



OCTOBER

AUTUMN 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!

Geese arrive on our shores and wet grasslands. Do they come to you each winter?



Ireland is a really important overwintering destination for some of these visitors like the **barnacle goose**, the **light-bellied brent goose** and the **Greenland white-fronted goose**. Accidentally disturbing these birds, or moving them on while they are feeding or roosting, can really affect their body condition ahead of their breeding season in northern climes.



Bogs

As rainfall increases, bogs act as **giant sponges**, absorbing water and then slowly releasing it.



Rewetting sections of peat bog can be a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way of reducing flood risk downstream, while also creating valuable wildlife habitat. Is there a man-made drain on your land that could be blocked? - watch as wildlife returns!

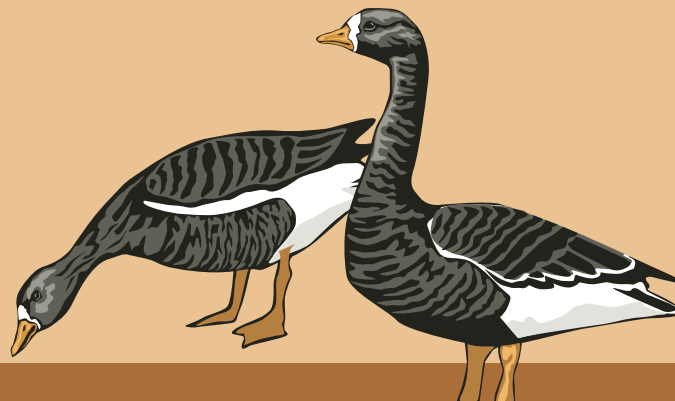


Buildings
& walls

It's that time of year when **house spiders** always seem to be on the move... and in a hurry!



This flurry of activity is mainly caused by **males looking for females**. Males mature in the autumn (at 2 years old) and start charging around looking for a mate!



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Ireland's **coastal saltmarshes** were once considered of little use to farmers. However, saltmarshes are now being recognised as of increasing importance in terms of providing a **buffer** between productive agricultural land and rising sea levels.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

However, as seas continue to rise due to climate change, our coastal saltmarshes are being squeezed out. In response, some farmers are choosing to conserve this natural buffer zone by allowing the saltmarsh to creep further inland. This not only protects their productive fields by maintaining a buffer zone between the farm and rising tides, but also conserves a unique habitat, home to a variety of rare **salt-tolerant plant species**.



Hedgehogs are beginning to hibernate.



A Hedgehog entering hibernation builds a ragged, ball-shaped nest made from grass and autumn leaves. A well-built nest can be vital to survival, as can choice of nest site. Ideally the nest site should be sheltered and safe. A site deep in a thick hedge [or under a shed] brings obvious benefits.

Rake up **leaf litter** into piles and leave over the winter months for **moth** and **butterfly larvae**.



Fieldfares and **redwings** are snacking on earthworms and berries.



These thrush-like birds come to Ireland for the winter and need plenty of food to help restore their strength.



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Hill pasture

As grass growth will begin to drop off soon, it's a good time to consider how winter stocking levels might impact on the long-term health of the farm.



PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

Could selling store lambs in August/September help to prevent overgrazing this winter? Overgrazing can lead to erosion and a reduction of sward diversity as grasses replace native **heathers**, **sedges** and **bryophytes**.



Pasture, meadows & field margins

Allow some **tussocky grass** and **wildflower seed heads** to remain uncut through winter to provide food and shelter for wildlife.



As the days continue to shorten, the value for wildlife of autumnal vegetation in field margins, along tracks and roadside verges, and in gardens, should not be underestimated.



Ponds

Pond plants are beginning to die back as the weather cools and the days shorten.



Building ponds can be addictive – is there room on the farm for another one?



Streams & rivers

Eels were once common in all of Ireland's waterways, but are more difficult to spot now.



Our eels are believed to hatch in the Sargasso Sea [off North America] before making their way across the Atlantic to Ireland, where they swim up our rivers as **elvers**. **Eels** spend up to 50 years growing in our waterways until, on a new moon in autumn, with the river in flood, they 'run' downstream and back out to sea where they re-cross the Atlantic to spawn and die.



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Tillage fields

Wild bird cover and other crops like **fodder radish** or weedy **winter stubbles** will be providing valuable food for birds and small mammals.



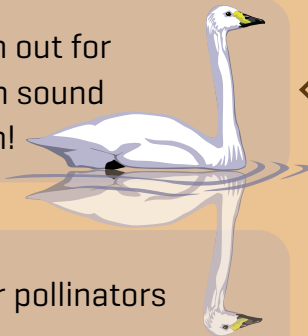
PRACTICAL ACTIONS AND NOTES

These crops will feed small birds such as the **yellowhammer**, **skylark** and **linnet**, as well as small mammals that themselves will feed predators like the **kestrel**, **sparrowhawk** and even the rare **hen harrier**.



Wet or rough ground

Whooper swans arrive - listen out for their honking voice, which can sound like an old-fashioned car horn!



These swans arrive from their breeding grounds in Iceland to spend the winter in the mild and wet Irish climate in wetland areas.



Woods

Ivy is a vital source of food for pollinators ahead of the winter.

Resist the temptation to 'tidy up' older trees or trees with broken limbs as these may be useful for wildlife.

In woodlands, watch out for brightly coloured **orange-peel fungus** and **amethyst deceiver** mushrooms.



If you can leave ivy in place - trimming it back perhaps instead of getting rid of it altogether - it will be of great benefit to nature, particularly in spring and autumn.



Bats and **birds** may **roost** and nest in your woodland, particularly in old or hollow trees. Rotting wood also plays host to a whole variety of insect and fungal life.

The **ink-cap mushroom** or '**lawyer's wig**' is also visible in October. The ink-cap is one of a number of mushrooms that stuns and digests nematode worms using underground hyphae - a carnivorous mushroom!

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TIPS FOR THE MONTH!



Climate

Energy is a significant cost on Irish farms, both to the climate and the farmer.



Check out www.smartfarming.ie for tips on how to reduce your on-farm energy footprint this winter.



Pollinators

Most **bumblebees** have gone into hibernation by now, but you may still spot some pollinators out and about stocking up for the winter.



It's the perfect time to plant some pollinator friendly bulbs such as **crocus**, **grape hyacinth** and **allium** in gardens or around the yard or farm entrance. These will provide a great food source for pollinators and a welcome splash of colour in spring!



Water quality

Slowing the flow of water is one of the best ways to reduce nutrient loss on farmland.

Drainage channels act as **connecting corridors**, moving contaminants quickly across the land and into watercourses. Is there a bottleneck in this drainage system where you could install a **wetland**? A wetland will **slow the flow**, allowing nutrients to be absorbed and sediment to be filtered by plant life before the water reaches watercourses. Wetlands are also great habitats for birds and insects!



Planting hedgerows or stands of trees on exposed land and steep slopes can also be a great way to **slow the flow** and prevent erosion and nutrient loss. At the same time, these trees will improve soil quality, boost biodiversity and provide food and shelter for livestock!



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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

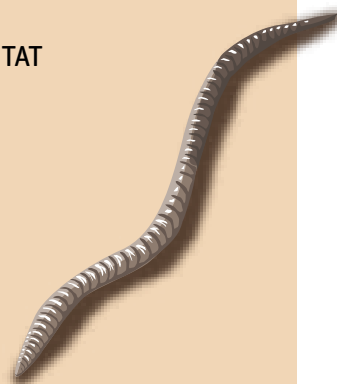
www.birdwatchireland.ie

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

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.

