

# Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 34 (October 2022)

MENTER AR GYFER  
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU

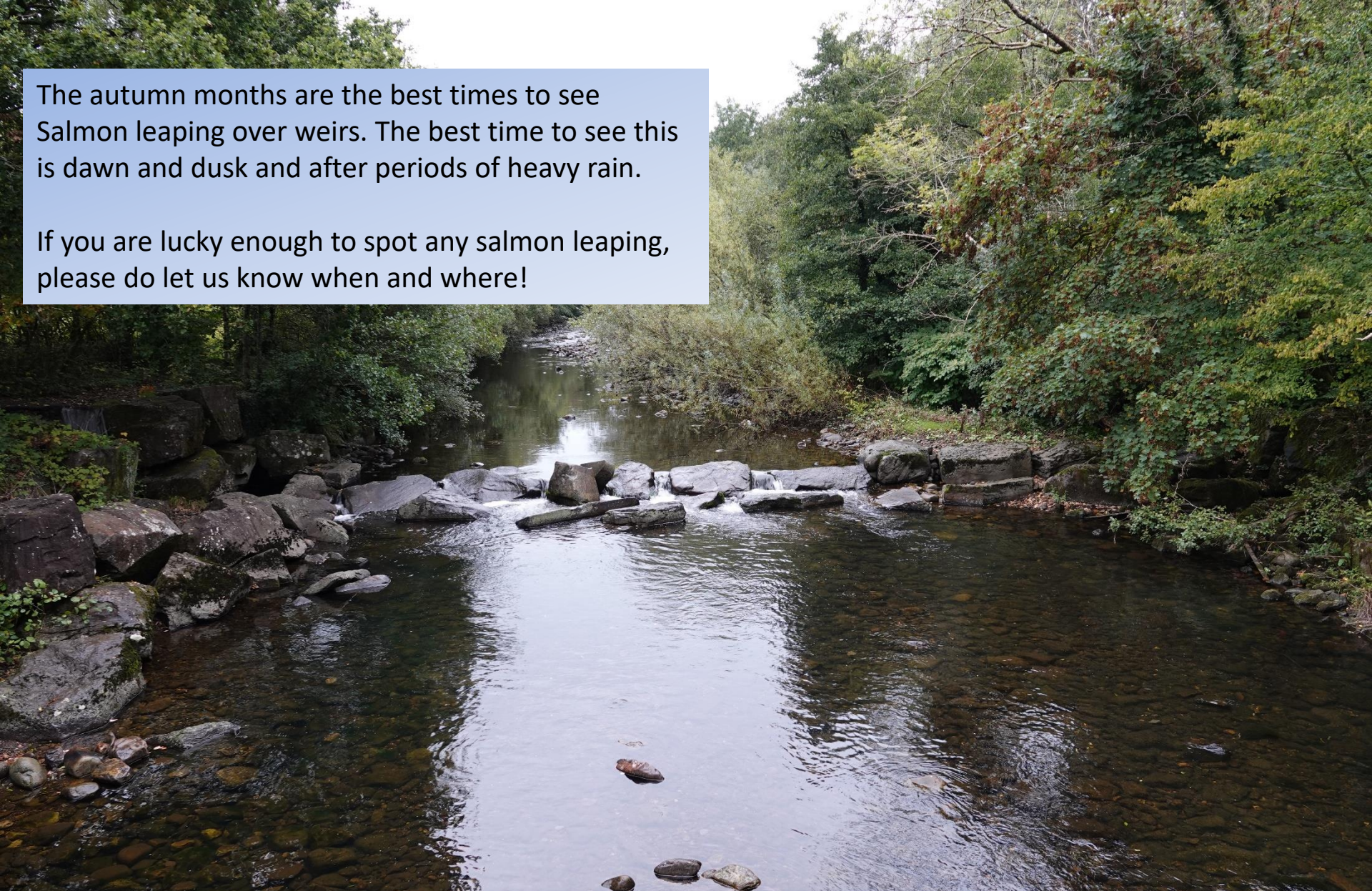


INITIATIVE FOR NATURE  
CONSERVATION CYMRU



The autumn months are the best times to see Salmon leaping over weirs. The best time to see this is dawn and dusk and after periods of heavy rain.

If you are lucky enough to spot any salmon leaping, please do let us know when and where!







