



Amman Valley Wildlife Update: November 2023

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU




**INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU**



We had an excellent volunteering day at the wildlife garden in November. Lots of woodland management to open up the garden a bit more. Huge thank you to all the volunteers involved.



As well as the outdoor work, volunteers Sarah and Hilary were able to sow seeds of one of the rarest plants in Wales, Small-flowered Catchfly (*Silene gallica*).

A close-up photograph of a person's hands, wearing a tan long-sleeved shirt, gently holding a small brown frog with dark spots. The frog is resting on the person's palms, which are slightly muddy. The background is a blurred green field of low-lying vegetation.

We even got to see
the first Frog (*Rana
temporaria*) at the
wildlife garden,
thanks to Paul.



Best part of the day was the wood-fire baked potatoes and cheese. Just what you need after a morning of hard work.



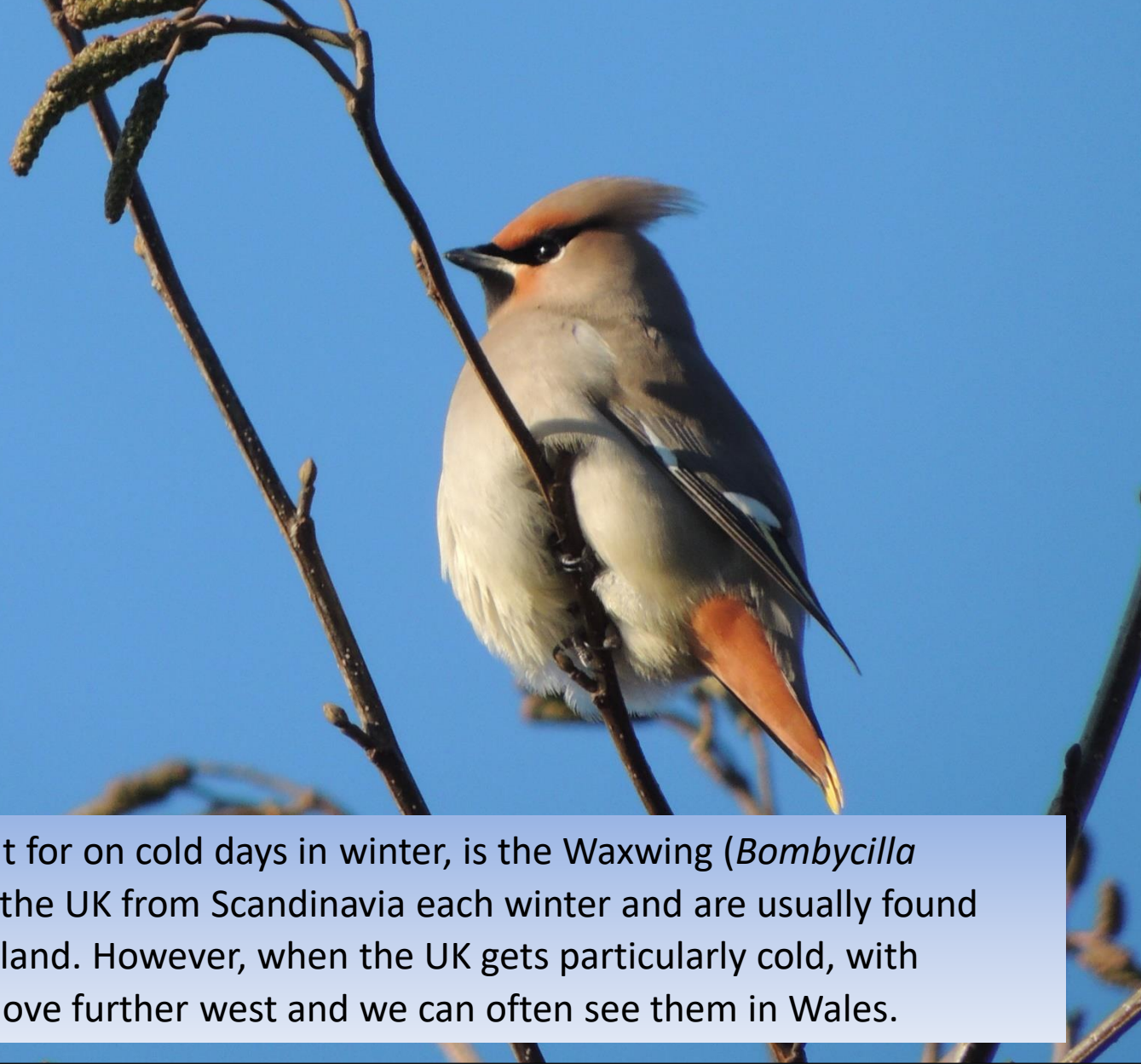


Our next volunteer work party at the wildlife garden will be in January. More details to follow in the New Year.

