



NEWSLETTER: APRIL 2021

News

Welcome to the second month of the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme for 2021.

I know that some of you are impacted by Covid restrictions. Please don't worry if this is the case. The main thing is to try to get back to your walk as soon as restrictions allow. If that can happen, the longer term impacts should be minimal, particularly where you have a well established walk.

Remember new volunteers can join at anytime!

What happened in April 2020

- 76 transects were walked last April.
- While the maximum number of *individual* bees spotted on a walk last April was 46, the average number was 13 (this is almost double the average for April 2019).
- Many people were still seeing only queens – not workers yet. This is very normal.
- No one walked their transect without seeing any bumblebees last April. This is excellent, though likely to be a reflection of the very good weather we had in this month last year. It is possible to walk a zero bumblebee transect in April, depending on the weather conditions. However, where at all possible, you should try to choose a day when some bees are flying.
- Winner for last April with most variety, was Karina Dingerkus who spotted 7 different queens: *B. hortorum*, *B. lapidarius*, *B. lucorum*, *B. pascuorum*, *B. pratorum*, *B. terrestris* and *B. sylvestris*. Most people spotted 2-5 species.
- April 2020 was unusual because the weather was so good! Top recorded in order were: *Bombus terrestris* queens (recorded on 80% of all transects), *B. lucorum* queens (71%), *B. pascuorum* queens (61%), *B. lucorum* agg. (36%), *B. pratorum* queens (32%), *B. lapidarius* queens (29%) and *B. hortorum* queens (18%). We also had first sightings of *B. jonellus* and *B. muscorum* as well as two of the cuckoo bumblebees (*B. bohemicus* and *B. sylvestris*). These were all recorded in very low numbers.
- The total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last April was 1017 (plus 157 honeybees). This is almost double the bumblebee total we had in April 2019 – again reflecting the good weather.

Tips & advice this month

- ✓ It can still be difficult to find suitable weather conditions to do your walk this month. Don't forget it should be above 13°C and at least 60% sunshine. If this simply isn't possible just try your best and record the conditions you did have.
- ✓ You are going to gradually start seeing more variety this month as widespread species like *B. lapidarius*, *B. hortorum*, *B. pascuorum* and *B. pratorum* come out of hibernation. It's not unusual to still only see queens, particularly if you do your walk earlier in the month.
- ✓ Cuckoo bumblebees can start to appear towards the end of April on some sites, but don't worry if you don't see them (I've never found them on my own walks). They are very rare overall. If you see something unusual, you can always try to get a photo and send it to me to check.

Common errors last April

- It would still be very unusual to see males yet, so be careful not to mistakenly identify these.
- Depending on the weather, you might start seeing workers of *B. lucorum* agg., *pratorum*, *pascuorum* or *hortorum*. Workers of other species are possible, but less likely.
- *B. muscorum* has only blonde hairs on the abdomen. It emerges a little later, so it would be unusual to see anything other than queens in April (if you're lucky enough to have this species on your route!).
- The very rare species like *B. distinguendus* or *B. sylvarum* emerge from hibernation later and are very unlikely to be spotted yet. Also remember that these are so rare that you will probably only see them if your transect is in an area where they are known to occur – mainly counties Clare and Mayo.
- Be careful with cuckoo bees. Those most likely to be spotted are *B. bohemicus* and *B. sylvestris*. Send a photo to check if you're not sure.

Important food plants in April

In April 2020, we received 458 casual bumblebee records that also stated what the bee was feeding on. Based on this data, bumblebees were foraging on over 90 different plant species last April. By far and away the most important was Dandelion, accounting for 40% of all the records! This was followed by garden heathers, Bush Vetch, Rosemary and Willow. If you're seeing something important or unusual on your walk this month, please submit a casual record and fill in the foraging box:

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/bumblebees>

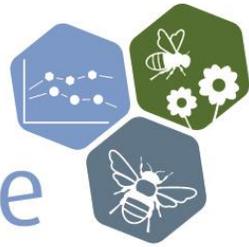


Photo of the month



This lovely photo of a *Bombus pratorum* queen was submitted this year by Janet Whelehan.

Interesting recent research

Existing species-rich and coastal grassland sites should be conserved, and other areas restored, for the Great Yellow Bumblebee in Ireland.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10841-021-00299-7>

If you are interested in getting a free copy of this paper contact Niamh Phelan directly at: nphelan@biodiversityireland.ie

Other things to keep an eye out for this month

Keep an eye out for the Grey Mining Bee (*Andrena cineraria*). This is one of our most distinctive solitary bees. It nests by making little burrows into bare soil. It is the only solitary bee that is black with two grey bands. Photos from left to right show the bee itself, its nest sites and what a good pollinator it is!



Jonathan Derham



Liz Gabbett



John Cullen



Workshops and upcoming events

All our events are still suspended until restrictions lift. I am happy to answer as many queries as you have by email and to look at any photographs you have for identification.

Free online course on identifying and monitoring bumblebees

Don't forget we have this free online resource. It should be especially useful for new volunteers. It not only helps you get familiar with our common bumblebees, but it also explains how to take part in the monitoring scheme, including how to log your route online and submit your monthly data. You can access it here:

<https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/projects/monitoring-scheme-initiatives/bumblebee-monitoring-scheme/identifying-irish-bumblebees-online-course>

We need more volunteers

Despite Covid, 2020 was a successful year. While a lot of people dabbled, we had 66 transects that were walked sufficient times to be included in the 2020 monitoring analyses (at least 6 out of 8). There are some walks that couldn't be walked due to Covid restrictions, that will hopefully come back on track as things improve. Also, some new people joined the scheme mid-way through and will hopefully come on stream with their data from this year. **This is an incredible achievement and we are very grateful to all of you.**

We also fully understand that sometimes unexpected events arise and it is simply impossible to achieve this target in a particular year. Where this happens, please do still persevere as the data is still very useful. The longer you've been in the scheme, the better able we are to cope with occasional monthly gaps in your walk data.

Our target is to get to 100 monitoring standard walks each year so we do still need to recruit many more volunteers over the coming years. If you know of anyone wishing to get involved with the monitoring scheme please forward this to them and/or encourage them to get in touch with us here in the Data Centre.

Thank you for all your efforts and for being generous enough with your time to take part in this important scheme.

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