

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 that are being overwintered, 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 and forestry

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

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 away from forest machinery and be aware that there may be heavy timber lorries on the tracks you are using. Do not climb on timber stacks as they are dangerous if the timber rolls.

Conservation

Birds will be taking advantage of unharvested crops for winter feeding and shelter. Do not linger if you are disturbing birds – listen for their alarm calls which can be an indication they are being disturbed.

Help to minimise disturbance to land managers 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 if you're out walking, cycling or horse riding in these areas.

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.