

Amman Valley

Wildlife Update: October 2023



In early October we were fortunate to have one of Wales's foremost mycologists, Emma Williams, to give us a guided fungi walk around a site in the Valley. Thanks to everyone for coming along and for Emma for providing a fascinating insight into the world of fungi, big and small.





We searched in different habitats to see what species we could find, including woodland, scrub, and marshy grassland. All have slightly different fungi associated with them.

While the diversity of fungi found was relatively poor due to sub-optimal weather earlier in the year, we still saw some beautiful and interesting species.

This tiny fungus (about 1cm high) is called Dripping Bonnet (*Mycena rorida*), so called because of the mucus covering, as can be seen in the photo.

It grows on decomposing wood, including small twigs as here.



This species is a Common Earthball (*Scleroderma citrinum*) and was found growing on the woodland floor. It bears a passing resemblance to an edible species but this one is poisonous.





An extra bonus we saw on the walk was this beautiful caterpillar – a Pale Tussock moth (*Calliteara pudibunda*).

The adult, which flies in early summer is grey with very fluffy legs (see left).



It was a surprisingly warm day, and a few other invertebrates were seen during the walk including Red-legged Shieldbugs (*Pentatoma rufipes*) (left) and Dock Bugs (*Coreus marginatus*) (below).



Another species we saw was a Common Green Shieldbug (*Palomena prasina*). The ones we saw were all green, but before long they will start turning brown in readiness for hibernation (see picture on the left) – much harder to spot amongst dead leaves.



As mentioned in last month's newsletter, Alice, our new Community Conservation Officer, started with us in early October. She has already started planning work to benefit Hedgehogs and House Martins in the valley.



