Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 33 (September 2022)

September and October are still good months to spot some of our dragonfly and damselfly species such as this Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*).

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Work has continued in the wildlife garden throughout September and we have been open more often. Lots of scabious plants have been planted and we have been planning for our new pond.

We have continued to show more people around the wildlife garden and we have welcomed many more subscribers to these newsletters.

Volunteers and staff have continued to show visitors around the developing garden this month. The garden will be open on Saturdays if anyone would like to come and say hi and maybe have a go at potting on some Devil's-bit Scabious to help out our Marsh Fritillary project.

Ellyn, our intern has now returned to the University of Exeter to complete her studies.

We wish her the very best with her course and hopefully we will see her working in conservation in the near future. Whilst with INCC, Ellyn was able to spearhead some of our species monitoring in the wildlife garden as well as help people get that little bit closer to wildlife.

Thanks Ellyn for all your help.

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INCC has worked with many people this year who have helped nature conservation in the Amman Valley. We were able to say a big thank you this month to some of those landowners, graziers, volunteers, contractors and supporters for their help and support. We were kindly hosted by one of the landowners that INCC works with and listened to some interesting talks and had a walk around the site.

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Sadly the weather wasn't especially kind but everyone enjoyed the afternoon and especially the generously-provided and specially-cooked pizzas! Huge thank you to everyone involved.

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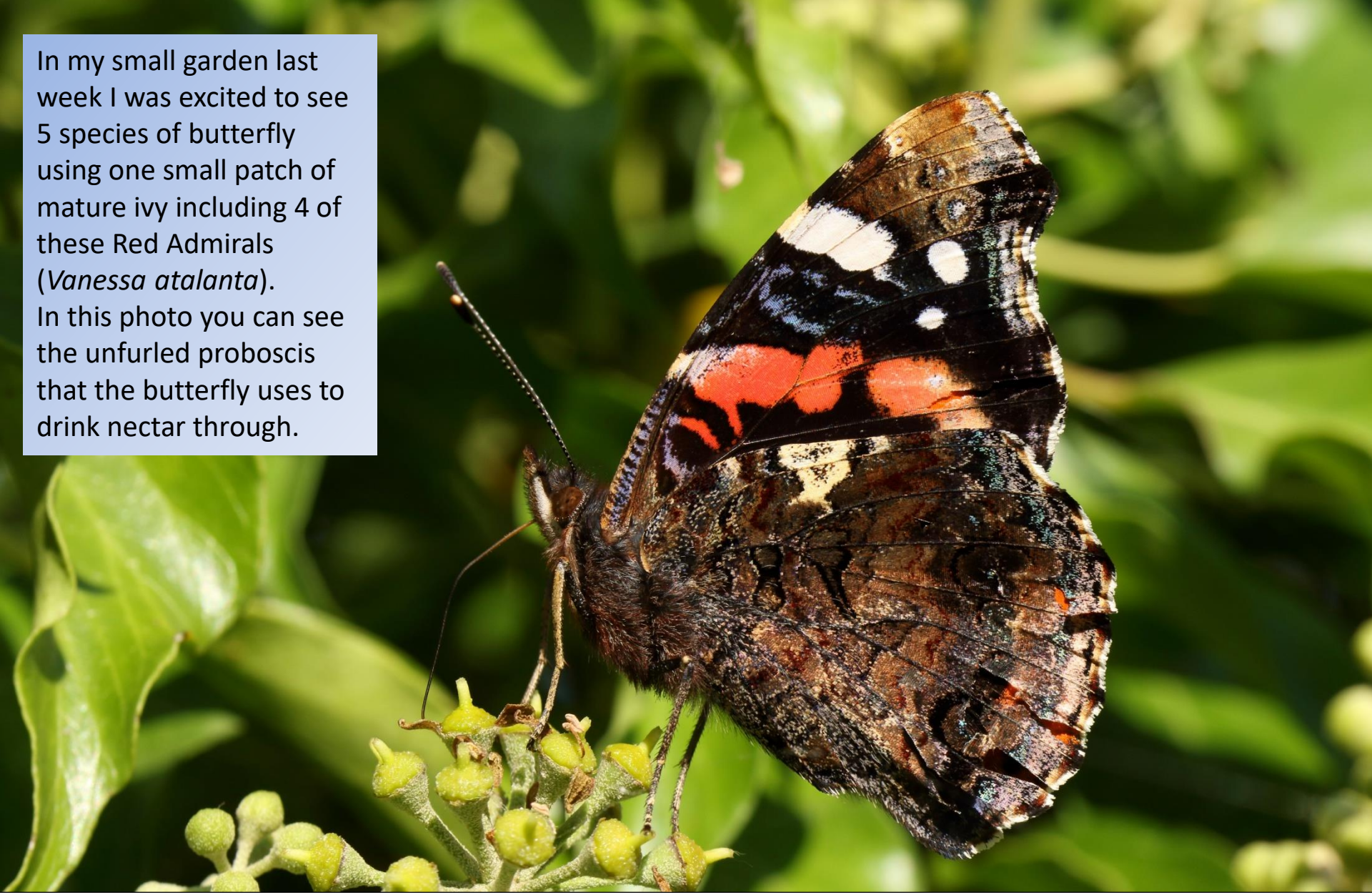
Ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a well-known but little-loved species of plant that is much maligned. When you mention ivy to many people they will associate it with their supposed habit of killing trees. However contrary to popular belief they do not strangle their host trees but instead enhance the biodiversity of the tree (or other structure) that they climb up.

