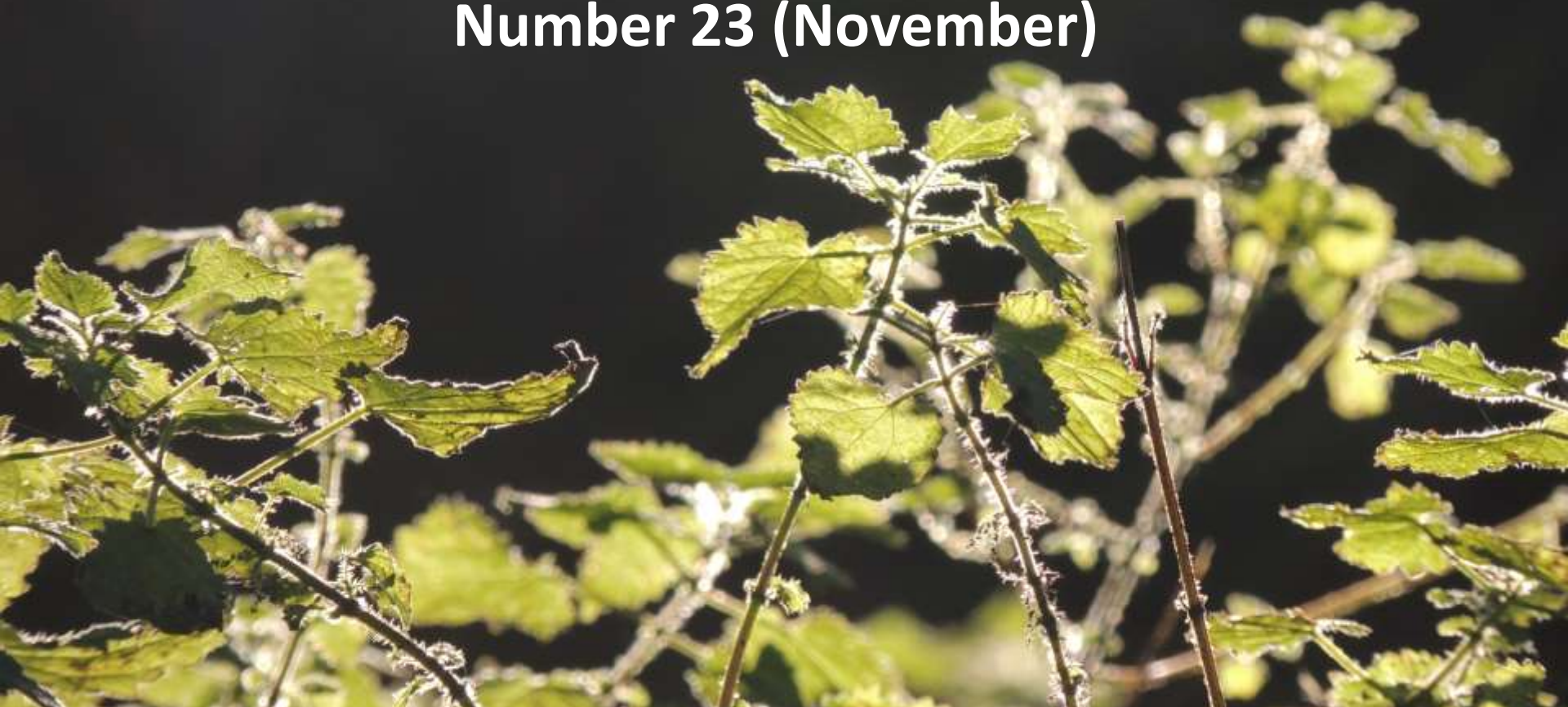


Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 23 (November)



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You may be seeing a lot more Jays (*Garrulus glandarius*) in the garden lately.

Jays are colourful members of the Corvid or Crow family. They are woodland specialists and partly responsible for our Oak woodlands. In winter they gorge themselves on acorns and those that aren't eaten there and then are buried in the ground. Only a small number of these acorns are then dug up and eaten – the rest help form and extend new oak woodlands.

This year there has been an absence of acorns, so Jays are wandering further afield to find food – often ending up in our gardens.



