



NOVEMBER

# WINTER 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 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!

As we finish celebrating the harvest feast of 'Samhain', a lot of animals are brought indoors where they are fed for the winter. Not everywhere though!



This time of year is a turning-point for farming, unusually so in the case of the Burren where livestock [mainly suckler cows] are herded onto the rough limestone grasslands [known as **winterages**] for the winter. On these low-lying hills they can enjoy the 'dry lie' afforded by the limestone bedrock, as well as a healthy diet of native herbs, grasses and calcium-rich water.



Bogs

In addition to **flood relief** and **carbon capture**, natural [undrained] bogs filter and **purify water**, leading to cleaner, clearer water downstream.



To maximise these natural '**ecosystem services**', where possible avoid burning, cutting peat, planting forestry, draining or overgrazing on bogs or peatlands.



Buildings  
& walls

Time to have a look around the farm and see if there are any suitable places to plan to put up **nesting boxes** for our native Irish farmland birds such as barn owls.



Barn owls will happily nest in indoor or outdoor barn owl boxes, ideally close to some rough grassland for hunting.

If you are hoping to attract barn owls to your farm, it's a good idea to use **live or snap traps rather than rodenticides** for any rodent issues - barn owls [as well as other wildlife] often eat poisoned rodents, which can be fatal. Of course the best rodent control on a farm is the barn owl itself - a breeding pair can eat as many as 2000 rats and mice in a year!

Plan to get nest boxes up before December, as barn owls need time to get used to a new box before they will nest in it - often farmers find a box is empty for a few years before miraculously being filled with screeching owlets one spring!

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Coastal farms

**Sea buckthorn** is adorned with clusters of yellow-orange berries.



Sea buckthorn was introduced to Ireland in the 1800s and has since become invasive in some coastal areas. It uses underground rhizomes to colonize new areas and can quickly crowd out native coastal species. If you have sea buckthorn on your farm, it's best to keep its growth in check.



Garden or  
farmyard

Hang up some **bird feeders** in quieter areas of the garden or yard, near to a hedgerow or somewhere birds can fly back to for safety.



Join Birdwatch Ireland's **Garden Bird Survey** and report into the national database on what birds are coming to your feeder - winter visitors might include **blackcaps**, **greenfinches** and **siskins**. If you have any **spoilt grain**, putting this out - say near a good hedge - on a regular basis in the harsher winter months will feed a lot of wild birds.



Hedgerows

Plant **new hedgerows** and 'gap-up'.



When planning your new hedgerow, remember to maximise the benefit to wildlife by planting a variety of **native flowering species grown from local sources**. Also, try to connect new hedgerows to existing natural habitats to create **corridors** for wildlife. Look at what grows well in your area and plant-in more of these - better still, collect local seed and grow some yourself, it's easier than you think!



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

Think about some **hedge laying** to rejuvenate the hedge and improve stock proofing.



Hedgerows

Trim hedgerows where needed.



### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

Laying a hedge is a real skill and a great way to help make it more stockproof. Coppicing species such as **hazel**, **willow** and **whitethorn** is also a good way to create different age structures in the hedgerow. The 'All-Ireland Pollinator Plan' has some excellent resources on managing new and existing hedgerows for wildlife.

To minimise the impact on wildlife if you are cutting your hedgerows, try to cut them between November and January. While hedgerows can legally be cut from the 1st of September, this early cutting reduces food supply for wildlife. Ideally, cut your hedgerows in smaller sections and on a three-year rotation to ensure there is always some food available for wildlife. Try, if possible, to leave some hedgerow sections uncut, this increases the diversity and structure of habitats present.



Hill pasture

Have you heard an **eagle** cry this year?

Due to conservation efforts, some of our native birds of prey are making a comeback. Keep your eyes peeled for **buzzards**, **white tailed sea eagles**, and even the **golden eagle** as they recolonize Irish farmland. These charismatic birds prey on species such as crows and rabbits, helping to keep the populations of these potential 'pest' species in check.