Being evergreen they continue to provide shelter for invertebrates through the winter where other plants have shed their leaves or died back. The dense structure of the plant provide plenty of nesting habitat for birds and also roosting sites for bats.

At this time of year ivy is particularly important as the unassuming flowers (see left) provide a vital source of nectar in late summer and early autumn.

Encouraging or keeping ivy in the garden is a great way to improve its biodiversity value!



In my small garden last week I was excited to see 5 species of butterfly using one small patch of mature ivy including 4 of these Red Admirals (*Vanessa atalanta*).
In this photo you can see the unfurled proboscis that the butterfly uses to drink nectar through.

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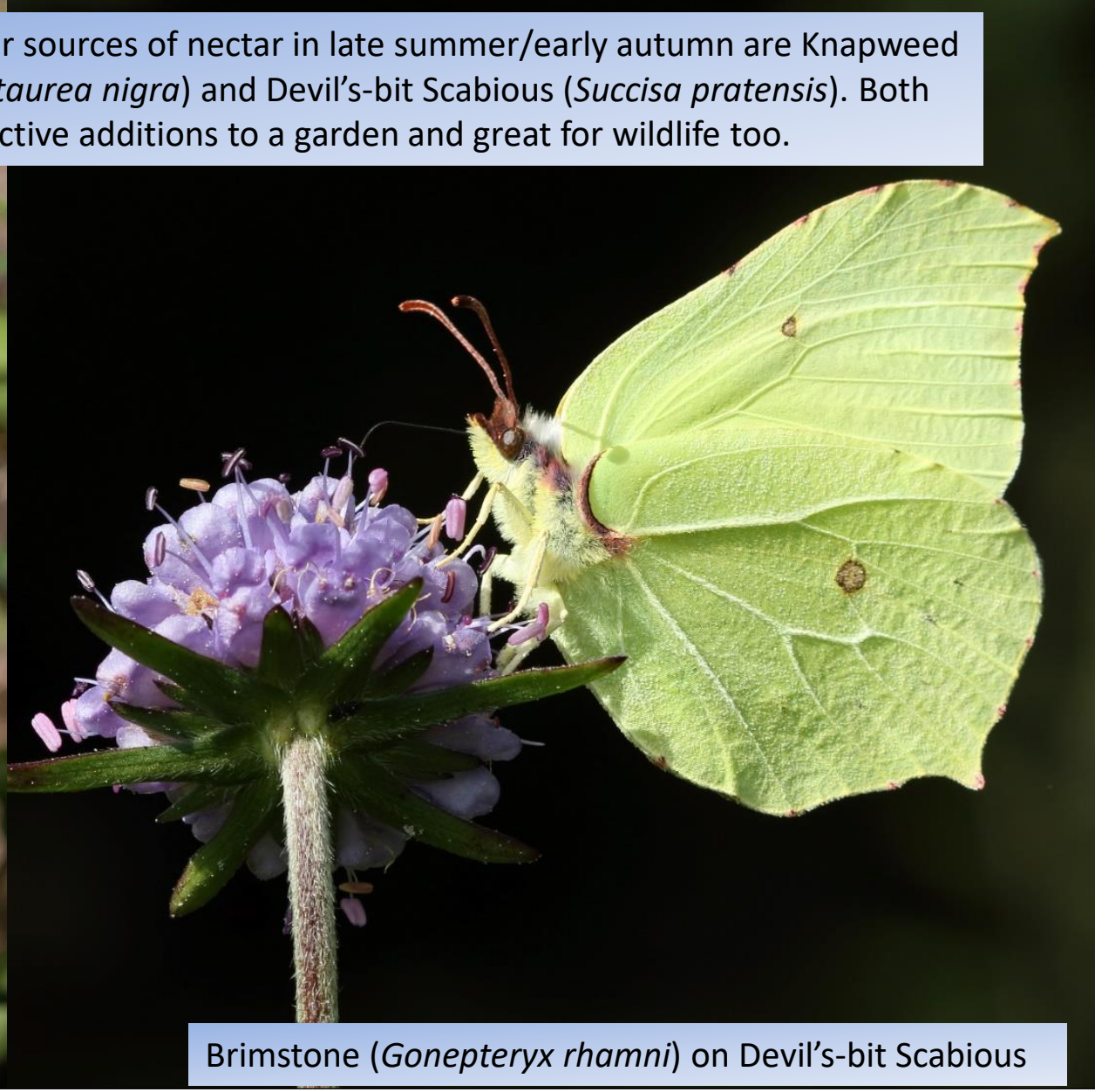
Numerous hoverfly species appreciate the nectar provided at this time of year including *Myathropa florea* (above) also known as the 'batman hoverfly' due to the pattern behind its head.

Many other species use it too including less aesthetically-pleasing flies (see inset), bees, wasps, woodlice and moths (try shining a torch on ivy flowers at night!).

Earlier in the summer I was fortunate to see this lovely little Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*) using an ivy-covered wall to raise a brood of chicks. The cover and structure provided by the ivy means it suits a variety of species including robins, thrushes, finches and wrens.

Other sources of nectar in late summer/early autumn are Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*). Both attractive additions to a garden and great for wildlife too.

