

# Amman Valley Wildlife Update Number 35 (November 2022)




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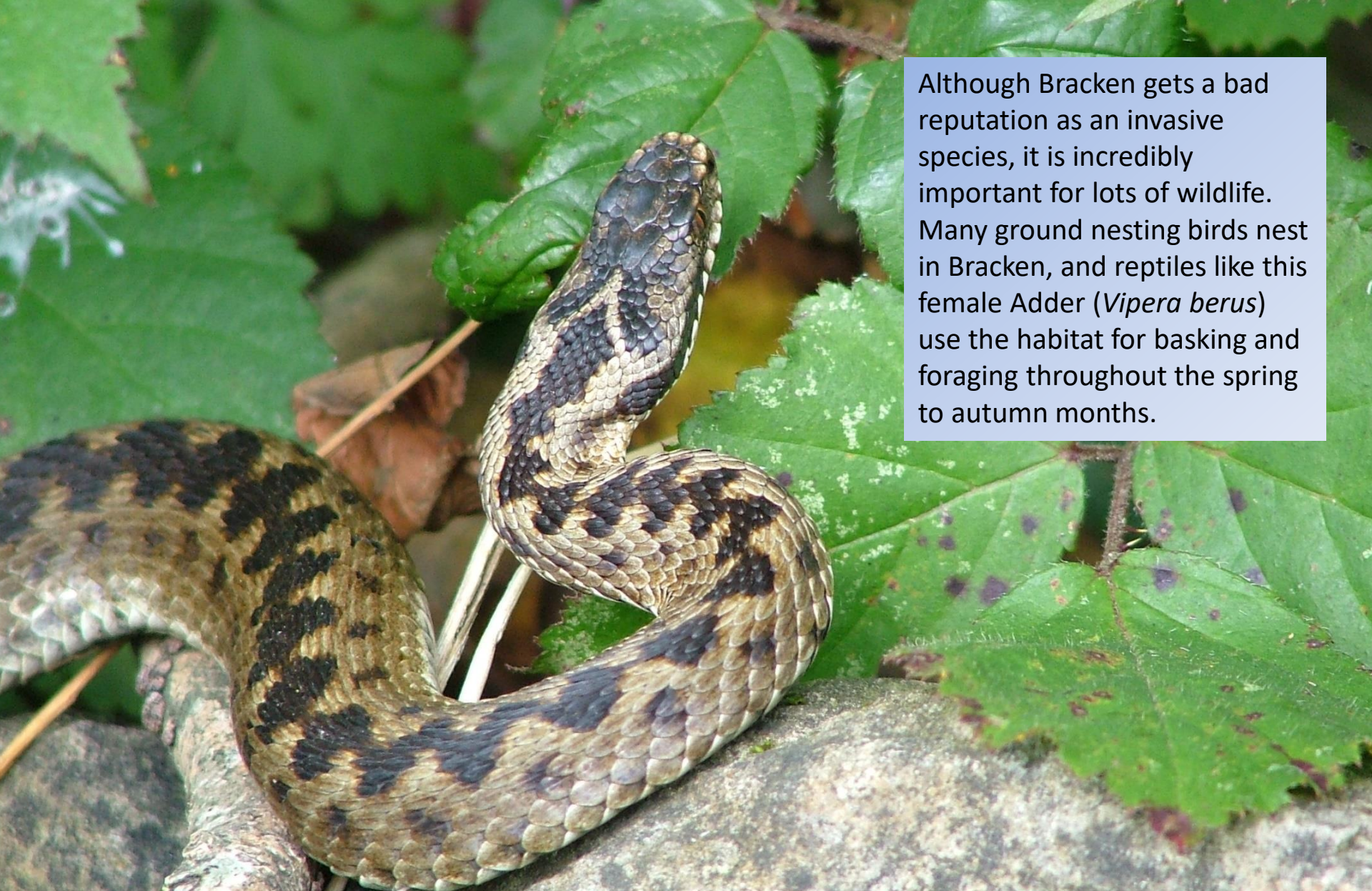
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There are always beautiful moths to see throughout the year. This is a Feathered Thorn (*Colotois pennaria*), perfectly camouflaged on some dying Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).





Although Bracken gets a bad reputation as an invasive species, it is incredibly important for lots of wildlife. Many ground nesting birds nest in Bracken, and reptiles like this female Adder (*Vipera berus*) use the habitat for basking and foraging throughout the spring to autumn months.



Dry sunny days in winter are some of the best times to go walking in the Amman Valley. Especially in our uplands. If you take a walk up to Tair Carn, to the north of the Amman Valley you will pass several impressive sinkholes. A sinkhole is created when soluble rocks such as limestone are dissolved by groundwater. This creates an underground cavern which eventually collapses to create the sinkhole.






