



JUNE

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!

When we hear the term invasive species we tend to think of Japanese Knotweed, Rhododendron and Himalayan Balsam, in flower now. But there are many others...



Established alien invasive species also include Cotoneaster, Buddleia [butterfly bush], Clematis, Montbretia and Snowberry – find out more at www.invasivespeciesireland.ie



Bogs

Look out for the pin-points of colour that appear in our bogs around now – the beautiful **bogbean**, the fascinating **sundew**, the **ragged robin**.



Bogbean leaves resemble those of the broad bean. It has stunning star-shaped, pink/white flowers fringed inside with long white hairs. It was used to flavour beer, known by some as the 'bog hop'!



Buildings
& walls

Old stone walls can look like the arrival halls of airports as parent birds fly too and fro feeding broods hidden in cracks between the stones.



All this activity can also be quite noisy as chicks compete for precious mouthfuls of food. Sometimes strange sounds are added to the mix – starlings are great mimics, and have been known to imitate the sounds of car engines, reversing alarms or radios!



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Coastal farms

The **Irish coastline** stretches for over **5500kms**. Where prevailing winds lead to sand being blown onshore, **sand dunes** take shape. Dunes come in many shapes and sizes and support a wide range of flora and fauna. Watch out for **sea sandwort**, **sea spurge** and the **spotted orchid**.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

In addition to providing habitat for a range of species, sand dune systems act as **natural protection from storm impacts** and rising sea levels. However, sand dune systems are fragile and prone to disturbance by human activities. We can protect our sand dune systems by avoiding activities that damage the surface of the dunes, by fencing out livestock and by keeping to designated pathways through the dunes.



Garden or farmyard

Leave a sunlit patch of **nettles** for bees, butterflies and hoverflies.



Nettles are a food plant for lots of butterfly larvae [e.g. **red admiral**, **peacock**, **comma** and more]. On farmland they provide important early cover for birds like the **corncrake**. Great for making soup and fertiliser too!



Hedgerows

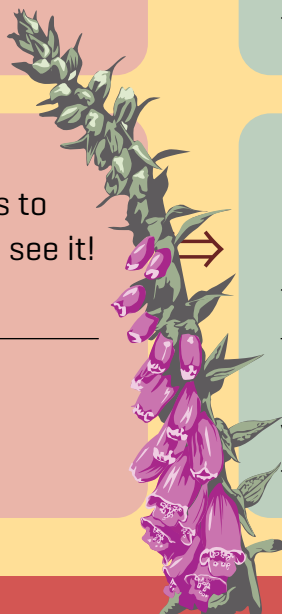
The **honeysuckle** or 'woodbine' begins to flower. You'll often smell it before you see it!



Honeysuckle is a rich source of nectar for many insects, which will keep the bird populations healthy. The **elephant hawkmoth** loves its nectar. Just before flowering is a good time to take cuttings and try to propagate new plants for transplanting around the farm.

As the summer rolls on, can you see **foxgloves** in your hedgerows?

Foxgloves – also known as ladies' fingers – only flower every other year (biennial). Although poisonous, foxglove is important in the treatment of heart conditions.



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Hill pasture

With its distinctive call lasting up to half an hour, the **skylark** is best heard in early summer.



The song is usually given while the bird is flying 50 to 100 metres overhead. Although hill ground is a favourite, the skylark also likes tillage fields and pastures. Topping or mowing can easily destroy the nest.



Pasture, meadows
& field margins

The **meadow thistle** – or bog thistle -will begin flowering now in wetter grasslands.



Ireland hosts 25% of the world's population of this elegant, non-prickly thistle, which is a favourite of the larvae of the **painted lady butterfly**. Light grazing in early summer followed by heavier grazing in late summer will help this plant.

This is a great month for flowering grasses and herbs in our pastures and meadows.

Depending on your perspective, flowers in the grassland can be viewed as weeds or as welcome displays of biodiversity. **Yellow rattle** is one such plant – a semi-parasite, it weakens grasses and thus allows more space for less-competitive herbs to take hold. Less grass more flowers anyone?

