

# Wild Cymru

## Amman Valley Newsletter

### February 2026





We start this newsletter with some big news..... INCC is rebranding, as of March 2026, our new name will be **'Wild Cymru'**





The new name marks the next chapter of our journey, and I wanted to share the news with the people and supporters of the Amman Valley first. Thank you for all your support over the past 7 years.





Just before Christmas, students and volunteers helped sow wildflower meadow seeds at our Llwyndewi Nature Reserve.



Hopefully the new species rich meadow will flourish and we can use new seeds from there to restore other parts of the nature reserve and within the Amman Valley.



Please do keep an eye and ear out for Dippers on the River Aman. Dippers are one of the earliest breeding birds in Wales. At this time of year many Dippers will already be sitting on eggs. The heavy rain and swollen rivers means it's a bit harder for the Dippers to get to their underwater prey such as the larvae of mayflies, stoneflies, caddis flies and Freshwater Shrimp.

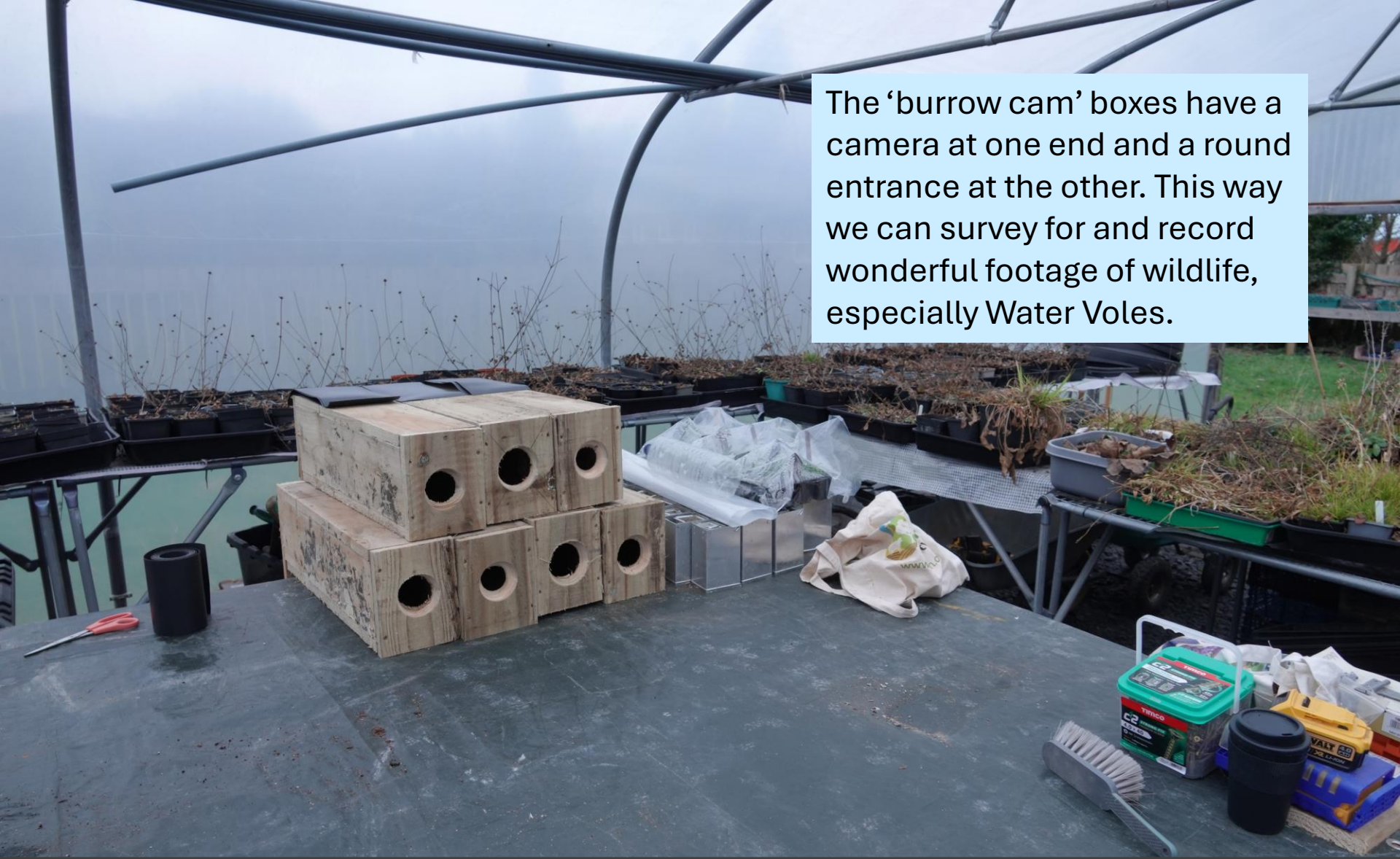


Photo: Jeff Slocombe

Despite the heavy (non-stop) rain, we have been busy at the wildlife garden, although admittedly inside the Polytunnel. We were using wood, cloth, compost and cement to make artificial Water Vole burrows.



