

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.

Advice for dog walkers

Don't take your dog into fields where there are lambs, calves or other young animals. Dogs can worry young farm animals and cows can be aggressive when protecting their calves. Going into a field with ewes and lambs may cause the lamb to separate from its mother. 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. Pay attention to any local signage that may ask you to temporarily take an alternative route.

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.