

# Amman Valley Wildlife Update: September 2023

MENTER AR GYFER  
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE  
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Some Exciting news to begin with..... Meet our new Community Conservation Officer, Alice Connell.

Alice will be working part-time in the Amman Valley over the coming months, running events and activities down at the wildlife garden and specifically looking at how we can get more engaged with wildlife – particularly wildlife of the town and garden such as House Martins and Hedgehogs.

Alice will be starting with INCC from early October.


Hedgehogs will be preparing for hibernation soon and will be stocking up on food. If they enter hibernation underweight, then they are very unlikely to survive the winter. It can help to put out food for them at this time of year, as long as it is the right kind. Specialist Hedgehog food is now widely available but wet dog or cat food can be used too.

We will soon be starting a Hedgehog project in the Valley so please do let us know if you have Hedgehogs visiting the garden. Keep your eyes peeled soon for details on the project.





The wildlife garden's polytunnel was in full flower during September. Mostly Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) plants. We have been hard at work sowing wildflower seeds including grasses such as Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*).



Early autumn is a good time to see spiders and their beautiful webs. This 4-spot Orb Weaver (*Araneus quadratus*) is most frequently seen in wet grassland and can make very strong webs.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews



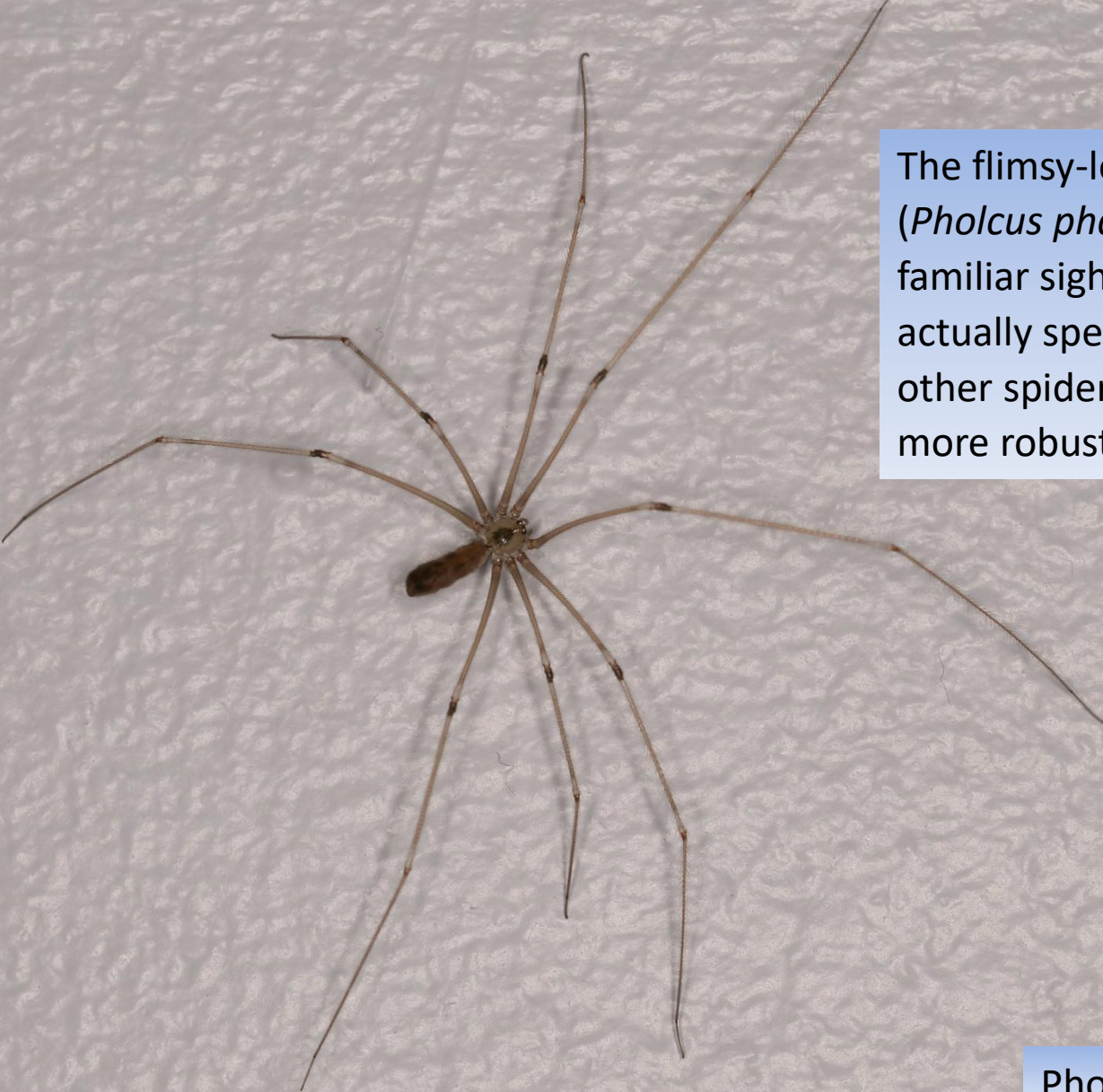
A closely-related species, Garden (or Cross) Orb Weaver (*Araneus diadematus*), is common almost everywhere and can be abundant – I have a few in my garden and they often create large webs in inconvenient locations that are difficult to avoid!