Autumn is the best time for spotting fungi and this damp, mild October has led to an abundance of different species of all shapes and sizes popping up.





These giant parasol fungi were some of the largest we've seen this year – pencil for scale!





This distinctively-shaped fungus is known as a Stinkhorn and is well-named as it can usually be detected by its scent of decaying flesh before it is seen. Its scientific name *Phallus impudicus* is also fairly self-explanatory...

The smell attracts bluebottles and other insects which then inadvertently pick up the spores and transport them elsewhere.



This extremely rare fungus, Violet Coral (*Clavaria zollingeri*) was found at the New Bethel chapel yard in Cwmaman – a lovely surprise on an autumn walk.





Short grassland that hasn't had the influences of agriculture, such as often found in churchyards, can be a good place to find other spectacular grassland fungi - waxcaps. There are a number of species, often brightly-coloured and they can indicate grassland of high biodiversity value. Do let us know if you spot any waxcaps and send us in photos.







Fungi are not only important in their own right but they are also a vital part of healthy soil and facilitate the breakdown of wood and other materials.

They also provide food for many creatures from deer to slugs, as well as some moth caterpillars and the fungus gnats that can be seen on the mushroom in this photo.



It was a pleasure to be able to help out Brecon Beacons National Park staff with their annual Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scotica*) surveys a couple of weeks ago. We were on the lookout for the elusive birds themselves but also distinctive signs such as their droppings (see inset photo).







Red Grouse are a wonderful feature of the area with the heather moorland providing the food and shelter they require. The unmanaged burning of the hillsides are a threat to the population here however, so annual counts allow population changes over long periods of time to be analysed.





Red Grouse are mostly vegetarian, with young heather shoots a favoured food. They will also eat insects in summer months.

