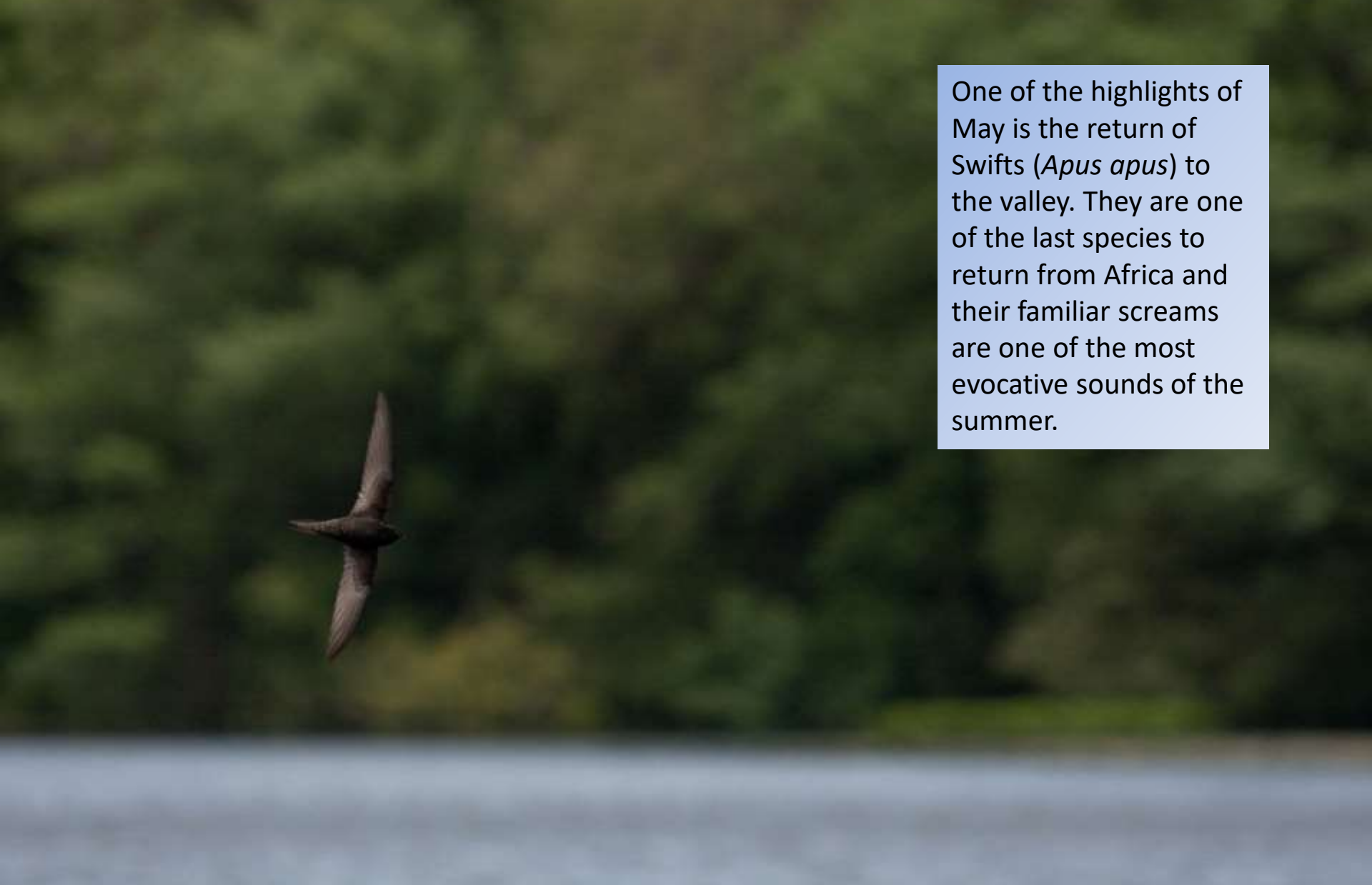


Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 29 (May 2022)



INCC's work in the Amman Valley (and beyond) has recently been benefitted hugely by the arrival of our Species Officer – Vaughn Matthews. Vaughn has previously been working on our marsh fritillary reintroduction work in South Wales, but will now also be helping out with our ongoing species and habitat work in the valley.

