Out & About in Springtime!

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Out and About in Springtime!

The days are growing longer, the weather growing warmer and with this, our desire to be outside enjoying the fresh air, nature, wildlife and our beautiful British countryside.

We’ve pulled together lots of ideas, information and guidance to get the most from being outdoors, including activities to do with the family and walking etiquette - where you can go and what to look out for when you’re out and about!

If you’re keen to learn more about farming & the countryside visit a LEAF Open Farm Sunday event in June.

Farmers will be explaining what’s going on, what’s growing in the fields and what breed of animals you’ve seen on your adventures!

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Hundreds of farmers across Britain and 27 countries around the globe are members of LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming). For more than 30 years LEAF has been committed to driving change and focused on delivering more sustainable farming, through the adoption of Integrated Farm Management. Find out more here
Visiting the countryside is a wonderful opportunity for everyone to get some fresh air, exercise, watch wildlife, relax and have fun! Farmers manage around 70% of UK land and they welcome responsible visitors, but do you know where you can go to walk, cycle or go horse-riding?

**Accessing the countryside:**

Visiting the countryside is a wonderful opportunity for everyone to get some fresh air, exercise, watch wildlife, relax and have fun! Farmers manage around 70% of UK land and they welcome responsible visitors, but do you know where you can go to walk, cycle or go horse-riding?

**Scotland**

Scotland’s access legislation is different to the rest of the UK. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code gives visitors the rights to access most land and inland water for a whole range of non-motorised outdoor activities, as long as you behave responsibly. Put simply:

- Take responsibility for your own actions
- Respect the interests of other people
- Care for the environment.


**England and Wales**

In England and Wales, visitors can explore networks of footpaths, bridleways, byways, national trails and some open access land, by following the **Countryside Code** which applies to all routes. Respect. Protect. Enjoy!

**Respect other people**

- Be considerate to those living in, working in and enjoying the countryside
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Do not block access to gateways or driveways when parking
- Be nice, say hello, share the space
- Follow local signs and keep to marked paths unless wider access is available

**Protect the natural environment**

- Take all your litter home, leave no trace of your visit
- Take care with BBQs and do not light fires
- Always keep dogs under control and in sight
- Dog poo - bag it and bin it, any public waste bin will do
- Care for nature – do not cause damage or disturbance

**Enjoy the outdoors**

- Check your route and local conditions
- Plan your adventure – know what to expect and what you can do
- Enjoy your visit, have fun, make memories

*Read the full Countryside Code [here](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-code)*
Keeping on track! Signs to follow:

Grass covered fields may look like a huge recreation area, but the countryside is carefully managed by farmers – it’s their livelihood. When you’re out and about in England and Wales, here is a guide to help you keep on track!

**Footpath**
Open to *walkers* only, waymarked with a yellow arrow

**Bridleway**
Open to *walkers, horse-riders & cyclists*, waymarked with a blue arrow

**Restricted Byway**
Open to *walkers, cyclists, horse-riders & horse-drawn vehicles*, waymarked with a purple arrow.

**Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)**
Open to *walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, horse-drawn vehicles, & motor vehicles*, waymarked with a red arrow.

**National Trail Acorn**
Identifies 15 long distance routes in England and Wales and the England Coast Path. All are open for walking and some trails are also suitable for cyclists, horse-riders and people with limited mobility.
Check the National Trail website at [www.nationaltrail.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk) for information including maps, trip planning tools and trail diversions.

**Open Access land**
We’re lucky that throughout the UK there is 865,000 hectares of mountain, moorland, heathland, down land and registered common land (mapped under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) available for people to walk, run, explore, climb and watch wildlife, without having to stay on paths.
There are estimated to be **140,000 miles** (225,000km) of footpaths and other public rights of way, in England and Wales, plus **9,300 miles** (15,000km) in Scotland. ([Source: BBC](https://www.bbc.co.uk))

Farmers are responsible for the upkeep of a large proportion of these paths, keeping them clear from overgrown hedges, clearing routes through the middle of a crop, and ensuring there are footpath friendly gates that are accessible for all in areas where livestock might be grazing.