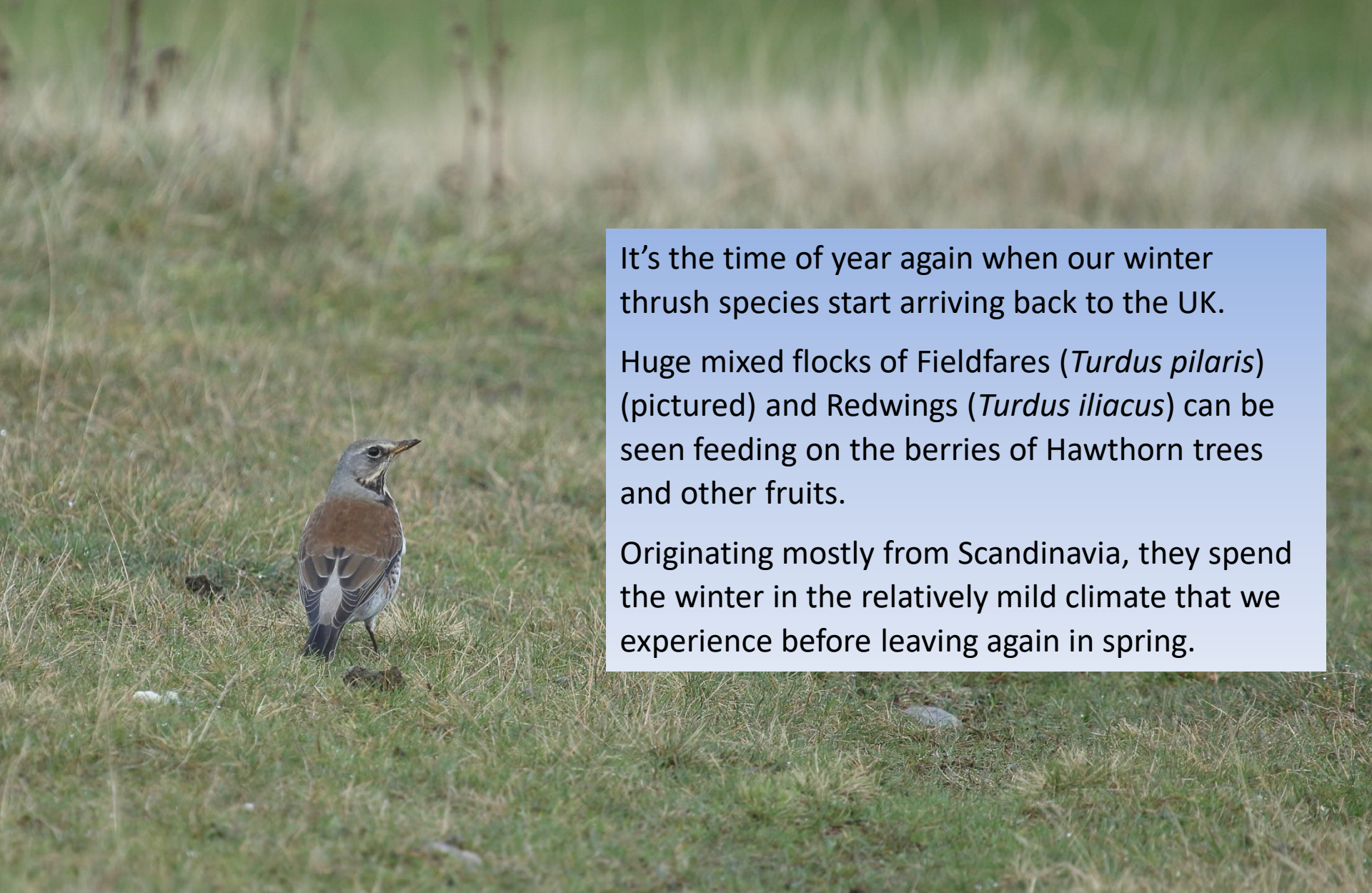


We enjoyed showing members of Carmarthenshire's Local Nature Partnership around Brecon Carreg's land, soon to be INCC's new nature reserve.

Attendees from various conservation bodies and other organisations were introduced to the site and its diverse habitats; upland heath, marshy grassland, hay meadows and more. We discussed our plans for managing the site over the coming years. Cattle will soon be introduced to start improving the grassland habitats for wildlife.




We also put out a number of refugia at the reserve – small squares of Onduline that are a method of surveying for reptiles and also small mammals. We are leaving them to bed in over the winter before starting to survey in the spring, when reptiles will be emerging from hibernation.

A Fieldfare (Turdus pilaris) is shown standing in a grassy field. The bird has a grey head and neck, a brown back, and a white underbelly with dark streaks. It is facing right, looking slightly upwards. The background is a soft-focus field of green and yellow grass.

It's the time of year again when our winter thrush species start arriving back to the UK.

Huge mixed flocks of Fieldfares (*Turdus pilaris*) (pictured) and Redwings (*Turdus iliacus*) can be seen feeding on the berries of Hawthorn trees and other fruits.

Originating mostly from Scandinavia, they spend the winter in the relatively mild climate that we experience before leaving again in spring.



There are still a small number of moth species that are flying at this time of year. One of these is the appropriately named November Moth (*Epirrita dilutata*).

Another two species found only at this time of the year are Red-line Quaker (*Agrochola lota*) (left) and Feathered Thorn (*Colotois pennaria*) (right) – the latter named because of the ‘feathery’ antennae of the males.



