

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.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



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.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



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

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'



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

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.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

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

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



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

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

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.....



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

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.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

A close-up photograph of a small brown bird, likely a wren, perched on a large green leaf. The bird has a yellow beak and is looking towards the right. The background is a soft-focus green and blue, suggesting a natural outdoor setting with foliage and a clear sky.

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

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

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 Wilderforce

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

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.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Photo: Lizzie Wilberforce

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.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

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.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



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



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

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

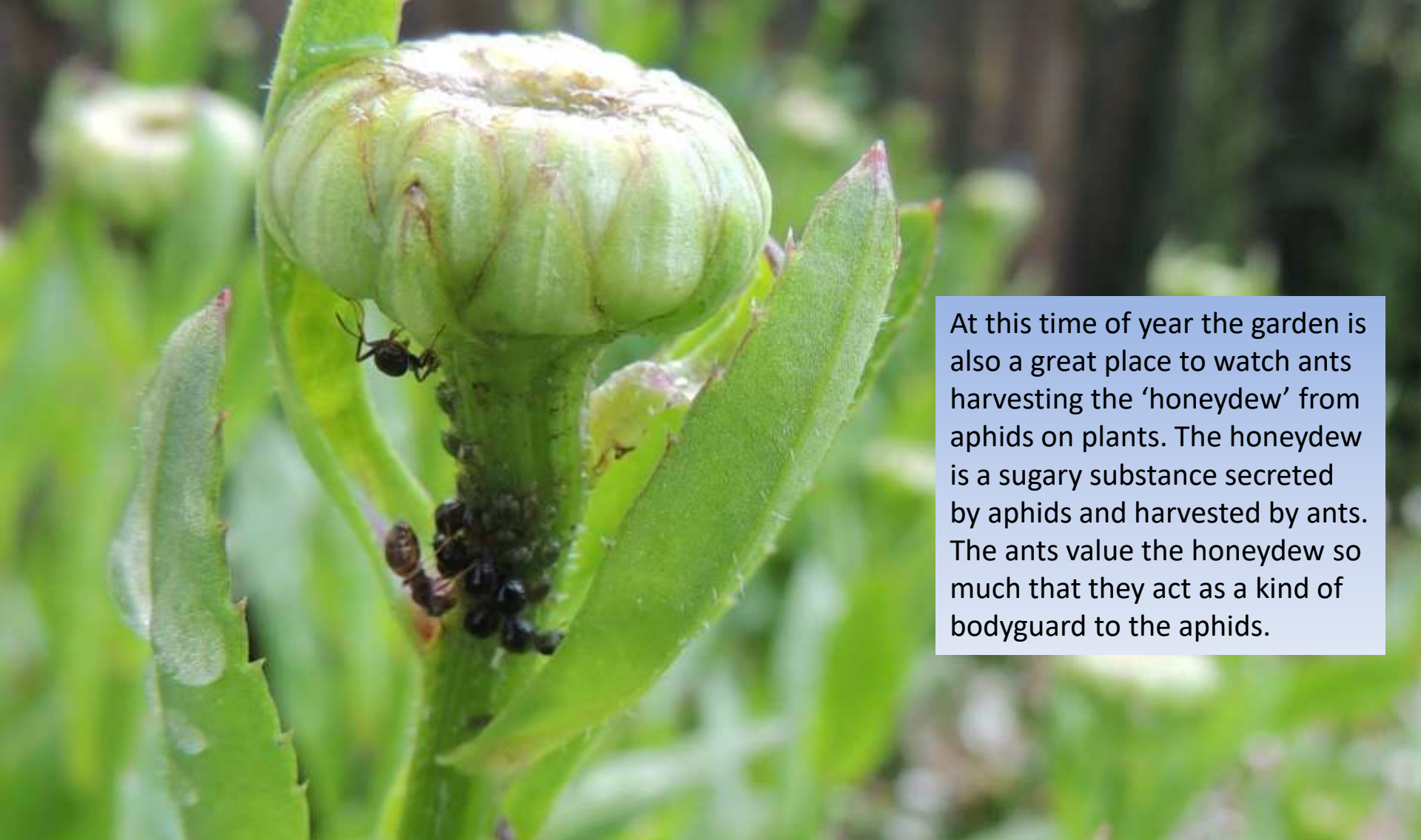


And this Phoenix (*Eulithis prunata*) moth.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



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.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



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

Photo: John Maul

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



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.