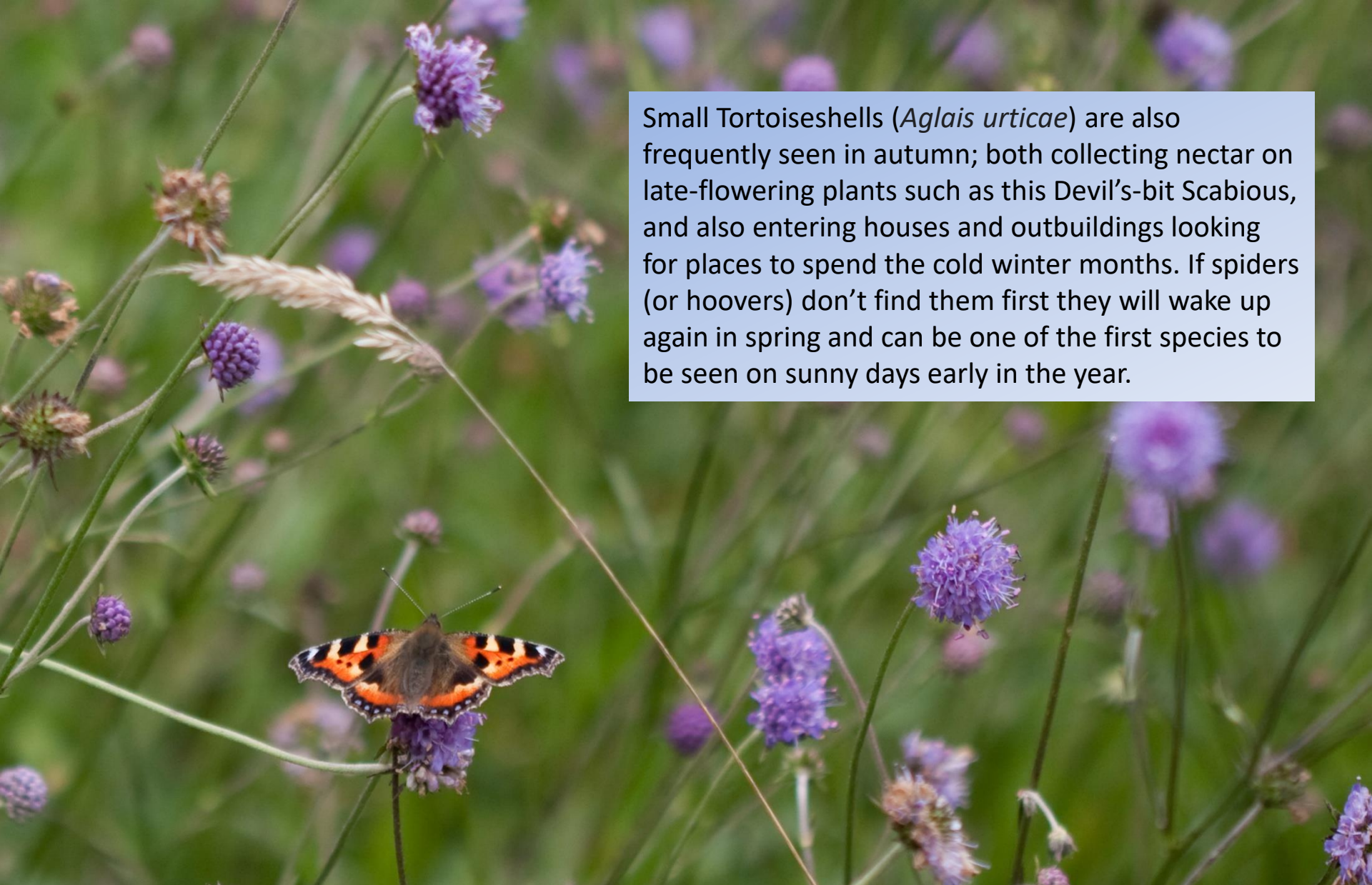




The mild start to autumn means that there are still butterflies to be seen – including Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*) like this one.






A Small Tortoiseshell butterfly (Aglais urticae) is perched on a purple flower. The butterfly has orange wings with black markings and a white border. The background is a soft-focus green field with many purple flowers.

Small Tortoiseshells (*Aglais urticae*) are also frequently seen in autumn; both collecting nectar on late-flowering plants such as this Devil's-bit Scabious, and also entering houses and outbuildings looking for places to spend the cold winter months. If spiders (or hoovers) don't find them first they will wake up again in spring and can be one of the first species to be seen on sunny days early in the year.



A close-up photograph of a Merveille du Jour moth (Aegrotia perizoma) resting on a piece of bark covered in green lichen. The moth's wings are a mix of light green, white, and black, with a pattern of dark, wavy lines and spots that provide excellent camouflage against the textured, lichen-covered background. The moth's head is visible at the top, with long, thin antennae extending outwards.

A highlight of moth trapping in October is the spectacular Merveille du Jour ('wonder of the day'). The beautiful colouration provides perfect camouflage on lichen covered trees. The larvae feed on oak.



The mild weather and southerly winds have led to a greater than normal number of migrant moths turning up across the country.

These range in shape and size from giant *Convolvulus* Hawkmoths to diminutive Diamond-backs.

Somewhere in the middle is this appropriately ghost-like *Palpita vitrealis* that appeared in our moth trap this October.