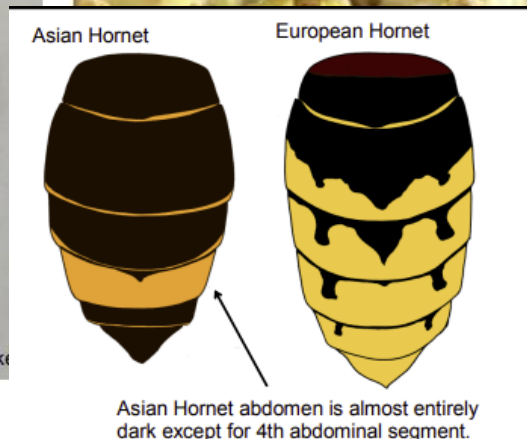
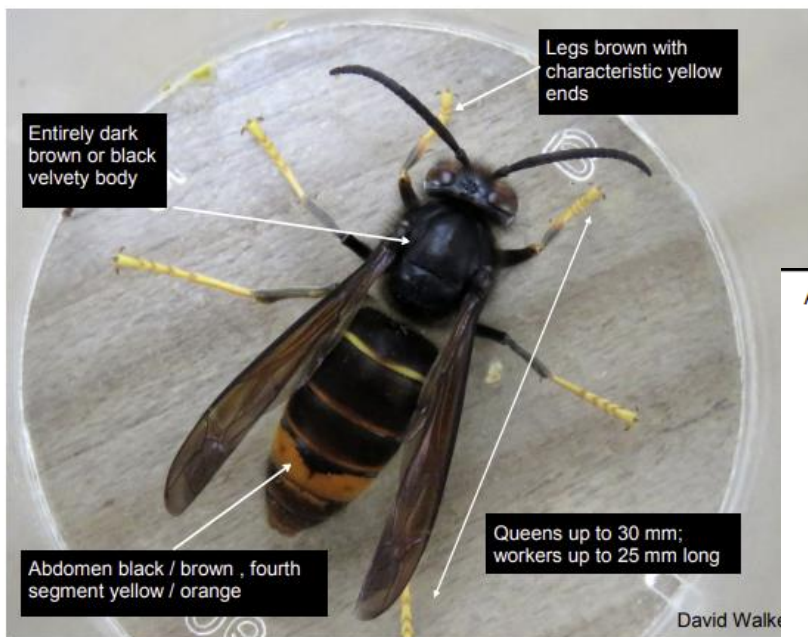
Another insect you might encounter in or around buildings at this time of year is a European Hornet (*Vespa crabro*). These large and fearsome-looking creatures are actually more docile than other wasps and at this time of year are likely to be queens looking for somewhere to hibernate over winter.

