

## **Someone has been cutting the ivy**

Autumn has been bountiful this year. The trees and shrubs are laden with nuts and berries. The woodland floor in the early part of the autumn was littered with various types of fungi, especially on fallen trees left to rot as an integral part of the woodland eco-system.

This bountiful autumn is much welcomed by the birds and insects, especially after the two lean seasons of very wet years gone by. However this bounty is not enough to sustain them over the winter into spring.

One plant that comes to the rescue through these lean periods is the much maligned ivy which is a very valuable plant for insects and other animals because of the food and shelter it provides at this crucial time of the year. By October when the ivy comes into bloom, there are few plants still in flower. Late flying butterflies and moths are provided with energy giving nectar. Reversing the order of normal seasonal growth, it bears flowers from late autumn and berries ripen in early spring when the survival of the birds depends on it to see them through to middle spring when there will be a fresh food supply again.

The network of stems and the mass of short branches of the ivy as it climbs up the trunks of trees to reach the light provide a good foundation for nests of robins and wrens and a good perch for roosting birds. Night flying insects such as herald moths which visit the flowers attract long eared bats. Pipistrelle bats also roost in the thick foliage.

Ivy can live for over 100 years and during this time will have grown thick trunks. Ivy has an undeservedly bad reputation for killing off trees upon which it climbs, hence you may have often come across ivy with its thick woody stems severed at the base. Ivy is not a parasite nor does it strangle its host; it merely uses fellow trees purely for support. When it has climbed high enough to reach the light, grown a thick trunk or stem and spread its evergreen foliage profusely it can act as a sail and its sheer weight might bring down a tree in very blustery conditions. This can be of concern if near properties, busy roads or in parks. In such situations where it poses a risk to properties or people, it is usually cleared or the stems severed. However, in a woodland its goodness far outweighs this concern, and so is left to thrive and bestow benefits to wildlife that relies so heavily on it for survival, which literally hangs by a thread - or rather the vines of the ivy.

For our October work day we had an excellent turn out despite the heavy rain. Over the last few weeks a number of the steps leading down from the end of Millrace Close to the upper bridge had rotted and become dangerous. With the fear of the rain washing all our work away, everyone worked well, managing to replace the 7 worst steps.

For December, it is a tradition that we have this month off, so will be returning on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> January when we will be continuing the work of hedge laying. More details to follow in the January edition of the Link.

From all of the "Friends", we would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas, and hope to see you in the New Year.

(information on the ivy by courtesy of Ranger Service CCC)

Jonathan Singleton

**Future work days**

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> January - Meet at the Hoel Cefn Onn entrance at 2.00 pm**

Hedge laying – Learning these traditional skills. A continuation from last years work.