Peacock (*Aglais io*) on Knapweed

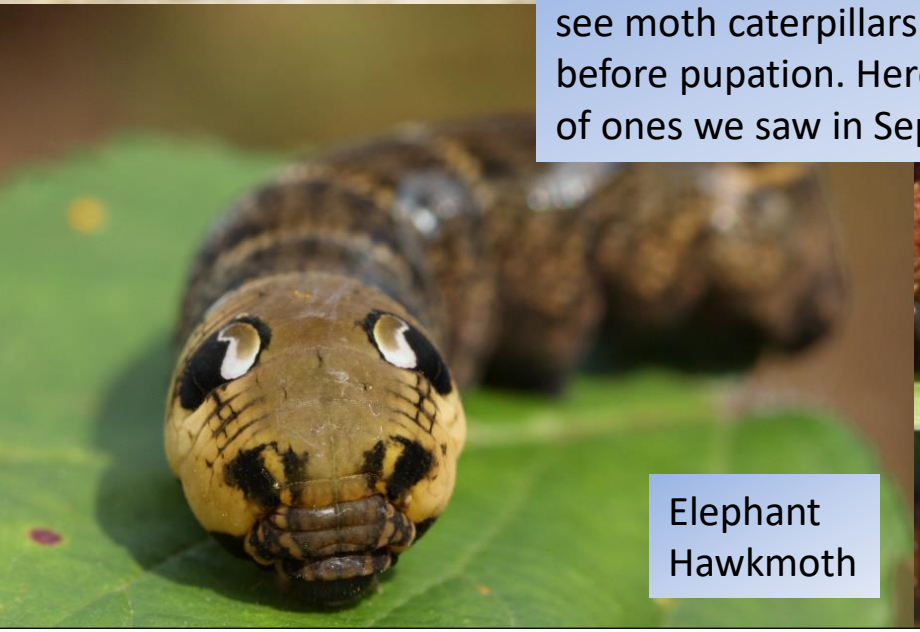


Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) on Devil's-bit Scabious

Bright-line Brown-eye

Fox Moth

Late summer can be a good time to see moth caterpillars as they feed up before pupation. Here is a selection of ones we saw in September:



Elephant Hawkmoth

Broom Moth

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Thanks to John Driver for sending in this photo of the caterpillar of the Pale Tussock (*Callister pudibunda*) moth.

The adult moth flies during May and June and are quite common in the moth trap.