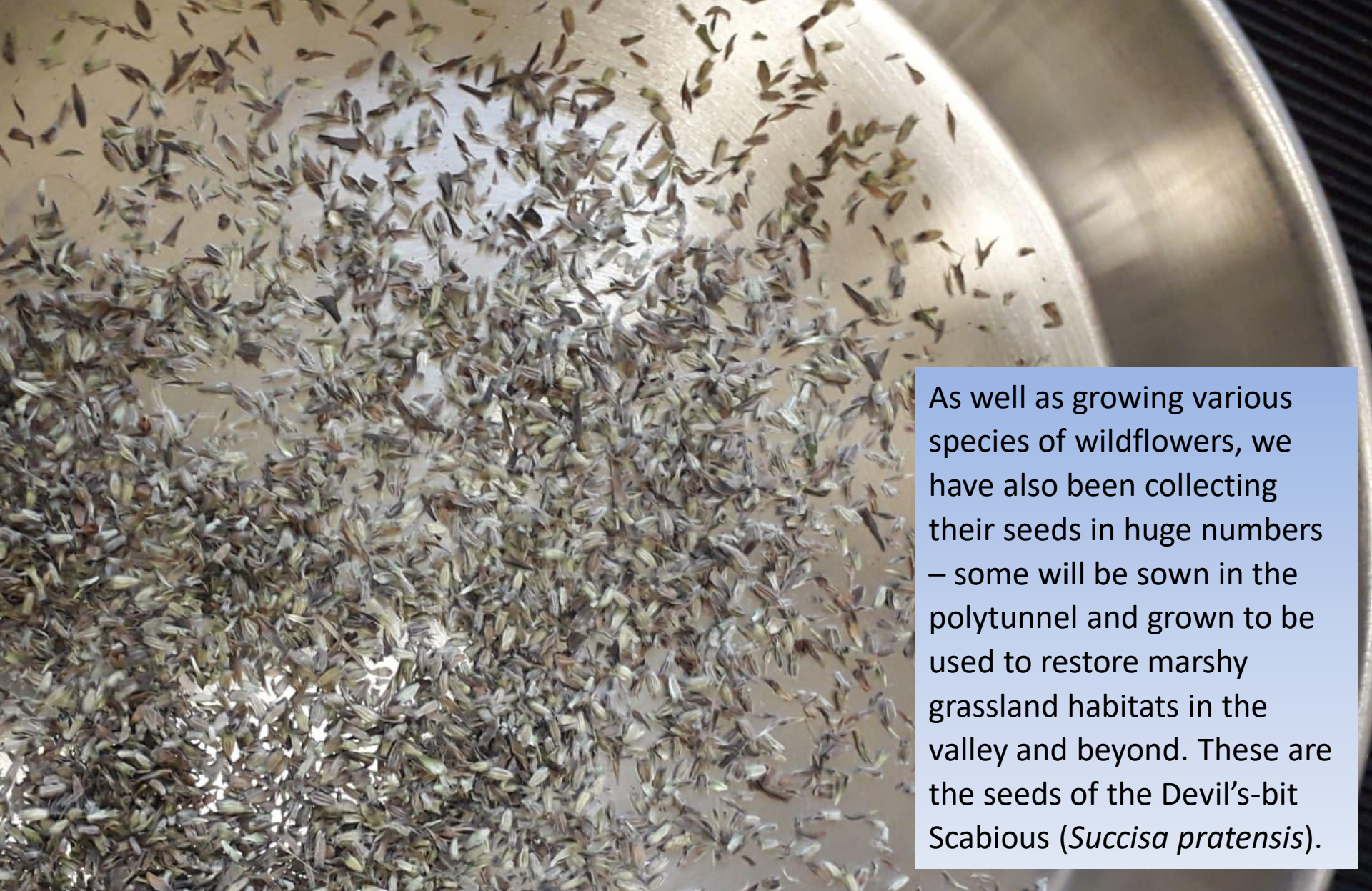


Not to be confused with the European Hornet, the invasive non-native Asian Hornet (*Vespa velutina*) is making its way to Wales. Asian Hornets are now spreading across Europe, and it is thought that a single female found in a shipping containment in France is the cause. They are predatory and aggressive and will have an impact on local biodiversity.

[For more information please click the link - Hunting for the Asian hornet - APHA Science Blog](#)

Key ID Features





As well as growing various species of wildflowers, we have also been collecting their seeds in huge numbers – some will be sown in the polytunnel and grown to be used to restore marshy grassland habitats in the valley and beyond. These are the seeds of the Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*).

