

Countryside Calendar – January



Skene of grey geese © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Early lambing may be starting under cover in some places with selected breeds. This is an important time for sheep. If dogs chase them, they may lose their developing foetuses. Keep your dog under close control or on a short lead.

Cattle are often near to farm buildings for winter feeding, so watch out for farm vehicles taking feed to livestock.

Crops

Farm activities include drainage work, hedging, planting and ploughing. Proceed carefully and keep a safe distance if you come across any works in progress. Remember that the farmer may not be able to see or hear you when operating large machinery.

Many arable fields are bare having been previously ploughed and/or seeded. Other arable fields will be greener with autumn sown crops.

Tree felling and taking out timber often takes place in winter months. Read any signs warning you of forest operations and follow any precautions advised by the land manager.

Conservation

A few fields will contain stubble, which feeds and shelters over wintering birds. Some will be kept as set-aside and others will be prepared for sowing in the spring.

Wildfowl shooting takes place close to water during the autumn and winter usually around dawn and dusk. The inland season closes on 31 January.

Pheasant and partridge shooting takes place during the autumn and winter in woods and forests, and on neighbouring land. Take extra care and follow signs and notices where shooting is taking place.

Countryside Calendar – February



Tractor and Harrow preparing soil for planting © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Watch out for farm vehicles taking feed to livestock or spreading farmyard manure and slurry – this will take place as soon as the ground is dry enough.

Early lambing continues under cover in the lowlands. Calving starts under cover in some beef herds. Do not take a dog into a field with lambs or other young animals. Heavily pregnant ewes may abort their lambs if they get chased or unduly disturbed. Entering a field with ewes and lambs may cause the lamb to separate from its mother. This may lead to the lamb being rejected by the ewe. Avoid disturbing sheep around lambing time by going into a neighbouring field or land next to it. If you can't do this, for example in open country around crofting areas in north west Scotland, keep as far from the animals as you can. Keep your dog under control.

Many milking herds are kept indoors or in yards close to farm buildings. Watch out for farm vehicles taking feed to livestock or spreading farmyard manure and slurry – this will take place as soon as the ground is dry enough.

Crops

You may see ploughing and some cultivation where the land is not too wet.

Some land managers will be spraying growing crops, e.g. fertiliser on grass for silage and winter cereals, and fungicides on some autumn crops. How long crop spraying is dangerous depends on the materials used. As these chemicals can be dangerous to public health, land managers have to reduce the risk to people who want to enter land where they have been used. Follow any advice asking you to avoid using particular routes or areas at these times.

Manure and slurry is good for soil conditioning and as fertiliser but it must be used carefully to avoid pollution.

Conservation

Deer control can take place within forests all year round, often around dawn and dusk. You can help to minimise disturbance by taking extra care at these times and by following signs and notices, if deer stalking is taking place.

The season for pheasant and partridge shooting closes on 1 February. The wildfowling season below high water closes on 20 February.

Countryside Calendar – March



Sheep and Lambs © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Some cattle are turned out on pasture that has been rested over winter. After a winter indoors, these animals are often inquisitive and may follow the fence line to watch anything new that appears! Be careful when entering a field with cattle. Main spring calving starts in beef herds

Lambing is under way on lowland farms. Going into a field with ewes and lambs may cause the lamb to separate from its mother. Avoid disturbing sheep especially heavily pregnant ewes around lambing time by going into a neighbouring field or land next to it. If you can't do this, keep as far from the animals as you can. Do not take a dog into a field with lambs or other animals.

In upland areas where grass is scarce pregnant sheep are hungry by March and will be fed in fields. They watch for the food coming and will follow anyone carrying a bag! Farmers bring food out on quad bikes, land rovers or tractors depending on the feed (grain or hay

Crops

There is a noticeable increase in activity on farmland. Ploughing is under way to prepare the fields for sowing crops. Keep clear of farm tractors and equipment working on the land, for example ploughing fields ready for sowing crops. Some sowing will have already begun with crops that were planted soon after the last harvest now beginning to show. In a field of crops, avoid damaging the crop by using any paths or tracks, the field margin, unsown ground or look for another route.

