



NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2022

News

Welcome to the start of the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme for 2022. We are still number crunching the 2021 data but will release an annual report with the 2012-2021 trends over the coming months.

In excellent news, **2021 was the best year we have ever had within the scheme!** An incredible 84 transects were walked at least 6 out of the 8 times. This is an increase of 18 from 2020, and occurred in spite of lingering Covid restrictions.

I cannot thank you all enough. Nor can I stress how much this level of commitment strengthens our ability to track bumblebees. Our aim has always been to try to get to a consistent 100 walks each year. It is fantastic, that thanks to your generosity, it now feels within touching distance!

What happened in March 2021

- 79 transects were walked last March.
- Twenty people walked their transects and recorded no bumblebees last March. While this is unusually high, it is still normal and can occur in years when spring is running late or weather conditions are poor across the month.
- While eleven walks had 10 or more *individual* bees, the average number spotted was 4.
- Six walks recorded four different queens last March. Most of us (myself included) saw between 1-3 different species, with lots of people just seeing *B. terrestris* and *B. lucorum* queens.
- Top recorded in order were:
 - Bombus terrestris* queens (recorded on 61% of all transects)
 - B. lucorum* queens (47%)
 - B. pratorum* queens (22%)
 - B. pascuorum* queens (18%)
 - B. lapidarius* queens (11%)
 - B. lucorum* agg. (8%)

There were also a very small number of *B. hortorum* and *B. jonellus* queens spotted. Apart from *B. lucorum* agg. there were no other workers recorded last March, another indication that spring 2021 ran quite late.

- Total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last March was 308 (plus 181 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.
- ✓ In March, you are going to predominantly see queens. Of the 308 bumblebees spotted across all walks last year, 96% were queens! This is particularly high given the late spring, but they will always predominate this month. Of the workers, *B. lucorum* agg. is the one most likely to be spotted.
- ✓ Rarer species like *B. muscorum* or *B. sylvarum* will be very unlikely to have emerged from hibernation this month. It is also unusual to see cuckoos, unless spring runs very early.
- ✓ Remember you won't see males yet.

Common errors last March

- I can't find any significant errors in the March 2021 data! Congratulations to all who participated and submitted your sightings.
- There were a few small input errors. This is easily done – make sure you add your abundance against the correct species in the table when entering your data online.

Important food plants

Based on the casual bumblebee data submitted to us across 2021, bumblebees were spotted feeding on around 45 different plant species last March. The top plants were Dandelion & Garden Heather, followed by Willow, Flowering Currant, Rosemary, Mahonia and Crocus. 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 a *Bombus pratorum* queen was submitted last year by Jimmy Goodwin.

Interesting recent research

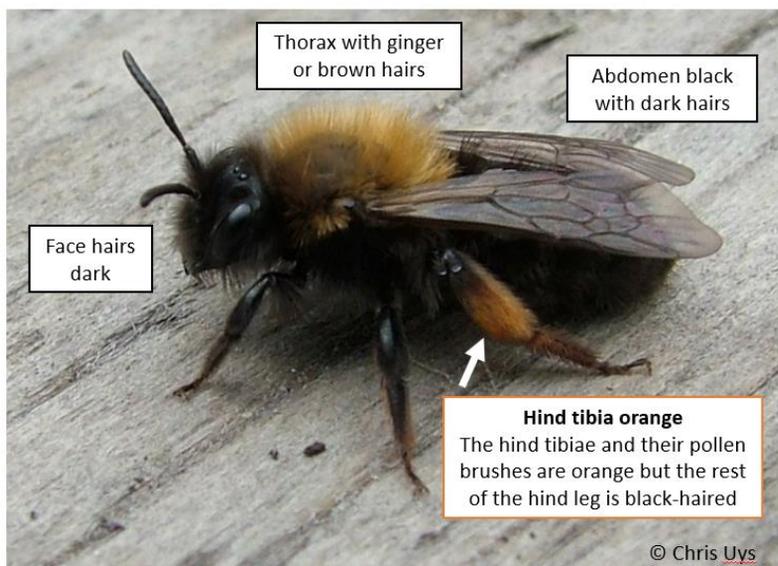
It makes sense, but researchers show that a balanced pollen diet reduces the negative effects of parasitic infestation for bumblebees:

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220124/Balanced-pollen-diet-reduces-the-negative-effects-of-parasitic-infestation-for-bumblebees.aspx>

Other things to keep an eye out for this month

I've kept this challenging one for 2022! 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

While we might not yet return to pre-Covid levels, I am hoping that we can have a few workshops again in 2022. I'll bring you the dates as they are arranged. I am still more than 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://biodiversityireland.ie/identifying-irish-bumblebees/lesson.html>

We need more volunteers

2021 was our most successful year to date, with 84 transects that were walked at least 6 of the 8 months. Some new volunteers joined the scheme during the year and their data will hopefully come fully on board from 2022. **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 the target of at least 6 walks in a particular year. Where this happens, please do still persevere as the data is still extremely useful. The longer you've been in the scheme, the better we are able to statistically account for 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 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 me.

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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