**Don’t forget, farmers use this land to make a living, so being courteous and following the code is essential!**

Jake Freestone is farm manager at Overbury Enterprises - an arable and sheep farm which is also a LEAF Demonstration Farm. Set within the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, on the historic slopes of Bredon Hill on the Worcestershire/Gloucestershire border, Jake has responsibility to manage...

45km of footpaths and bridleways
25km hedgerows
24km stonewalls!
Be prepared!

Here’s a few top tips for those of you thinking about venturing out into the countryside, to keep both your feet dry and the land accessible for years to come!

- **Think about footwear!** Unless we’re in a heatwave, ground conditions are bound to be a little damp underfoot in places. A path which starts off dry and firm can soon turn muddy - the chances are you’ll need waterproof footwear that can cope with lots of mud and puddles!

- **Stick to the footpath at all times.** Most footpaths are clearly signposted, and all are labelled on a map. Take a map with you, or download a walking app, and if you’re unsure, ask someone for guidance. Most footpaths run through private land, and lots of damage can be done if you stray off course!

- **Keep on track!** If the designated track you’re on is muddy, don’t stray off course to find dryer ground, this can be extremely damaging to the surrounding crop, widens the footpath to unreasonable widths and encourages others to follow your step.

- **Keep your dog on a lead.** If you take your dog with you, remember to keep it on a lead or under very close control! Your dog may be well behaved at home and mean no harm, but you never know what’s in the next field. This guidance is in place to protect your dog as much as to protect livestock and wildlife, such as ground nesting birds. Remember you are walking across someone else’s property, and you should therefore be courteous towards this.

- **Bag it, bin it!** Picking up your dog poo is so important because dog faeces left in fields containing cattle can expose cows to a parasitic infection – this can lead to early abortions or infect their young.

- **what3words app** If ever you need rescuing, the what3words App could be a lifesaver. What3words has divided the globe into 3m squares and given each one a unique 3 word address. When needed:
  1. Tap the locate button to find the 3 word address for your current location (It works offline – ideal for areas with unreliable data connection)
  2. Share your 3 word address over the phone to the call handler.
  3. The emergency service can then coordinate a response directly to the exact location where help is needed.
Enjoy the outdoors with the family: Fun ideas to keep everyone engaged on your adventures.

There are lots of fun games and ideas that can keep everyone entertained whilst out in the fresh air. Walking for miles via public routes isn’t for everyone, however some of these activities are achievable in your local park, your regular dog walking route or even on your way to school or work!

• **Work your way through the alphabet, identifying items of nature!** E.g. A = acorn, B = butterfly, C = caterpillar etc.

• **A scavenger hunt** Write a list of items / colours / sounds that need to be identified on the walk. Tick them off as you go, you could even take photos of the items to create a scrapbook of your walk when you get home.

• **Throw and catch pine cones!** Nature provides us with some wonderful natural resources, make use of them - have a game of catch with a pine cone! See who can find the longest stick, the tallest tree?

• **Geocaching** Download a geocaching app and use GPS to go on a treasure hunt, discovering small waterproof treasure boxes that have been hidden.

• **A bug hunt!** Take a magnifying glass and ask your children to identify different insects, spiders, and beetles they might come across outside.

• **Map reading** Bring a map with you and encourage each member to check you are on track; determine the next path to take whilst developing map reading skills.

There are more fun activities for children to do outdoors in the LEAF Education ‘Springtime activities’ booklet, available [here](#).
What can you see in the countryside?

Can you identify these six plants and wildlife that we share the landscape with?

1. **Grey Squirrel**
   The grey squirrel is not native to the UK. It was introduced in the 1800s. Classified as an invasive, non-native species here, the Grey Squirrel is considered responsible for the decline in the red squirrel. You can identify the grey squirrel by its grey fur, with brown face and pale underside. A bushy tail and small ears.

2. **Bluebells**
   From early April to May, the sight of masses of bluebells carpeting many woodlands and hedgerows is one of the wonders of Springtime. The stunning sea of beautiful blue flowers and sweet perfume is unforgettable. These nectar rich flowers are also invaluable as a food source for many species of insects.