Fertiliser, farmyard manure and slurry spreading will also be taking place in some areas. You are advised not to go into recently manured fields. Otherwise you increase the risk of exposure to infections and disrupting the farmer's biosecurity measures. Farmyard manure can carry diseases and can damage your health. Avoid going into these fields for several weeks to allow bacteria to break down. Follow any advice or choose an alternative route.

Conservation

You will come across managed fisheries around Scotland. Fishing seasons for Salmon and Sea Trout (migratory fish) and for Brown Trout have rules to protect the fish at sensitive times. The brown trout season runs from the 15th March to 6th October, inclusive. Fishing for salmon and sea trout can take place from January to December but the exact times may vary around the country as spawning depends on local conditions. There are no closed seasons for coarse fish and rainbow trout, but there may be advisory ones; many fisheries are open seven days a week. Some of the larger waters close in the winter months but as a general rule nearly all fisheries will be open for a minimum of April through to October.

When using field margins to avoid cropped areas be aware that these are wildlife corridors and some may be managed to encourage game birds. Keep dogs on a lead and keep moving to minimise disturbance.

Countryside Calendar – April



Cows and Calves © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

There will be calves in many fields, with calving just beginning in upland areas. Remember that cows in particular are extremely protective of their young. Cattle (including dairy cattle) are put into fields in the south and can take a few days to settle into a new field. When dairy cattle are out at grass they will be brought into the milking shed twice a day.

Sheep that have been wintered away on farms in the lowlands will also be returned to the hills and glens. There are likely to be lambs in many fields. Avoid taking dogs into fields with young animals and pay attention to any local signage. Going into a field with ewes and lambs may cause the lamb to separate from its mother.

Crops

Watch out for farm vehicles working on the land, as the main potato crop and the last of the cereals will be planted by the end of April. Some fertilising will also be taking place.

Conservation

April sees the start of the breeding season of many ground nesting birds in woodlands, moorland, grassland, loch shores and the seashore. Wet grassland is one of the most valuable habitats for farmland waders. Take care to keep dogs on a short lead or under close control, keep to paths where asked to do so, and don't linger if you are disturbing birds.

Wetlands occur on many farms. They vary in size and character from rushy low spots in pastures to river valley meadows, lowland raised bogs and coastal dune slacks. In some cases water levels have been raised to improve the habitat. Follow local information aimed at preventing damage and the spread of erosion. Some grass fields may be closed off for environmental reasons but you can still exercise your access rights keeping to the advice in the Code. Follow any agreed local information.

Rocky coasts and islands are important habitats for some of the largest seabird concentrations in Europe. Certain cliffs may be rare bird nesting sites and there may be agreements in place to avoid disturbance to wildlife. Follow local guidance to help protect the natural heritage of these areas.

Be aware that riverbanks are often a refuge for wildlife and may be used for fishing and related management. Show consideration for people fishing and keep a safe distance if an angler is casting a line. Rivers are often unfenced and you may find livestock and crops close to the bank side. Some water margins may be fenced off to encourage growth of vegetation along the riverbank. Keep to paths and tracks if there are any.

Countryside Calendar – May



People walking on a track © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Hill lambing traditionally starts in mid-May so many fields and hilly areas will have lambs present.

Cattle (dairy cows, sucklers, bulls and calves) are turned out in most of the country if the weather is mild. Bulls are put out with suckler cow herds in most areas (one per herd) and run with the cows until late summer. Remember cows with calves, and not just bulls, are unpredictable and dangerous. Like children, young cattle can be inquisitive & boisterous too. Keep a sensible distance from all animals, particularly where calves are present, and avoid disturbance.

Most livestock is kept out of grass fields for hay and silage so you will generally find these gates closed. Seasonal grazing starts so fields that had no livestock since October may suddenly have a herd of cows in them!

Crops

Watch out for farm vehicles working on the land as turnips and swedes are sown at this time of year for feeding to livestock in winter. Bright yellow fields of oil seed rape will appear across the country. Cereals are sprayed with herbicides and fungicides if needed.