Vaughn Matthews
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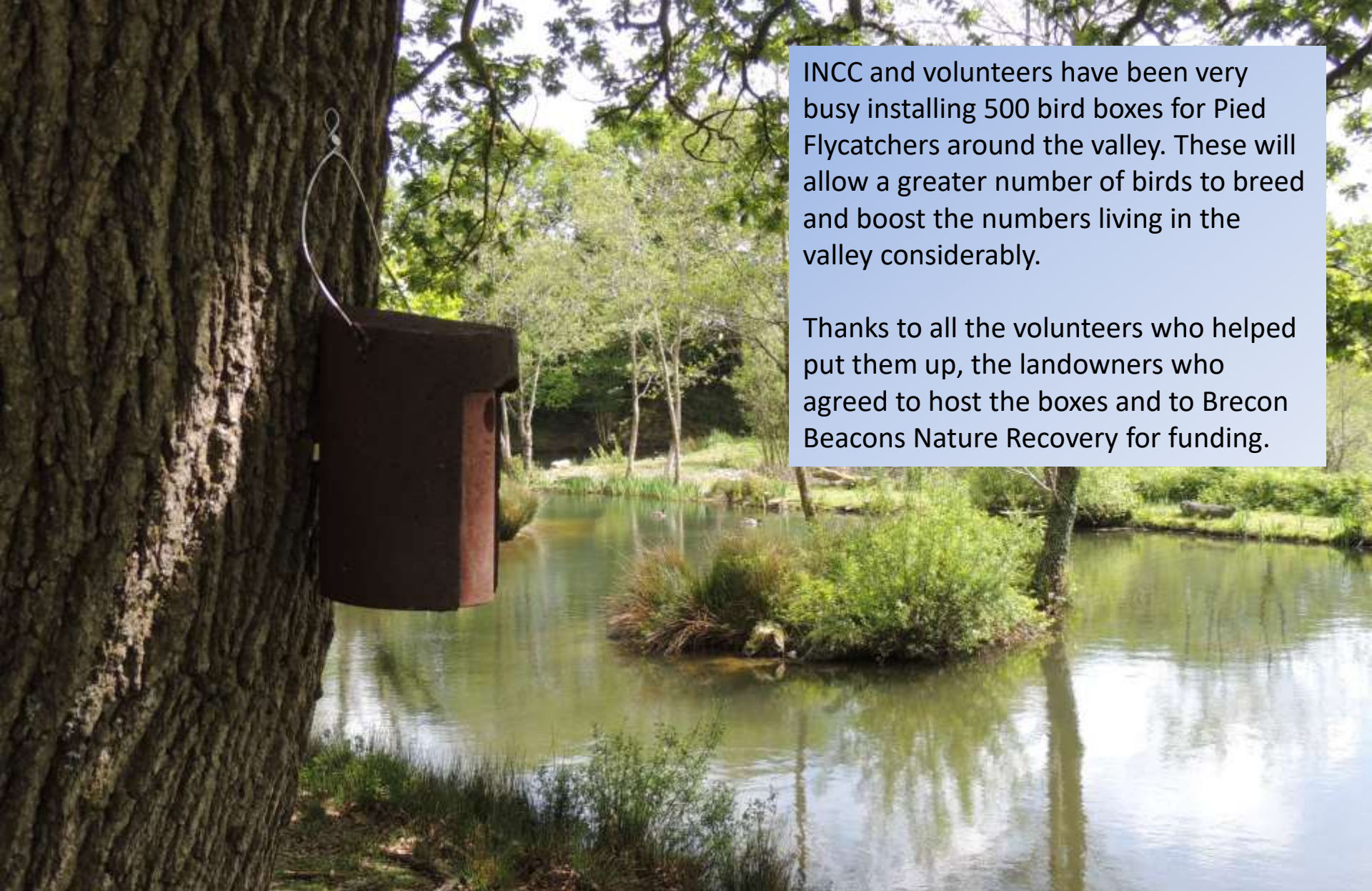


One of the highlights of May is the return of Swifts (*Apus apus*) to the valley. They are one of the last species to return from Africa and their familiar screams are one of the most evocative sounds of the summer.



Another iconic migrant returning from Africa through April and early May is the Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*). The Amman Valley woodlands provide excellent habitat for this rare species.






INCC and volunteers have been very busy installing 500 bird boxes for Pied Flycatchers around the valley. These will allow a greater number of birds to breed and boost the numbers living in the valley considerably.

Thanks to all the volunteers who helped put them up, the landowners who agreed to host the boxes and to Brecon Beacons Nature Recovery for funding.



