

Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 31 (July 2022)

A month of celebration





A warm welcome to all our new newsletter subscribers who visited the wildlife garden Open Day last week.

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We will be opening up the garden on a more regular basis for people to come in and just enjoy the garden and the wildlife..... And help with potting on if you fancied.



A huge thank you to everyone for popping by to see us and to all who have donated and supported the project. Thank you.



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The wildlife garden is also being used as a place to dry and store wildflower meadow seed. This is the seed of a wildflower meadow from the Brecon Beacons National Park and will be used to help restore meadows locally.



The Amman Valley does have some of the most special grassland habitat in the whole of Wales.

A close-up photograph of a field of white Whorled Carraway flowers. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some showing the characteristic umbel shape. The background is a soft-focus field of similar flowers and green foliage.

More than a quarter of the world's entire population of Whorled Carraway can be found in the UK. Whorled Carraway is the plant of Carmarthenshire and we still have lots of it in our marshy grassland habitats. A special thank you to all the landowners who look after it for us all.

In early July, the INCC team were invited to the grand unveiling of the new community art installation in Ammanford.

The mural is a celebration of the local area. It was so wonderful to see the environment, marsh fritillary butterfly and devil's-bit scabious at the heart of the design.

Huge thank you to the Ammanford Lions Club for supporting the project and to community artist Danni Lee for the design and all the volunteers who helped create it.



The INCC team at
the mural unveiling.

Carla (Volunteer)

Vaughn

Rob

Jan (Volunteer)

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Not only was the mural a beautiful work of art but it also has some lovely words about the role that the local mining community has played over the years in creating the ideal conditions for the butterfly to flourish in the area.

Thank you to everyone involved.



Last month, I asked for people to send in memories of Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) in the Amman Valley.

Thank you to all those who were able to share their stories, it was much appreciated.

As well as Curlew, we also had memories of Red Squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*) being seen along Folland Road (Garnant/Glanaman) in the 1950s.



Unfortunately, Red Squirrels are now one of the rarest mammals in England and Wales.

In Wales they are confined to conifer forests in mid Wales, north Wales and Anglesey.

The forests are not the best of habitats for squirrels because the seeds in the pine cones are very small, so they need a lot of them to survive. However, because conditions are so bad and food so hard to come by in conifer forests, the non-native Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) doesn't often venture into these areas. The non-native Grey Squirrel is larger and more aggressive than the Red Squirrel and also carries a Squirrel Pox, which is deadly to the reds. These conifer forests are now the last salvation for our native Red Squirrels.





I was lucky enough to have this uncommon visitor in the garden in July. Hummingbird Hawkmoths (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) can be seen from May to September. As they are migrants, they are often best seen in gardens during periods of warm weather and southerly winds.



The Eyed Hawkmoth (*Smerinthus ocellata*) we caught in the moth trap in June laid eggs in the tub. So, we are now the proud parents of an Eyed Hawkmoth caterpillar.