Stigmella aurella

A common one on hazel: Nut Leaf Blister Moth (Phyllonorycter coryli)

Not all caterpillars are quite so obvious however – some of the smaller moths (which don't have common names) have such tiny caterpillars that they live within the leaves, often creating distinctive 'mines'. This time of year is a good time of year to spot them. Here are a few recent ones:

Stigmella hemargyrella

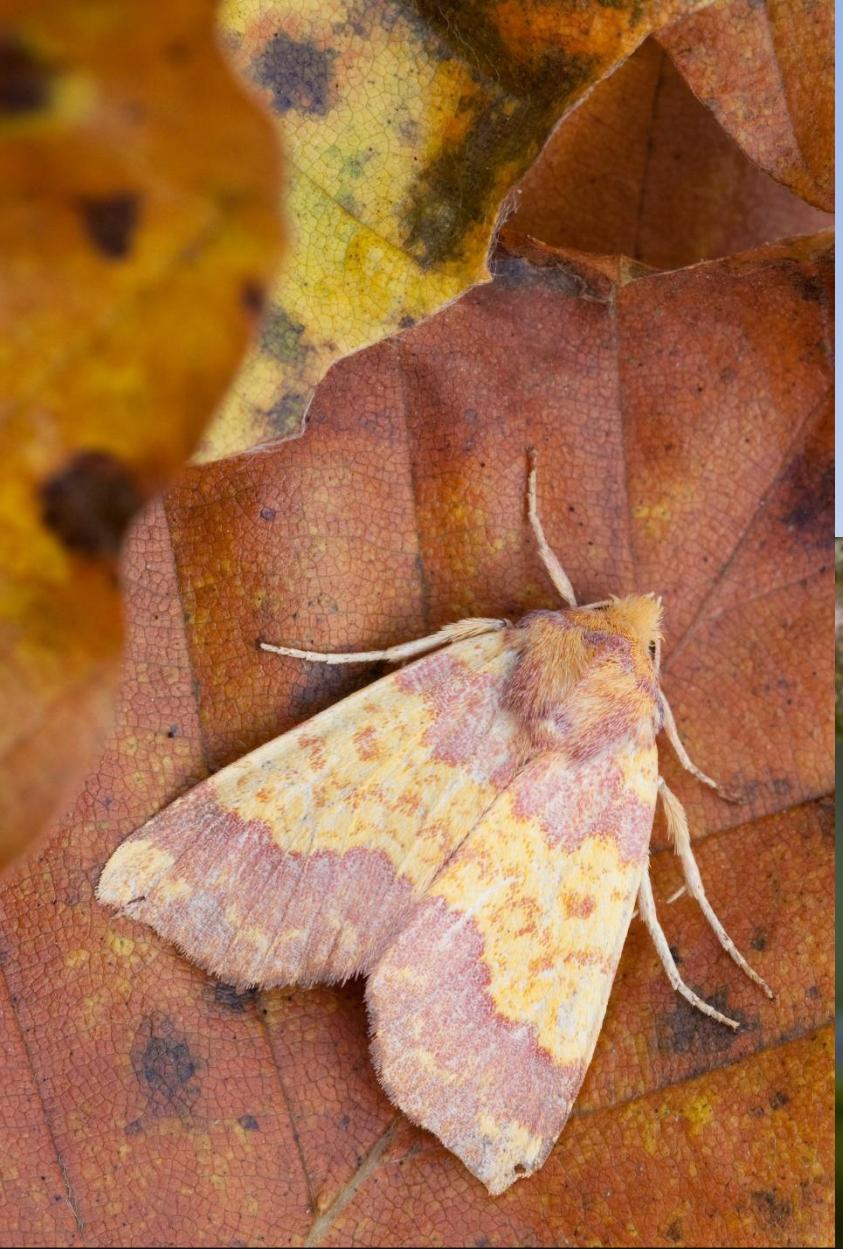
However not all caterpillars are moths/butterflies and not all leafmines are caused by small moths…