3. **Ash tree**
   Ash trees are the third most common trees found in woodlands, hedgerows and urban parks across the UK. They’re identifiable by their leaf structure (see picture), often one of the last trees in full leaf. Ash trees are currently suffering from a disease called Chalara Ash Dieback, a fungal disease which is thought to have come from Europe.

4. **A bird of prey**
   Buzzards, unlike most birds of prey are often seen actively hunting for their prey during the day – can you spot one whilst out in the countryside?
   They’re large brown birds, with broad, round wings and short tail.
5. **A damselfly**

Active throughout spring and summer, and commonly found near water sources, but often seen in other areas too. Bright in colour, with large eyes, elongated body and two sets of long, translucent wings.

A damselfly can be identified from a dragonfly by the way they rest their wings when stationary. A damselfly will rest their wings along their body, whereas a dragonfly will keep their wings spread.

6. **3 different types of grass!**

Yorkshire fog, cocksfoot and fescues are all common types of grass you might find in meadows or along the edge of footpaths. Can you spot the difference between the three?

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**LEAF Demonstration Farms:**

**Nonington Farms** is a 400 acre family owned arable farm set within the stunning landscape of the Garden of England. Owned and managed by James and Emma Loder-Symonds, they grow a range of LEAF Marque certified combinable crops working to their values of Learn, Grow, Protect.

Virtually visit Nonington Farms at 2pm on LEAF Online Farm Sunday, 28th March. If you miss the live tour a recording will be available [here](#).

**Duncan Farrington, Bottom Farm:** The Farrington family has been farming in Northamptonshire for four generations - managed by father and son, Robert and Duncan Farrington. Bottom Farm is an arable enterprise growing combinable crops.

Let Duncan take you on a virtual tour [here](#).
Hedge cutting: seasons and reasons!

Why do farmers cut hedges?
Over the winter months, whilst out and about in the countryside you might come across a big piece of farm machinery cutting the hedges. It is useful for road users, allowing you to have better visibility and preventing the hedge from reducing road width.

Hedge cutting happens for similar reasons in farmland, to keep them the right size, shape and to prevent invasion of farmland used for grazing animals or growing crops. It’s also important to keep hedges thick and full – if not cut, hedges over time will grow into a row of trees! Thick, full hedges act as good barriers for livestock, but also provide excellent protection for lots of wildlife such as dormice. Low growing plants, overshadowed by expanding hedges, are given a new lease of life when hedgerows are trimmed so that sunlight can once again reach them. Hedge cutting for farmers in the UK is prohibited between 1st March and 31st August to protect nesting birds, insects, small mammals and other wildlife species that are prevalent in hedgerow habitats during the spring and summer months, alongside rare plant species often found in hedgerows. It is advised that farmers cut their hedges in the winter months as opposed to the Autumn to allow birds and other animals to make use of the berries and nuts as food sources.

Do farmers cut hedges every year?
Some farmers will only cut hedges every few years, others will be consistent and cut their hedges every autumn or winter. There are advantages and disadvantages to both, many native bird species like open, short hedges for their nests, and will not settle in large, overgrown hedges.

However, lots of wildlife relies on new growth to lay eggs and to feed on, which is lost when hedge cutting takes place. Flowers also often stem from new growth, so hedges that are cut every year often have fewer wildflowers, which in turn can be detrimental to insect life.
Thank you to our Sponsors:

Dates for your diary:

LEAF Open Farm Sunday
27th June 2021
Visit a farm on farming’s annual open day!

LEAF Online Farm Sunday
28th March & 26th September 2021
Two information packed programmes of live virtual farm tours to meet farmers across Britain.

LEAF Virtual Farm Visits
First Sunday of each month, broadcast live on our Facebook

Sunday 7th April
Sion Williams, spring lambs in Scotland

Sunday 2nd May
Ian Collinson, cut flowers in Norfolk

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If you're keen to support the leading sustainable farming charity, LEAF, become a member of LEAF or donate here.