The 'burrow cam' boxes have a camera at one end and a round entrance at the other. This way we can survey for and record wonderful footage of wildlife, especially Water Voles.



Water Vole inside a burrow cam box





The colder days of winter see uncommon winter visiting birds coming down from the hills to feed. This beautiful Redwing one of a small flock seen in Parc Golwg yr Aman.

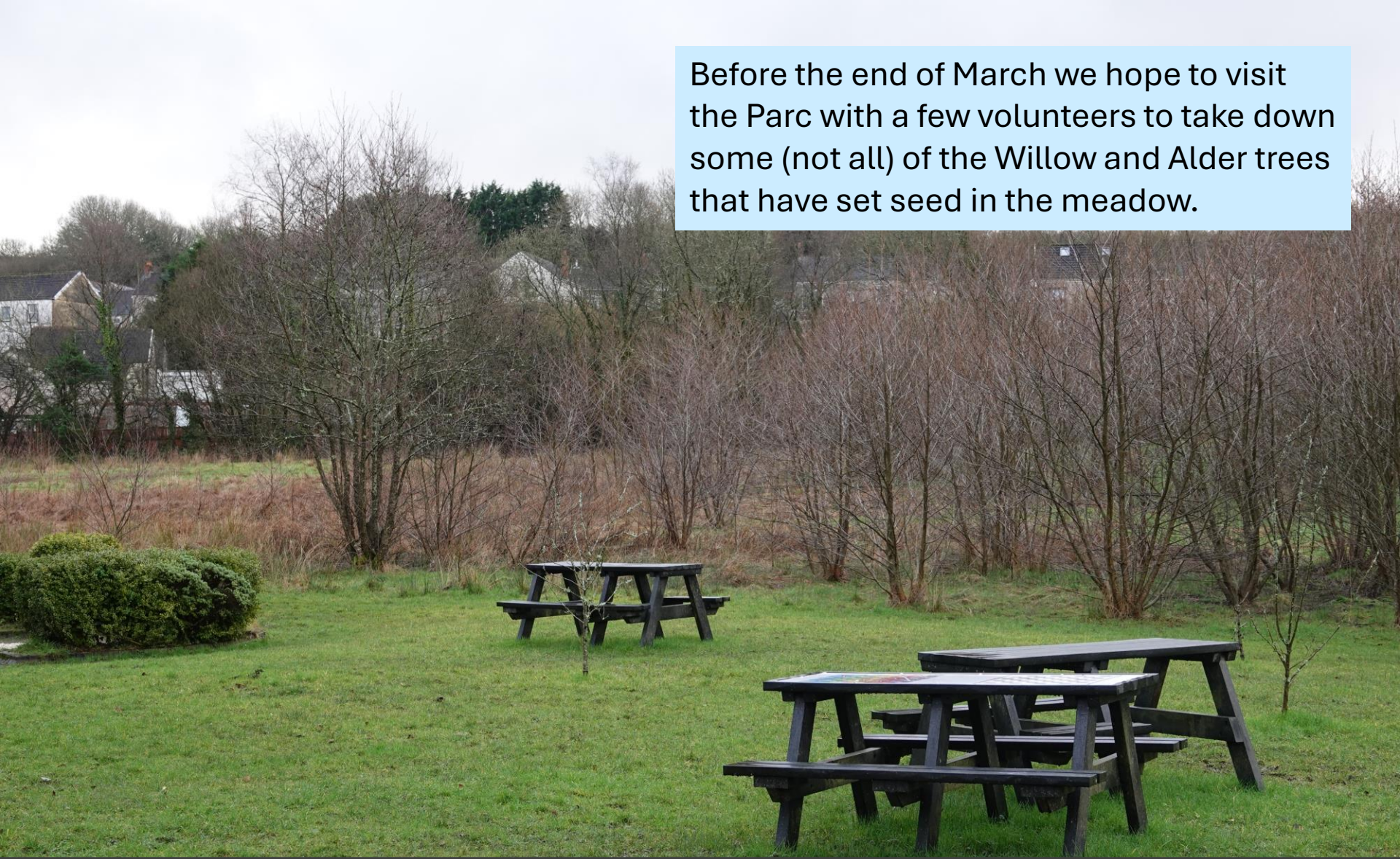
Golwg yr Aman is one of our most spectacular meadows. Over the past year or so it has not been managed too well and lots of scrub and trees have taken over, reducing the wildflower spectacle.