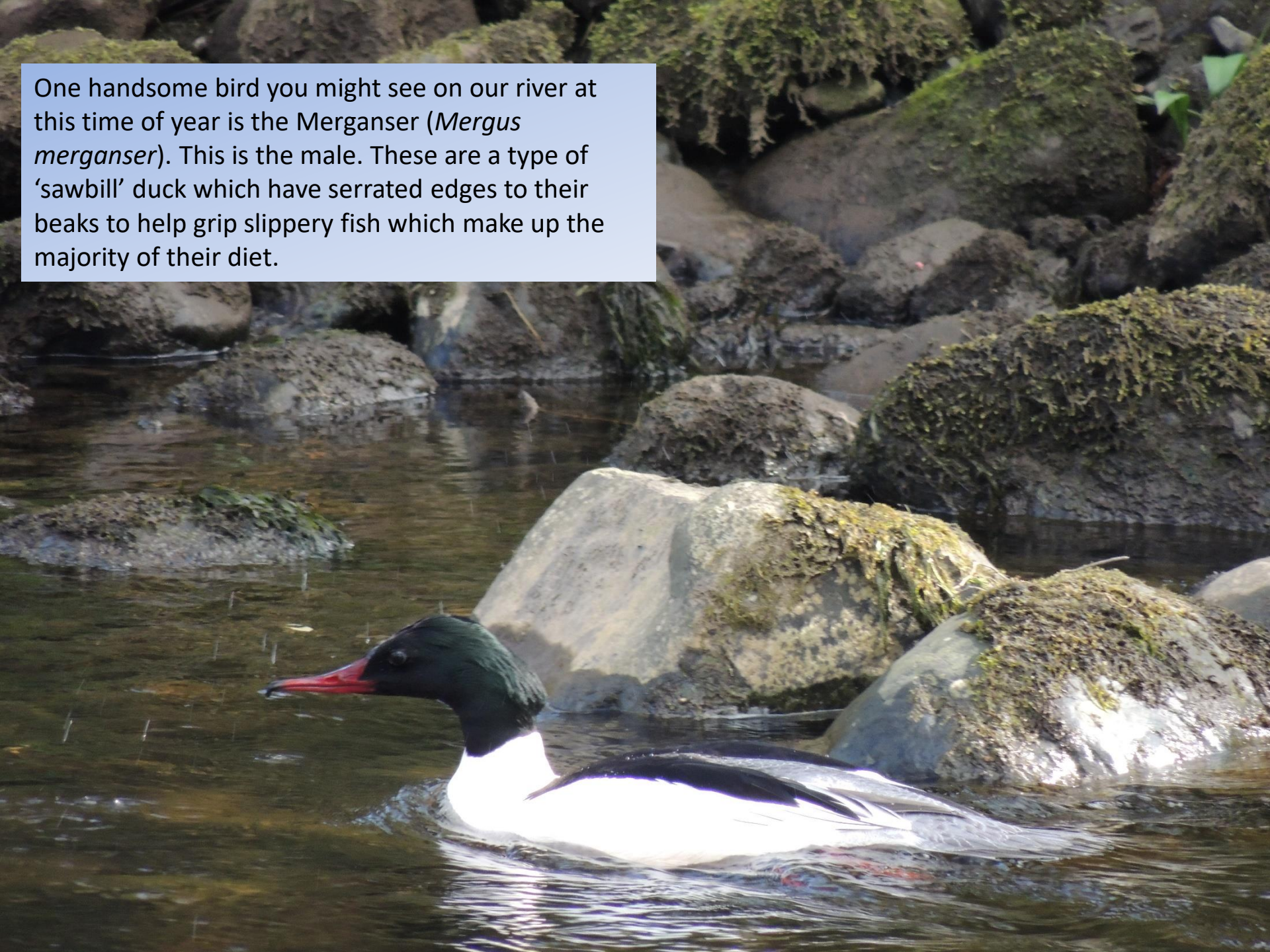


Another insect you might encounter in or around buildings at this time of year is a European Hornet (*Vespa crabro*). These large and fearsome-looking creatures are actually more docile than other wasps and at this time of year are likely to be queens looking for somewhere to hibernate over winter.





One handsome bird you might see on our river at this time of year is the Merganser (*Mergus merganser*). This is the male. These are a type of 'sawbill' duck which have serrated edges to their beaks to help grip slippery fish which make up the majority of their diet.