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Earlier this month we were joined by Mycologist - Emma Williams to help identify some of the wonderful fungi we have in the Amman Valley.



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We had 20 people attend the fungi surveys over the 2-day period and we found dozens of different fungi species.



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The rarest find was this (*Hebeloma odoratissimum*) found at Garnant Golf course. Its only the 4th record of the species for the whole of Wales.

The fungus likes old coal spoil sites like the golf course.

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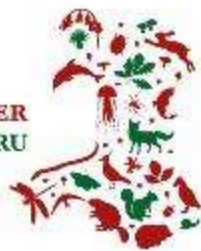


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Other species included
this Jelly baby fungus
and.....



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This cordyceps fungus. There are lots of different species of cordyceps. These fungi infect and kill many insect species, often turning them into zombies first to force the insect to spread more fungal spores to other insects.

This particular species of Cordyceps is probably *C. militaris* and infects the larvae of moths and craneflies (Daddy Longlegs).





This Sycamore Tarspot (*Rhytisma acerinum*) Fungus appears as black splodges on the leaves of Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). It is not harmful to the leaf or tree, but instead is an excellent indicator of good air quality. Atmospheric pollutants from industry and intensive agriculture can kill lots of fungi species including Sycamore Tarspot. The fact that we have it in the Amman Valley is a good indicator of clean air.

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Fungi are not restricted to woodlands. They play an essential role in grassland habitats too. The mushrooms that we see above ground are just the tip of the ice-berg, as underground there is a vast microscopic network of mycelium that helps transfers nutrients from plant to plant and from plant to fungus.

Many flowering plants including Orchids need this partnership (symbiotic relationship) with fungi to germinate and survive. These fungi are known as mycorrhizal fungi and are crucial for meadows and wildflowers.

These grassland fungi are easily destroyed by intensive agriculture, especially where soils are rotavated. Therefore places like cemeteries and coal spoil are often great places for grassland fungi and wildflowers.

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Waxcap fungi are grassland fungi that are good indicators of healthy soils. The fungi are also some of our most vibrant coloured fungi in Wales.

Scarlet Waxcap
(*Hygrocybe coccinea*)



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Persistent Waxcap (*Hygrocybe acutoconica*) – I think!

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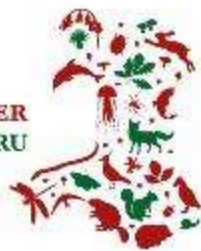


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Pink Waxcap (*Hygrocybe calyptriformis*).

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Other grassland fungi recorded on
Garnant Golfcourse was the Shaggy
Inkcap (*Coprinus comatus*)

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A good place to see waxcap fungi and other Autumn / Winter wildlife in the Amman Valley is the old disused quarries at Mynydd Isaf. On a recent walk we were treated to lots of waxcaps as well as Raven (*Corvus corax*), Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*) and Fieldfares (*Turdus pilaris*).

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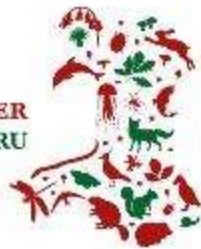