If walking in the uplands you will also come across plenty of peat or bog pools. These small water bodies are quite acidic, meaning that the wildlife found in them are specially adapted to these harsh conditions.







The small pools are very important breeding habitats for dragonflies and damselflies like these Large Red Damselflies (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*).

The wetter our bogs and peatlands the better they are at providing habitat for wildlife and for storing Carbon.



Unfortunately, most of our peatland and bog habitat in the area is degraded and has lost a lot of its biodiversity value. These hessian traps are designed to block water running off peatland habitat in an attempt to keep the water on the land. Fires and too much grazing cause erosion, which washes the peat away.





In some parts of Wales the Welsh Government is investing in peatland restoration to make our peatland habitats more robust to store carbon and provide habitat for wildlife. Diggers are often used to dig peat pools, and the dug material is then used to block drainage channels on the peatland so that the water backs up and keeps the peatland wet.







The peatland restoration works can have incredible results for the habitat and the species that depend on it. This photo is from high up in the Tywi Forest. This landscape is one of the last refuges for Water Vole in Wales (*Arvicola amphibius*).





Restoring the peatland habitat by making it wetter, should have a huge benefit for our dwindling water vole population. Monitoring will tell us if its working or not.



Grazing marshy grassland and peatland habitats are important management tools. Cattle are great conservation grazers. But if you can't have cattle, ponies do an ok job. This is a Kerry Bog pony, and it is an incredibly rare breed, but now helps graze marshy grassland habitat in the Amman Valley.

First bred in Kerry, Ireland for working on Peat bogs the pony went out of fashion and only a few dozen survived. Thanks to pony conservationists, the breed is now recognised and will hopefully be saved.

Interestingly, the closest genetic link to the Kerry Bog pony, is our very own Welsh Mountain Pony.



The upland habitats of the Amman Valley are important winter refuges for a special species of bird, the Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*). Over the coming winter weeks numbers of Golden Plover increase in the uplands and can easily pass over 100 birds.



Thanks to Simon James for sending in this wonderful Golden Plover photo taken from the Amman Valley uplands.






Other spectacular looking birds to look out for at this time of year when wandering the Amman Valley is the Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*).





And Raven (*Corvus corax*). Both of which are pretty common in the Valley.





Whilst out walking recently, it was great to see new cattle grids being installed with little ramps.

The ramps are designed to help wildlife such as frogs, toads, mice, voles and hedgehogs get out of the cattle grid if they fall in.



Thanks to Laura Pulsen for sending in this photo of a Palmate Newt (*Lissotriton helveticus*), found when digging the garden. Newts only use ponds for a relatively short period in spring to breed. At this time of year they will be sheltering underground or under stones and logs. If you see a newt during winter gardening, just place it back under a log or stone or in some dense vegetation. Do not put it in a pond.







Huge thanks to all the landowners as well as John and Callum Andrews for helping us to install more Barn Owl boxes in the Amman Valley. Barn Owls need clear flight paths into the box so hopefully this tree is a good location for a nest box.





Although, this might be my favourite location for a Barn Owl box. Barn Owls need rough grassland habitat full of mice and voles to predate. This location looks ideal. We should know more next spring, but it might take a few years for birds to find the boxes.





It has still been quite mild for November and there is still lots of fungi to see when out and about. This fungus is called Scarlet Caterpillarclub (*Cordyceps militaris*). The orange/red part is the fungus' fruiting body.

The fungus parasitises the caterpillars and pupae of various moth species. The white part of the photo is a moth pupa, which would have been underground. The fungus parasitised the pupa and grew up through the soil to fruit in the grassland. If you see these small red fingers in a grassland, you know there is a parasitised caterpillar (or crane fly larva) just under the ground. Nature is truly wonderful.





Another great fungal phenomenon to look out for is Guttation. This is when the fungus exudes moisture which then condenses in the atmosphere. It is better known in plants, but the process is less understood amongst fungi.





The Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) is a relatively common bird in our towns and gardens. In winter Pied Wagtails roost together at night in large numbers, sometimes several hundred at a time. They often do this in trees in town centres. If you know of any Pied Wagtail winter roosts, please do let us know.







Another autumn / winter visitor to our towns is the Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*). These birds are at home in our towns and cities, but are still very rare in the UK. They only breed in places like London, Manchester and Birmingham, but if you are lucky you might spot one in the valley.



Thank you for sending in your photos and wildlife encounters. Please do keep them coming.

Also, if you would like us to cover any particular species or habitats, please just let me know. Thank you. Rob  
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