

Countryside Calendar – March



Sheep and Lambs © Lorne Gill SNH

Livestock

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

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)

Cattle - 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

Advice for dog owners

- 1. Fields where there are sheep.** Whenever possible it's best to avoid going near sheep. Dogs can cause unnecessary worry that may contribute to the premature death of sheep as well as any unborn lambs. If you need to go into a field of sheep, keep your dog on a short lead or close at heel and keep your distance from the animals. In more open country, when there are sheep around, keep your dog close at heel and keep your distance from them. This advice also applies to other farm animals.
- 2. Don't take your dog into a field where there are lambs, calves and other young animals.** 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, for example in open country around crofting areas in north west Scotland, keep your dog on a short lead if there are lambs around, and keep your distance from them.

3. Remember that a farmer has the right to shoot a dog caught worrying his livestock. Don't get your dog a bad name or risk being guilty of a criminal offence. For more information on responsible dog walking check out the Scottish Outdoor Access Code at jessthehog.org.uk.

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.