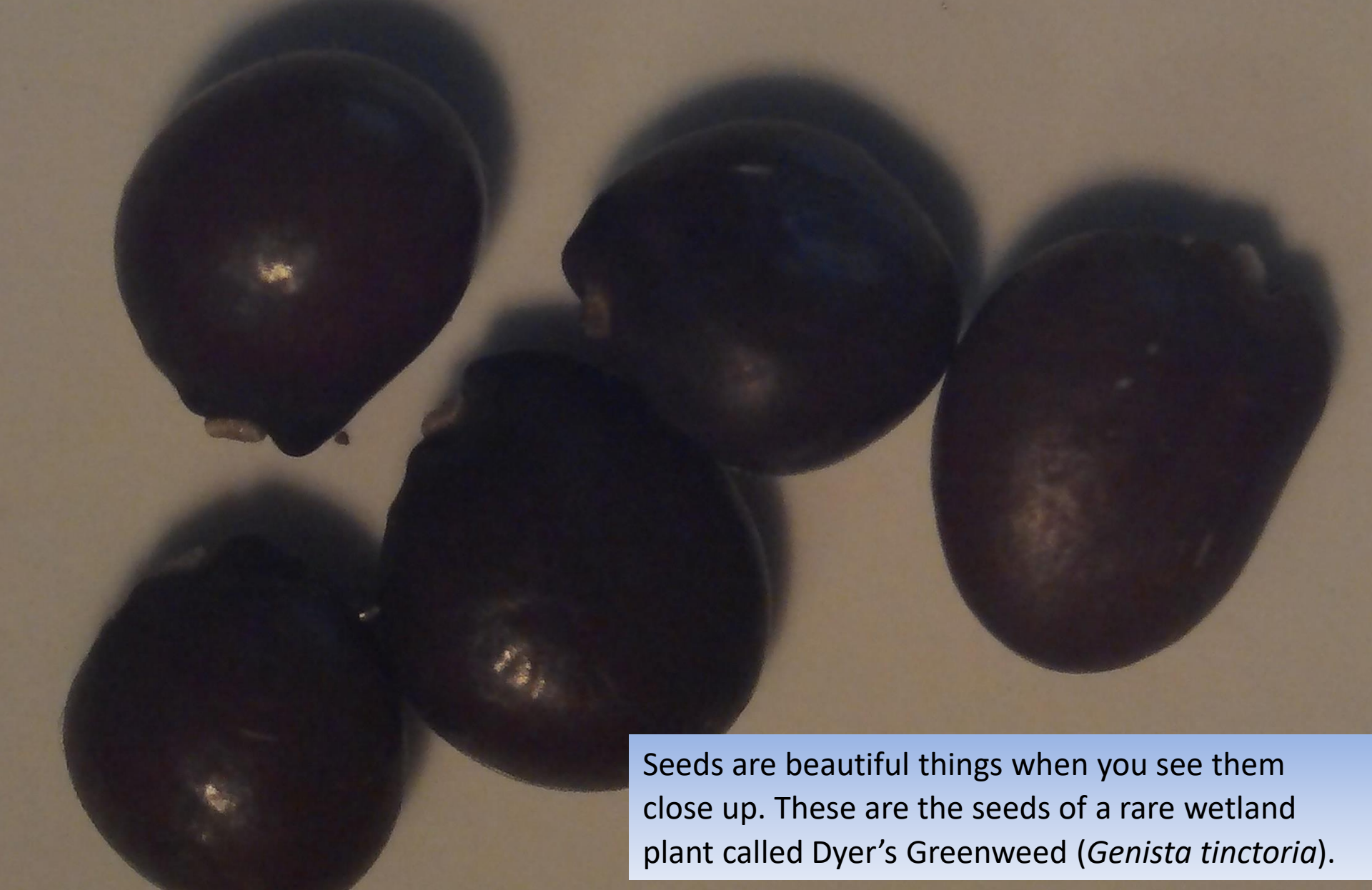




Similarly, schoolchildren in Rhondda Cynon Taff have been out collecting Devil's-bit Scabious seeds from sites near to Llantrisant Common, the location of INCC's flagship Marsh Fritillary population reinforcement project.

The thousands of seeds will be brought back to the polytunnel in Garnant and grown on to be used to feed the Marsh Fritillary caterpillars in our rearing pens next year as well as planted out to improve marshy grassland habitats.





Seeds are beautiful things when you see them close up. These are the seeds of a rare wetland plant called Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*).

Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*)





