



AUGUST

# AUTUMN on the farm

## NATURE'S CALENDAR & PRACTICAL ACTIONS

FARMING FOR  
nature

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 a lot 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!



Everywhere!

Tired birds are quieter this month, as they lie low to moult or finish raising late broods. Our **crow** [corvid] species continue to be vocal though – how many of our **seven native species of crow** can you spot around the farm?



Our farming practices [open pastures] and low densities of predators [e.g. buzzards] mean that Ireland has some of the densest populations of crows in Europe. See if you can tick off the **rook, jackdaw, hooded crow, carrion crow, chough, raven and jay!** These species have strong family bonds and they are incredibly smart – google the intelligence of crows and be amazed!



Bogs

The bilberry or '**frochan**' is traditionally gathered on both the last day of July and during the festival of Lughnasadh in August.



Also known as whortleberries, blaeberrys, huckleberries, and whinberries, these berries provide rich pickings for wildlife and humans alike!

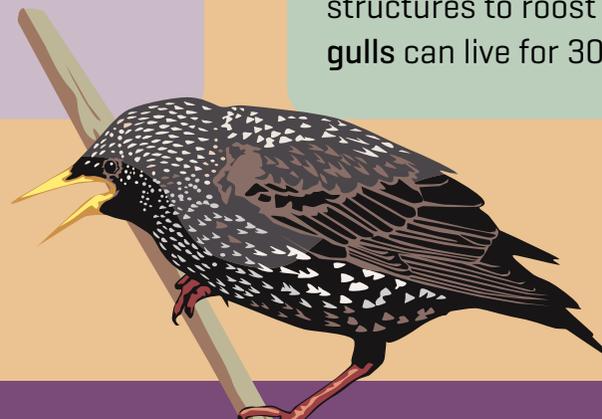


Buildings  
& walls

**Herring gulls** are spending more and more time inland and away from their natural coastal habitats.



The main reason for this is declining fish stocks [from overfishing], which is causing herring gulls to seek food in cities or to follow the plough. When drawn away from the coast, they often choose human structures to roost or to build their nests. Did you know **herring gulls** can live for 30 years?



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Coastal farms

**Estuaries** occur where freshwater and saltwater meet, creating vibrant and complex, but fragile, ecosystems.



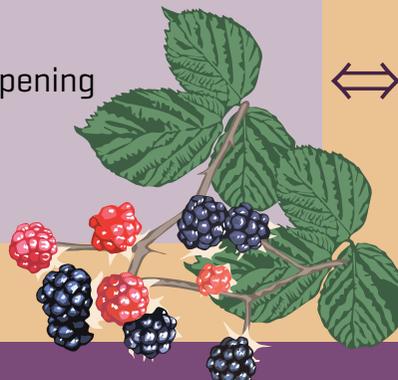
Garden or farmyard

Late summer is when some of our 'exotics' are on show.



Hedgerows

**Berries** in the hedges are ripening



### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

Heavy rain during the summer can spell disaster for these habitats, as agricultural run-off travels into watercourses and onwards out to sea. Slowing the flow of water across the land, for example through the creation of wetlands and natural dams, can help to prevent pollution from farm run-off during a summer deluge!

The orange flowers of **montbretia** and the bright red flowers of **fuschia** are exuberant in some parts of Ireland in August, but few people realize that these are native to South America and were originally introduced to Ireland as garden plants. Not as aggressively invasive as some of the **Himalayan knotweeds** and **balsams**, care should nonetheless be taken not to introduce these 'honorary natives' to new areas.

**Brambles, blackthorn, crab apple, hawthorn** and other shrubs will all soon be weighed down by their autumn loads. These berries will be important food sources for birds such as **thrushes, blackbirds, starlings** and smaller birds going into winter. Delay cutting these hedges until much later in the year so that wildlife can benefit as much as possible.

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### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES



Hill pasture

Can you spot any stands of **birch trees** on hill pasture this summer?



We have become used to seeing much of the Irish uplands as grazed, rolling hillside, which is beautiful in its own right. However, in the past, belts of **birch woodland** (and other species) were a natural feature of Irish hillsides, while charismatic species such as the **golden eagle** soared overhead. Diversifying upland habitats through **high nature value farming** could make them more resilient, provide for wildlife and offer tourism potential for the future.



Pasture, meadows & field margins

Plant a **herbal ley**?



Can you find space to allow some **tussocky grass** and **wildflower seed heads** to remain uncut through winter?