This time of year is good for spotting newly fledged baby birds. One frequent (and often noisy) visitor is the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) which can sometimes appear in big groups and benefit from the provision of bird food in our gardens. The young lack the beautiful colouration of the adults and have a dark, as opposed to yellow, beak.





Lots of insects are active now and the warm weather means that damselflies and dragonflies start emerging. This is a Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*) and is often seen around garden ponds.

Azure Damselfly

Black mark is
the shape of a U

Common Blue Damselfly

Black mark is
the shape of an
ace of spades.

There are a number of blue damselflies and the way to tell them apart is to look at the subtle differences in markings. These are two of the commonest; Azure (*Coenagrion puella*) (left) and Common Blue (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) (right). The markings on the abdomen by the base of the wings is the identifying feature.

This lovely metallic beetle is a Green Dock Beetle (*Gastrophysa viridula*). At this time of year they can be found almost anywhere dock plants are present. The females, when pregnant (or gravid to use the technical term), have such swollen abdomens that their wing cases are displaced.

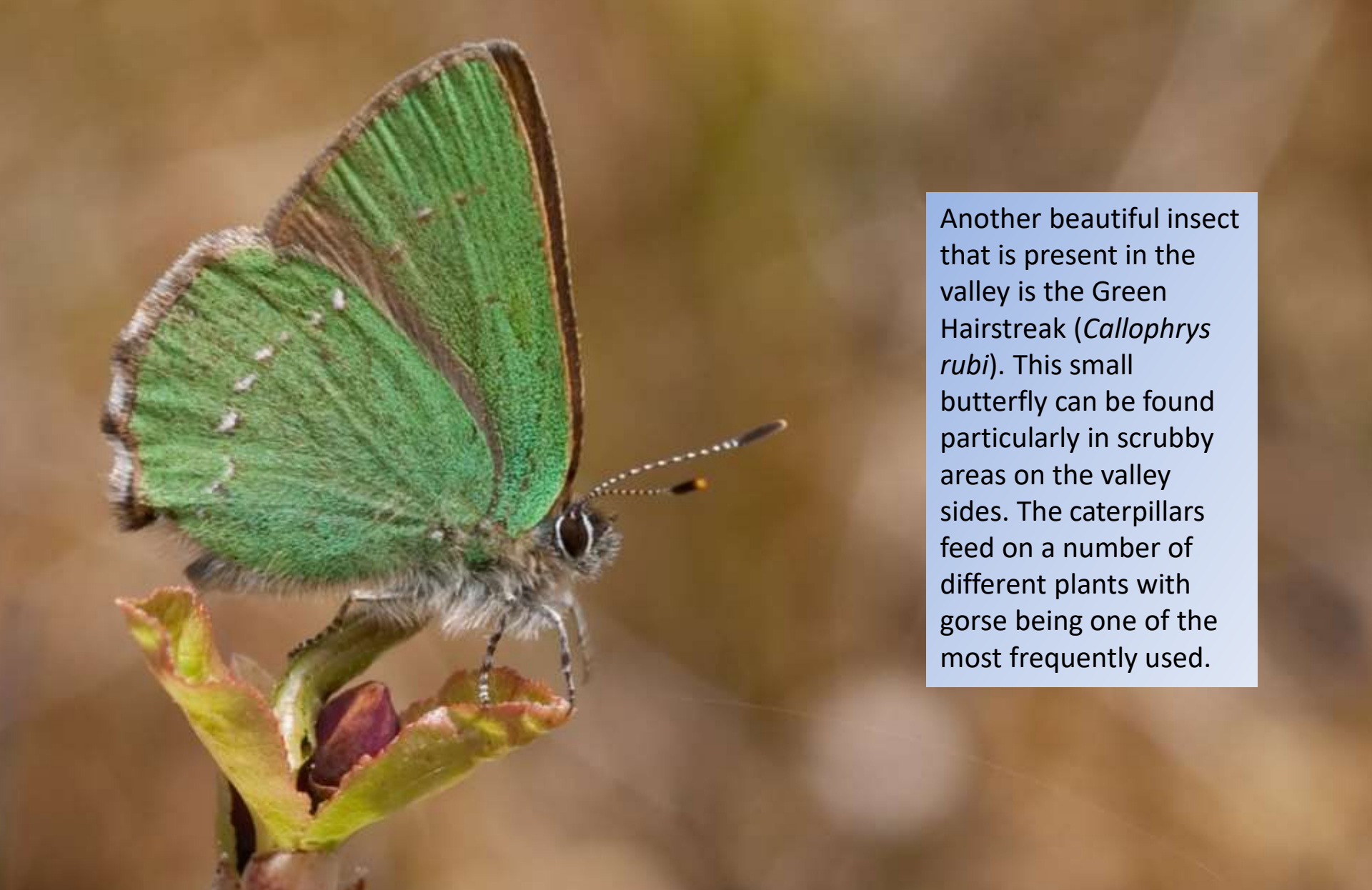


They lay dozens of bright yellow eggs on the undersides of dock leaves. The larvae that hatch from these will feed on the leaves before dropping to the ground to pupate in the soil.

It wouldn't be an update without mention of the marsh fritillary butterfly.

The Amman Valley is an important area for Europe's fastest declining butterfly, the Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) which flies in May and June. This beautiful species relies on flower-rich marshy grassland, known as rhôs pasture, which is still present in the local landscape.





