

MAY



# SUMMER on the farm

NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS



**As the farming year unfolds, are you keeping an eye out for what wildlife appears on your farm?**

**What flower or bird brings you joy as the seasons change? What can you look forward to appearing this month? What wildlife might be on your land? What more can you do to encourage it and enhance it?**

**HERE IS A MONTH BY MONTH GUIDE TO HELP YOU FARM FOR NATURE!**

This is just a start – please help us create a rich calendar to celebrate and support farming for nature! What have we forgotten? Do you have any useful ‘nature hacks’ to share? Let us know on [info@farmingfornature.ie](mailto:info@farmingfornature.ie)

Generally, there is lots of good information available for farmers who want to help wildlife. We have many resources available on [www.farmingfornature.ie](http://www.farmingfornature.ie)

If you have any queries why not submit them to our **Farming for Nature Forum** on the website and allow other farmers to answer.

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### NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!



Hedges

Crab-apple, Spindle, Guelder rose and Rowan may be flowering in hedgerows around now, but this is the month in which the Whitethorn transforms the countryside with its frothy exuberance!

The Willow warbler, Chiff-chaff and Blackcap are back and letting everyone know about it, filling the field boundaries with noisy life.



### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

The flowers of the 'sceach gheal' [Whitethorn] have quite a 'musky' fragrance. The small red berries [haws] are an important food source for wildlife: in hungrier times both leaves and haws were eaten, referred to as 'bread and butter'. Protected by the fairies, it is said to be bad luck to damage Whitethorns!

These birds that winter in Africa come back to our hedgerow trees as they flower. Let's look after them while they visit!



Woods

For early risers, the dawn chorus, nature's very own orchestra, will be in full, glorious flow these mornings.



At its best, the dawn chorus is surely one of the greatest things to enjoy on a nice early summer's morning. Birds are busy finding mates, building nests and some will already be feeding young.



Pasture  
Hedges  
Bogs

Cuckoo calling is in full tilt during May.



'The Cuckoo comes in April, she sings her song in May, in June she changes her tune, and in July she flies away'. One of our most distinctive and fascinating birds, its call - declining in some areas - is a connection to what generations before us would have experienced in the countryside.



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### NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!

### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES



Fields and field margins

This month is a great time to see a variety of flowers emerge. Early purple orchids, twayblades or some bitter vetches may appear in the shade of a hedgerow, yellow rattle, milkworts and speedwells begin to show in unimproved grasslands, and any number of so called 'weeds' flower everywhere.



Research is ongoing to establish the linkages between the above - and below - ground biodiversity and the positive impact on nutrient access for plants (and grassland productivity and resilience). Consider leaving areas of pasture un-topped so that the clovers, thistle, yarrow, self-heal, plantains and others can be a source of nectar and then later seeds for some bird species such as the finches. Most flowers/weeds are really great indicators of site management and soil health, such as soil compaction or soil acidity. Weeds such as dandelion, as well as being great for pollinators, have tap roots to break up compaction and absorb nutrients from below.



Buildings

Swifts are returning to nest in old buildings especially roof spaces.



Make sure to seek advice before you undertake any changes/renovations. Either way try to avoid the nesting season.



Wet ground

Look out for Yellow flags (Irises), butterworts, early marsh orchids and native hogweed.



Beautiful butterwort is an insectivorous plant (eats insects!). Cherish your farm's wetlands, they are amazing!



Garden

Sow Nasturtiums as a decoy for white butterflies.



These colourful flowers are also edible in salads.



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Bog

The fluffy cotton grass [bog cotton] is in 'flower' as is the strikingly beautiful bogbean.



Pastures  
Hedges

Moths and butterflies, bees and hoverflies will be busily abundant in any habitats with a diverse mix of species.



Tillage

A really nature-rich farmed habitat can be created by sowing an area of wild bird cover around now.



Can you spot Sparrows, Blue Tits etc. eating aphids off the crops?

### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

The bog cotton flowers are in fact hairy fruits that follow the earlier brown clusters of flowers. Bogbean's hairy petals are coloured white but tinged with pink. Its intense bitterness led to its use for brewing beer [a substitute for hops] and was also once used for curing rheumatism, coughs and colds.

A greater diversity of habitats, and a greater diversity of species therein, will host a richer fauna. Even the soft rush provides the food plant of day-flying moth species.

Agri-environment schemes will usually help with the costs. The crop is left un-harvested over winter providing seed sources for the birds.

There are many natural predators of the 'pests' out there. Before spraying, see if nature is doing her job in helping you grow your crops. The common wasp is a predator of aphids; Ladybirds, lacewings and earwigs are among others that do the job as well.



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### NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!



Ditches  
Streams  
Rivers

Listen out for Reed Buntings calling [a short "ziu"] especially along stream margins and other wet vegetation.



These wetland birds have over recent years spread into farmland. Sparrow-sized, the male has a black head, white collar and a drooping moustache.



Pasture

Early varieties of red clover are flowering.



Clovers are the cornerstone of organic farming and the engine that drives productivity. In contrast to white clover, red clover has an upright growth habit and a strong deep root. All kinds of bumblebees love their nectar, if they are allowed to flower.

First cuts of silage are being taken.

Consider if you can leave a 100m by 4m uncut strip along a field margin? Or can some fields be managed for later cuts or hay? This can help provide bees and other pollinators with the continuous supply of flowers they require to forage.



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### NOTICING NATURE - AND SOME WAYS TO HELP IT!



Hill

Gorse [furze, whins] is in flower...



### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

...and love is in the air [well, it flowers most of the year!]. One of the most beautiful perfumes of the countryside, gorse is of great importance to spiders and songbirds and can provide shelter for stock as well as young oaks and ash. A nitrogen-fixer, it was once harvested and crushed, used to feed livestock.



Everywhere

Care for your soil. It is the basis of everything for your farming produce and productivity. Among the many benefits of healthy soils are:

- Improved soil aggregate stability
- Better infiltration
- Crop and grassland resilience [to drought/flood]
- Reduced weed pressure
- Adherence to Statutory Management Requirements
- Avoidance of pollution issues



Do not leave soil exposed or susceptible to erosion.  
Avoid poaching, pinch-points, trafficking and rutting.  
Nurture the soil and build humus – give back [healthy] nutrients.  
Minimise tillage.  
Add species diversity to your sward.

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**Farming For Nature offers best practice Guidelines and Actions for different land types.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE GO TO**  
**[www.farmingfornature.ie](http://www.farmingfornature.ie)**

To investigate what native species you have or could encourage on your land there are plenty of sources to help:

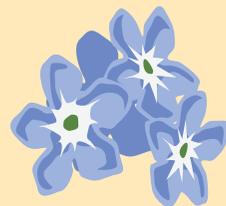
FOR NATIVE FLOWERS - YOU CAN SEARCH BY FLOWERING MONTH, COLOUR OR HABITAT  
**[www.irishwildflowers.ie](http://www.irishwildflowers.ie)**

FOR NATIVE TREES SEE HERE - IT WILL GIVE YOU ADVICE ON DIFFERENT TREES  
**[www.treecouncil.ie](http://www.treecouncil.ie)**

FOR NATIVE BIRDS SEE HERE  
**[www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)**

FOR NATIVE BUTTERFLIES SEE HERE  
**[www.irishbutterflies.com](http://www.irishbutterflies.com)**

FOR A COMPLETE BREAKDOWN OF ALL IRISH SPECIES,  
THE NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY DATA CENTRE IS THE KEY SOURCE  
**[www.biodiversityireland.ie](http://www.biodiversityireland.ie)**



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