

# Amman Valley Wildlife Update: INCC Highlights 2022



MENTER AR GYFER  
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE  
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Despite winter being a difficult time for insects you can see a handful of hardy moth species on milder nights in December. This one is the aptly-named December Moth (*Poecilocampa populi*).





Another aptly-named species is the Winter Moth (*Operophtera brumata*). It is an unusual species as the female only has little stumps instead of wings so she can't fly – instead she crawls up tree trunks and releases pheromones to attract the males.





There are a few butterfly species that sometimes can be seen in December – the Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) – which is active on milder sunny days. It doesn't properly hibernate overwinter unlike Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) and Peacock (*Aglais io*) which sometimes come inside houses and outbuildings before emerging again in the spring.





As well as our usual monthly wildlife update, we thought it would be nice to have a recap of some of our highlights of the year. Thank you to everyone for your help, for caring about wildlife and for looking after this wonderful little valley.



A major highlight for us was the opening of the wildlife garden in Garnant back in the spring. We are now growing lots of wildflowers for local projects.







We will be digging a pond there soon but it is already home to a variety of species – reptile sheets have revealed Slow Worms, Toads and Palmate Newts, with lots of different insects on the native flowers, trees and grasses.



The wildlife garden is also a place for people to come and learn about wildlife or enjoy some of the wildlife they share the valley with.







We wouldn't have been able to achieve half as much for wildlife without the support of volunteers, friends and landowners, who have given us so much. Thank you.

One of those special volunteers is Jan. The success of the wildlife garden is largely down to Jan's dedication, commitment and powers of persuasion.

Jan not only raised over £1,000 for tools and equipment, but she also potted on countless seedlings, kept the plants fed and watered and made sure the garden was open on weekends so that passers by could pop in and look around.

Don't know how we would have managed without Jan. Thank you.

p.s. Jan, we need a better photo of you...





Jan also played a major part in our march at the Global Day of Action back in June. We and thousands of others were marching for a wilder Wales.







A big thank you also goes to Carla for giving so much time and effort toward the wildlife garden. As well as looking after the garden and its plants, Carla was a pro in the field of table making and wheelbarrowing stone for paths and fences. Thank you.





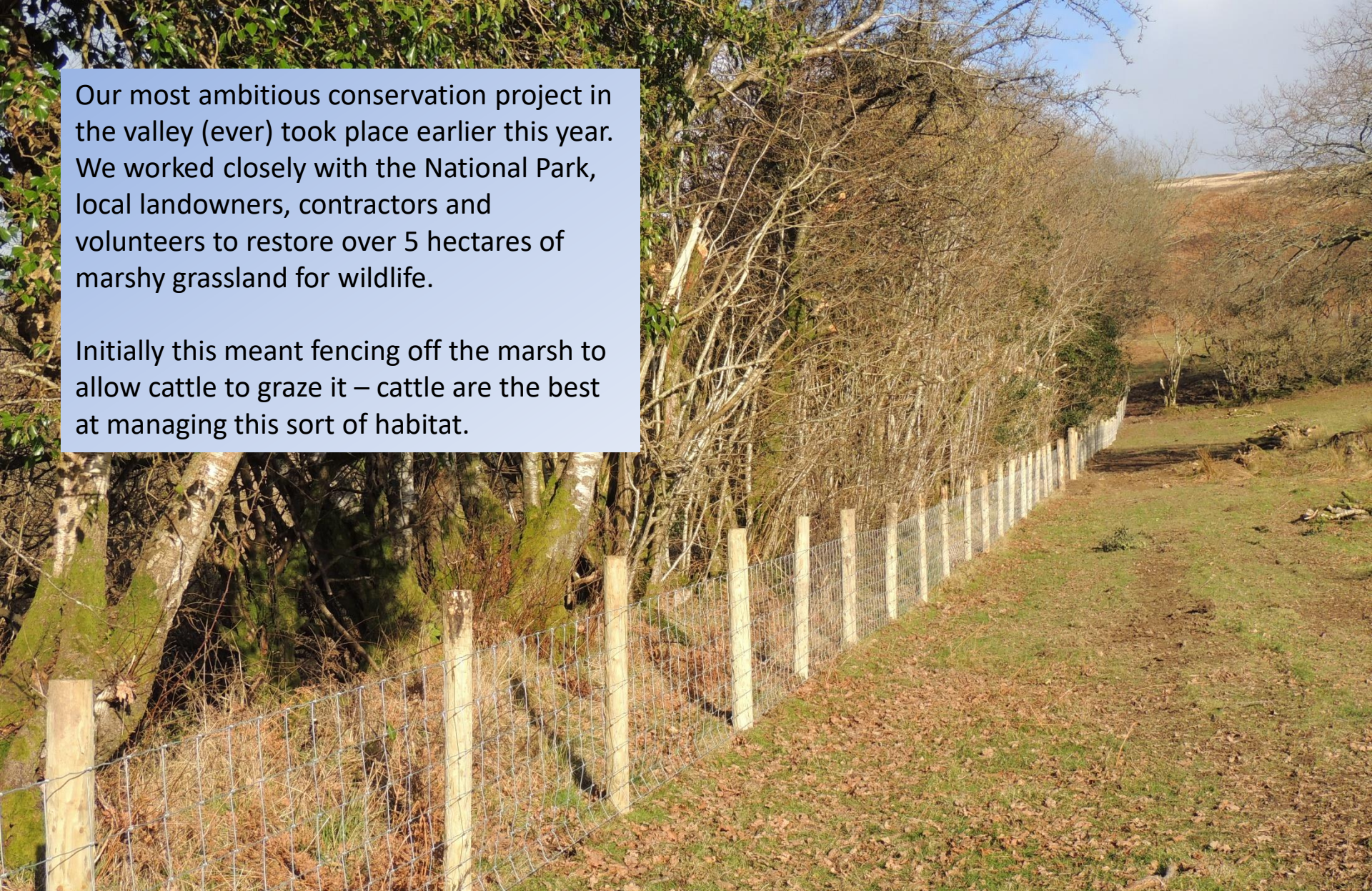
Carla was the first to record this rare structure in the Amman Valley called hair ice. It was first spotted in Parc Golwg yr Aman in January.