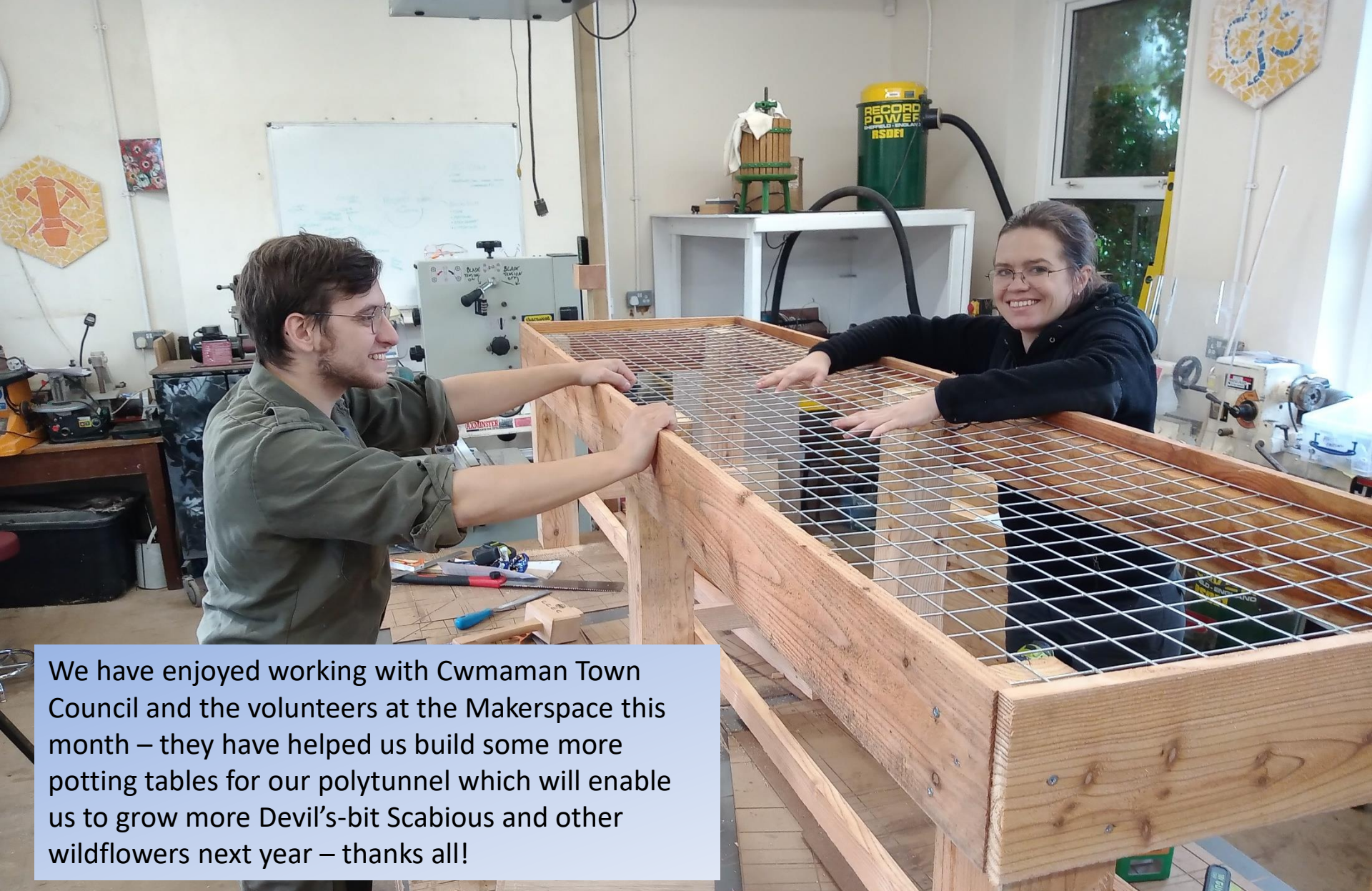




Mergansers (female below) breed in forested areas across Europe and North America and return to milder areas in the winter. Mergansers here will stay over winter and return to breeding sites in the spring where they make their nests in holes in trees.







We have enjoyed working with Cwmaman Town Council and the volunteers at the Makerspace this month – they have helped us build some more potting tables for our polytunnel which will enable us to grow more Devil's-bit Scabious and other wildflowers next year – thanks all!







