



NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2023

Welcome to the start of the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme for 2023.

In excellent news, **2022 was the best year we have ever had within the scheme!** An incredible **90** transects were walked at least 6 out of the 8 times. 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. Thanks to your generosity, we are getting closer and closer to this target!

What happened in March 2022

- 96 transects were walked last March.
- Eleven people walked their transects and recorded no bumblebees last March. This is normal for the first month in the scheme.
- Thirty-one walks had 10 or more *individual* bees last March, and the average number spotted was 7.5. This is unusually high and is reflective of an early spring with warm and sunny weather in the second half of March 2022.
- Two walks recorded six different queens last March and nine walks recorded 4 different queens. 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 75% of all transects)
 - B. lucorum* queens (54%)
 - B. pratorum* queens (23%)
 - B. lucorum* agg. (20%)
 - B. pascuorum* queens (20%)
 - B. lapidarius* queens (7%)
 - B. hortorum* queens (7%)

There were also a very small number of *B. jonellus*, *B. hypnorum* & *B. bohemicus* queens spotted. Apart from *B. lucorum* agg. there were no other workers recorded last March.

- The total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last March was 718 (plus 182 honeybees). This is more than double the number of individuals bumblebees spotted in March 2021. This, and many of the figures reported here for March 2022, are higher than normal reflecting the early spring last year.

Tips and 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 718 bumblebees spotted across all walks last year, over 90% were queens! Queens will always predominate at this stage in the season. 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

- The most important thing to remember is that it would be unusual to see workers other than *B. lucorum* agg. If you think you've spotted one, check it carefully. It is too early to see males this month.
- 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 2022, bumblebees were spotted feeding on around 65 different plant species last March. The top plants were Dandelion & Garden Heather, followed by Willow, Rosemary, Crocus & Flowering Currant. 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>

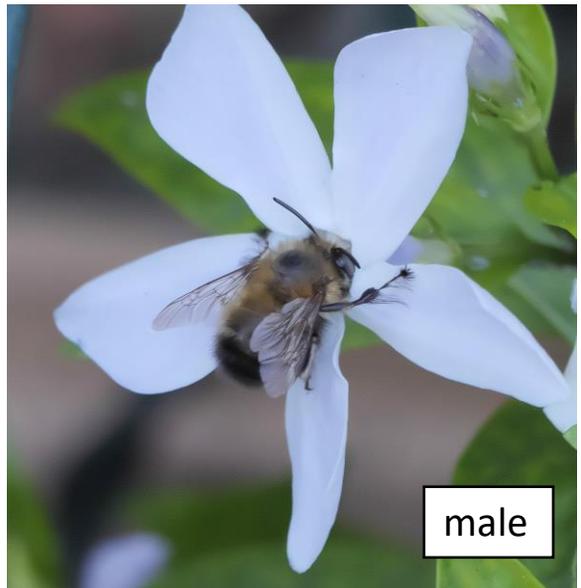


Photo of the month

This lovely photo of a *Bombus pratorum* queen was sent to us by Holly Grogan.



Other things to keep an eye out for this month - Hairy-footed Flower Bee



This **solitary** bee was first spotted in Ireland by Mary Molloy in Harold's Cross, Dublin last March. The Hairy-footed Flower Bee is a large, bumblebee-sized species. It is one of the first solitary bees to emerge in spring, coming out of hibernation in late February or early March. Males emerge first and after about two weeks, the first females will be spotted. The males and females are very different to each other. The female resembles a small black bumblebee with distinctive orange hairs on the hind leg. In Britain, it shows a preference for Lungwort. Males have light brown/ginger hairs all over their body and cream markings on their face. They also have distinctive long orange hairs on their middle legs and feet, which is where the species gets its name. It can resemble *Bombus pascuorum*, but their quick darting flight motion is a good way to tell them apart from bumblebees. Keep an eye out and send a photo if you think you find any new populations this spring!

Interesting recent research

Bumblebees have become the first known insects to “play”

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ball-rolling-bumble-bees-just-wanna-have-fun/>

Workshops and upcoming events

Information on any relevant workshops and events will be released across the year. There will be a National Biodiversity Data Centre workshop on bumblebees for beginners on Sunday the 16th April in Harold’s Cross, Dublin.

This is part of the main workshop programme and can be booked here:

<https://events.eventzilla.net/e/monitoring-and-identifying-bumblebees-for-beginners-2138597571>

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 still need more volunteers

2022 was our most successful year to date, with 90 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 2023. **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 your generosity in taking part in this scheme

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<https://biodiversityireland.ie/surveys/bumblebee-monitoring-scheme/>