It has been spotted again this year in the same location – worth looking out for elsewhere. It appears during freezing conditions and is caused when a fungus pushes water out of decaying wood in such a way that the very fine water freezes on contact with the cold air.



Our most ambitious conservation project in the valley (ever) took place earlier this year. We worked closely with the National Park, local landowners, contractors and volunteers to restore over 5 hectares of marshy grassland for wildlife.

Initially this meant fencing off the marsh to allow cattle to graze it – cattle are the best at managing this sort of habitat.





These Herefordshire cattle are the perfect hardy breed that is required to graze this sort of habitat. They have already made a big difference and we look forward to monitoring how they continue to make the site better for wildlife.





The Amman Valley is an important Welsh landscape for its marshy grassland habitats. Grazing by cattle helps keep the grassland in check and allows lots of different wildflowers to grow. These Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) are low growing, so quite often get shaded out in longer grass.





A huge thanks to volunteers who helped us out in the marsh at the start of the year.... in less than ideal weather!

We were enhancing the marshy grassland by planting some typical native wetland plants like devil's-bit scabious, bog myrtle and ragged-robin.





Sadly, many of our special grassland habitats in the valley are being planted up with trees, broadleaved and conifer. In time, the trees will shade out and destroy the wildflowers and all the insects that depend on them. Tree planting is often done to store carbon, but grassland roots are just as good at doing this. Planting trees, can actually release more carbon. It is a growing problem in the valley and across Wales.





Trees and tree planting isn't bad – as long as it is done in the right places and not on top of ancient wildflower rich grassland habitats. For instance....

We planted this new hedgerow back in February on an already agriculturally improved field. Dedicated volunteers (on another wet day) planted out a mixture of native tree species, chosen to benefit wildlife as much as possible.

It was incredibly wet, but.....



We had a lovely cup of tea and some cake afterwards, courtesy of the landowners Mark and Sarah. We are incredibly grateful to Mark and Sarah for all they have done at the farm for wildlife over the past 12 months. Thank you.





A number of these large bat roosts, designed to favour horseshoe bats, were put up around the valley, as well as smaller roosts hung in trees.





The houses are specifically designed for horseshoe bats, which are one of the rarest bat species in the UK.







As well as bat boxes, we have been able to install a number of Barn Owl nest boxes. Thanks again to the support of landowners and tree surgeons, John and Callum.