This leafmine is caused by the larva of a tiny fly on leavers of Alexanders.

This is the larva of a Scabious Sawfly (*Abia sericea*). Sawflies are relatives of bees, wasps and ants and some of their larvae look superficially similar to those of butterflies and moths.

The main difference is the number of legs – sawfly larvae have more pairs of the fleshy ‘prolegs’ towards the rear (compare with the Broom Moth previously).

While moving plant pots around in mid-September we came across this lovely little millipede curled around her eggs. Millipedes are vegetarian (in contrast with centipedes) eating mildew and decaying vegetation and they therefore perform a useful nutrient-recycling function.



Moth numbers in the trap start to drop as nights get cooler but there are still a good selection of species to be found at this time of year.

A few of the species that fly in early autumn have very seasonal colours – such as the three below: left to right – Barred Sallow (*Tiliacea aurago*), Centre-barred Sallow (*Atethmia centrago*) and Sallow (*Cirrhia icteritia*). Despite their names, only the latter species actually use sallow trees as food for their caterpillars.

INCC's Marsh Fritillary population reinforcement project has reached its next milestone with this year's cohort of caterpillars being released on Llantrisant Common. Their larval webs were collected from the Devil's-bit Scabious plants in the rearing pens (inset) and taken to the Common to be carefully placed in areas of suitable habitat.

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Our Species Officer has been helped by students from Bridgend College who have supported the project in a number of ways. Thanks to them and the staff for all they've done.

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Our beautiful pin badges are an excellent way to help support INCC. All the profits go to our Marsh Fritillary conservation project so if you're keen to help out, whilst also getting something pretty out of it, then please visit our shop:
[Marsh Fritillary Pin – Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru](#) Thank you!

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It’s the season for Fungi. This *Leratiomyces ceres* was kindly identified from photos by Emma Williams.

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They were found by Lizzie growing in woodchip mulch outside Garnant Coop.

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Other fungi to look out for in the valley at this time of year is Fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)

With help from volunteers at the Amman Valley Makerspace, our Water Vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) monitoring boxes have returned some exciting results already. This water vole was filmed one of our boxes near Pendine in Carmarthenshire.