There may be grass reseeding on some farms. Fields are ploughed up then sown with grass seed. Some fields of grass are not grazed but are left to grow for hay, which is not cut until the summer. In livestock areas the grass may be cut for a silage harvest instead of waiting for the longer hay making process.

Cultivation and sowing of crops is under way in crofting areas.

When grass has just been sown, treat it like any other crop by using any paths or tracks provided, the field margin, unsown ground or look for an alternative route. In hay and silage crops you can exercise access rights unless the grass is at such a late stage of growth that it might be damaged. A "late stage of growth" is when the grass is about 8 inches (20cm.) high. In such cases, use paths or tracks if there are any or go along the field margins.

After a silage cut, grass will be fertilised with nitrogen or spread with farmyard manure or slurry to provide growth for the next cut or for grazing. The chemicals in spray treatments and bacteria in slurry can be dangerous to your health – so please follow any advice asking you to avoid using particular routes or areas at these times.

Conservation

Crofts comprise a small scale patchwork of pasture, meadow and cultivated land with boundary fences or walls. Many crofts are found near the coast and as with other, less intensive farming have created and maintained valuable wildlife habitats.

By keeping to paths and tracks if there are any, you will be less likely to disturb wildlife.

Be aware that lochs and reservoirs are often a refuge for wildlife and may be used for fishing and related management.

May falls within the breeding season of many ground nesting birds in woodlands, moorland, grassland, loch shores and the seashore. Take care to keep dogs on a short lead or under close control, stick to paths where asked to do so, and don't linger if you are disturbing birds.

Field margins may be important for conservation and ground-nesting birds, so be careful when taking access in field margins.

Deer control can take place within forests all year round, often around dawn and dusk. You can help to minimise disturbance by taking extra care at these times and by following signs and notices, if deer stalking is taking place.

Countryside Calendar – June



Potato Harvesting © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

There will still be lambs and calves in many fields and hilly areas. Look out for sheep gathering i.e. rounding up all the animals. Bulls will be put in with cow herds until late summer - they can be unpredictable and dangerous. Summer calving starts in some suckler herds.

Watch out for fields with livestock and young animals- look for different routes where possible, avoid taking dogs into fields with young animals and pay attention to any local signage.

Pig farming is found mainly in north and east areas although you may see pigs on the islands with lower rainfall. Outdoor shelters are often used. Pigs can turn aggressive at any time. If there is a pig in the field go into a neighbouring field or onto land next to it.

Crops

Farm vehicles are busy working on the land e.g. lifting the first early potatoes. Silage cutting continues in most of the country. Hay is cut in drier districts near the end of the month.

Other operations you might see include grass-re-seeding and spraying crops with herbicides, fungicides and insecticides where necessary. Remember that these chemicals can be dangerous to your health so please follow any advice asking you to avoid using particular routes or areas at these times.

In fields of crops, avoid damaging the crop by using any paths or tracks, the field margin or un-sown ground, or look for another route? When using field margins to avoid cropped areas, be aware that these are wildlife corridors and some may be managed to encourage game birds. Keep dogs on a lead and keep moving to minimise disturbance.

Conservation

June falls within the breeding season of many ground-nesting birds in woodlands, moorland, grassland, loch shores and the seashore. Take care to keep dogs on a short lead or under close control, keep to paths where asked to do so and don't linger if you're disturbing birds. Machair is found in the north and west of Scotland and has been created by wind-blown sand fertilising the underlying peat. It's often unfenced and supports breeding wading birds and wildflowers in May and June. Follow any guidance aimed at reducing dune or machair erosion or at avoiding disturbance of nesting birds.

Countryside Calendar – July



Tufted Ducks nest & eggs © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Bulls will be put out with cow herds until late summer – they can be unpredictable and dangerous so take care near their fields. If you're out with your dog, where possible, choose a route that avoids taking your dog into fields with cows or horses. If you do need to go into such a field, keep as far as possible from the animals and keep your dog on a short lead or close at heel. If farm animals react aggressively and move towards you, keep calm, let your dog go and take the shortest, safest route out of the field. Both you and your dog will be far safer if you allow your dog to escape on its own. Pay attention to any local advice and information.