Photo: Vaughn Matthews



At this time of year spiders become far more obvious inside - these House Spiders (*Tegenaria* sp.) can get large and look quite scary but are not as aggressive as they look...

Photo: Vaughn Matthews



The flimsy-looking Cellar Spiders (*Pholcus phalangioides*) that are a familiar sight inside houses are actually specialists at feeding on other spiders, including the much more robust House Spiders.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews

These stunning Wasp Spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*) haven't reached the Amman Valley yet (unless you've seen one, please let us know if so!) but they are spreading quickly after being first recorded in the UK in 1922.

They require warm summer months and mild winters so the changing climate is allowing them to survive at more northern latitudes. They are now established in South East Wales – we saw a few this year while we were carrying out Marsh Fritillary surveys on Llantrisant Common.

They inhabit areas with long grass and feed most frequently on grasshoppers.

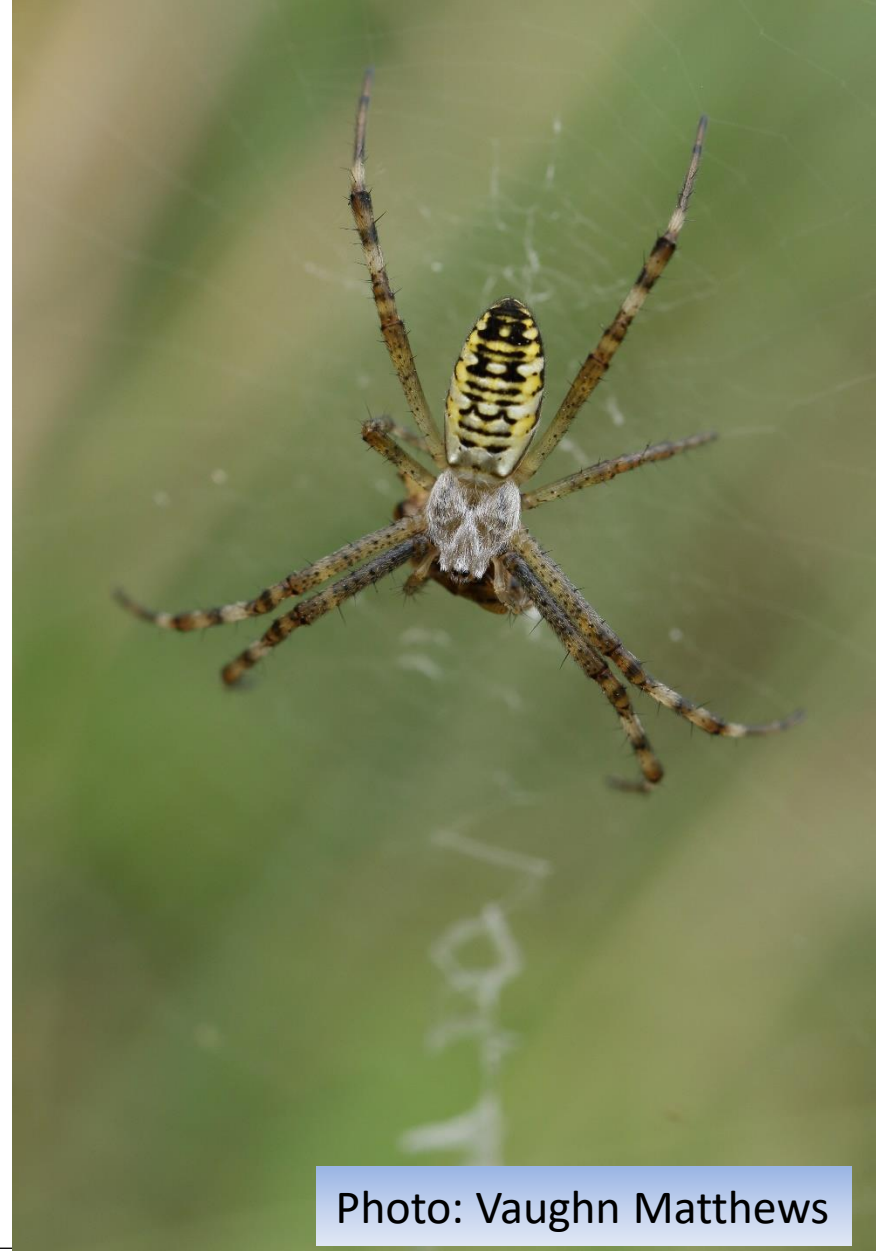
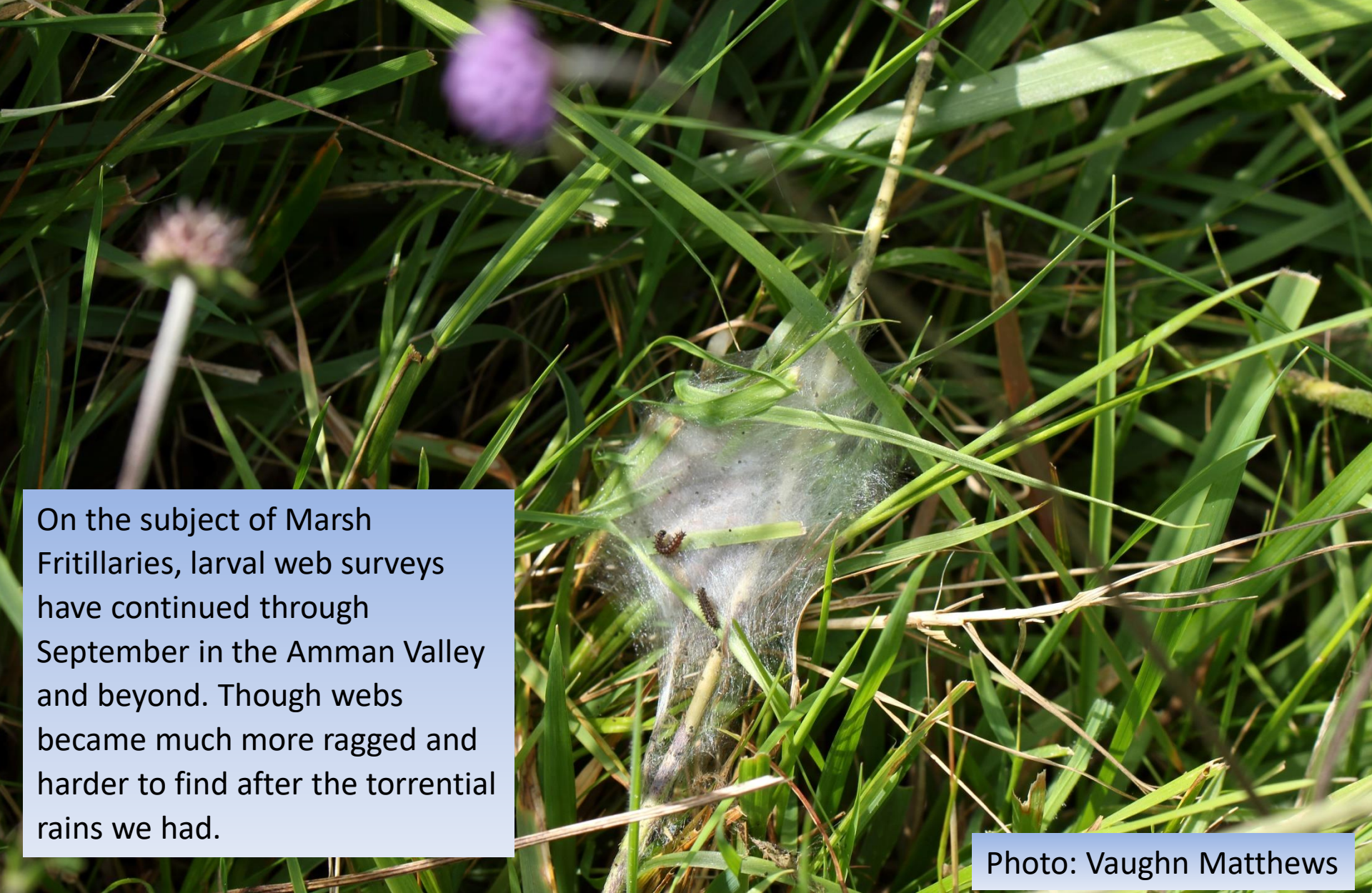