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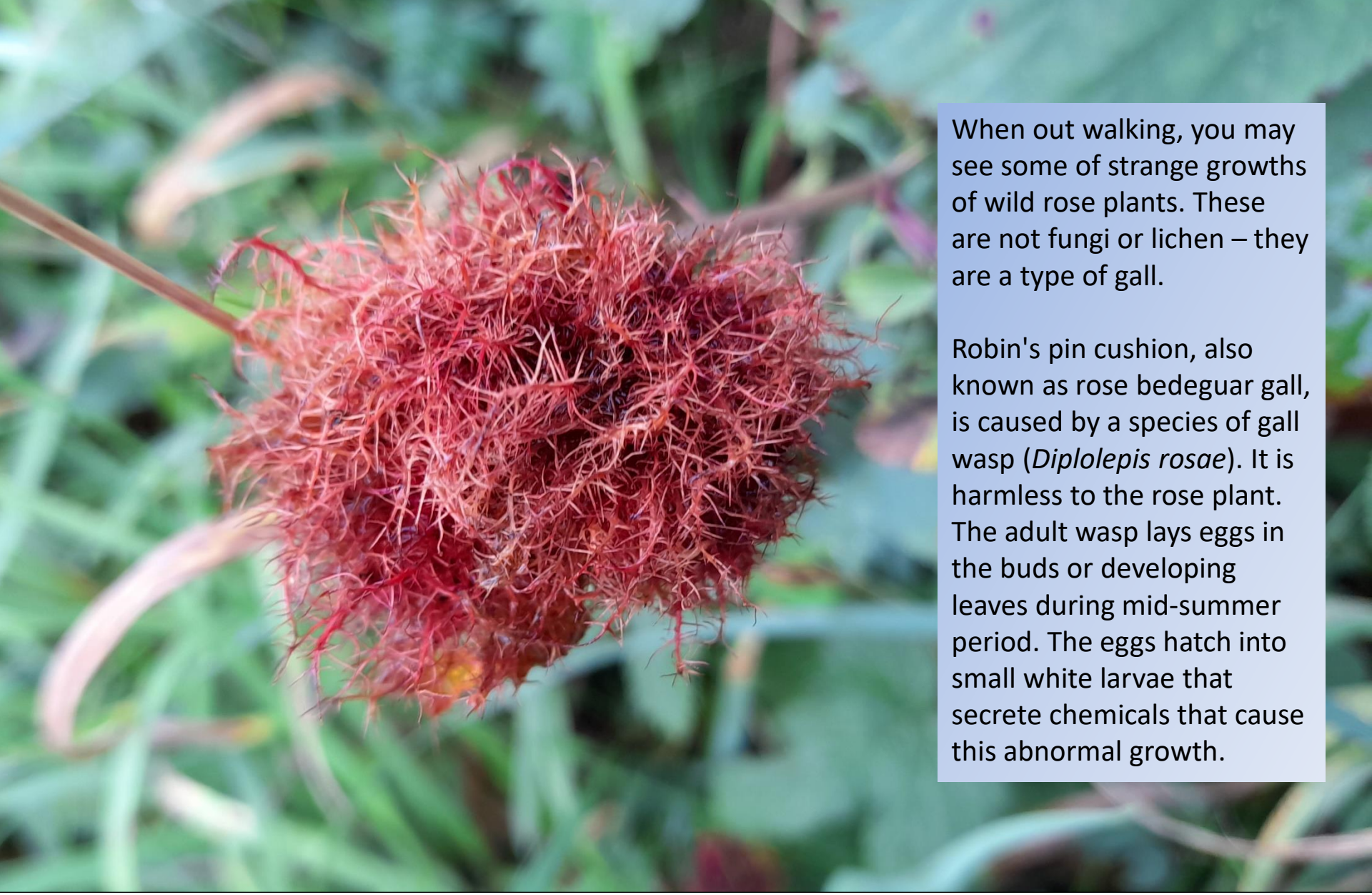
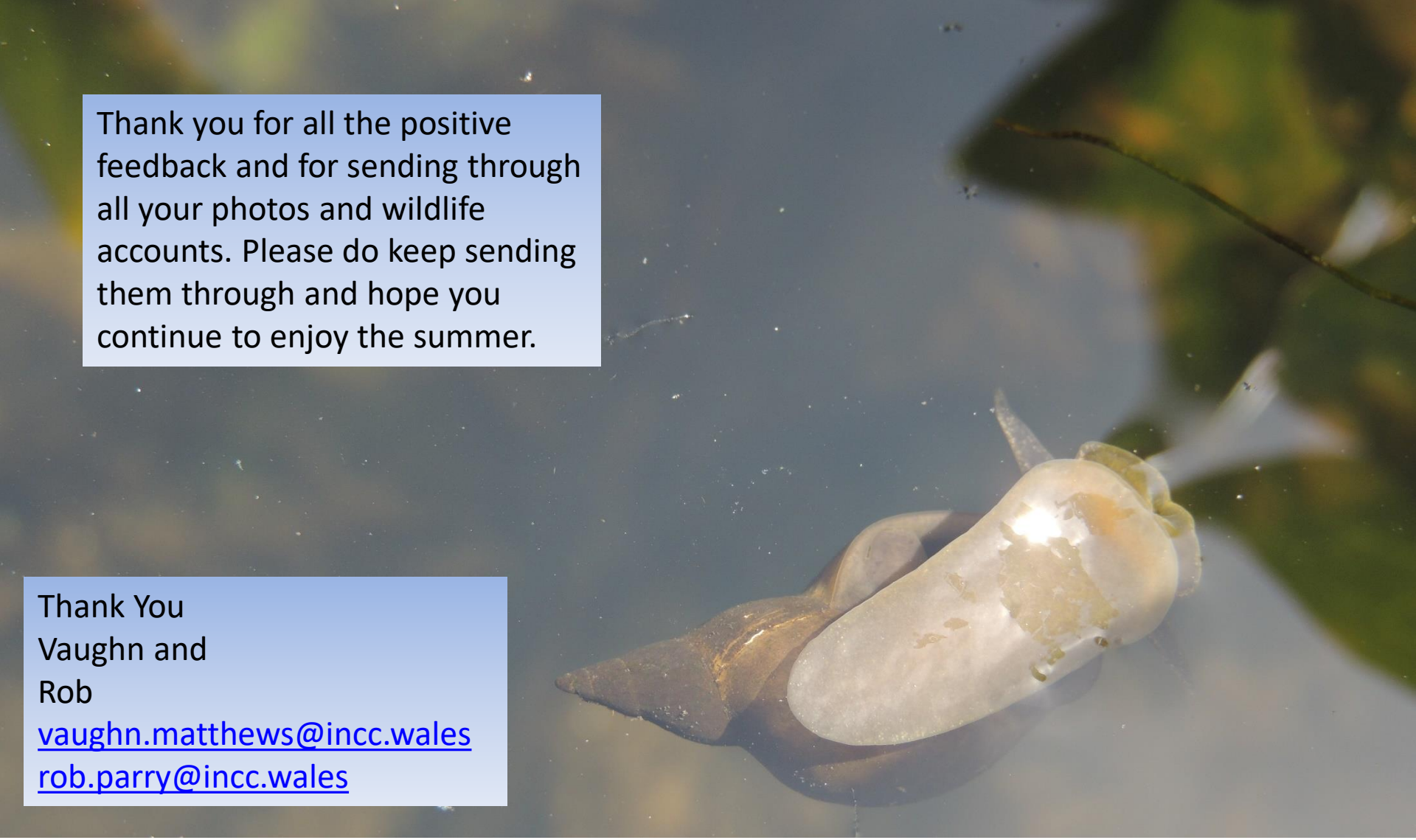


When out walking, you may see some of strange growths of wild rose plants. These are not fungi or lichen – they are a type of gall.

Robin's pin cushion, also known as rose bedeguar gall, is caused by a species of gall wasp (*Diplolepis rosae*). It is harmless to the rose plant. The adult wasp lays eggs in the buds or developing leaves during mid-summer period. The eggs hatch into small white larvae that secrete chemicals that cause this abnormal growth.



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
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