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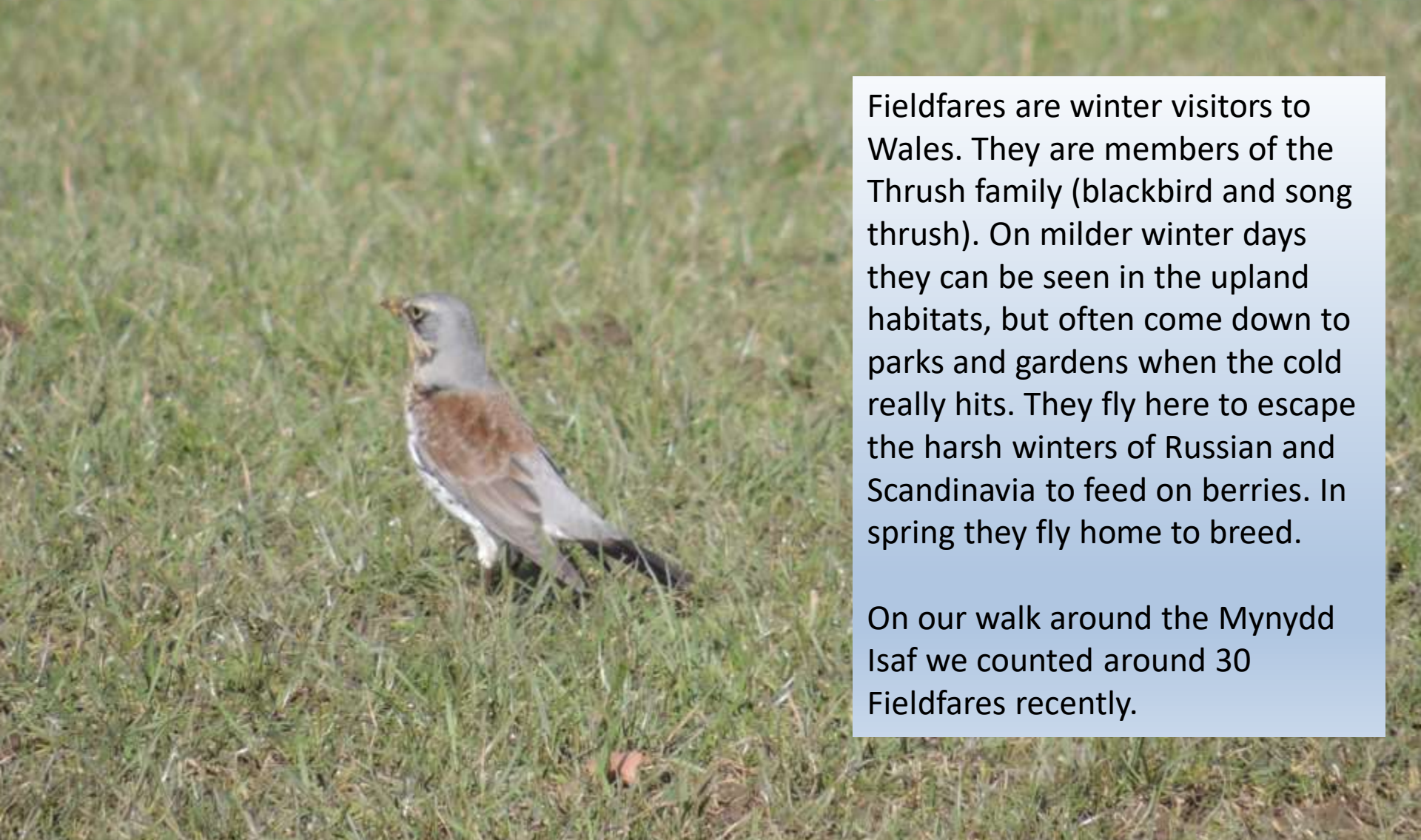


You can always
tell a Raven by
its pointed,
diamond
shaped tail.

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Fieldfares are winter visitors to Wales. They are members of the Thrush family (blackbird and song thrush). On milder winter days they can be seen in the upland habitats, but often come down to parks and gardens when the cold really hits. They fly here to escape the harsh winters of Russian and Scandinavia to feed on berries. In spring they fly home to breed.

On our walk around the Mynydd Isaf we counted around 30 Fieldfares recently.

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A spectacle to see and hear at this time of year is the gathering Jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*) at dusk. Jackdaws are very intelligent members of the crow family and in autumn huge flocks gather in the sky above the Amman Valley. Quite often you can hear them chattering in the sky before you see them. Once their aerial acrobatics are done, they settle down together to roost overnight.

So far we have counted a total of 405 Jackdaws.

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Jackdaw during the warmer summer months.

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A recent survey of some of our rivers in the Amman Valley has revealed very fresh Otter (*Lutra lutra*) spraint (droppings). We still don't know how many otters there are in the Amman Valley, or whether they stay with us all year long.



We have now placed a camera out overlooking the spraint to see if we can catch a glimpse of the otter. Fingers crossed.