Photo: Vaughn Matthews



On the subject of Marsh Fritillaries, larval web surveys have continued through September in the Amman Valley and beyond. Though webs became much more ragged and harder to find after the torrential rains we had.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews



Photo: Vaughn Matthews

A number of other caterpillars have been encountered over the last few weeks, including these large Fox Moths (*Macrothylacia rubi*), often seen covered in dew in marshy grasslands.

These Knot Grass moth (*Acronicta rumicis*) seem particularly common this year, they feed on a variety of different plants. This one was seen eating the flowers of Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) in our wildlife garden. Please let us know if you have seen any recently.



Photo: Vaughn Matthews



Photo: Vaughn Matthews

September is generally when one of the stars of the mothing world starts appearing in moth traps – the Merveille du Jour (*Griposia aprilina*). The larvae feed on oak so they can be found throughout the valley, though rarely in high numbers.

Another couple of lovely species found only at this time of the year are Sallow (*Cirrhia icteritia*) (left) and Autumnal Rustic (*Eugnorisma glareosa*) (right).



Photos: Vaughn Matthews

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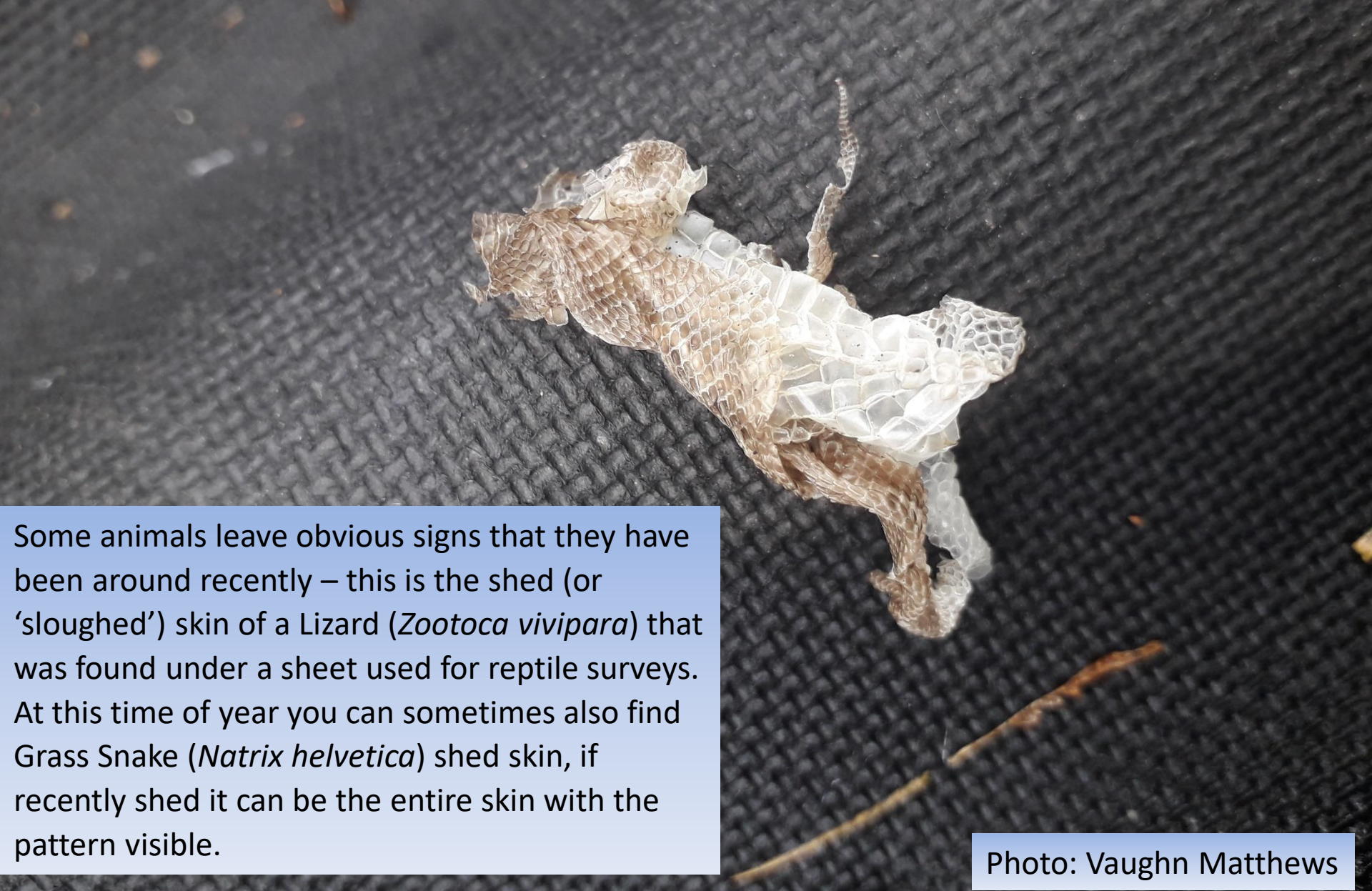
Photo: Vaughn Matthews