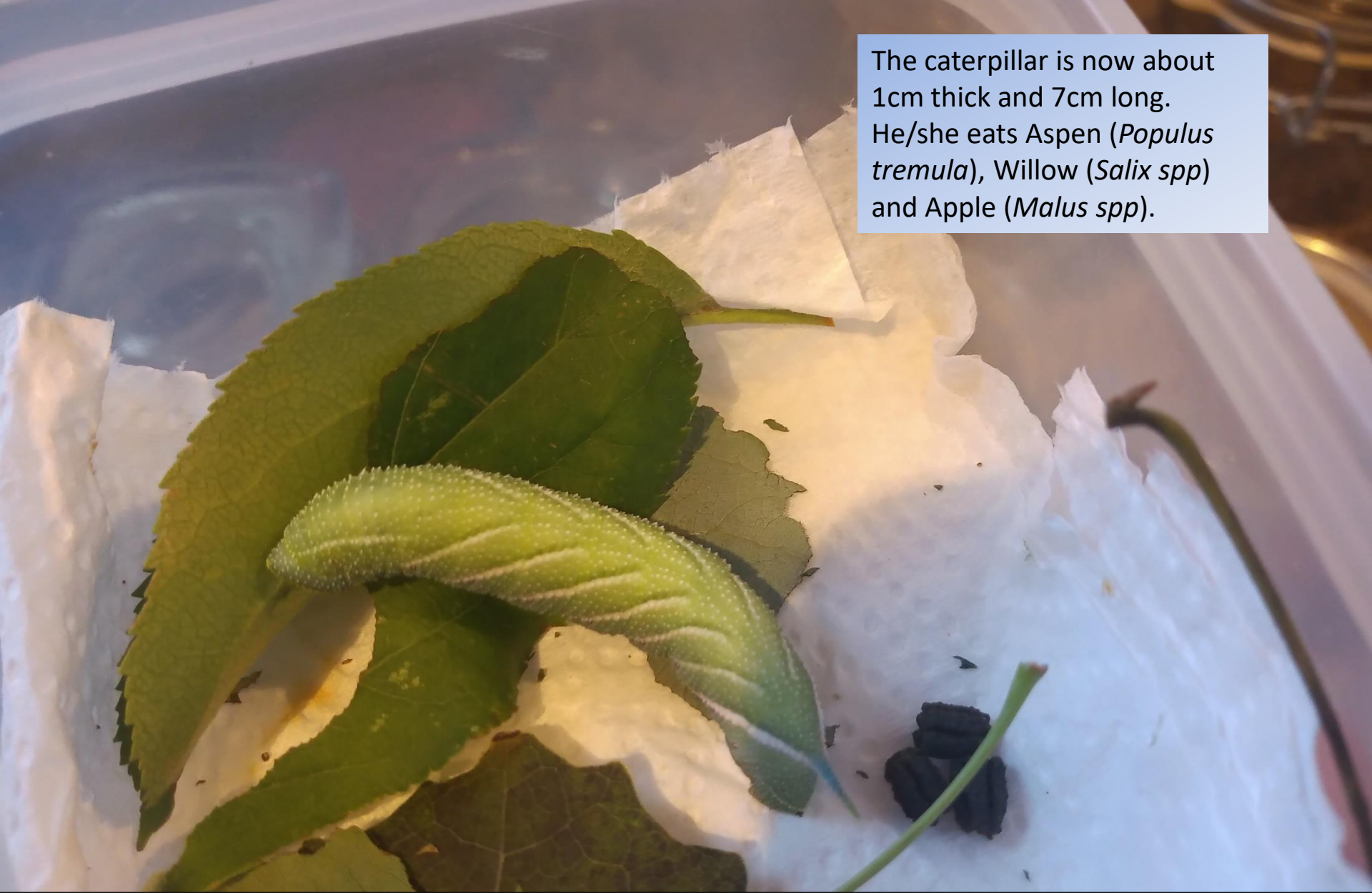
Photo: Vaughn Matthews

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The caterpillar is now about 1cm thick and 7cm long. He/she eats Aspen (*Populus tremula*), Willow (*Salix spp*) and Apple (*Malus spp*).



This time of year is a good time to take a closer look at Nettles (*Urtica dioica*). Nettles are wonderful for wildlife and they are the food plant of caterpillars such as this Peacock (*Aglais io*) and the Small Tortoiseshell. The association with nettle is reflected in the Small Tortoiseshell's Latin name *Aglais urticae*.





Peacock butterfly feeding on Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*).



Small Tortoiseshell feeding on Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*).



Photo: Vaughn Matthews

Ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*) is not everyone's favourite plant but it's vital for these colourful Cinnabar Moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*) caterpillars and a good source of nectar for numerous other invertebrates.

