



NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2021

News

Welcome to the start of the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme for 2021. We are still number crunching the 2020 data but will release an annual newsletter with the 2012-2020 trends later in the year.

In excellent news, it looks like 66 transects were walked at least 6 out of the 8 times in 2020. Another 18 of you managed to walk your route at least 4 times. This is an amazing achievement, given all the disruptions in 2020! I know that some of you were impacted by Covid restrictions. Please don't worry at all if that was 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.

What happened in March 2020

- 76 transects were walked last March.
- Nine people walked their transects and recorded no bees last March. This is normal, depending on where you are and the precise weather conditions at the time.
- While eleven walks had 10 or more *individual* bees, the average number spotted was 5. Most of us recorded between 1-5 queens (which is very normal).
- Most of us (myself included) saw between 1-3 different species, with lots of people just seeing *B. terrestris* and *B. lucorum* queens. The winner for last March with most variety was Mirelle McCall who had 5 different queens on one of her March walks!
- The most commonly spotted bumblebee was *B. terrestris* which was found on 59% of all transects. This was followed by *B. lucorum* which was found on 39%
- Top recorded in order were: *Bombus terrestris* queens, *B. lucorum* queens, *B. pascuorum* queens, *B. pratorum* queens, *Bombus lucorum* agg., *B. lapidarius* queens. There were a few queens of *B. hortorum* and *jonellus* and a small number of workers spotted towards the end of the month (*B. pascuorum*, *B. pratorum*, *B. hortorum*).
- Total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last March was 391 (plus 87 honeybees).

Tips & advice this month

- ✓ It can be difficult to find suitable weather conditions to do your first walk of the year. 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. Remember, the key target for your data to be of maximum use is to walk at least 6 of the 8 months (even if you don't see anything during the first and/or last months).
- ✓ I find this month tricky because often the healthy queens will be high on trees like Willow or Blackthorn and much harder to spot. Just record those that you are able to see clearly enough to identify.
- ✓ Last year, spring ran quite late and we did see slightly fewer numbers of bumblebees. This year it seems to be running more typically. If the milder weather holds, we should see good numbers of queens out of hibernation in March.

Common errors last March

- I can't find any errors in the March 2020 data! Congratulations to all who participated and submitted your sightings.
- Remember, it would be unusual to already spot a cuckoo bumblebee, although you may see *B. bohemicus* towards the very end of the month on certain sites. If spring runs a little early, that might be more likely this year.
- Remember you won't see males yet.

Important food plants

Based on the casual bumblebee data submitted to us across 2020, bumblebees were spotted feeding on around 40 different plant species last March. By far and away the top plant was Dandelion. This was followed by Garden Heather and Willow. If you're seeing something important or unusual on your walk this month, please submit a casual record and filling the foraging box:

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



Photo of the month



This lovely photo of *Bombus terrestris* was submitted last year by Andrew Malcolm.

Interesting recent research

This is not a cheery story, but I think it shows just how important schemes like the All-Ireland Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme are for helping us better understand what is happening in nature.

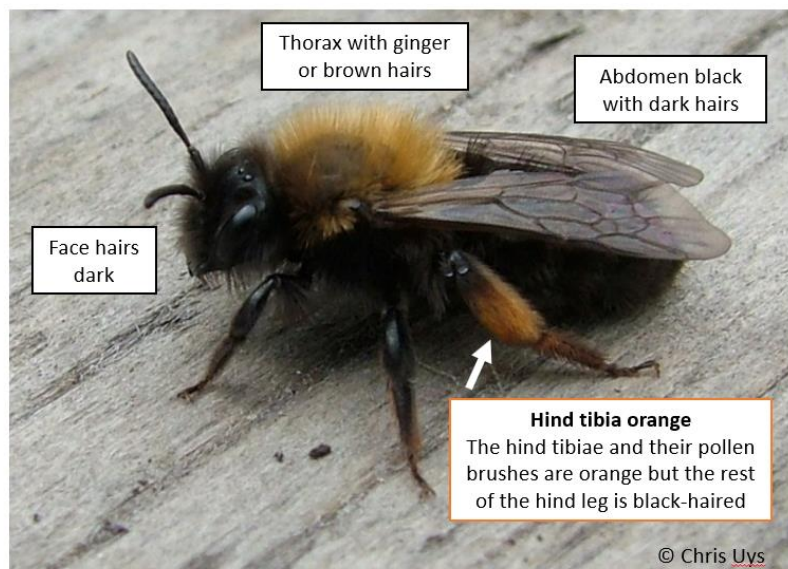
A quarter of known bee species haven't been seen since the 1990s:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/we-havent-seen-quarter-of-known-bee-species-since-1990s>

Other things to keep an eye out for this month

Slightly trickier one, but keep an eye out near Willow for this solitary bee towards the end of the month

Females of *Andrena clarkella* are distinctive



- ✓ Large solitary bee (11-15mm long)
- ✓ Spring flight period (March-June)
- ✓ Ground nesting
- ✓ Feeds on Willow



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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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