



JULY

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

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

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!

Summer evenings are the best time to come across **hedgehogs**.



Bogs

Listen for the haunting call of the **curlew** across the bog in summer. **Curlew** arrive back from winter feeding grounds to breed on bogs in March or early April, by July their chicks are fledging. Chicks leave the nest within a day or so, and thereafter feed themselves.



Buildings
& walls

Have a closer look and see what your stonewalls are growing - ferns like **hart's tongue**, **wall rue** or **maidenhair spleenwort**, the pink flowers of **herb robert**, **mosses** and **lichens**.

PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

Snuffling and grunting like a pig [its young are called hoglets!], the hedgehog is out and about looking for food. They can travel 1 to 2 km each night in search of food - their diet includes **earthworms**, **beetles**, **spiders** and **slugs**.

Habitat loss due to forestry and destruction of peatlands has devastated breeding populations of curlews in Ireland. If you farm on or near a bog, safeguard this precious habitat to ensure our curlews can continue to breed in Ireland in summer.

Walls can also provide homes for bird nests, cavity-nesting bees and our only native lizard, the **common lizard**.



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Coastal farms

Coastal estuaries, sand bars and mudflats can seem quiet at this time of year, as many of our winter-visiting waders, for example **black-tailed godwits**, have flown to northerly latitudes to breed. They don't stay away too long though – the first can start to return as early as July.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

In the meantime, low tide can reveal the signs of an abundance of life along the coastline. Look out for the trails of **crabs**, squirts of water from **razor clams**, and tiny coils of sand from **lugworms**. These tidal habitats are vulnerable to pollution from agricultural run-off. In particular, run-off containing fertiliser or FYM can cause the growth of a blanket of green **sea lettuce** or 'ulva' to appear, smothering natural shore-life.



Garden or farmyard

Food is more abundant during the summer months and many birds choose to feed protein rich insects to their chicks. This means that feeders can be conspicuously quiet during the summer months.



During hot or dry periods, provide a shallow dish of water for garden birds to drink and bathe in. There's nothing quite like watching a blue tit take its morning bath! As with any bird feeders, it's a good idea to raise birdbaths off the ground and to make sure birds have a good view of any potential predators approaching – cats in particular!



Hedgerows

The fruit of **crab apple**, **sloe**, and the different **rose** species are gradually maturing at this time. Hedgerows are a hive of activity in mid-summer, from buzzing bees to darting bats to furtive field mice.



The natural bounty of our hedgerows is a testament to our pollinators having done their job in spring. With so much countryside activity around now, these hedges also act as a safe space for our wildlife to shelter, travel and eat.



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Hill pasture

Heathers are becoming increasingly prominent on hillsides as the summer progresses, to the delight of many beekeepers.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

On closer inspection it's usually possible to distinguish between different types of heather – from 'ling' to 'bell heather' to 'cross-leaved heath'. Often growing together, these can form a spectrum of pinkish-purple colour with occasional flashes of white.



Pasture, meadows & field margins

In more diverse grasslands, the bluish-purple (and occasionally white) flowers of the **devil's-bit scabious** appear now.

It's a great time to go **orchid**-hunting. Look out for the fragrant orchid, the **pyramidal** orchid, the **frog** orchid and **helleborines** such as the 'common' and the 'dark-red'.

It's **hay cutting** season for some; deciding when to cut is to strike a balance between the condition of the crop, the availability of help, the weather forecast and, ideally, nature's needs!

Keep your ears open for the shy, secretive (but noisy!) **corncrake** in any old-fashioned hay meadows.



The story goes that devil's bit scabious received its name because the plant contained so many cures that it angered the Devil and he cut the roots short (they look blunt as if bitten off). They are also the larval food plant of the **marsh fritillary butterfly**.

While orchids aren't known for their scent, the pyramidal orchid is said to have a faint 'foxy' smell and the fragrant orchid has a wonderful smell resembling that of cloves.

Delaying the cropping of hay until late July or August can make a huge difference to the diversity of plant species, as more plants get a chance to flower, seed and to enhance the soil seed bank.

