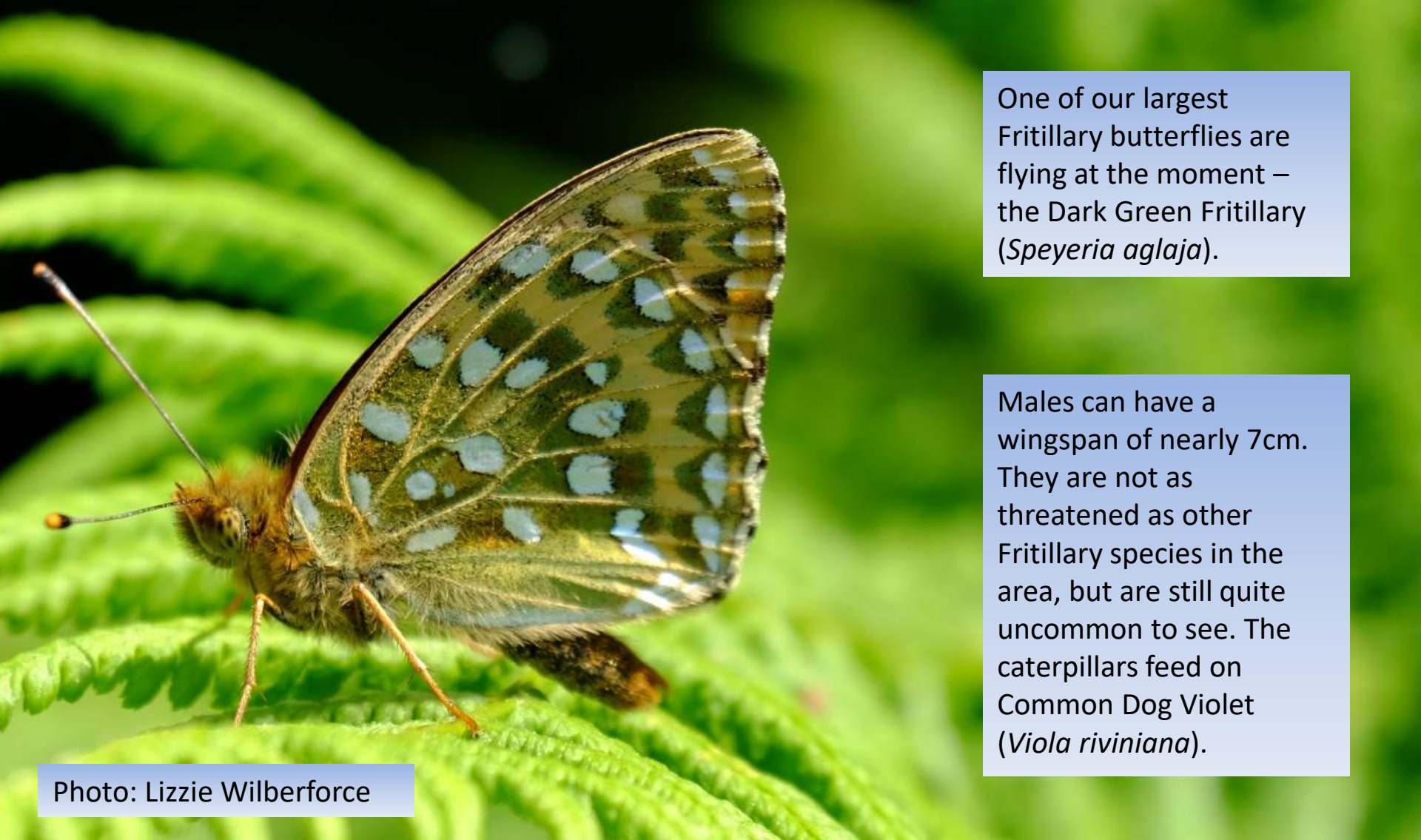


We recorded 14 different species of grass, including this beautiful looking Common Quaking Grass (*Briza media*).

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One of our largest Fritillary butterflies are flying at the moment – the Dark Green Fritillary (*Speyeria aglaja*).