Another beautiful insect that is present in the valley is the Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*). This small butterfly can be found particularly in scrubby areas on the valley sides. The caterpillars feed on a number of different plants with gorse being one of the most frequently used.

There are lots of caterpillars around at this time of year but two of the most frequently spotted are those of Drinker (*Euthrix potatoria*) moths (below) and Lackey (*Malacosoma Neustria*) moths (right).

Drinker moths are so called because of their supposed habit of drinking dew. They feed on a variety of grasses.



Lackey caterpillars live in large communal webs that can be seen on blackthorn and hawthorn (amongst other species). There can be hundreds of caterpillars in each web but as they mature they become more solitary.





There are more day-flying species of moth in the UK than there are butterflies and quite a few can be seen at the moment.

Some of the larger ones include the Cinnabar (*Tyria jacobaeae*) (above), whose familiar black and orange striped caterpillars can be seen on ragwort, and the evocatively named Mother Shipton (*Callistege mi*). Mother Shipton was a 16th Century witch/prophetess from Yorkshire and the moth's name derives from the pattern on the wing which, if you use some imagination, looks like a (very unflattering) portrait of a face.





This tiny micro-moth (*Micropterix calthella*) is only a few millimetres long but is very abundant in May when almost every buttercup flower seems to have half a dozen of them in.

This is one of the most primitive moth species in the UK; they don't have a proboscis for drinking nectar like most moths and butterflies but instead have jaws with which they eat pollen.



Elephant
Hawkmoth



May is a great month for moth trapping so here's a selection of species caught in the trap this month.

Peach Blossom



Poplar Hawkmoth



Green Carpet

White Ermine



Buff-tip, an excellent
dead stick mimic!