Dogs can worry young farm animals and cows can be aggressive when protecting their calves. Go into a neighbouring field or onto land next to it. In more open country, keep your dog on a short lead if there are lambs around, and keep your distance from them.

Sheep shearing will be taking place in most upland areas and the flocks will be gathered together to bring them to one place. On the hill it takes time to keep all the sheep and lambs together, so keep a sensible distance from the animals, to avoid dispersing them over the land.

The stag stalking season (1 July to 20 October) is an important time for deer management. If you're going to be out in the hills, take time to find out where stalking is taking place by looking at the Heading for the Scottish Hills web pages on www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/hftsh. Stalking doesn't normally take place on Sundays.

Deer control can take place within forests all year round, often around dawn and dusk. You can help to minimise disturbance by taking extra care at these times and by following any signs or notices.

Crops

Farm vehicles will be working on the land, to harvest autumn-sown crops eg wheat, barley and oilseed rape, along with fruit and vegetable crops like strawberries and potatoes. Hay making may also be under way throughout the country (depending on the weather!), and some silage cuts will still be taking place.

The blight-spraying programme starts on potato crops, involving a follow-up spraying every four to six weeks.

Silage is harvested in late growing areas & those fields in conservation schemes. Second cut silage starts.

Harvesting involves a range of equipment that is used together, for example combine, tractors and trailers. The number of trips to and from farm buildings will increase and farm tracks will be busy. Keep a safe distance from farm machinery.

In fields of crops avoid damaging the crop by using any paths or tracks, the field margin, unsown ground or look for another route. Remember that the chemicals used in spraying can be dangerous to your health – so please follow any advice asking you to avoid particular routes or areas at these times.

Conservation

The months of June and July often see an increase in salmon fishing as the grilse (juveniles from last year) return to breeding waters.

Be aware that riverbanks are often a refuge for wildlife and may be used for fishing and related management. Show consideration for people fishing and keep a safe distance if an angler is casting a line.

Rivers are often unfenced and you may find livestock and crops close to the bank side. Some water margins may be fenced off to encourage growth of vegetation along the riverbank. Keep to paths and tracks if there are any.

July falls within the breeding season of many ground-nesting birds in woodlands, moorland, grassland, loch shores and the seashore. Take care to keep dogs on a short lead or under close control, stick to paths where asked to do so, and don't linger if you are disturbing birds.

Countryside Calendar – August



Fishermen fly fishing © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Male sheep or rams (tups) may be in fields so that they can sire next year's early lambing flocks. Along with the bulls running in fields with suckler cows, these rams can be dangerous and unpredictable. Sheep are gathered off the hill so sheep dipping can begin.

It takes time to gather all the sheep and lambs together, so please keep a sensible distance from the animals, to avoid dispersing them over the land. Make sure that your dog does not chase or worry livestock by keeping it under close control or on a lead.

The grouse shooting season begins on 12 August (until 10 December). Help to minimise disturbance by being alert to possible shooting on grouse moors and take account of advice on different routes. Avoid crossing land where a shoot is under way until it is safe to do so.

If you're planning to be out and about in the Scottish hills and mountains between 1 July and 20 October, find out where stag stalking will be taking place by looking at the [Heading for the Scottish Hills](#) pages of the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) website.

Crops

Farm vehicles will be working on the land, with second, and, in some areas, third silage cuts still taking place. Harvesting of spring crops is in full swing – weather and the ripeness of the crop permitting. Look out for combine harvesters gathering the grain and dropping the straw behind them, for future baling. Modern combines are fast, large and noisy – the driver cannot hear anyone calling from the ground.

Cultivations and drilling for winter oilseed rape will begin. Seed potatoes will be burnt-off (desiccated) when the tubers are the right size—to help minimise damage at harvest. Remember that the chemicals used to prepare potatoes for harvest are dangerous to your health – so please follow any advice asking you to avoid using particular routes or areas at these times.

