



NEWSLETTER: MAY 2021

News

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

I know that some of you are still 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 May 2020

- 82 transects were walked last May.
- While two people spotted more than 100 *individual* bumblebees on their walk last May, the average number was 22.
- Queens were still commonly observed last May. This is very normal.
- One person walked their transect and recorded no bees in May 2020. Where at all possible, you should try to choose a day when some bees are flying.
- I haven't picked winners for most variety on their May 2020 walk, as there were many people who all spotted a good diversity of species. The most common combination seems to have been *B. pratorum*, *B. pascuorum*, *B. lapidarius*, *B. hortorum* and *B. lucorum* agg.
- Top recorded in order for last May were: *Bombus lucorum* agg. (recorded on 73% of all transects), *B. pascuorum* workers (72%), *B. pratorum* workers (43%), *B. pascuorum* queens (40%), *B. terrestris* queens (39%), *B. lucorum* queens (33%), *B. hortorum* workers (24%), *B. lapidarius* workers (22%), *B. hortorum* queens (21%), *B. lapidarius* queens (20%), *B. pratorum* queens (18%) and *B. pratorum* males (10%).
- Also spotted in smaller numbers were *B. jonellus* (queens and workers), *B. muscorum* (queens and workers), *B. bohemicus* and *B. sylvestris*.
- The total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last May was 1767 (plus 349 honeybees). Figures are all up on May 2019, again probably reflecting the very good weather we had last April-May.

Tips & advice this month

- ✓ You should now be seeing more workers, but queens will still be around. Males of some earlier species will begin to be spotted, especially towards the end of the month.
- ✓ Many people find it difficult to tell *B. pascuorum* queens and workers apart. The queens are larger but it does take practice. The main thing is to try to be consistent.
- ✓ Don't forget *Bombus terrestris* workers should be recorded as *Bombus lucorum* agg. While we can distinguish *B. lucorum* and *B. terrestris* queens, it's not possible to reliably separate the workers by sight so both get recorded as *B. lucorum* agg.
- ✓ Cuckoo bumblebees may be around 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 May

- By far the most common error last May was mistakenly recording males. Some of you will definitely see *B. pratorum* males this month and possibly *B. lucorum* or *B. terrestris* males. While it's possible you might see other true males, it would still be a little unusual.
- Be careful not to confuse *B. pratorum* males for *B. lapidarius* males. Both have yellow faces and a yellow band on the thorax, but *B. pratorum* males also have a yellow band on the abdomen.
- Make sure that you don't confuse *B. pascuorum* and *B. muscorum*. If you're lucky enough to have *B. muscorum* on your route, all the hairs on the abdomen will be blonde.
- Be careful with very rare species. Often they are habitat specific or restricted to a particular geographic area. If you're not sure, I'm always very happy to check photographs for you. Be particularly careful with *B. sylvarum* and *B. monticola*.

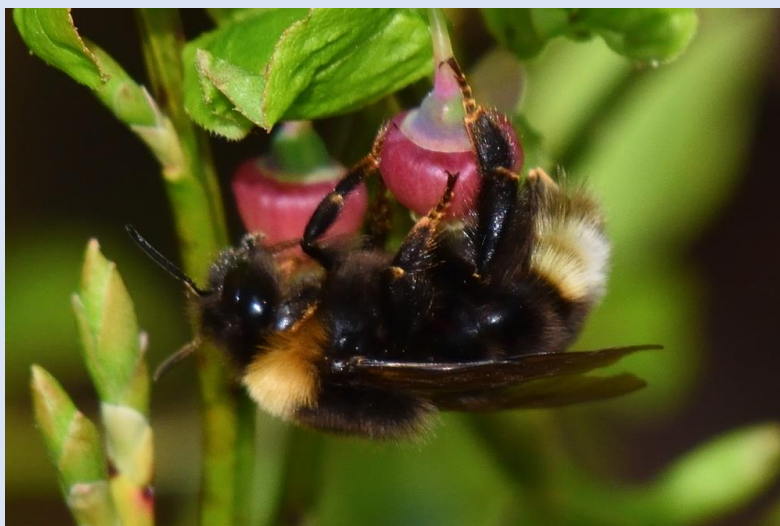
Important food plants in May

In May 2020, we received 493 casual bumblebee records that also stated what the bee was feeding on. Based on this data, bumblebees were foraging on over 130 different plant species last May. Bush Vetch was most common, followed by Dandelion, Cotoneaster, Apple Blossom, Red Clover & Bird's-foot-trefoil. 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 bohemicus* queen was submitted by Andrew Malcolm.

Interesting recent research

Weed killers should be redesigned to save bumblebees

<https://phys.org/news/2021-04-weed-killers-redesigned-bumblebees.html>

Other things to keep an eye out for this month

Andrena fulva is another of our most distinctive solitary bees – look out for deep red hairs on the thorax and orange hairs on the abdomen. The Tawny Mining bee was thought to be extinct for 87 years in Ireland, before being rediscovered in 2012. Currently only known from counties: Wicklow, Dublin, Kilkenny, Kildare, Tipperary and Down. Already in 2021, we’ve had first sightings from Carlow.

Females of the Tawny mining bee (*Andrena fulva*) are distinctive

© Sam Connolly

© Jonathan Sexton

© Anthony Slattery

Deep red hairs on the thorax

Orange hairs on the abdomen

Usually comes out of hibernation in early April and will be around until June. It nests by making little volcano-like burrows into bare soil. Most often found in gardens.

Bombus pascuorum

© Ralph Sheppard

Don't confuse with the Common carder bee (*Bombus pascuorum*). This very common bumblebee has a ginger thorax, ginger tail and some black hairs on its abdomen.

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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