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



Pasture, meadows  
& field margins

If left to seed, plants like **yarrow** and **lamb's quarters** will still be holding seed heads aloft, tempting hungry birds.



The birds will not eat all of the seeds - some will be carried to fresh pastures, where they will germinate and start the cycle again in spring.



Ponds

While all appears quiet on the pond, the larvae of **dragonflies**, **mayflies** and **water beetles** are busy below the surface, preparing to emerge as adults in spring.



During cold snaps, breaking the ice on the pond will provide oxygen for pond life as well as a place for birds and mammals to drink.



Streams & rivers

Plant some trees like **alder** and **willow** to stabilise eroding banks.



**Alder** coppices well and the wood makes excellent charcoal [and gunpowder!]. Everybody knows the **sally (willow)** - a really easy tree to grow: when simply pushed into the soil, willow cuttings will root and grow into new trees!



Tillage fields

November is a good time to take stock and think ahead. Do you have a less-productive field that could do with a nature-friendly boost to soil fertility?



Double cover crops, where two diverse cover crops are grown and mulched, or incorporated back to back [i.e. one in summer and one in winter], can kick-start depleted soil biology. Other options to consider are nitrogen fixing 'combi-crops' [where two mutually beneficial cash crops, e.g. barley and peas, are grown together and then separated at harvest] or making your own nutrient rich compost fertiliser on-farm.



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



Wet or rough ground

What 'waterfowl' visit your wetlands or watercourses? Can you spot the silhouette of the farmland bird the **lapwing** wading in the shallows?



### PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

Wet grasslands, alongside rivers in floodplains, can provide really important feeding habitats for thousands of ducks (e.g. **widgeon**), **geese** and **swans** that spend their winter in Ireland.



As dusk falls or dawn breaks you might see the **woodcock**, a beautifully patterned bird, whose marking camouflages it well.



**Woodcock** are a secretive bird, but if you are out and about on the farm late in the day, look out for these along woodland edges. Or can you spot the **jay** out collecting acorns? – a super oak tree spreader.



Woods

It's a good time to spot the mighty **scots pine** standing out amongst the bare deciduous trees.

Inoculating your bare-root saplings with **fungi** can naturally increase their growth rates and resilience to disease.

Our only native pine, it was thought to be extinct (and reintroduced from Scotland) until a stand of native pine was recently identified in the Burren. This tree is an important food source for the native **red squirrel**.

When planting, simply add a handful of well-rotted wood chippings or sawdust into the hole into which you are planting or around the base of the planted tree. The perfect source of this material is a local, well rotted down deciduous tree: it will be full of tiny fungal hyphae ready to nourish the roots of your saplings!



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### TIPS FOR THE MONTH!



Climate

Trees, shrubs and woody vegetation are great at storing carbon in their biomass.



Think of hedgerows, woods and copses on the farm as **nature's carbon storage tanks**. Is there space anywhere for more trees on the farm?



Pollinators

Trees are also a wonderful source of food for pollinating insects – could you plant some native trees from seed on your farm this year?



Ripe **rowan**, **hawthorn** and **elder berries** can all be gathered on the farm in autumn and the seeds planted (although remember to leave some for the birds!).



Water quality

November is bare-root planting season – is there a **buffer strip** on your farm that could be improved with a **stand of native trees**?



**Planted buffer strips** can slow the flow of water across the land, absorb excess nutrients, prevent erosion, provide food and shelter for livestock and provide habitat for wildlife!



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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:

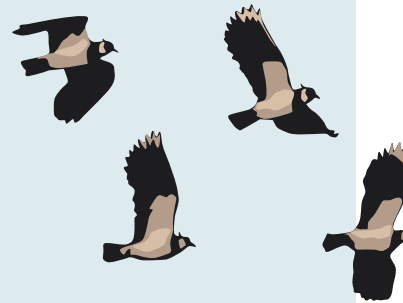
FOR NATIVE FLOWERS - YOU CAN SEARCH BY FLOWERING MONTH, COLOUR OR HABITAT  
**[www.irishwildflowers.ie](http://www.irishwildflowers.ie)**

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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