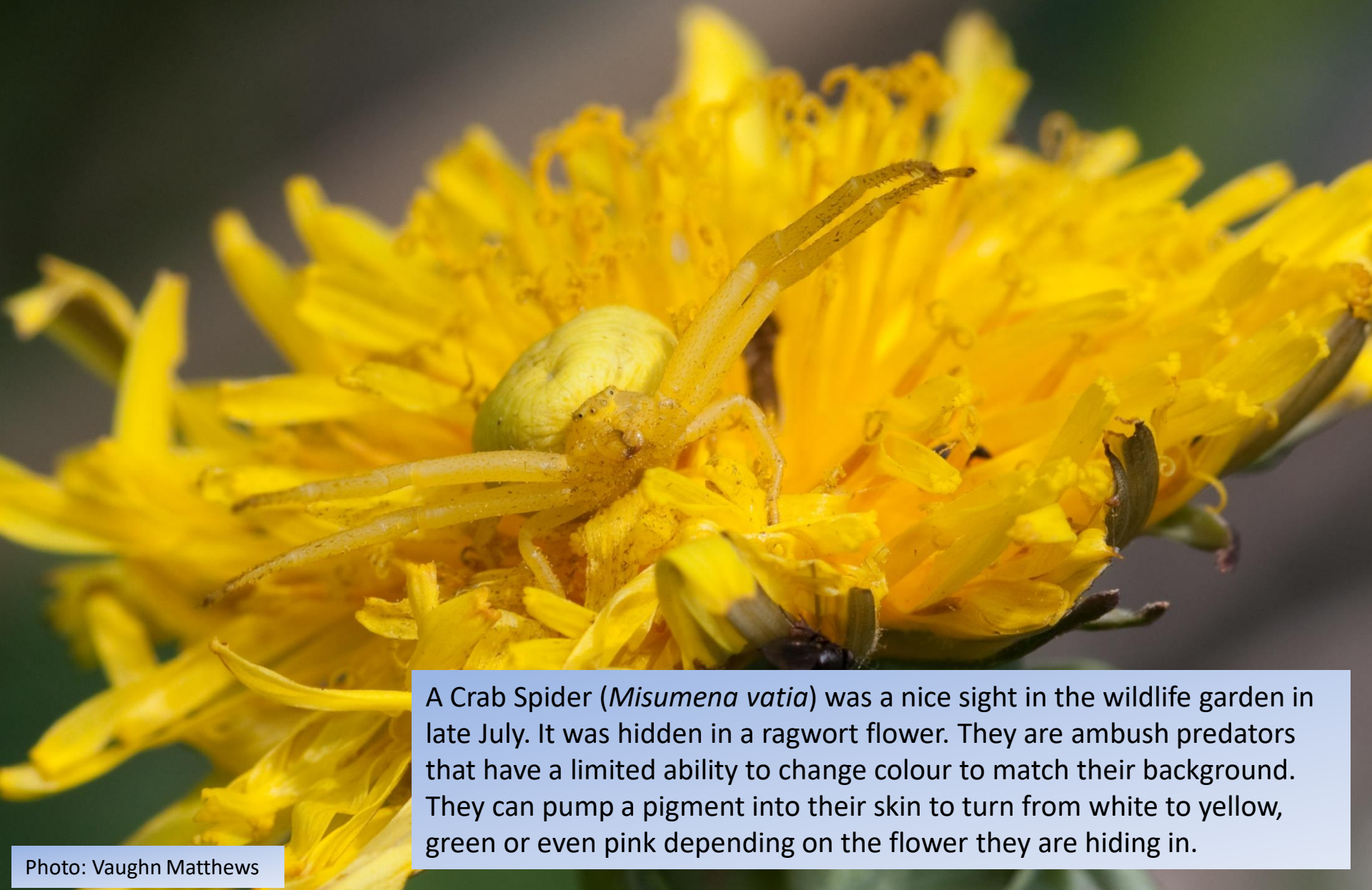


Photo: Vaughn Matthews

A Crab Spider (*Misumena vatia*) was a nice sight in the wildlife garden in late July. It was hidden in a ragwort flower. They are ambush predators that have a limited ability to change colour to match their background. They can pump a pigment into their skin to turn from white to yellow, green or even pink depending on the flower they are hiding in.