Hay making continues into August in crofting areas. Third cuts of silage are taken in early areas.

Soft fruit is harvested at this time of year and it is important to avoid contamination. Do not take your dog into fields of fruit unless you are on a clear path. In all other cases it is best to use neighbouring land.

Conservation

August is towards the end of the breeding season of many ground-nesting birds in woodlands, moorland, grassland, loch shores and the seashore. Take care to keep dogs on a short lead or under close control, stick to paths where asked to do so, and don't linger if you are disturbing birds.

Most green cover on set-aside has to be cut short or destroyed between 15 July and August.

Be aware that riverbanks are often a refuge for wildlife and may be used for fishing and related management. Show consideration for people fishing and keep a safe distance if an angler is casting a line. Rivers are often unfenced and you may find livestock and crops close to the bank side. Some water margins may be fenced off to encourage growth of vegetation along the riverbank. Keep to paths and tracks if there are any.

Coasts & Beaches

Marine litter can be harmful to human health, livestock and wildlife. Take all your litter away.

Countryside Calendar – September



Red Grouse resting in heather moorland © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Autumn calving starts in some beef herds. Bear in mind that cows with calves are very defensive of their young, and can be particularly aggressive towards dogs. In some areas, dairy cows are taken in for the winter. If you see fields with cows and young calves present – look for different routes where possible, avoid taking dogs into fields with young animals and pay attention to any local signage.

Male sheep or rams (tups) may be in fields to prepare for mating. Along with the bulls running in fields with suckler cows, these rams can be dangerous and unpredictable.

Sheep dipping continues during September, so look out for sheep gathering - rounding up all the animals - and avoid the area if you can. On the hill it takes time to keep all the sheep and lambs together, so please keep a sensible distance from the animals, to avoid dispersing them over the land. Make sure that your dog does not chase or worry livestock by keeping it under close control or on a lead.

Deer in enclosed fields are most likely to turn aggressive during the rutting season in late September and early October.

Crops

Farm vehicles will be working on the land with the last cuts of silage taken in many areas. The cereal harvest is mainly finished in most areas, leaving many stubble fields ready for ploughing to prepare the ground for next year's crops.

Winter barley should be sown by the end of the month, and the main crop potato harvest will begin.

Conservation

Help to minimise disturbance by being alert to possible shooting on grouse moors and take account of advice on alternative routes. The grouse shooting season continues until 10 December. Wildfowl shooting commences on 1 September and takes place close to water during the autumn and winter usually around dawn and dusk. Avoid crossing land where a shoot is under way until it is safe to do so.

Some agri-environment schemes encourage whole flood plains to flood naturally at times of high water level creating a mosaic of wash lands, dry lands and wetlands. There will be more natural flooding where the watercourse meanders through a relatively flat area and barriers to flooding have been removed. These areas are sensitive and prone to damage – follow any agreed local information.

Countryside Calendar - October



Field with Bales with Autumnal Trees © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Autumn calving is under way in some beef herds. If you see fields with cows and young calves – look for different routes where possible, don't take dogs into fields with young animals and pay attention to any local signage. In some areas, dairy cows are taken in for the winter.

Sheep will remain outside: ewes remain on the hill for approximately 36 weeks on average each year.

Male sheep or rams (tups) may be put in fields so that they can sire next year's lambs. These tups can be dangerous and unpredictable. Deer in enclosed fields are most likely to turn aggressive during the rutting season.

Depending on the weather, livestock may be taken in for the winter, so watch out for farm vehicles taking them feed.

Crops

Harvesting of oats is under way in crofting areas. Farm vehicles will be working on the land to prepare the ground for planting next year's crops. Most winter wheat is now sown and the potato harvest will be finished in most areas.

Look out for herbicides being applied to many cereal crops before they start to grow.