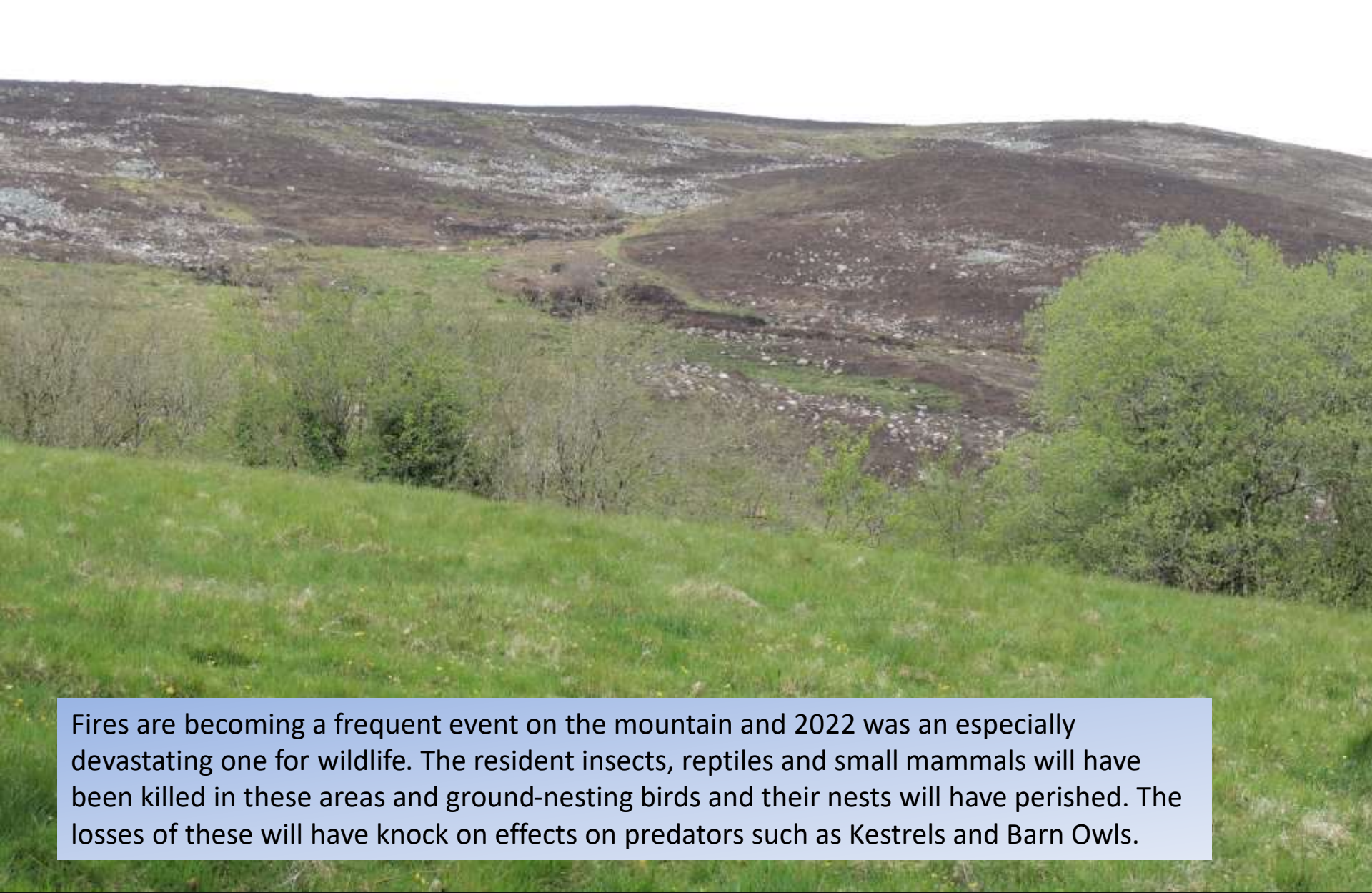


Various colour forms
of Peppered Moths



The floor of the polytunnel has now been finished, so our volunteers have been hard at work moving wildflowers back inside. The plants should thrive in readiness for use in the imminent wildlife garden and elsewhere. There will soon be more staging constructed too which will provide far more growing space. Thanks to Jan and Carla for their hard work.





Fires are becoming a frequent event on the mountain and 2022 was an especially devastating one for wildlife. The resident insects, reptiles and small mammals will have been killed in these areas and ground-nesting birds and their nests will have perished. The losses of these will have knock on effects on predators such as Kestrels and Barn Owls.



Our resident Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) may already be struggling. From five eggs laid, only two chicks have survived and one of those is very small. If parent birds can't find enough small mammal prey they will focus their attention into just the one chick. Hopefully, both owlets will make it.

This thrush egg was seen in an area recently burnt by fire. Hopefully it was early enough in the year that the female can set up another nest elsewhere.



Important pollinators and predators of garden pests, social wasps are beginning to create their intricate nests at this time of year. This photo was sent in by a resident whose shed is host to the beginning of a nest with the beautiful internal structure visible. The wasps can be seen (and heard) scraping at fenceposts etc. to collect the material they pulp for the construction.





INCC and volunteers have had camera traps out in various locations around the valley. One of the highlights was definitely seeing these 3 badgers going about their nocturnal business – lots of foraging as well as seeing them bringing back fresh bedding to the sett.



Where they're left uncut, the road verges are looking their best at this time of year. One of the most obvious flowers is Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*). This lovely plant has very delicate flowers and leaves which has led to its other name: Queen Anne's Lace.





The UK has thousands of species of flies but a distinctive one that can be seen at this time of year is one of the Dance Flies (*Empis tessellata*). This long-legged species with orange markings at the base of the wings has a long proboscis which it mostly uses to drink nectar.

However when trying to attract a mate the male will impale smaller insects with it and present them to the female. If she likes the look of the offering she will begin to feed. At this point the male will mate with her, usually while hanging off vegetation from its front legs with the female and prey dangling beneath!

Thank you for all the positive feedback and for sending through all your photos and wildlife accounts. Please do keep sending them through and hope you continue to enjoy the summer.

Thank You
Rob and Vaughn
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