Thanks to one local landowner, we were able to watch the comings and goings of a Barn Owl pair back in the spring. We watched the eggs being laid, chicks hatching and we eventually saw them fledge and leave the nest. It was wonderful (though a bit stressful). Fingers crossed there will be more pairs next year in the new boxes.





Thanks to funding from the Brecon Beacons National Park we were able to purchase 500 woodcrete bird boxes. These were placed around the Amman Valley to benefit pied flycatchers, a rare migrant species that breeds in the wooded valleys here.





We managed to monitor these, and previously installed wooden boxes, throughout the spring using an endoscope to minimise disturbance. The inset photo shows 4 pied flycatcher chicks in their distinctive nest.







Recently, we have experienced an extensive cold snap, with plenty of places seeing snow and frost. This can be a difficult time for wildlife, and birds will really benefit from feeders in the garden. Any bruised apples and pears will go down well with thrushes, as will currants and raisins.





If you keep an eye on your bird feeders at this time of year you might be lucky enough to spot an unusual visitor – a Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*).

Also known as a mountain finch, it is a more northern cousin of our familiar Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) and overwinter in Britain in varying numbers, depending on how much beech mast there is available.



Photo © Sorcha Lewis



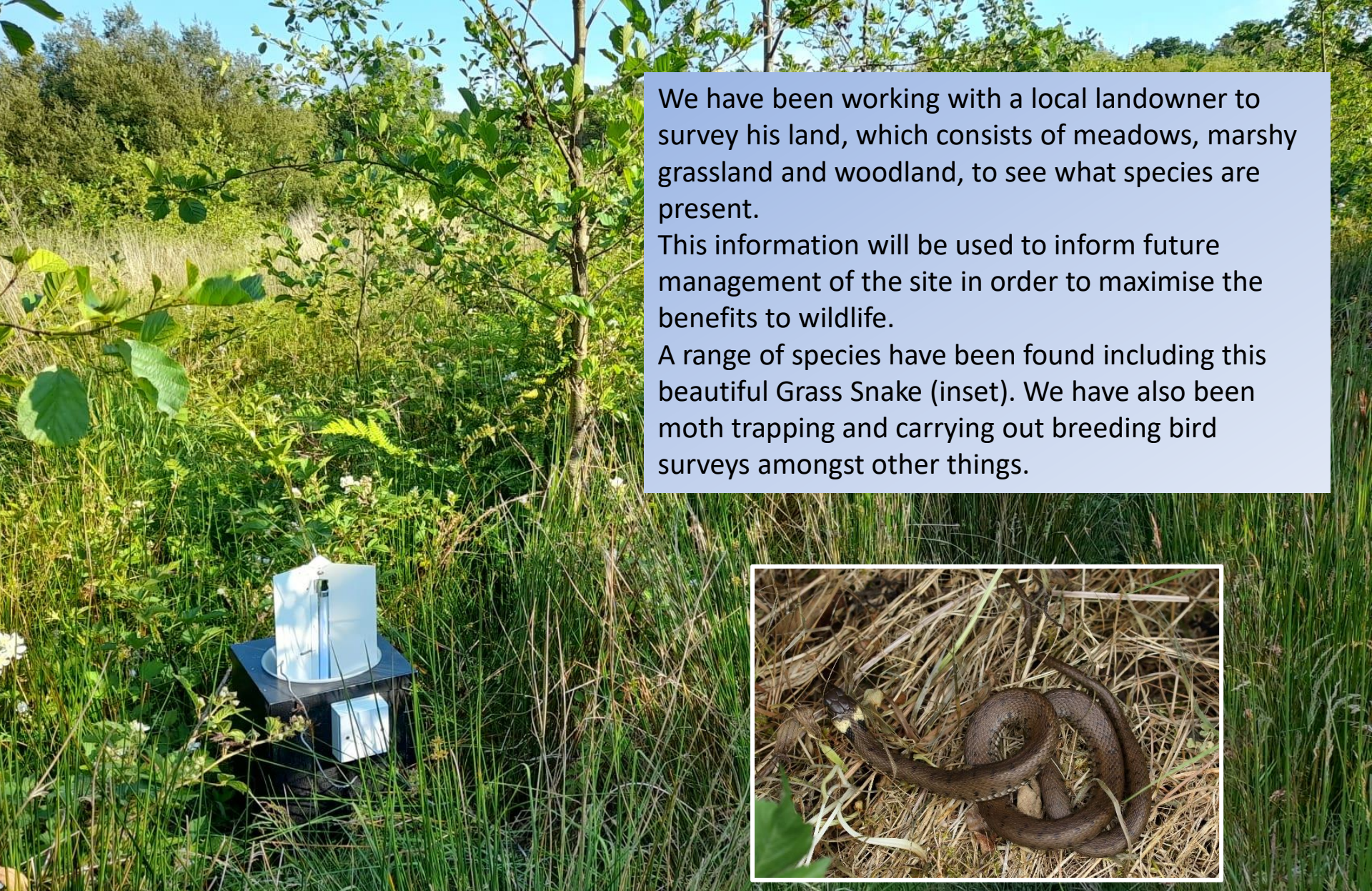
This year we have started a project with Brecon Carreg, converting the land around their factory near Trapp into a nature reserve.