Conservation

Pheasant and partridge shooting takes place during the autumn and winter around woods and forests. Take extra care and follow signs and notices where shooting is taking place. Help to minimise disturbance by being alert to possible shooting on grouse moors (the grouse shooting season continues until 10 December), and take account of advice on alternative routes. Wildfowl shooting takes place close to water during the autumn and winter usually around dawn and dusk.

Muirburn is controlled burning of moorland to help regenerate heather. It can take place between 1 October and 15 April inclusive.

Follow local advice to avoid a particular route or not to do a particular activity for safety reasons.

The intensive management of grass crops for cattle has led to increases in the number of geese that overwinter in Scotland. Some lowland wet grassland areas close to the coast are managed for these visitors when they arrive in October. Large inland lochs also provide a seasonal home.

Countryside Calendar - November



Image courtesy of SNH image library © Glyn Satterley SNH

Livestock

Most wintered cattle, including calves for overwintering, will be indoors and being fed by early November. Watch out for farm vehicles taking them feed. Once cattle are housed for the winter, farmers need to remove slurry and cattle manure on a regular basis. This may be spread on the land or stored in middens. Livestock manure carries bacteria which are dangerous to your health so you are advised to avoid any fields where this has been spread.

Cattle can remain out of doors as long as the land is dry but they will be fed on a daily basis. Hay or silage will be taken out by tractor or the cattle may be fed in troughs.

Male sheep or rams (tups) will be put out with upland sheep flocks. These rams can be dangerous and unpredictable. Keep a sensible distance from the animals and make sure that your dog does not chase or worry livestock by keeping it under close control or on a lead. This is an important time for sheep. If they are chased by dogs they will lose their newly developing foetuses. Keep your dog under control or on a short lead.

Crops

Farm vehicles will be working on the land to prepare the ground for planting next year's crops. Some winter wheat drilling will still be taking place. Swedes are harvested for winter feed for livestock, or in some cases, may be strip-grazed using an electric fence to subdivide the field for sheep. Look out for any signage advising you of electric fencing, or of alternative routes.

Conservation

Pheasant and partridge shooting takes place during the autumn and winter in woods and forests, and on neighbouring land. Take extra care and follow signs and notices where shooting is taking place.

Help to minimise disturbance by being alert to possible shooting on grouse moors (the grouse shooting season continues until 10 December) and take account of advice on different routes.

Wildfowl shooting takes place close to water during the autumn and winter usually around dawn and dusk.

Avoid crossing land where a shoot is under way until it is safe to do so.

Some farmers have grown unharvested crops for birds and this can be a good opportunity for bird watchers. Do not linger if you are disturbing birds.

Countryside Calendar - December



Snowy Farm © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

Male sheep or rams (tups) will be put out onto the open hillside with upland sheep flocks. These rams can be dangerous and unpredictable.

Early lambing starts in some indoor flocks, especially with pedigree tup breeders, e.g. Suffolks. Most cattle, including calves for overwintering, will be indoors and being fed by now. Cattle can remain out of doors as long as the land is dry but they will be fed on a daily basis. Hay or silage will be taken out by tractor or the cattle may be fed in troughs. Watch out for farm vehicles taking livestock feed.

Crops

Farm vehicles will be working on the land to prepare the ground for planting next year's crops. Some winter wheat drilling continues to take place. Swedes are harvested for winter feed for livestock, or in some cases, may be strip-grazed using an electric fence to sub-divide the field for sheep.

Management operations in forestry can take place at any time of the year but are generally planned to minimise environmental impacts. Felling and removal usually takes place in autumn and winter to avoid the bird-nesting season. New planting of trees takes place in autumn, winter and very early spring. Keep well way from forest machinery and be aware that there may be heavy timber lorries on the tracks you are using. Do not climb over timber stacks.

Conservation

Birds will be taking advantage of unharvested crops for winter feeding and shelter. Do not linger if you are disturbing birds.

Help to minimise disturbance by being alert to possible shooting on grouse moors (the grouse-shooting season continues until 10 December) and take account of advice on different routes. Wildfowl shooting takes place close to water during the autumn and winter usually around dawn and dusk. Avoid crossing land where a shoot is under way until it is safe to do so.