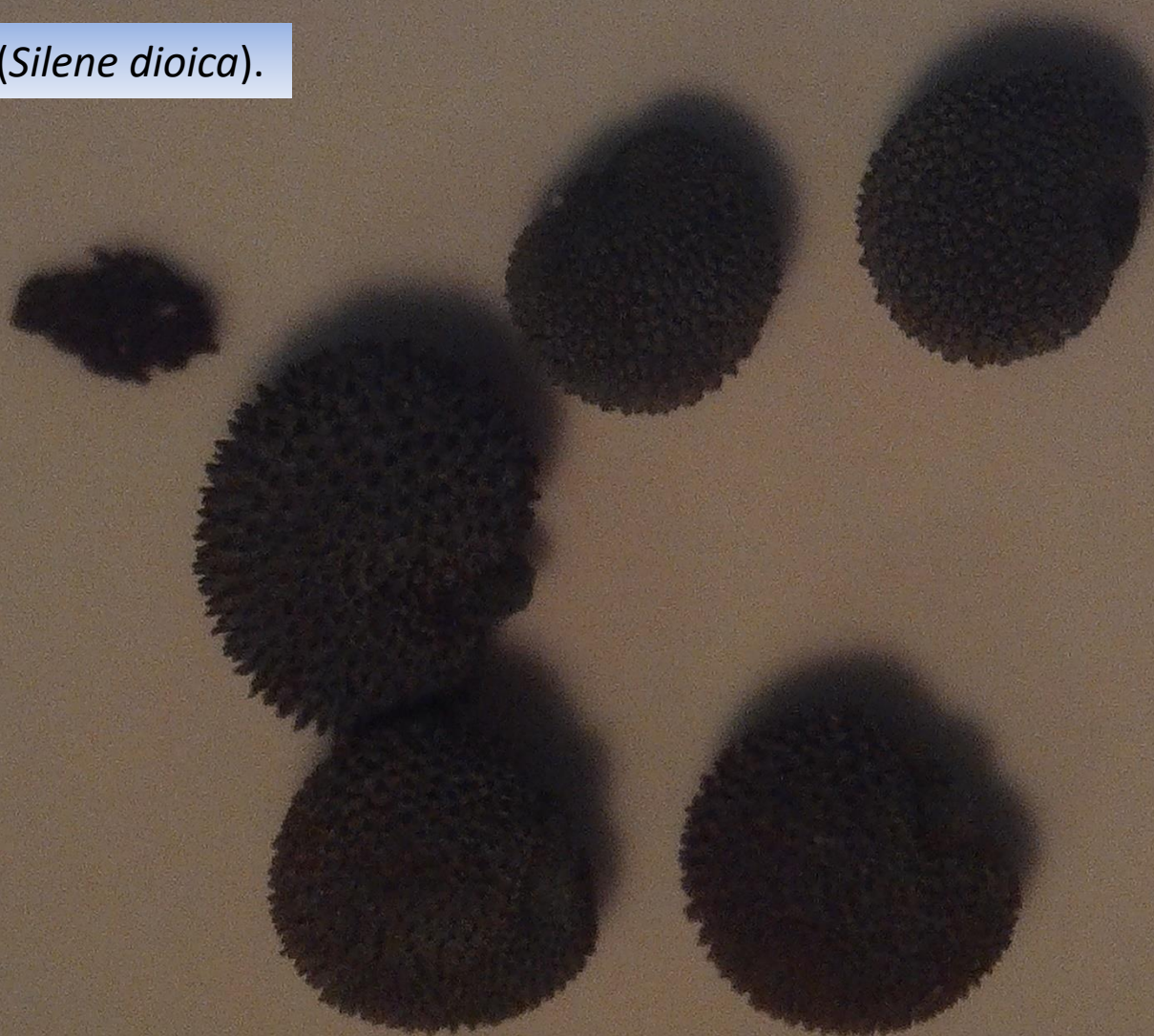
A very rare plant of arable fields called the
Small-flowered Catchfly (*Silene gallica*).



A Carmarthenshire specialty Whorled Caraway (*Trocдарis verticillatum*).



Red Campion (*Silene dioica*).





The now rare Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*).



Away from the Amman Valley, INCC has been working with the landowner to improve their farm for wildlife. Currently it is a mixed farm with arable crops and some cattle grazing.

One of the ways that biodiversity is going to benefit is hundreds of native trees being planted on site; ensuring that the trees are suitable to the area and crucially not planted on habitats that are good for wildlife already (especially flower-rich grassland).

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.

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Thank you, Rob.

