

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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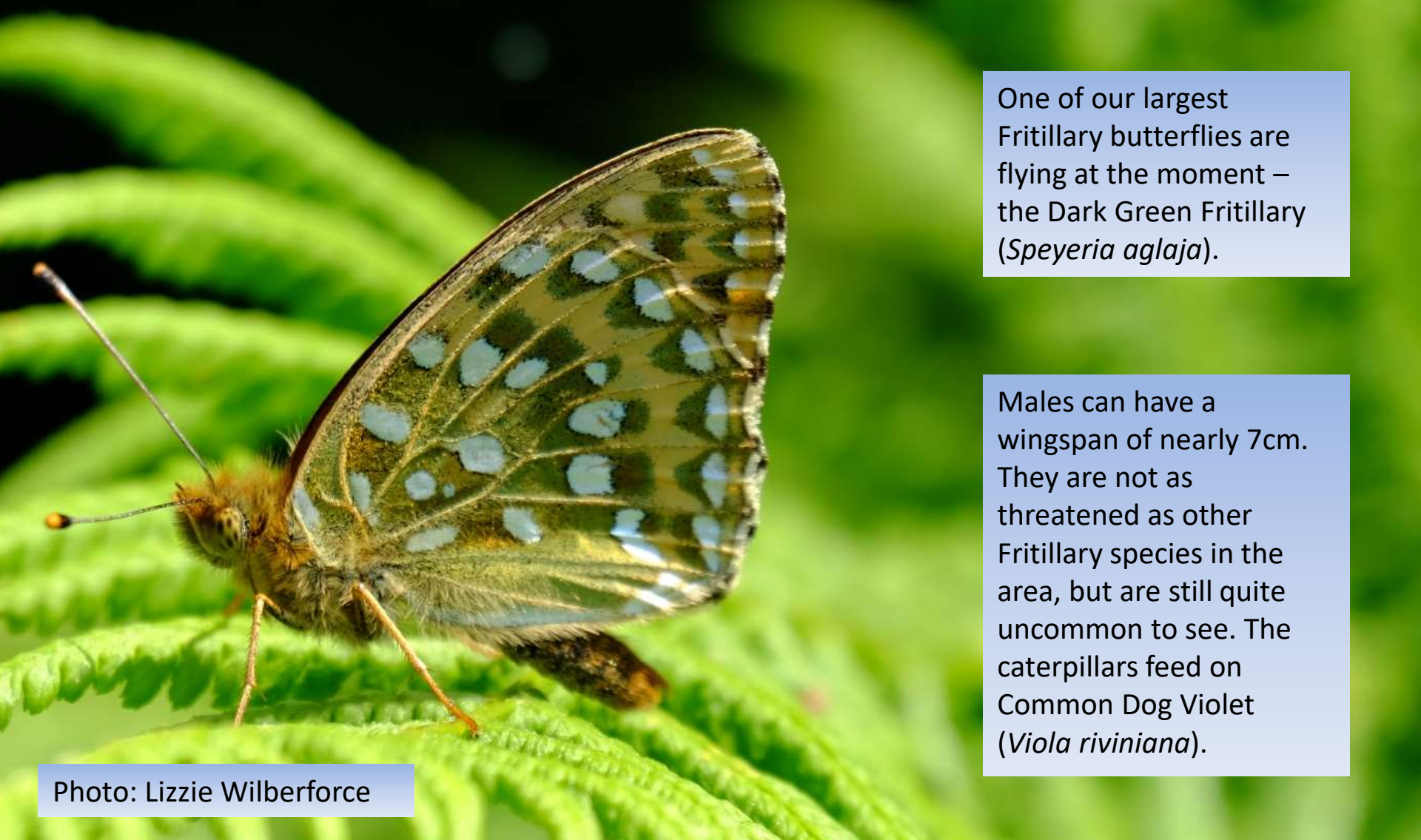


We recorded 14 different species of grass, including this beautiful looking Common Quaking Grass (*Briza media*).

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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



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.