Males can have a wingspan of nearly 7cm. They are not as threatened as other Fritillary species in the area, but are still quite uncommon to see. The caterpillars feed on Common Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*).

Photo: Lizzie Wilberforce

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Dark Green Fritillary adult.

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Because the grassland at Hen Bethel hasn't received any agricultural inputs for hundreds of years, the soil and grassland diversity is much higher than in managed grasslands close by.

The long grass is great for Grasshoppers like this Field Grasshopper (*Chorthippus brunneus*).



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To tell the difference between grasshoppers and crickets take a look at the antennae. Crickets – like this Great Green Cricket (*Tettigonia viridissima*) have long antennae. Grasshoppers, like the previous slide have much shorter antennae. Also, female crickets have a long ovipositor, an organ used for laying eggs.





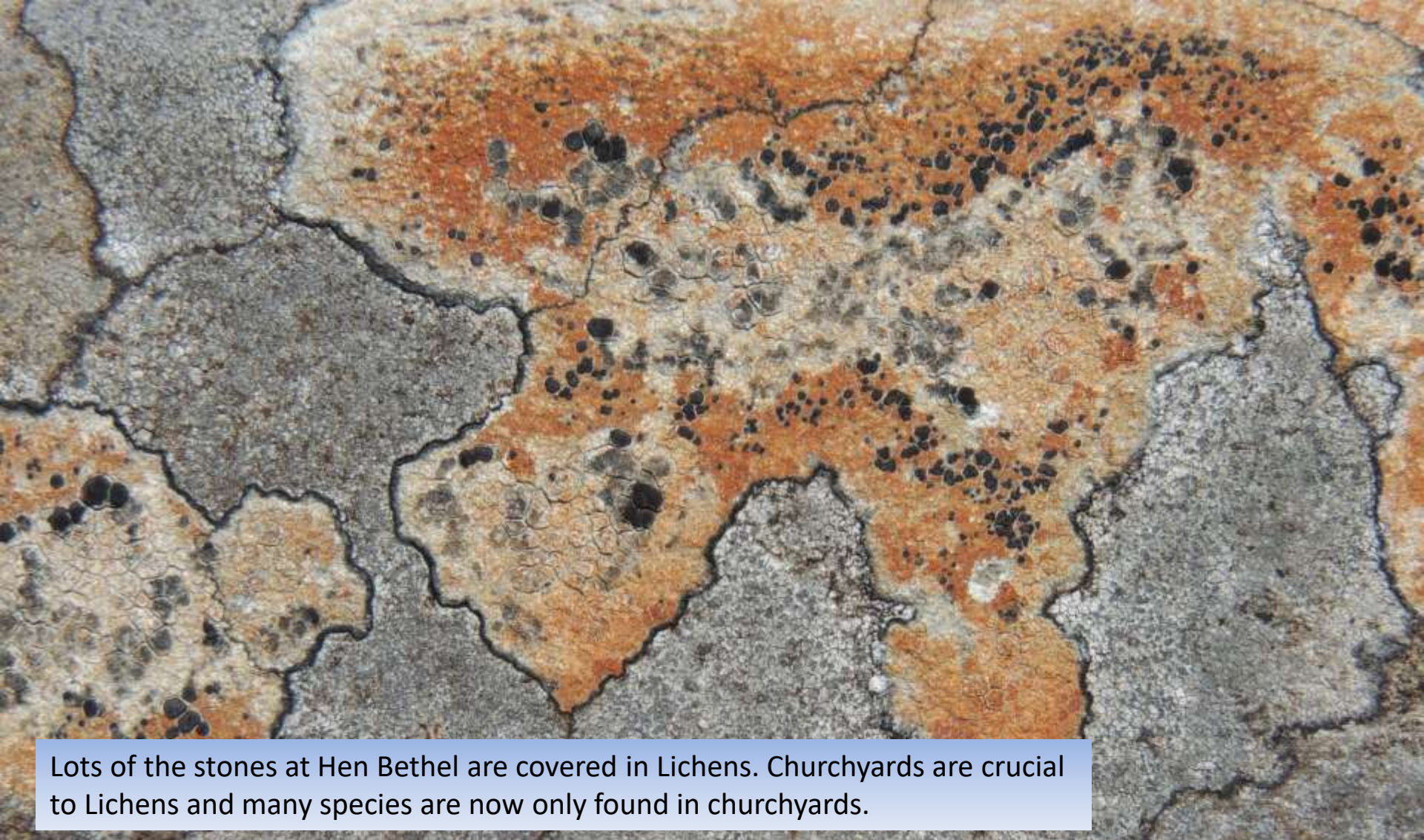
Whilst surveying we were treated to an aerial display by a Raven (*Corvus corax*).