It already boasts some fabulous meadows and marshy grassland but we are planning on introducing some cattle grazing and meadow management to ensure that the site is as good as it can be for wildlife.

It's a really exciting opportunity to work with such an enthusiastic and open landowner and we're very much looking forward to the next steps here.







We have been working with a local landowner to survey his land, which consists of meadows, marshy grassland and woodland, to see what species are present.

This information will be used to inform future management of the site in order to maximise the benefits to wildlife.

A range of species have been found including this beautiful Grass Snake (inset). We have also been moth trapping and carrying out breeding bird surveys amongst other things.





## BYWYD GWYLLT DYFFRYN AMAN WILDLIFE OF THE AMMAN VALLEY



Mae Dyffryn Aman yn gartref i amrywiaeth eang o gynffnoedd, gan gynnwys glaswelltir corsïog, dyffrynnoedd coedïog, afonydd hardd, rhostir agored a gweundir.  
The Amman Valley is host to a diverse range of habitats; including marshy grassland, wooded valleys, beautiful rivers, open moorland and heathland.



Mae ymyl de-ddwyrain Parc Ceredigion Bannau Brycheiniog, sy'n edrych i lawr ar y dyffryn, yn ardal wyllt o weundir sy'n frith o rug, ac mae'n hanfodol i rywogaethau megis y Rugar Goch, y Boda Tawyn a'r Cwtiad Aur. Mae Cadyllod Goch a Thyllaudd Gwyn hefyd i'w gweld yn hela am famaliaid bach yn y glaswelltir hir.

The south-western edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park, looking down on the valley, is a wild area of heather-dominated moorland and is vital for species such as Red Grouse, Hen Harriers and Golden Plover. Kestrels and Barn Owls can also be seen hunting for small mammals in the long grass.



Mae glaswelltir corsïog llawn blodau, a chwir hefyd yn dir pori rhost, yn gynefin pwysig i lawer o rywogaethau, gan gynnwys gloyn byw Brietseg y Gors, sydd mewn perygl. Mae llyn yn gynefin sy'n ddiannu'n gyflym gan ei fod yn cael ei ddarnio'n aml neu'n cael ei adael i droi'n brysgwydd. O'i reoli'n gywir, yn ddelfrydol i'w hosi gan wanhog, mae'r blodau trefnig yn yr haf yn llywod fuddiol i brydod, ac mae planhigion Tamaid y Cythraul yn hanfodol i gynnal lindsy y Fritseg.

Flower-rich marshy grassland, also known as rhost pasture, is an important habitat for many species including the endangered Marsh Frithery butterfly. This is a fast-disappearing habitat as it is frequently drained or left to turn to scrub. If managed correctly, ideally by grazing with cattle, the abundant flowers in summer are hugely beneficial to insects, with Devil's-bit Scabious plants vital to sustaining the Frithery's caterpillars.



Mae'r afonydd, a oedd ar un adeg wedi'u llygu gan rufuddiaid ddwyddymodol y dyffryn, bellach yn llawer glanach ac yn fwy cnesawgar i brydod dyfod. Mae'r rhain yn dda ar y pryd, megis Brwmeyn y Ddr a'r Siglen Lwyd, ac mae'r prydod sydd wedi'u gwyboda'r afonydd wedi arwain at Ddyffryn yn dychwelyd i'r dyffryn.