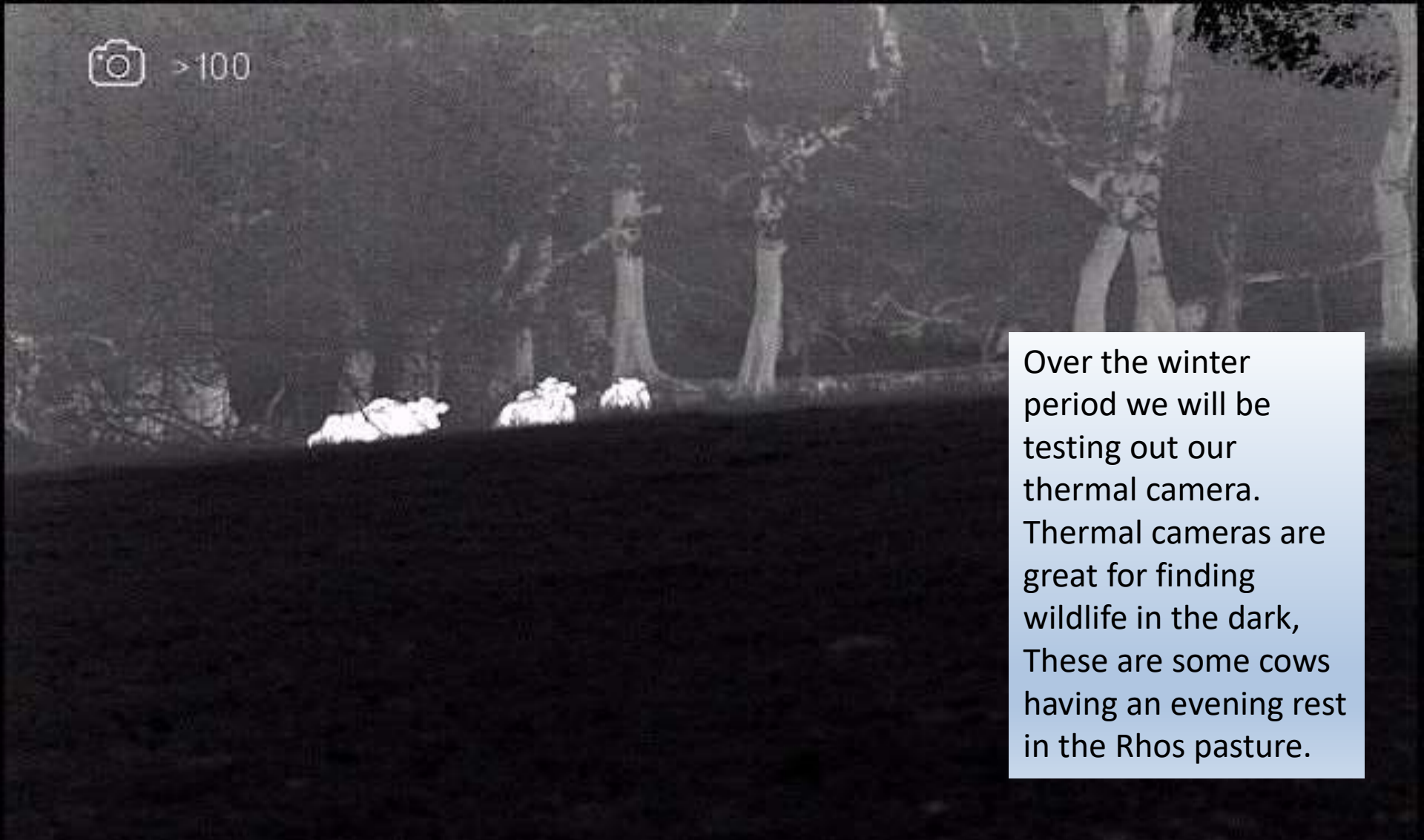
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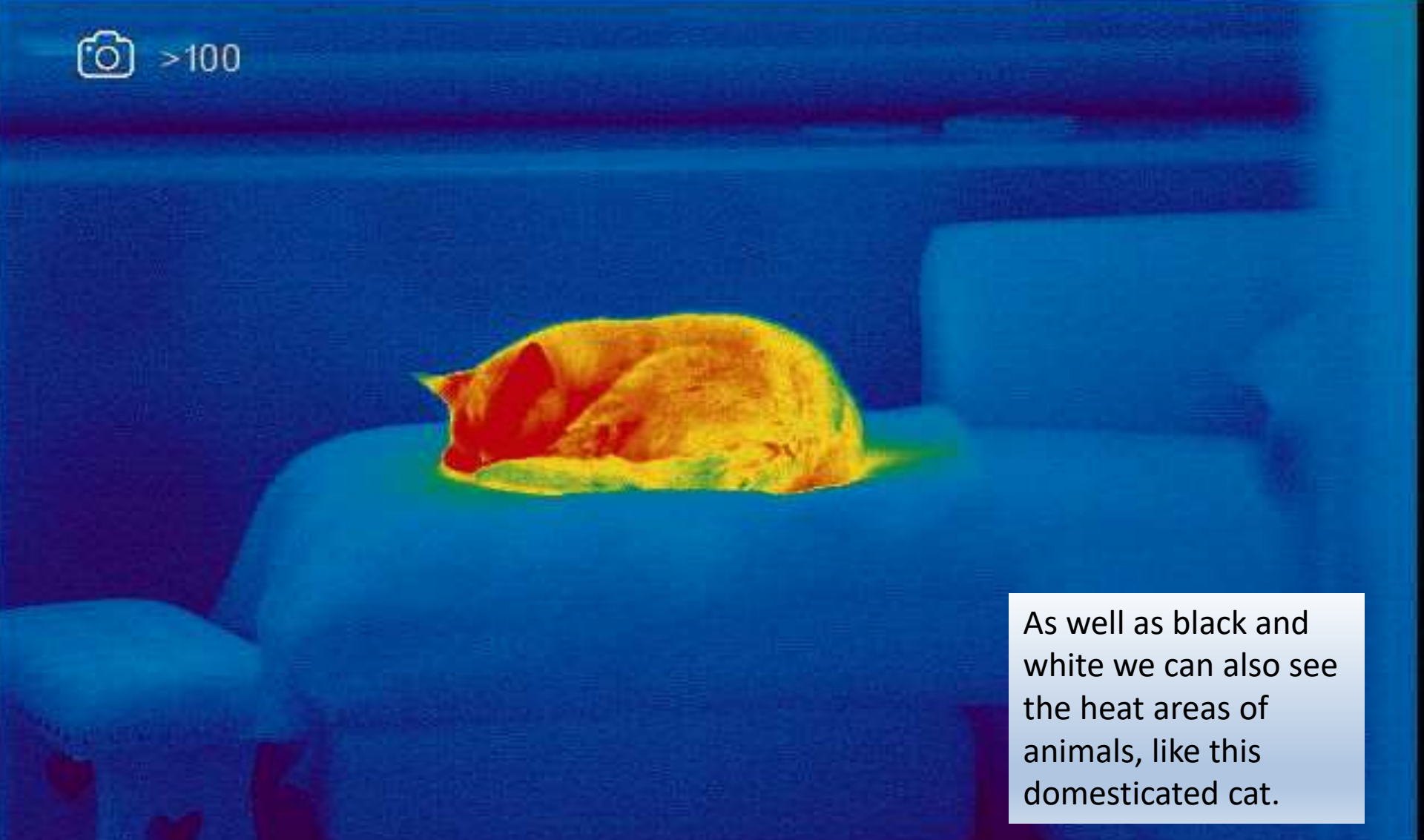


Over the winter period we will be testing out our thermal camera. Thermal cameras are great for finding wildlife in the dark, These are some cows having an evening rest in the Rhos pasture.

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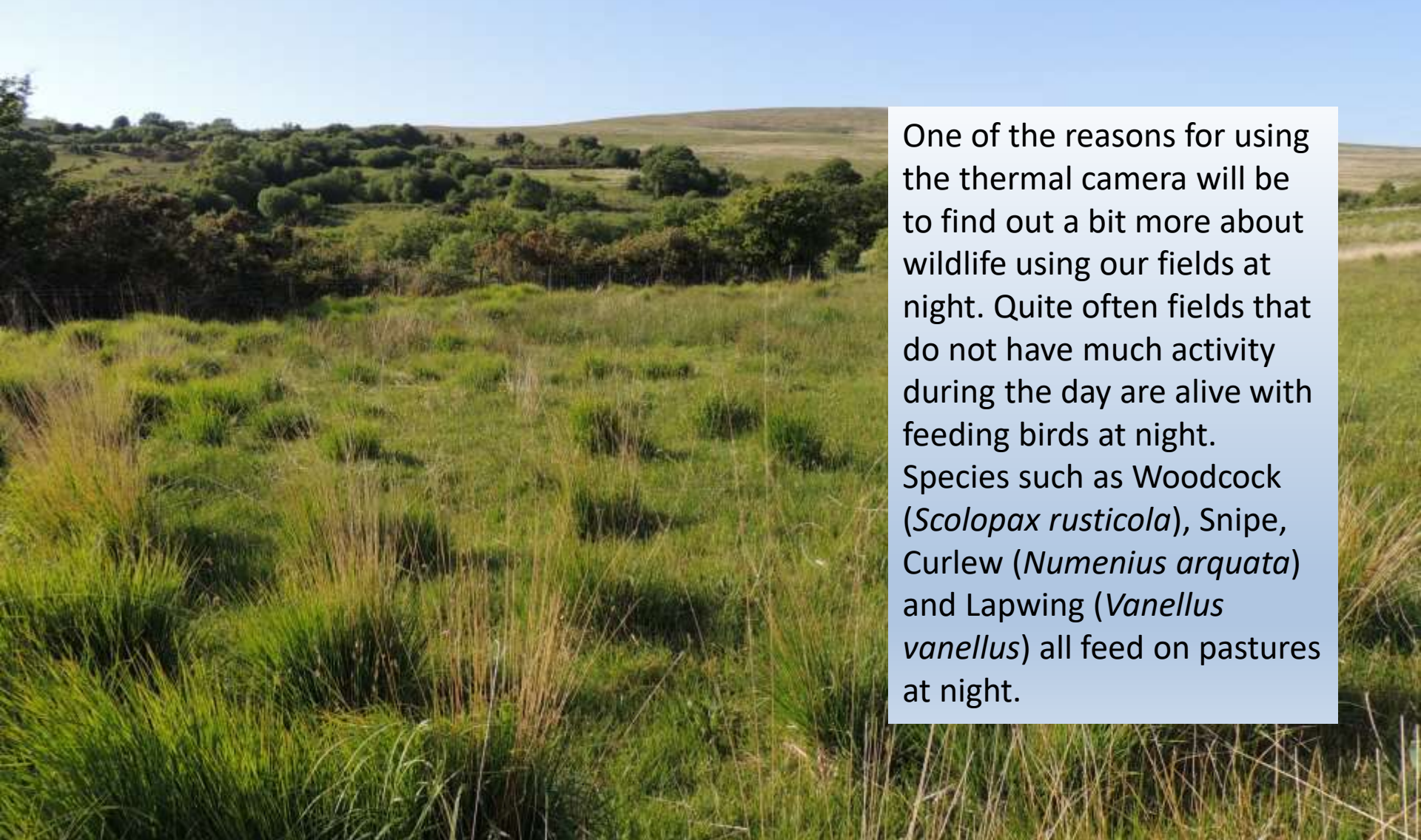


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As well as black and white we can also see the heat areas of animals, like this domesticated cat.





One of the reasons for using the thermal camera will be to find out a bit more about wildlife using our fields at night. Quite often fields that do not have much activity during the day are alive with feeding birds at night. Species such as Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*), Snipe, Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) and Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) all feed on pastures at night.

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Finally, thank you to all the volunteers who recently helped to make some donation boxes for the charity.

All 6 boxes will be used soon to help raise money for the charity enabling us to deliver more nature conservation work in the Amman Valley.

Thank you.



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Thanks again for all your feedback
and your wildlife records and stories

Any queries, please feel free
to get in touch and please
keep sending in your photos
and wildlife records – they are
very much appreciated.

Thank You
Rob
rob.parry@incc.wales

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Cronfa Datblygu
Cynaliadwy

Sustainable
Development Fund