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## Julia Bradbury's Countryside Skills

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# Land Girls



Millions of us tune into Countryfile, the BBC's slice of rural life every Sunday. But which of its stars is a dab hand on a dairy farm and who prefers heels to wellies? Hannah Bass grilled Helen, Julia and Katie to find out just how "country" they really are...

## So, tell us Katie...

Did you grow up in the countryside? Always, whether it was Hampshire, Wiltshire, Sierra Leone or Uganda. Where do you live now? London. I'm happy here because I can get out into the countryside easily, but I don't look out of my window onto a lovely view — I look onto other buildings! Where's your favourite place in the UK? Tieve, an island in the Scottish Hebrides. I've been going on holiday there pretty much every year since I was born. The beaches have the finest shell sand and, in the summer, the grass behind the sand dunes is covered in flowers. What do you love most about the British countryside? The seasons. I particularly love autumn, when the leaves are falling from the trees. Do you have a favourite memory from filming Countryfile? Going ice climbing in the Lake District, near Scafell Pike. They told me that the climb would only be about as high as my living room — which would have been true if my living room were the size of Westminster Abbey! But being alone among the elements was just incredible. What's the hardest thing about doing the show? I don't do half as much filming as the other girls, so it's always just a complete joy — a lovely day out experiencing the best of Britain. Can you milk a cow? No, but I'd love to. Can you ride a horse? I can barely sit on a horse. I can ride an elephant, though. If you were lost in the wilderness, would you be able to forage for food? I once made dandelion bjaigs on

Countryfile, so I'd happily give those another go. Can you cook on an Aga? I have done. But I can't promise it would be of Masterchef quality! Wellies or heels? Wellies, definitely — sometimes I even wear them in London. I can't walk in heels. Do you have any animals of your own? No pets, but I'd love a massive tank full of exotic fish.

**'I can barely sit on a horse. I can ride an elephant, though'**

Could you catch a fish? I've caught male perch with a line in Uganda. Are you a 'twitchee'? I do a bit in Treet and I'm not bad at identifying different species. But there are three things I'm looking forward to getting really into when my kids are older: stargazing, gardening and birdwatching. Do you think the countryside is becoming "cool" again? Definitely, and I think Countryfile is great for people who are just becoming interested in it. It's not just about farming — we look at all different activities like outdoor sports, mountain climbing, walking, cycling, the National Trust... There's so much to get involved in.



**Katie Knapman**

## So, tell us Julia...

Did you grow up in the countryside? Both the countryside and the city — my parents worked in Sheffield but our family home was in Rutland, in the middle of England. Where do you live now? London, but I get back to my



**Julia Bradbury**

Rutland whenever I can. My parents still live in the 400-year-old rectory I grew up in, so that feels like home. Where's your favourite place in the UK? The Lake District — it's one of the most beautiful places in the world. What do you love most about the British countryside? Village life, where everyone knows each other. Do you have a favourite memory from working on Countryfile? Filming a story in the Golden Valley in Wales, about blue butterflies that had been brought back from extinction. I was sitting there talking about this great butterfly comeback and suddenly one flutters right into our line of vision! You can stake out wildlife for weeks and weeks and not capture a moment like that. What's the hardest thing about doing the show? The travel. I have a suitcase permanently on my landing, packed and ready to go. Can you milk a cow? I've milked cows, camels, goats... You name it, I've milked it! Can you ride a horse? I'm not a natural horsewoman — let's

**'I'd probably kill myself with the first mushroom!'**

turned up and nobody complained about the rain. It could only happen in this country! What's the hardest thing about doing the show? Competing against Matt Baker! Can you milk a cow? Yes, although it's funny — no dairy farmers actually milk cows by hand so I've only learned to do it recently on the show. Can you ride a horse? My uncle was a jockey and my grandad used to breed Clydesdales, so I've always been around horses. I had a Shetland pony called Bonnie from the age of two — when I got too big for her, I walked her around on a lead like a dog. If you were lost in the wilderness, could you forage for food? I'd like to think I could forage for berries and rhubarb, but I wouldn't risk the mushrooms. Can you cook on an Aga? I learned to cook on one in our farmhouse in Cumbria. Wellies or heels? Muckers, which are like little wellies. Do you have any animals? A cross-breed dog called Barney who's on Blue Peter with me. And I'm hoping to get a rescue donkey soon.



**Helen Skelton**

Could you catch a fish? Yes, I learned that in the Amazon, but nearly cut my thumb off gutting the fish. Are you a 'twitchee'? No, but I do have a bird feeder in my garden, so give me a few years... Do you think the countryside is becoming "cool" again? Massively! Now people think it's amazing if you've managed to grow and produce something.

put it that way! Last time I rode a horse was in Mongolia for Children In Need. Mongolian horses are very small and fast with a strange, comely gait that I found very uncomfortable — I called them devil ponies. Matt Baker, of course, was like a cowboy riding off into the distance... If you were lost in the wilderness, would you be able to forage for food? I'd probably kill myself with the first mushroom! Can you cook on an Aga? No, Agas drive me insane! Wellies or heels? Heels, because it means I'm somewhere warm. Do you have any animals? A badly-behaved family dog, Lotie. Could you catch a fish? My dad taught me how to catch trout with my bare hands. Are you a 'twitchee'? No; I think it's amazing that some people can identify a small black dot flying through the air at great speed. Do you think the countryside is becoming "cool" again? We're in the middle of a revival. Our countryside is so relevant — it's about food security, energy and preserving our beautiful landscape.

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