The rivers, once polluted by the valley's industrial past, are now much cleaner and more hospitable to aquatic insects. These attract insectivorous birds such as Dippers and Grey Wagtails, while the fish that have recolonised the rivers have led to Ospreys returning to the valley.



Mae'r dyffrynnoedd afonydd ag ochrau serth yn aml yn cael eu dominyddu gan gynffnau perygl a chwir y Gwchog Llew Cetaidd. Mae'r cynffnau prin llyn yn cynnwys coednodd gwyllt, llath, sydd i'w gweld o fewnau a cheruau. Ddyffryd y malla llyn o gartref yn yr haf gan y Gwybedog Brith, rhywogaeth llyn sy'n mudo yma o Affrica.

The steep-sided river valleys are frequently dominated by an important habitat known as the Cefn Rainforest. This rare habitat consists of wet, humid woodlands with abundant mosses and lichens. This type of woodland is used in the summer by Pied Flycatchers, a rare species that migrates here from Africa.



Mae ardaloedd mwy trefol y dyffryn hefyd yn gartref i rywogaethau pwysig megis Dracnogod a Gwennolad Du, y mae'n fferocedd y nall a'r llall yn lleihau. Gall rheoli ardaloedd i'w gwerddi ar gyfer bywyd gwyllt wneud gohaniaethau mawr i ddarnogod, prydol sy'n peilio ac ystlmod.

More urban areas in the valley are also home to important species such as Hedgehogs and Swifts, both of which are declining. Managing areas of our gardens for wildlife can make a big difference to hedgehogs, pollinating insects and bats.

We were delighted to be able to create these interpretation panels which described how important the valley is for wildlife. They went up around the valley including in the new café at the bowls pavilion in Garnant.





In 2022 our Marsh Fritillary population restoration project really took off with our captive-bred caterpillars surviving the winter on Llantrisant Common before emerging as butterflies in May – the first time they'd been there in about 25 years.





Surveys for their larval webs (see inset) in later summer found almost 200 across the common – a great result, but hopefully just the beginning for this population, with further releases and habitat management planned.







We had these fabulous Marsh Fritillary pin badges created for us by Ammanford's AC9 Design.

All proceeds from the badge will go to INCC's Marsh Fritillary population restoration project.

They can be bought here:  
[Marsh Fritillary Pin – Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru](#)

Thanks to everyone who has already generously purchased one.





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.

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In August INCC were helped out by Ellyn Baker who joined us for a month as our Species Monitoring Officer. She helped us at the wildlife garden, and with marsh fritillary larval web surveys, and other wildlife recording. She was a great help to INCC and we wish her well now she's returned to the University of Exeter in September to continue her studies in Biology.





INCC, with Brecon Beacons National Park and Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership, harvested wildflower seed and spread it on nearby sites in the Amman Valley to create and restore wildflower meadows in the area. The seed is harvested using a brush harvester, which collects the seed using rotating brushes, without cutting the grass itself. The seed is then broadcast by hand.







We have enjoyed working with Cwmaman Town Council and the volunteers at the Makerspace on a variety of projects again this year – including helping 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!





They have also been helping us to build more Water Vole monitoring tunnels which had some great results.....





Water Vole – the UK's  
fastest declining  
mammal species.



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The conservation volunteers from Bridgend College have been helping us out again – this time building more water vole monitoring boxes for us. A massive thanks to them for this and for their help and support throughout the year, particularly on the marsh fritillary project.



Pic: Lyn Evans



In 2023, we hope to do a lot more conservation work for Hedgehogs.

Hedgehogs really need our help at the moment so we need to find out much more about their distribution in the Amman Valley and the types of threats they are up against.

If Hedgehogs had an 'Amman Valley Champion' it would be Mal Walker. Mal has leant us his engineering and woodworking skills for the last few years, helping us to make bird boxes and dormouse boxes. This year, Mal has turned his skills toward making packs of hedgehog feeding boxes. We will be putting the boxes together in March 2023 ready for when the Hedgehogs wake up from hibernation.

Huge thanks to Mal for all his help and support.







So, in summary, its been a busy year. So please forgive me for having a little lay down on the job.



Thank you for all the positive feedback throughout the year and for sending through all your photos and wildlife accounts. Please do keep sending them through.

From all the INCC team (i.e. Rob, Vaughn and Lizzie), hope you have a lovely Christmas and New Year. Looking forward to seeing you in 2023.

Thank You  
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