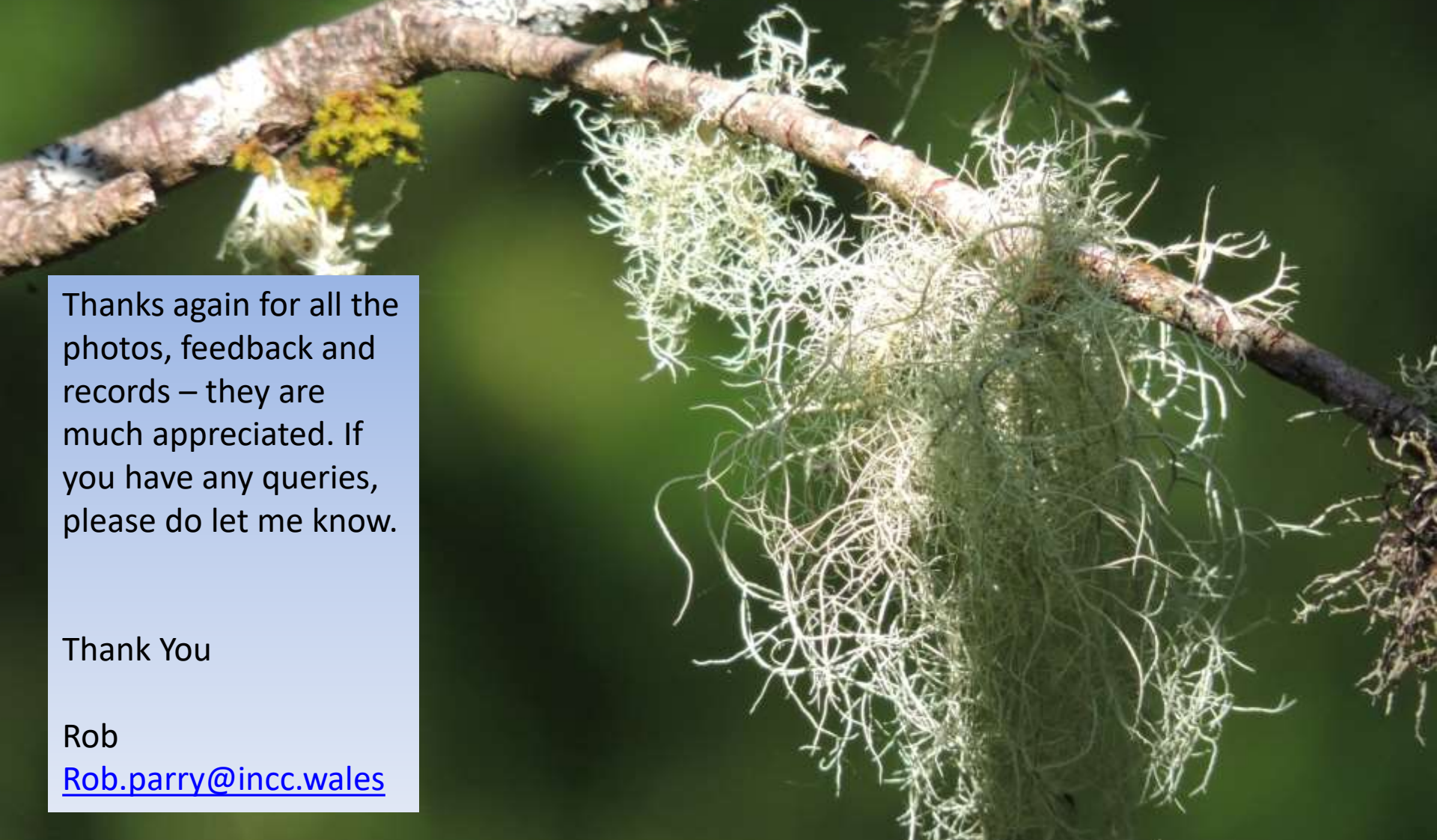


As far as wildlife goes, the winner of the group that gets the least attention is..... Rusts and Smuts. This is the Nettle Rust (*Puccinia urticata*), which develops on the leaves and stem of Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*). This one was found at Golwg yr Amman.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



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

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU