


Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 24 (December 2021)



**MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU**



**INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU**



We've had some lovely sunny days this month, and the oranges and browns of the hillside feel warm in spite of the chill in the air. Here, the headwaters of the Pedol cascades over the exposed limestone below Tair Carn.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



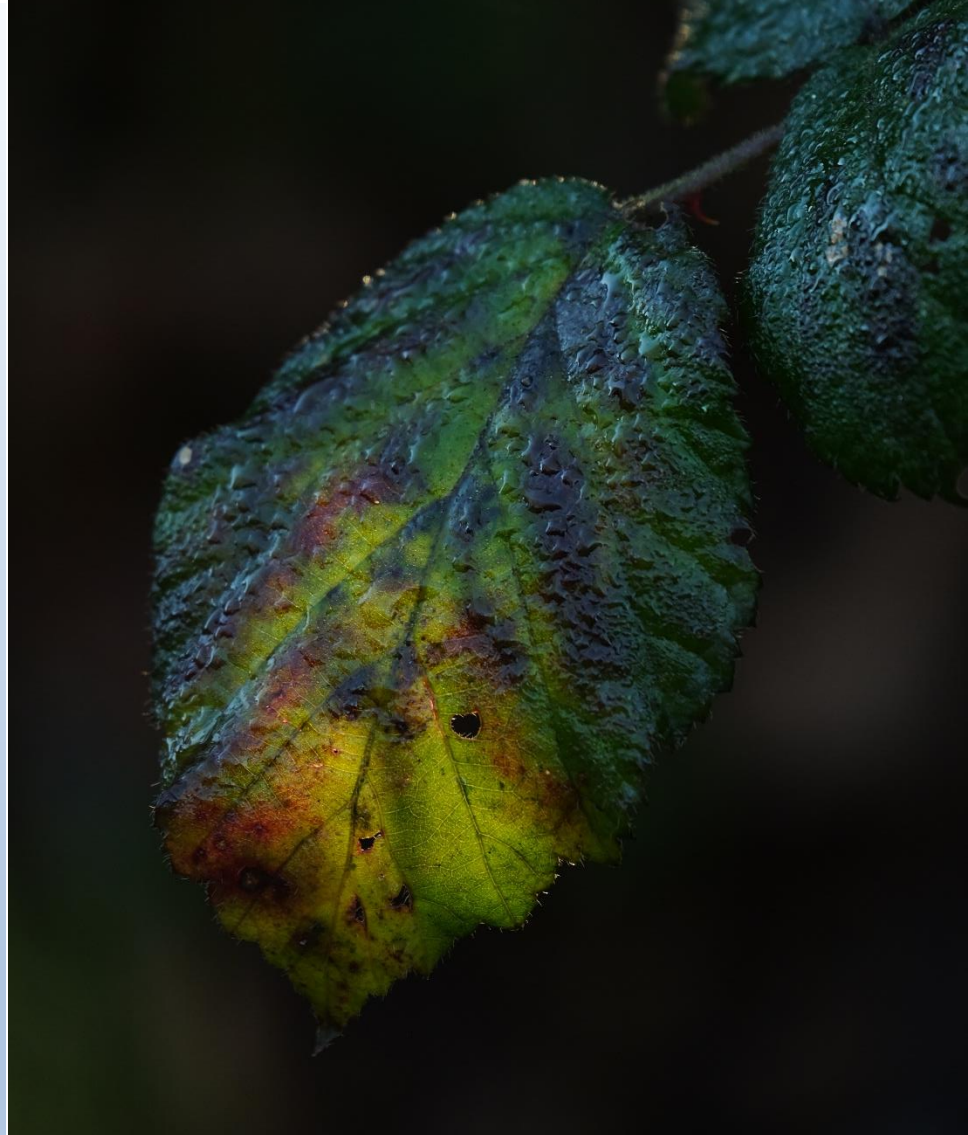
INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

This picture of a backlit bramble leaf was taken on Grenig road by Lizzie this month.

Most of us think of bramble (blackberry) as being one species, but in fact it's a group that comprises over **320** microspecies.

Trying to tell them apart is really difficult, but if you start looking, some of the variation is actually quite noticeable. For example, some brambles are deciduous (losing all their leaves in winter) whereas some, like this one, are semi-evergreen. Some also produce consistently tastier fruit than others!

Brambles can invade other important habitats but are also incredibly important in their own right, as a source of food for wildlife.



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

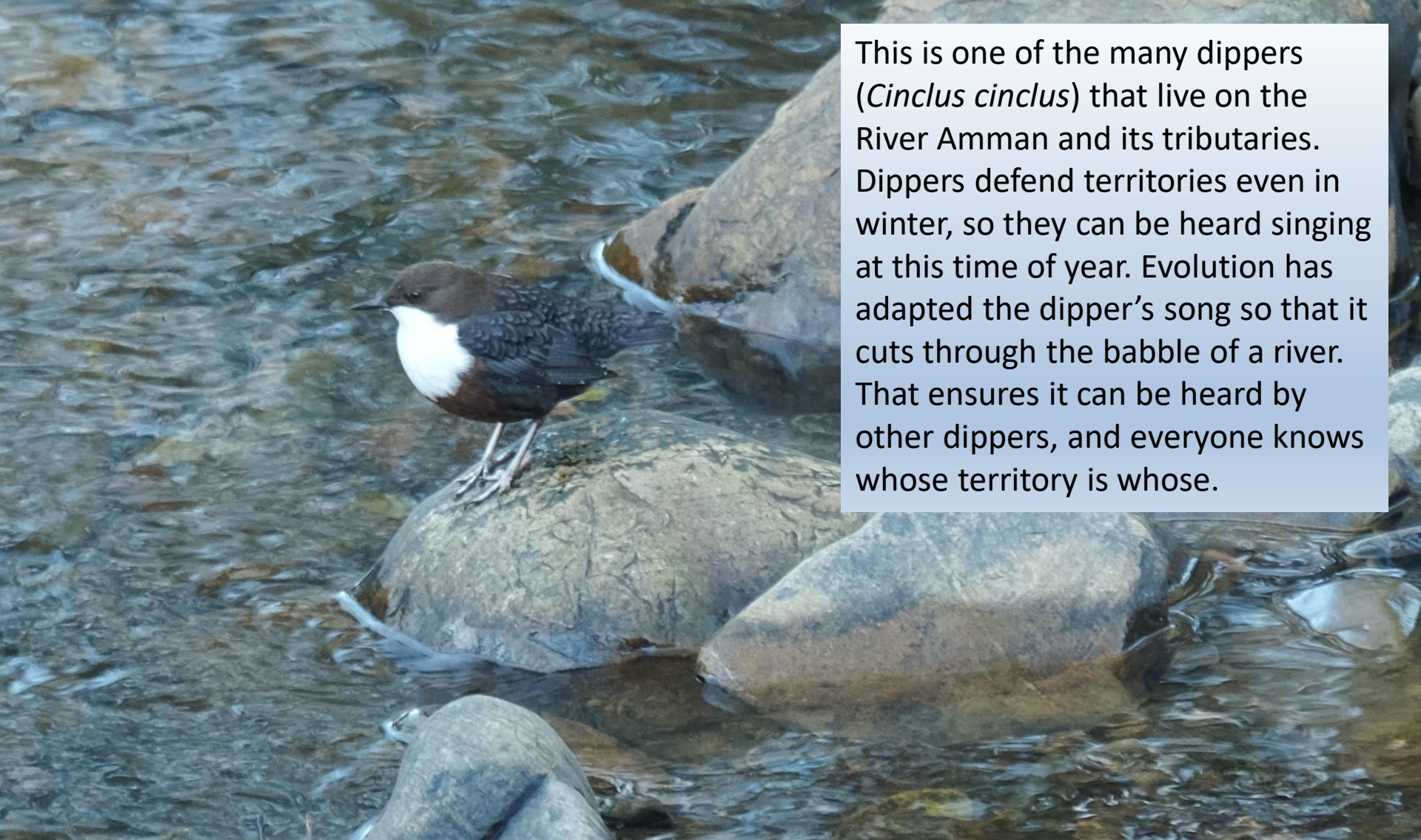


Something else to look out for on Bramble leaves at the moment is marks left by Bramble Leaf Miner (*Stigmella aurella*) larvae, which feed internally within the leaves. The tiny (6mm) adult moth will emerge around May.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

A photograph of a dipper bird (Cinclus cinclus) standing on a large, wet rock in a river. The bird has a white breast and belly, a dark brown head, and dark wings and back. It is facing left. The water is clear and flowing over rocks.

This is one of the many dippers (*Cinclus cinclus*) that live on the River Amman and its tributaries. Dippers defend territories even in winter, so they can be heard singing at this time of year. Evolution has adapted the dipper's song so that it cuts through the babble of a river. That ensures it can be heard by other dippers, and everyone knows whose territory is whose.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

During the winter, Goosander (*Mergus merganser*) visit the Amman- this picture was taken this week by Lizzie in Parc Golwg yr Aman. They are diving ducks, and they use their long, serrated bills to catch and hold the slippery fish that they eat.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

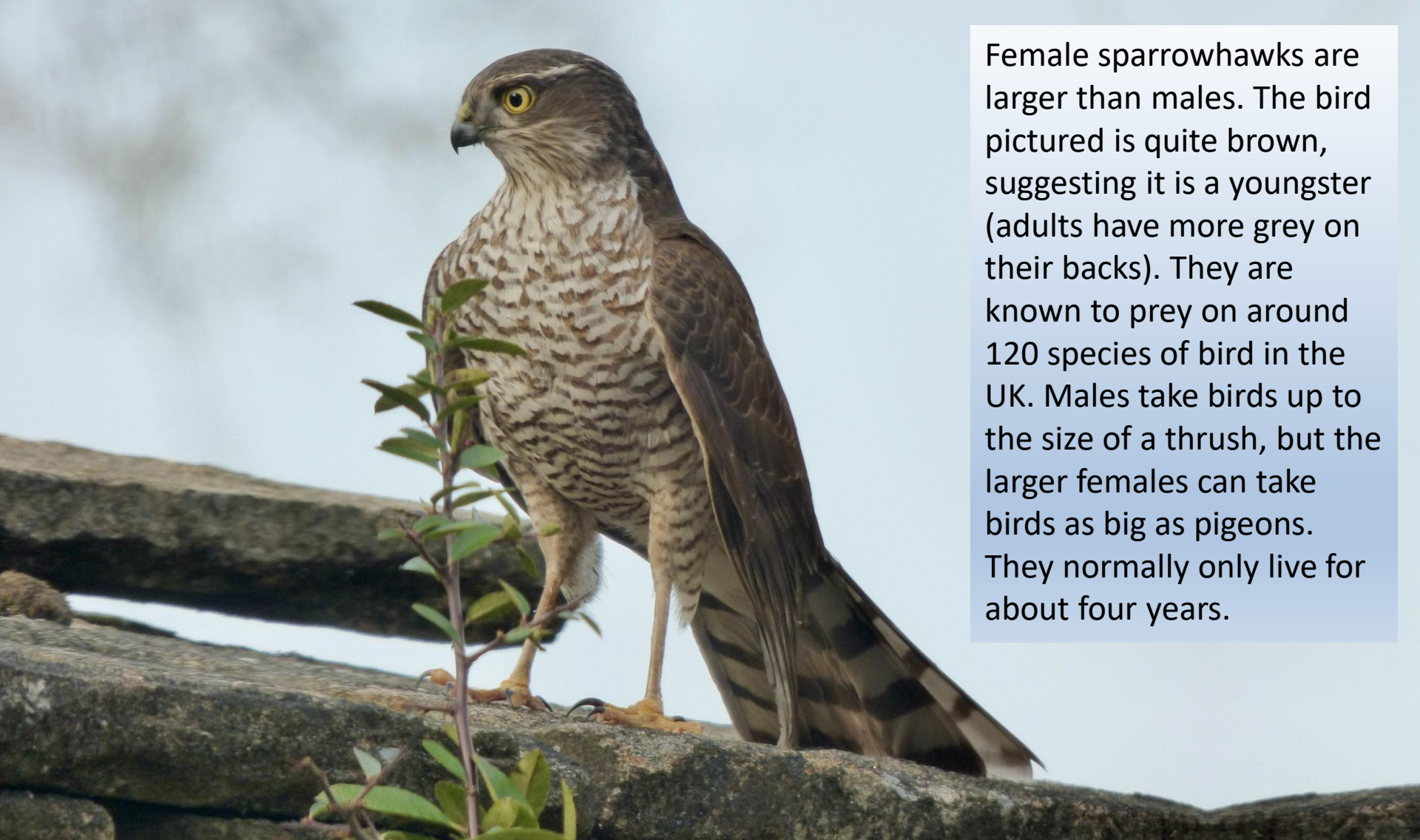
This pile of feathers was spotted on a log near Grenig Road this month. This is the plucking post of a sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), a spot where it takes its prey (small birds) to pluck and eat.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Female sparrowhawks are larger than males. The bird pictured is quite brown, suggesting it is a youngster (adults have more grey on their backs). They are known to prey on around 120 species of bird in the UK. Males take birds up to the size of a thrush, but the larger females can take birds as big as pigeons. They normally only live for about four years.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Collared doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*) are really common in the Amman valley now. It's hard to believe they first bred in the UK only in 1955, after a natural range expansion from Europe.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Collared doves are very resilient birds. This one was pictured (during the summer) nesting inside a garden centre in Carmarthenshire!



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Collared doves are a monogamous species, and in warmer climates will breed all year round. They don't flock, unlike many other pigeons and doves. Here in Cwmaman they won't breed in winter, but you will still see them in pairs at this time of year.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

This Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) was photographed near Wern Road this month. They are common winter visitors to garden feeders. They normally travel in extended family groups – siblings, uncles and aunts for example! The groups normally number 8-20.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

December is a quieter time for moths, but some species fly over winter. This appropriately named December Moth (*Poecilocampa populi*) was recently trapped by Cwmaman volunteer Jan Slade and photographed by Vaughn Matthews. December Moths have thick bodies that are covered in hair-like scales, which insulate them and allow them to fly efficiently even in the cold. Their 'fluffy look' makes them an attractive species.



Another stunning moth from Jan and Vaughn's December trap check was this Scarce Umber (*Agriopis aurantiaria*). This is a male of the species- the females don't have full wings, and can't fly. Why that's the case is uncertain, but is perhaps an adaptation to saving energy when carrying a heavy burden of eggs in the cold winter months.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Grey Squirrels don't hibernate, although they are less active in the cold months and spend more time sleeping in their 'drey', constructed of twigs and leaves. Normally dreys can be found in the forks of branches in tall trees. However, a large tree cavity offers more protection- like this one we found recently on Old Llandeilo Road.

Normally dreys are occupied by a single squirrel but in winter they sometimes double up for warmth.

Grey Squirrels aren't native to the UK, and one reason they do better than our native Red Squirrel is their prolific breeding. They are able to breed as early as late winter, and so produce many more young each year than Red Squirrels do.



Some really exciting camera trap news this month! This came from 2nd December, when INCC volunteer Jan Slade caught not one but TWO otters on camera on the Pedol, as seen in this screenshot.



IMG_0289

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Thanks to the support of volunteers, Cwmaman Town Council and the Brecon Beacons National Park, work has begun creating Bat 'Night' Roosts, which can be installed across the Amman Valley.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

The bat roosts are designed to help some of our rarer bats, the Horseshoe bats. After feeding, bats need to rest up and digest their food. These roosts will be the perfect resting place for bats foraging in the landscape.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

This spectacular Cobalt Crust fungus (*Terana caerulea*) was photographed this month on Wern Road. It can be found on dead wood from a range of tree species. Its distribution is mainly restricted to England and Wales (and not Scotland). Here in south Wales we are at the core of its distribution.

This is Yellow Brain Fungus (*Tremella mesenterica*), a photo taken on Mynydd y Betws this week. It's best spotted in winter.

You can find it on dead wood of a few tree species, but it's often found on gorse stems in this area (as in the photo).

More fungi to look out for at this time of year! This impressive Birch Polypore (*Piptoporus betulinus*) is growing on a dead birch tree on the footpath above Hendre Road in Garnant.



It only grows on birch trees, which is why the second part of its latin name (*betulinus*) looks like the Latin name for birch itself (*Betula*).

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Time for some
Christmas themed
wildlife facts!

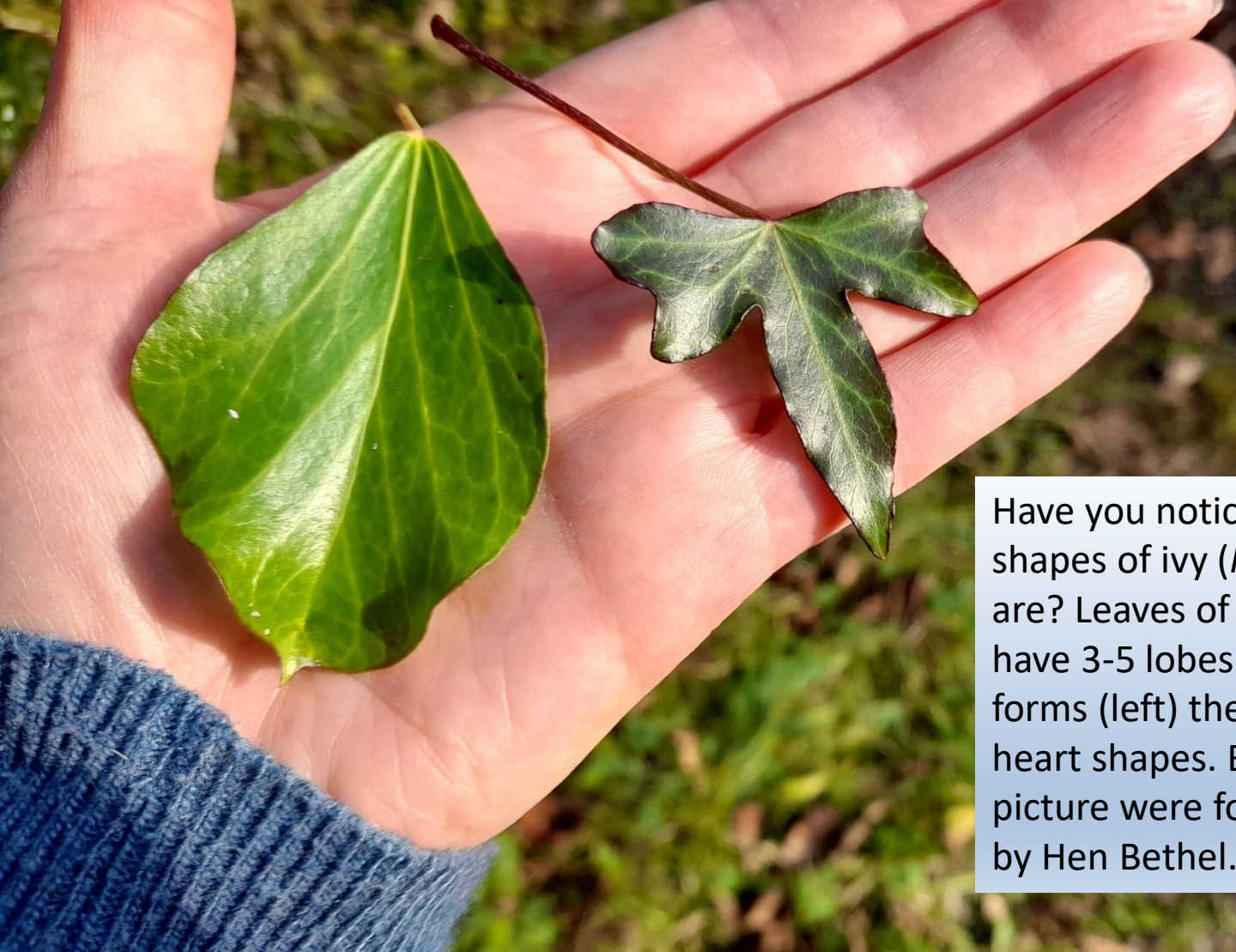
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) has a really dense, fine-grained wood, and the colour of the timber is really pale. For that reason, it used to be used to make the white pieces in chess sets.

Holly is common
throughout the
Amman Valley.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Have you noticed how variable the shapes of ivy (*Hedera helix*) leaves are? Leaves of juvenile forms (right) have 3-5 lobes whereas on mature forms (left) they are simple oval or heart shapes. Both types in this picture were found on the roadside by Hen Bethel.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) is not common in Carmarthenshire. It prefers Powys and Gwent, where you can see it growing in profusion, especially on fruit trees in the many orchards there. However, there are a handful of old records from the south side of the Amman Valley. We've never seen any here, please let us know if you do!



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Thanks again for all your feedback
and your wildlife records and stories
– they are greatly appreciated,
please do keep sending them.

Nadolig llawen a blwyddyn
newydd dda gan dîm INCC.
Merry Christmas and a happy
new year from the INCC team.

Thank You
Rob
rob.parry@incc.wales

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



Cronfa Datblygu
Cynaliadwy

Sustainable
Development Fund