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Before the end of March we hope to visit the Parc with a few volunteers to take down some (not all) of the Willow and Alder trees that have set seed in the meadow.



Another project we are hoping to run this year (if we find funding), is a Swift conservation project.

Swifts are amazing birds that we only get to see for a few short months each year. Their numbers are dwindling across Wales – so we want to change that, starting in the Amman Valley.

We will hopefully be making dozens of specially designed Swift nest boxes as well as installing a Swift tower in the Valley. A swift tower holds lots of nest boxes up high where the birds like to nest.



Changes to modern housing building techniques means that there are fewer gaps for Swifts to nest. Nest boxes are a good way to recreate these gaps in our eaves.

Centuries ago Swifts, were originally tree dwelling nesters, taking up residency in old Woodpecker holes. This is now very rare and most Swifts nest in the eaves of houses and buildings. Their screeching calls of an evening is the most beautiful sound of summer.



Another bird that is desperately in need of our help is the Willow Tit. The Willow Tit population of the UK has declined by around 97% since the 1990s. Willow Tits are now the most threatened resident bird species in the UK and it is quite possible that they will go extinct in Wales in the next few decades unless we act to save them.



Photo: Jeff Slocombe



We are very fortunate that we still have Willow Tits in the Amman Valley and at our Llwyndewi Nature Reserve. They nest in deadwood, and they excavate their own little nest chamber. At the reserve we have been cutting logs to strap to trees so once the logs start to decay the Willow Tits can excavate their nests in them.



The biggest threat facing Willow Tits in the UK however isn't nest site availability. It's the presence of garden birds such as Blue Tits and Great Tits.

Photo: Sorcha Lewis



Blue Tits and Great Tits actively seek out and evict Willow Tits from their nest once the Willow Tit has dug it. Blue Tits can even build their own nest on top of Willow Tit eggs and chicks. Once a Blue Tit finds a nest there is often very little a Willow Tit can do to protect themselves, and the only hope is to try to dig another nest chamber somewhere else. Humans have caused this problem by feeding birds and putting nest boxes up in the garden. This gives Blue Tits and Great Tits a huge advantage over Willow Tits, and the Willow Tit population is struggling to compete.

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Unfortunately, its not just Blue Tits and Great Tits that are a problem for Willow Tits. Great Spotted Woodpeckers whose numbers are also artificially high in the UK due to garden feeders are one of the Willow Tits most feared predators. Because Willow Tits nest in deadwood, they are easy to get to for Woodpeckers.



Photo: Sorcha Lewis



In some good news, our Marsh Fritillary caterpillars have woken up from hibernation. The caterpillars don't eat at first when they emerge from hibernation, which is a good thing because their Devil's-bit Scabious food plant is still very small and hidden away.



Hopefully all the caterpillars waking up from hibernation means that we are in for another bumper year of rearing and releasing into the wild.

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Vaughn has been visiting our Pied Flycatcher nest boxes in the Amman Valley recently to clean them out before the birds return in spring. Removing old nest material helps reduce parasites in the nest and makes the boxes more favourable for nesting.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews

The weather has been pretty bad for moth trapping in the garden so far this year, but hopefully in the next few weeks we can get the moth traps dusted off. It's a good time of year to spot the Oak Beauty.



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In February and March keep an eye out for the flowers of Hazel Trees. The catkins (male parts) have been out for several weeks, but now its time for the female flowers to shine. They are only small so you need to get a close in view.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews





Photo: Vaughn Matthews

Another species to look out for in early Spring are Lizards. This photo was recently taken by Vaughn at our nature reserve.

This time of year is a great time to check on ponds for Frogspawn. Although tempting, it is always best to leave frogspawn where you see it and not move it from pond to pond. Moving frogspawn also moves viruses, diseases and non-native plants around too. Ranavirus is the leading cause of global amphibian decline and has already resulted in several species going extinct.



Also keep an eye out for Toadspawn which is much rarer to see. Unlike frogspawn, toadspawn is long strings of spawn woven around pond vegetation.





If you could do just one thing in your garden for wildlife this year – dig a pond. They are wonderful for all sorts of wildlife.

Thank you.

Please do keep sending us your wildlife and landscape photos of the Amman Valley. If you have any questions, please do get in touch at: [Rob.parry@wild.cymru](mailto:Rob.parry@wild.cymru)

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