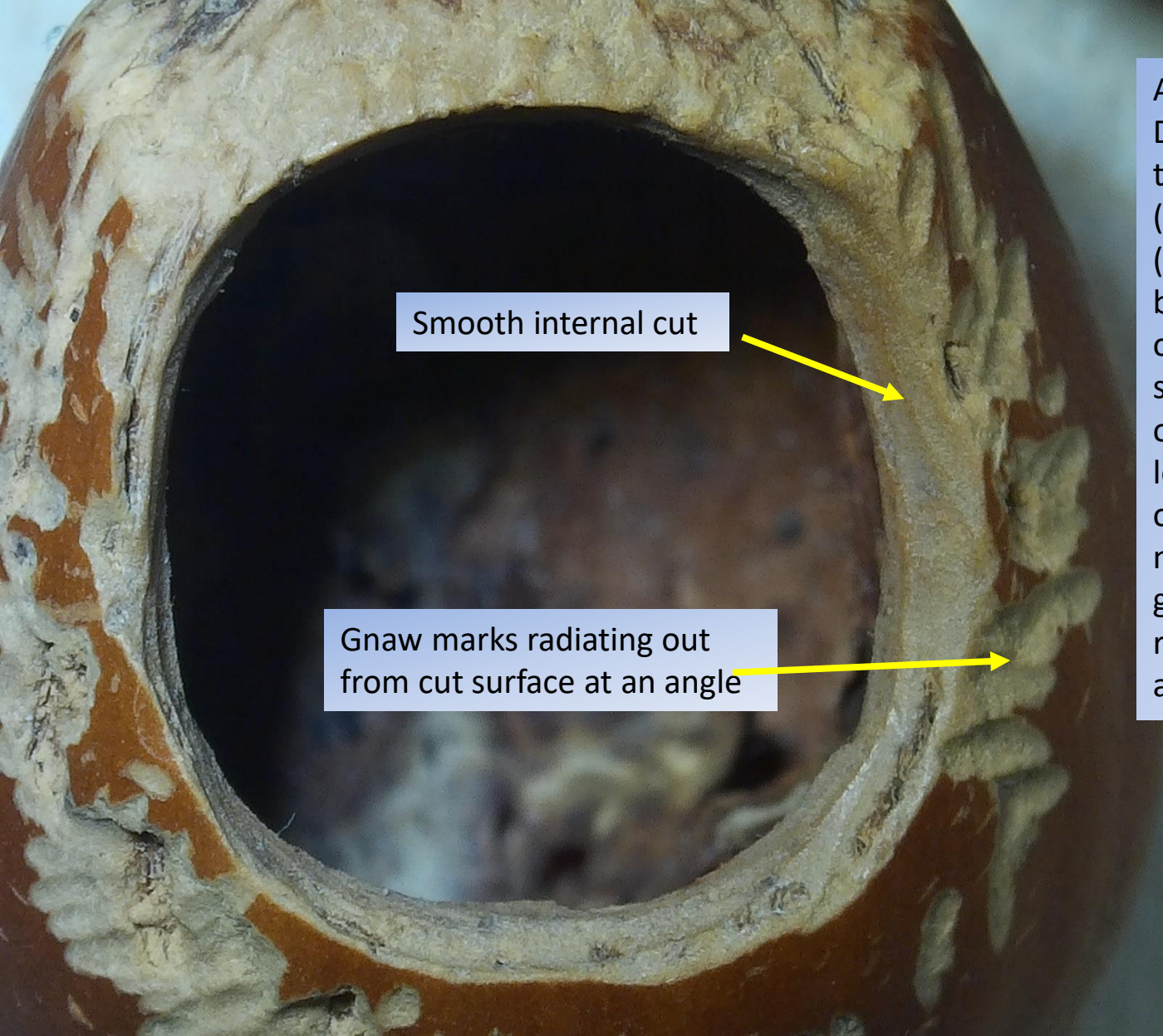
There are a range of sizes and they are slowly making their way to the polytunnel...





Common, or Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) are just about to go into hibernation in the Amman Valley. Its been a mild autumn so they have been foraging on insects and fruits to see them through the winter.