A native grass-wild flower mix sown now increases the value of the area for wildlife, especially pollinators. The weather in August – warm spells and showers – may suit the establishment of these leys. Contact your seed merchant for info.

Allowing tussocky grass and wildflower seed heads to remain in field margins, along tracks and roadside verges and in gardens, will provide food and shelter for invertebrates and other wildlife.

Late summer colours are still to be seen, with **purples, blues** and **yellows** to the fore.

**Knapweed** and **scabious** flowers are common at this time of year, as well as **harebells**. Complementing the purples and blues are an array of yellows – including **bedstraws, ragwort** and **goldenrod**. The latter two flowers are deceptively similar, though one is far more benign than the other! Delaying the mowing of hay meadows into August will allow some of the taller herbs to spread their seed, as well as providing food for insects and birds.

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

### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES



Look out for late-flowering **orchids** in your pastures and meadows.

Late summer and early autumn is a good time to see fungi sending forth their fruits – **mushrooms!**



While it's getting late in the season for orchids, you can still see fragrant and pyramidal orchids in bloom, also some **helleborines**. But one of the rarest and most beautiful of Ireland's orchids, the **autumn lady's tresses**, is best seen at this time of year. Try not to graze orchid-rich areas too heavily in August, light grazing now followed by heavier grazing into the autumn would be ideal.

In Ireland, the **field mushroom** is the only commonly eaten species. It has a white cap and salmon pink to brown gills. Field mushrooms grow best on old unimproved pasture, particularly where horses have been grazed.



Look out for **caddisflies** skimming over the water on warm August days.



If you're removing excess vegetation or pondweed from your pond, dispose of it away from the banks of the pond – otherwise as it decays the nutrients will leach back into your pond, causing yet more vegetation growth!



The frothy pinkish white of **hemp agrimony** in flower can be spotted in wet areas.



At up to two metres tall, you wouldn't immediately recognise hemp agrimony as a member of the **daisy family!**

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### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES



Tillage fields

Create **beetle banks**.



Use a plough to create a ridge of earth about 40cm [16inches] high and 2m [about 6.5 feet] wide. Sow with tussock and mat-forming native grasses, like **timothy, cocksfoot or fescues**. To allow wildlife to move to and from the bank, the distance between it and the field boundary should be less than 25m. These banks provide a habitat for many beneficial insects and nesting birds.



Wet or  
rough ground

Lots of **late blooming** flowers appear on heavy, wettish ground around now.



**Purple loosestrife, willowherbs** and **meadowsweet** [so called as it was once used to sweeten mead] are big, showy plants often found in profusion at this time in hedges and on wettish areas. One of the most stunningly beautiful flowers in Ireland, the delicate '**grass of parnassus**' is also found on damp ground at this time and is worth the search.



Woods

Let the **ivy** grow in the hedgerow as a key source of nectar for the pollinators.



Some people worry about ivy growth but, unless it's causing real damage, the consensus seems to be that it's better to leave it. Where growth is very heavy, prune it back from the crown of the tree to prevent the weight of the ivy causing the tree to blow down. Its early season flowers are vital for bees and the fruits are important late-winter feed for birds.



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### TIPS FOR THE MONTH!



Climate

Have you considered using new **farm technology** to help you to reduce your carbon footprint?



Robots, drones, GPSs and tractor sensors are becoming increasingly easy to operate from your mobile phone. This new technology is designed to help to reduce chemical inputs through targeted spreading.



Pollinators

Can you hear a loud buzzing in woodland glades? It's likely the sound of one of our 180 species of native **hoverfly**.



Fruit flies are also amassing in numbers wherever summer fruits are allowed to over ripen. We have over 30 species of fruit fly [also known as **vinegar fly**] in Ireland.



Water quality

Would you like to know more about the water quality on your farm or in your catchment?



One way of finding out how healthy your water bodies are is to monitor the presence of **indicator species** or 'bio-indicators'. Indicator species are plants, animals or fungi whose presence gives you a good idea of how healthy an ecosystem is. In terms of water quality, **dragonflies** and **damsel flies** are useful indicator species. To find out more about how to monitor these and other species on your farm, check out [biodiversityireland.ie](http://biodiversityireland.ie)



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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. IF YOU WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO CITIZEN SCIENCE YOU CAN JOIN THE FARMERS WILDLIFE CALENDAR CLIMATE TRACKER BY RECORDING AND SUBMITTING YOUR SPECIES THROUGH THE BIODIVERSITY DATA CENTRE

**[www.biodiversityireland.ie](http://www.biodiversityireland.ie)**



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This leaflet has been jointly supported by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