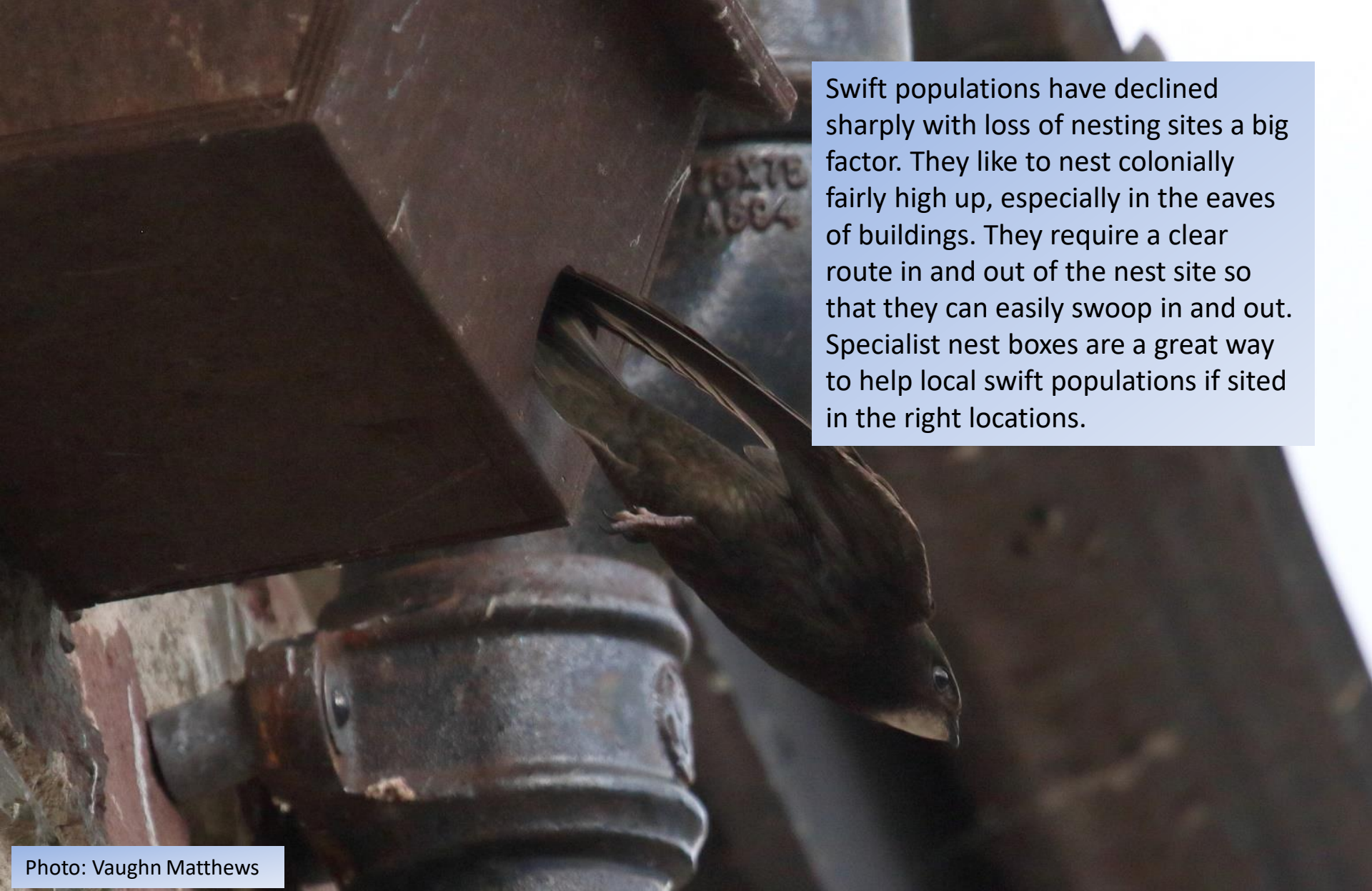
Swifts (*Apus apus*) are one of the most charismatic birds in the Valley with their screaming calls an evocative sound of summer. They only spend a few short months in this country before heading back to Africa in early August. This one has a full 'bolus' of insects it has caught while flying.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews

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Swift populations have declined sharply with loss of nesting sites a big factor. They like to nest colonially fairly high up, especially in the eaves of buildings. They require a clear route in and out of the nest site so that they can easily swoop in and out. Specialist nest boxes are a great way to help local swift populations if sited in the right locations.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews

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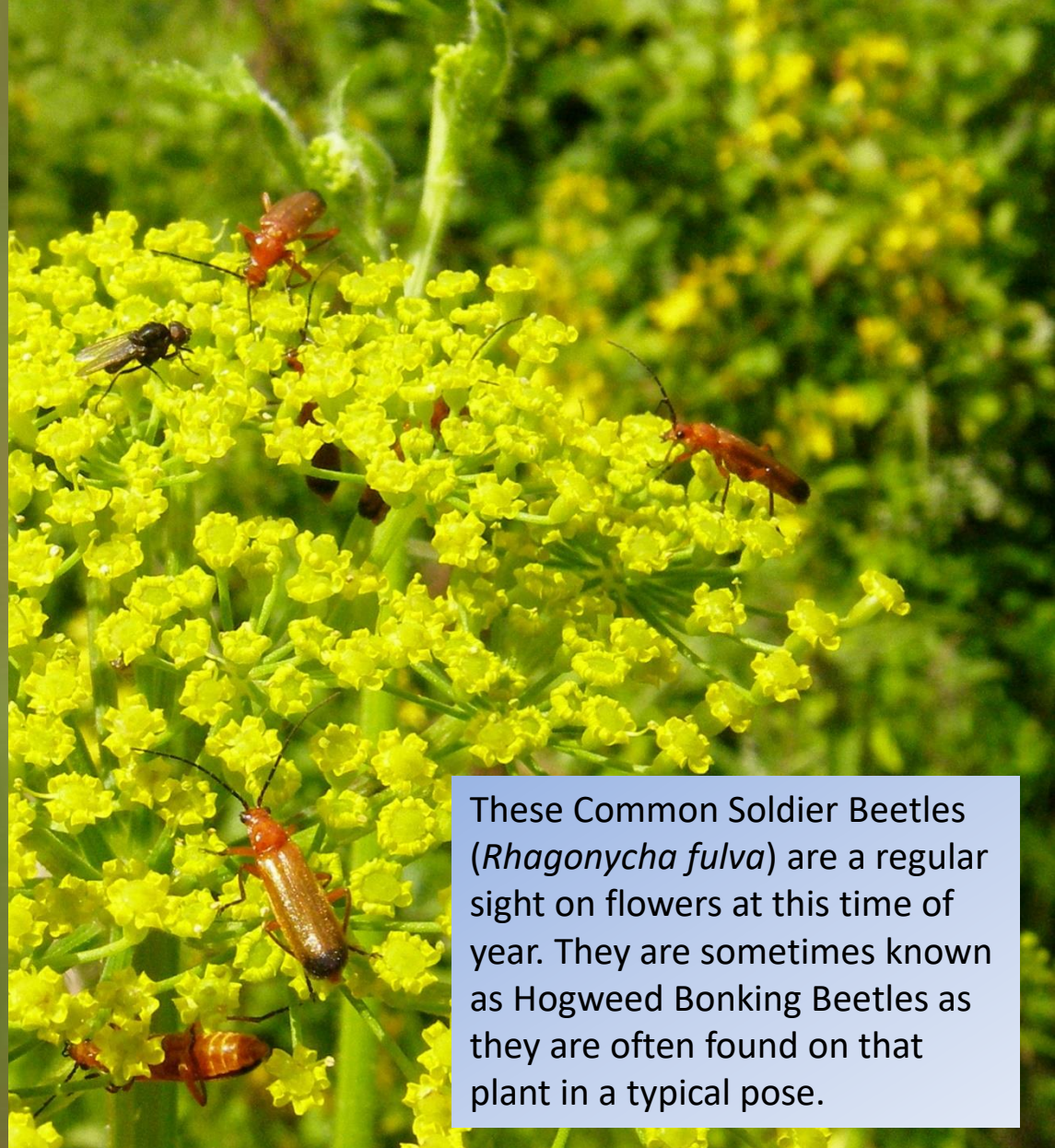


Photo: Vaughn Matthews

Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) leave for Africa later than Swifts but this family were seen in the upper reaches of the Amman Valley feeding up the chicks in readiness for their maiden journey.



Photo: Vaughn Matthews



These Common Soldier Beetles (*Rhagonycha fulva*) are a regular sight on flowers at this time of year. They are sometimes known as Hogweed Bonking Beetles as they are often found on that plant in a typical pose.



Thank You

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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.

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