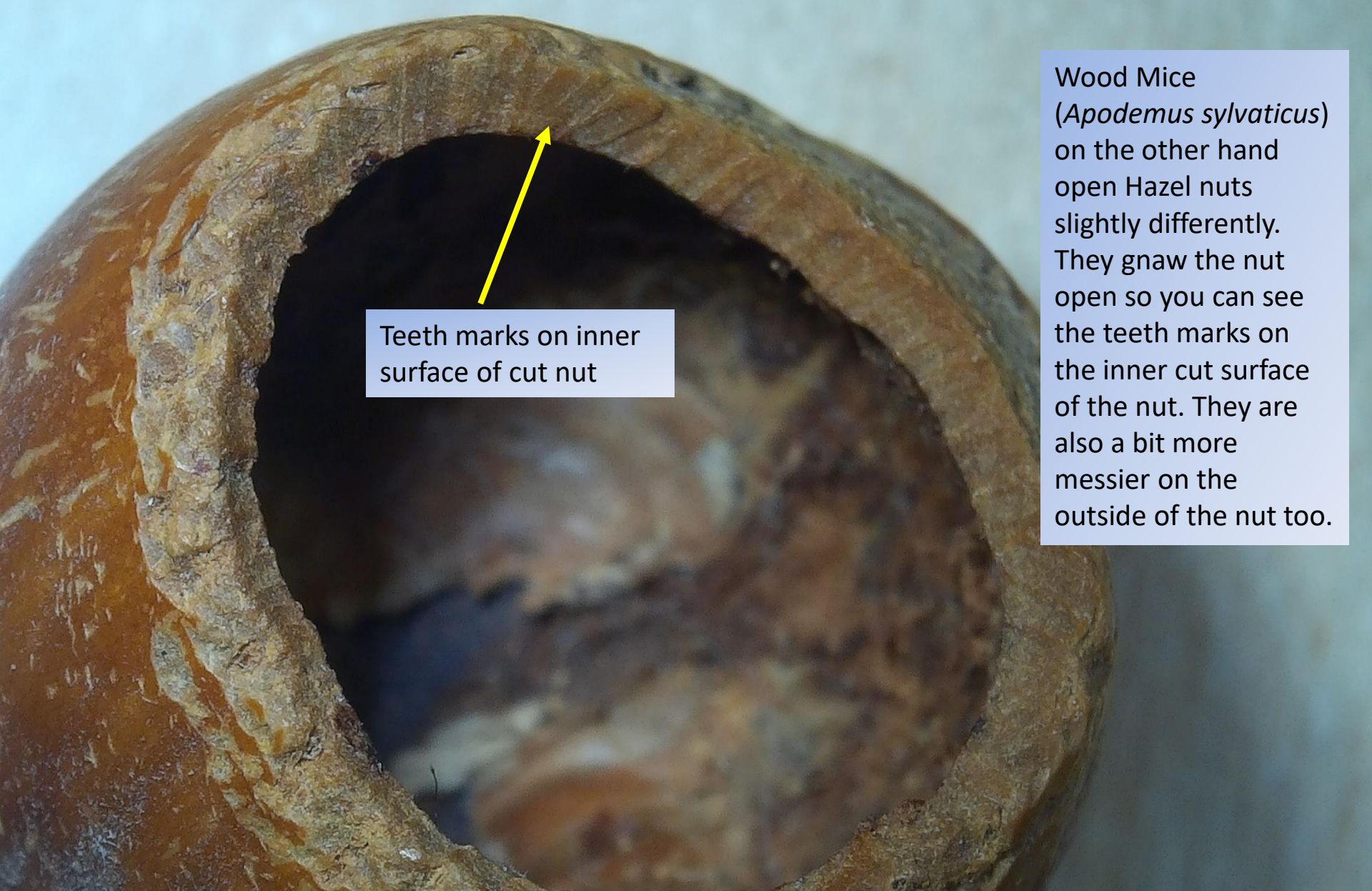


Smooth internal cut

Gnaw marks radiating out  
from cut surface at an angle

A good way of identify Dormice is by looking at the way cobb nuts (from Hazel trees (*Corylus avellana*)) have been opened. Dormice open nuts when fresh so they scrape the nut open with their teeth leaving smooth edges on the inside cut of the nut. They also leave gnawing marks at a roughly 45 degree angle around the cut hole.






Teeth marks on inner  
surface of cut nut

Wood Mice  
(*Apodemus sylvaticus*)  
on the other hand  
open Hazel nuts  
slightly differently.  
They gnaw the nut  
open so you can see  
the teeth marks on  
the inner cut surface  
of the nut. They are  
also a bit more  
messier on the  
outside of the nut too.





A close-up photograph of a wood mouse (Apodemus sylvaticus) peering out from a hole in a piece of plywood. The mouse has brown fur, large dark eyes, and long whiskers. Its pinkish nose and one paw are visible. The plywood is light brown with several dark, circular knots or holes. The background is dark and out of focus.

You are much more likely to see Wood mice in the Amman Valley, especially in the garden and in woodlands and scrub which are ideal habitats for them. Wood mice do not hibernate so you can see them all year long.



October is the month when we start welcoming back our winter visitors such as the Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*).

Fieldfares are a large species of Thrush. They do not breed in Wales, but flock here in their millions over winter when their breeding grounds in the north of Europe get too cold. You can see mixed flocks of Fieldfares feeding amongst other thrush species, including another winter visitor, the Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*).





Redwing are much smaller than Fieldfares and look similar to Song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) but have a cream stripe above the eye and orange / red under the wing, hence the name.





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  
Vaughn and  
Rob

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