Once common, this is a really rare bird now. It is hanging on in a few places [e.g. Mayo] with some farmers really working hard to give it a better future.



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Pasture, meadows
& field margins

Ragwort is beginning to flower. This 'noxious weed' [it contains alkaloids which can cause liver damage to cattle and horses] shouldn't be mistaken with 'goldenrod'.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

While ragwort is much maligned, it's an attractive native flower and beneficial to a wide range of insects, particularly the black and yellow striped **cinnabar moth caterpillar**. The Latin name for **goldenrod** is *solidago* which means 'to make whole' and this plant was used on the skin to heal wounds.



Ponds

Enjoy the spectacle of **damselflies**, **dragonflies** and **bats** feeding over your pond.



If a prolonged period of drought causes the water level of your pond to drop very low, consider topping it up. Rainwater can be harvested and stored for this purpose during the winter months.



Streams
& rivers

Meadowsweet begins to flower in late summer near streams or in wet grasslands.



Its creamy flowers look like feathers in the wind. It has a distinct strong sweet smell, which attracts insects [it smells of almonds!].



Tillage fields

Following harvest, it's a good time to think about nature friendly ways to build soil fertility for next year's crop.



A diverse winter cover crop can help to protect soil from erosion, while also fixing nutrients that are then available for the following cash crop. While cover crops are great for soil and wildlife, do consider also leaving some fields in winter stubble, as this is an important winter feeding habitat for farmland birds such as **linnets** and **yellowhammers**.



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Tillage fields

Fungal mycelium unlocks natural nutrients in the soil, improves drainage and promotes aeration. It's a great time to think about how to boost mycelium in your soil for the benefit of next year's crop.



Tilling soil results in fragmentation of mycelium, leading to compaction, the growth of anaerobic organisms and the release of greater amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. In contrast, min- and no-till methods promote the growth of native mycoflora [fungi], which in turn help the farmer by **decomposing stubble, improving soil structure and fertility, and nourishing the roots of crops.**



Wet or rough ground

Manage your **wet grasslands** carefully: light grazing from here on may be worthwhile if underfoot conditions allow. While some poaching of the ground is inevitable, take care not to overdo it.



Wet grasslands are important for lots of biodiversity including charismatic breeding 'wading birds' such as **lapwing, snipe** and **curlew**. Where drains have been used in the past, it will really help if these can be blocked or maybe even if sections could be expanded out to form linear ponds.



Woods

Another damp-loving, sweet-smelling plant that starts flowering in July is **wild angelica**.



Look for its umbrella-like clusters of pink-tinged white flowers in wet grasslands and woods. A cousin of **fennel**, it was used to flavour liqueurs.



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TIPS FOR THE MONTH!



Climate

Plastics are produced using fossil fuels. The less plastic products used on the farm, the lower the carbon footprint of the farm.



When purchasing farm inputs, try to avoid excessive packaging and ask your co-op or farm advisor about which suppliers are the most environmentally friendly.



Pollinators

Manage beekeeping activities with care.



While keeping bees can seem like a good way to boost pollinator numbers, bought in bees can introduce disease as well as compete for limited resources with native wild bees. Rather than installing a hive, think about creating species rich grasslands and field margins and reducing the use of pesticides. If you build it, they will come!



Water quality

Summer can be a good time to think about making simple changes to reduce the impact of **winter housing** on water quality.



Simple checks can include making sure that there are no leaks from water troughs, tanks or pipes. Any leaks can cause pooling or run-off of contaminated water. Likewise, it's a good time to ensure slurry tanks have no leaks and that sufficient stores are available for FYM in the wintertime.



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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

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

FOR NATIVE TREES SEE HERE - IT WILL GIVE YOU ADVICE ON DIFFERENT TREES

www.treecouncil.ie

FOR NATIVE BIRDS SEE HERE

www.birdwatchireland.ie

FOR NATIVE BUTTERFLIES SEE HERE

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

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