Ivy (*Hedera helix*) is looking at its best at this time of year, and is a vital source of late summer nectar for a host of insects – I had 25 Red Admirals (*Vanessa atalanta*) on one mature Ivy on 22<sup>nd</sup> of September this year!



The number of insects is starting to tail off but in the right weather dragonflies can still be seen on the wing. This Southern Hawker (*Aeshna cyanea*) was seen flying around the pond in the wildlife garden.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews



Some animals leave obvious signs that they have been around recently – this is the shed (or ‘sloughed’) skin of a Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) that was found under a sheet used for reptile surveys. At this time of year you can sometimes also find Grass Snake (*Natrix helvetica*) shed skin, if recently shed it can be the entire skin with the pattern visible.

Photo: Vaughn Matthews



Photo: Simon James

Huge thank you to Simon James for sending us a few photos of the mountain wildlife of the Amman Valley.

This Dotterel (*Charadrius morinellus*) is one of the Amman Valley rarities and can only be found in a few locations high up in the mountains overlooking the valley. They spend some time with us during their autumn and spring migration. They don't breed in Wales, as they prefer the high mountain plateaus such as the Cairngorms and other Scottish mountain ranges.



Photo: Simon James

As well as Dotterel, another beautiful bird that can be found in the upland areas of the Amman Valley over autumn and winter is the Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*).

In some winters, several hundred Golden Plover can be found in our upland heath and moorland habitats. Although they are much more common than the Dotterel, we don't know if many stay in the valley to breed during the spring months.



Photo: Simon James

Another bird to look out for at this time of year is the Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*).

The Kestrel was once the most common bird of prey in the UK but is now quite a rare sight. It is believed that Kestrels no longer breed in mainland Carmarthenshire and are now restricted to the coastal breeding sites only. A few years ago we installed several nest boxes in the Amman Valley to encourage them to nest, but none of the boxes have ever been occupied.

Maybe next year....

We have been out doing Dormouse surveys around the valley, looking in these specially-made boxes. No luck with finding Dormice so far but we did find a couple of boxes with big piles of leaves – these are nests of Woodmice. Dormice nests are often covered in leaves too, but it is a spherical nest within the leaves – these had no such structure.





Photo: Vaughn Matthews

I hope you can join us for a Fungi Walk on Sunday 8th of October.

We will be joined by Emma Williams, one of Wales' expert mycologists who will be surveying a site for fungi and sharing some of her vast knowledge on the subject. We will be out in the field from 9:30 - 12:30.

We will be meeting at the wildlife garden in Garnant and then car sharing to the site, which is on the south side of the Amman Valley.

The morning will be slow paced, but the site is quite overgrown, muddy and difficult terrain, so please wear appropriate clothes and boots. Wellies are advised.

Booking is essential, so if you are interested please do let me know by email - [rob.parry@incc.wales](mailto:rob.parry@incc.wales) or phone 07821 397625.



Big thank you to everyone for volunteering and coming on walks to see local wildlife.

Please do keep sending in your wildlife queries, photos and sightings.

[Rob.parry@incc.wales](mailto:Rob.parry@incc.wales)

Thank you, Rob.