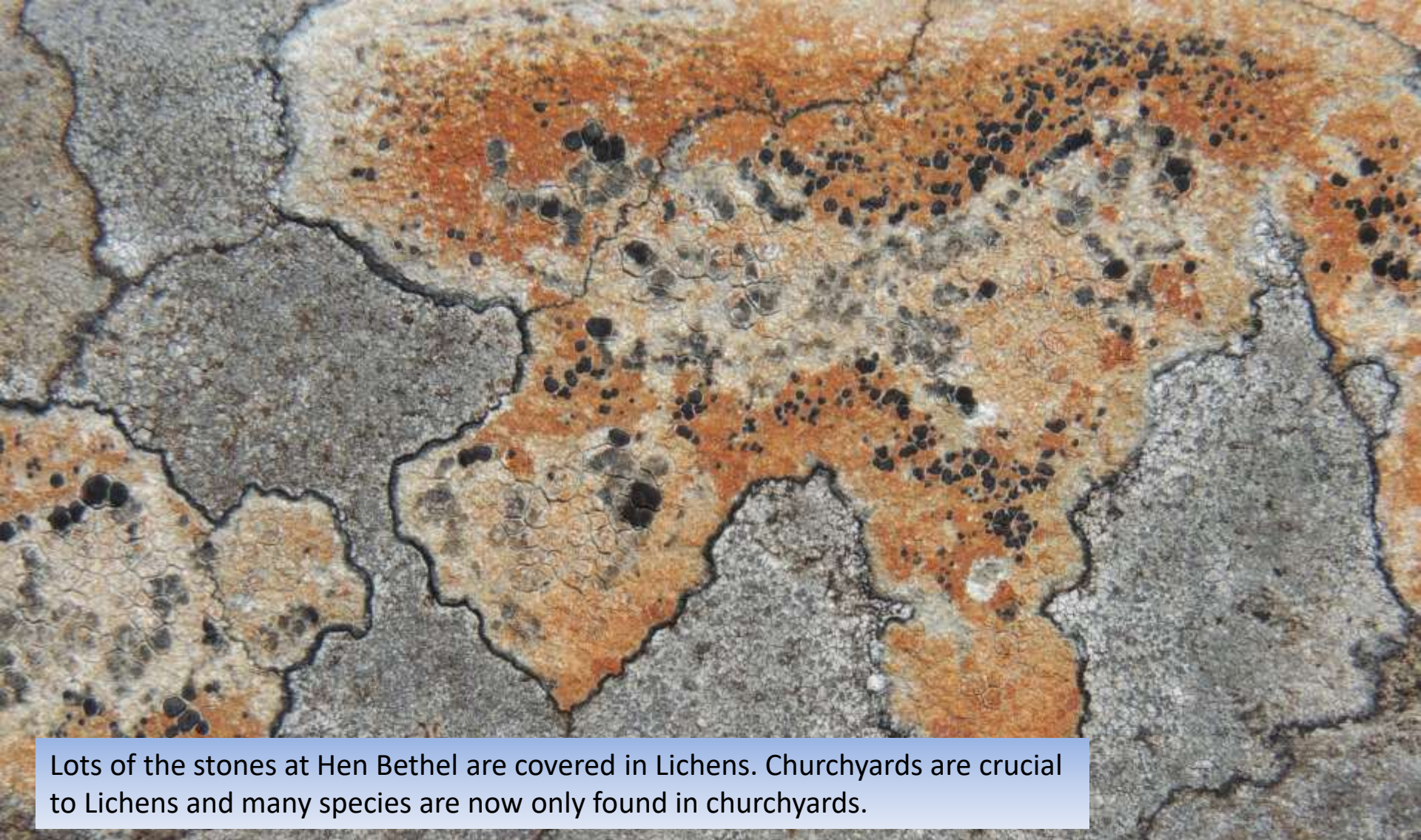
Whilst surveying we were treated to an aerial display by a Raven (*Corvus corax*).

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.



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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Its 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.



Its 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

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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.

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](#) .



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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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