We get Ravens breeding in a few places in the Amman Valley. To spot them in flight look for a 'diamond' shaped tail like in this photo. Crows on the other hand are smaller and have a much more 'fan' shaped tail.

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Lots of the stones at Hen Bethel are covered in Lichens. Churchyards are crucial to Lichens and many species are now only found in churchyards.

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Hen Bethel, is a special place, (as with many areas of the valley).
But we still haven't found a Glowworm (*Lampyris noctiluca*).

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It's been a very busy few weeks with moths in the garden. We had our first ever Buff Arches (*Habrosyne pyritoides*).

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We also had this July Highflyer
(*Hydriomena furcata*).

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And this Light Emerald.
(*Campaea margaritata*).

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Lots of moth species names are quite descriptive. This moth isn't very distinctive and can be confused with several other moths. Its called The Uncertain (*Hoplodrina octogenaria*).

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Photo: Rhian Thomas

Rhian Thomas was extremely lucky to get a Scarlet Tiger Moth (*Callimorpha dominula*) in the garden.

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Thank you to everyone
for the continued
records of Rabbits.
Especially to Jennifer
Thomas for this photo.



It's not all good news. On a short walk down the Amman, we came across piles and piles of plastic litter in the river. The currents and eddies in the river below weirs causes a pile of litter to develop.

Lizzie and I decided to do a litter pick from Hen Bethel down the road to Folland Road. In just 920m we collected 123 items of litter, weighing 3.4kg in total.

Photo: Lizzie Wilberforce





Photo: Lizzie Wilberforce

The summer months are the best time for dragonflies and damselflies, like this Golden-ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*).

All dragonflies need water to lay their eggs, but you might see them far away from water. The reason for is to avoid predation by other dragonflies that emerged before them. Once they are fully developed and strong fliers they return to the watery habitats.

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As well as moths, we often find beetles in the moth trap, like this Black Burying Beetle (*Nicrophorus humator*). This one is covered in hundreds of little mites.



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Mites are also the cause of mange in foxes
. We get this little 'mangy' fox (*Vulpes
vulpes*) in the garden in recent weeks.

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We also get this little Fox cub
turning up from time to time.

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The wetter weather this month has been very important for our largest shrew – the Water Shrew (*Neomys fodiens*).

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Water Shrews need to feed every few minutes. Many die of starvation when they wear their teeth down and can no longer feed. This species is a red-toothed shrew. Iron is deposited in the enamel of the tooth-tips, making them more resistant to wear-and-tear, and giving them a red appearance.



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Placing refugia in grassy and scrubby habitats is often a good way of surveying for small mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

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We have been trying to keep an eye out for House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) nests in the valley over the past few weeks. These are wonderful little birds who grace our buildings and summers every year when they arrive here from Africa. Their nests are made from mud and are often positioned under the eaves of houses.



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House Martins collecting mud for nest building. If you see any nests on one of your walks, please do let me know.



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Finally. My all-time favourite species – the Water Vole (*Arvicola amphibius*). Once very common, the Water Vole is the fastest declining mammal species ever recorded. There are no records of Water Voles in the Valley, but we are learning more and more about upland Water Voles, so you never know. I recently gave an online lecture on water voles in the uplands which you can find and watch [Here](#) .





Thanks again for all the photos, feedback and records – they are much appreciated.

If the Water Vole link doesn't work, please do let me know

Thank You

Rob

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