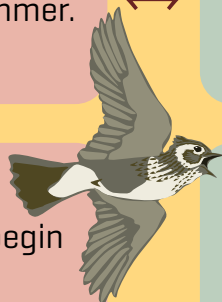


Ponds

June is a lively time around ponds with **frogs**, **damselflies** and **dragonflies** emerging, in turn attracting other animals to predate them.



Keep an eye out for herons visiting your pond; one of their favourite foods is the frog! Bats are also on the wing, with hedgerows and ponds favourite feeding areas.



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Ponds

Any sign of **pond skaters** or **water boatman** on your water bodies?



Pond skaters 'skate' around on the surface of the water in ponds, lakes, ditches and slow-flowing rivers, feeding on smaller insects which they stab with their sharp mouthparts or 'beaks'.



Streams & rivers

Our waterways are filled with new life as mother **mallards** shepherd **ducklings** between patches of flowering vegetation like **water lilies** and **flag irises**.



Secretive **moorhens** make nests in reeds and rushes, breaking cover only rarely.



Tillage fields

Can you spot **sparrows**, **blue tits** etc. eating aphids off the crops?



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.

As well as killing off 'pests', pesticides kill these useful predatory insects. This in turn can increase your 'pest' problem in the future.



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Wet or
rough ground

Rough or 'untidy' patches of ground are currently providing food for a **whole new generation of wildlife!**



Watch as **small birds** forage for insects, **hares** feed on woody plants, **field mice** gather seeds, and the **kestrel** hangs in the air overhead – before all return to feed hungry mouths in hidden places.



Woods

Normally very secretive, in summer it's possible to spot the **pine martin** during daylight hours.



Pine martins favour conifers and have a broad diet including invertebrates, nuts, fruits and small birds and mammals. Pine martins are returning to Irish woodlands after near extinction in the 1900s. Interestingly, they are also helping our native **red squirrel** to bounce back by predating on, or simply scaring off, invasive **grey squirrels**.

Did you know that there are over **2500 species of mushroom** in Ireland?

Fungi are also deeply enmeshed in Irish folklore. The **fly agaric** and **liberty cap**, for example, are believed to produce visions of faeries and leprechauns!

Traditionally only a handful of species of mushroom have been available for sale in shops in Ireland. However, there is a growing market for other varieties such as **oyster** or **shiitake**. In response to this demand, some farmers are diversifying continuous cover broadleaf woodland enterprises by growing these varieties on inoculated woodpiles. [Due to the danger of mushroom poisoning, however, foraging of wild mushrooms should be left to the experts!]



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TIPS FOR THE MONTH!



Climate

With farm machinery seeing heavy use at the moment, it's a good time to remember simple ways to reduce fossil fuel consumption.



- Turn the engine off rather than letting it idle
- Shift up a gear and throttle back for lighter work or on the road
- Remove unnecessary tractor weights – doing so can save over one litre of diesel/hr.
- Check tyre pressure regularly (lower pressures for field work will reduce fuel use)



Pollinators

Pollinators are busily pollinating many of our food plants at the moment, including **apples**, **strawberries** and **tomatoes**, amongst many others.



Research has shown pollinator activity **boosts oil seed rape production by ~30%** (when compared to crops where pollinators have been excluded)! – another good reason to reduce pesticides and safeguard our native pollinators!



Water quality

Sheep dipping may be underway on some farms in June. Leakage of sheep dips can lead to serious pollution of watercourses, including contamination of drinking water and large-scale fish kills.



Before dipping, make sure that your dipping tanks are leak proof and that they are located as far as possible from drains and water courses. Make sure to use a drip pen and to prevent sheep accessing any watercourses for at least 24hrs.

It's worth noting that, while many dips are terribly harmful for the environment, they are also harmful to humans. Dips containing organophosphate are linked to numerous cancers, and the effects of exposure can build up over time. Where possible, explore alternatives and eliminate the use of dips!



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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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