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



One visiting bird to look out for on cold days in winter, is the Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*). These birds visit the UK from Scandinavia each winter and are usually found along the east coast of England. However, when the UK gets particularly cold, with easterly winds, the birds move further west and we can often see them in Wales.




Goldcrests (*Regulus regulus*) are also another bird to look out for in winter. They have been seen in several locations in the valley over the past few years. They are our smallest breeding bird and are particularly vulnerable to cold weather and are often found nearby conifers and other evergreen trees.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU



The Icy cold weather which we saw for a few days in November gave rise to lots of Hoar Frost. This feathery looking frost is created when water vapour in the air falls on already frozen surfaces and instantly forms ice crystals which continue to grow.





The new pond saw its first freeze. We broke the ice in places to ensure there was enough oxygen for the freshwater invertebrates that have made the pond their home over the past few months. Despite the cold conditions, the wildflowers seem to be holding up well.




Big thank you to Grainne Connolly for sending in these photos whilst out walking in the Amman Valley.

Despite the cold spell, there was still plenty of fungi to see, like this *Helvella crispa* fungus.



And these *Hypholoma fasciculare* (I think).



A very special and rare fungus to see in the Valley in autumn is Violet Coral (*Clavaria zollingeri*). It can often be found in churchyards and cemeteries and is an indicator of good soils and ancient grasslands.



As well as the ice and frost, November saw a lot of rain. This was us at meeting up at our nature reserve near Llygad Llŵchwr with a fencing contractor, aiming to get the marsh grazed by cattle in the coming months.



The nature reserve is an amazing place for wildlife. These Greater Tussock Sedges (*Carex paniculata*) are uncommon in Carmarthenshire, but like growing in the marshy areas of the reserve. They are great habitat for small mammals and even Otters (*Lutra lutra*).




The dense sedges and grasses, provide ideal habitat for rearing young Otters (cubs). Over the next few months, we will be undertaking surveys to find out more about the wildlife at the reserve.





Next year we are hoping to survey the river running through the nature reserve for a very rare invertebrate – the White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*).

These crayfish are now incredibly rare across the UK, mainly because of Crayfish plague, a fungus that attacks our native crayfish, and is carried by the non-native Signal Crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*), which is also much larger and aggressive.



We will be surveying for the crayfish using specially designed crayfish traps as well as through kick sampling and turning over stones in the river channel.

We had a wonderful time down at the wildlife garden decorating the first batch of Hedgehog boxes, with pupils from Ysgol y Bedol. The boxes will hopefully go out in gardens across the Amman Valley in the next few months to give these wonderful mammals a safe place to eat and rest next year. If anyone is interested in a Hedgehog Box, please do get in touch.





Once the boxes were decorated, staff and volunteers from INCC were able to talk to school assembly about Hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*). The school has even taken one of the boxes and placed it in their school garden. Fingers crossed for next year.

Hedgehogs need to reach a weight of at least 450g to survive the winter. The boxes and the right food will help them achieve that weight before hibernation next year.

We also need to make sure that there is enough habitat for them in the valley and that they have access to that habitat. This means working with park and garden owners to create more scrub and grassland habitat as well as creating gaps in fences and walls so that Hedgehogs can move through the landscape better. This not only means more food and more places to rest for Hedgehogs, but it also means that they spend less time on roads.



MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU




Keep an eye out for Rosemary Beetles (*Chrysolina americana*) on the odd flowering plants and vegetation during autumn and winter. They might not be big, but they are very beautiful.



It is also a good time to keep a listen out for Tawny Owls (*Strix aluco*) at night. Young owls are starting to flex their muscle and compete for territory for next year's breeding season. They can often be heard at night all throughout winter.



Something that you won't see in the Amman Valley, at least for a while is White-tailed Sea Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). These Sea Eagle chicks are Norwegian but destined for a reintroduction programme in Ireland. Wales is still considering the feasibility of reintroducing the eagle here, but they have already been brought back to Scotland and England.

A large, brown, hairy spider is positioned on a green leaf. A delicate spider web is visible, partially covering the leaf and the spider. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting.

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

If you are interested in having one of our Hedgehog boxes, please do get in touch.

Thank you, Rob.