

# 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!

## 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 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.