



NEWSLETTER: MAY 2023

Welcome to the third month of the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme for 2023. We are still number crunching the 2022 data but will release an annual report with the 2012-2022 trends over the coming months.

Remember new volunteers can join at anytime!

What happened in May 2022

- 98 transects were walked last May.
- Five people had over 40 individual bumblebees on their walk. However, the average number was 16 (this is typical for May).
- Queens were still commonly observed last May. This is very normal.
- Four people walked their transect and recorded no bees in May 2022. At this time of year, where at all possible, you should try to choose a day when some bees are flying.
- Many people spotted a good diversity of species on their May walk last year. 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 pascuorum* workers (recorded on 70% of all transects), *B. lucorum* agg. (61%), *B. terrestris* queens (47%), *B. pascuorum* queens (43%), *B. lucorum* queens (36%), *B. pratorum* workers (32%), *B. hortorum* workers (19%), *B. hortorum* queens (17%), *B. lapidarius* queens (17%), *B. lapidarius* workers (17%), *B. pratorum* queens (13%), and *B. pratorum* males (7%).
- Also spotted in smaller numbers were *B. jonellus* (queens and workers), *B. muscorum* (queens and workers), *B. bohemicus* and *B. sylvestris*. *B. hypnorum* workers were spotted on a small number of transects in N. Ireland. One *B. sylvarum* queen was spotted on a walk in the Burren.
- The total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last May was 1,553 (plus 305 honey bees).

Tips and advice this month

- ✓ You should now be seeing more workers, but queens will still be around. Males of some earlier species may 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 be 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.
- Be careful not to confuse *B. lapidarius* and *B. ruderarius* females. Both are jet black with a red tail. *B. lapidarius* has black hairs on the hind leg and in *B. ruderarius* they are red. *B. ruderarius* is very rare.

Important food plants

Based on the casual bumblebee data submitted to us across 2022, bumblebees were spotted feeding on around 40 different plant species last May. Top plants were Bush Vetch, Dandelion, Clover and Catmint. 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>



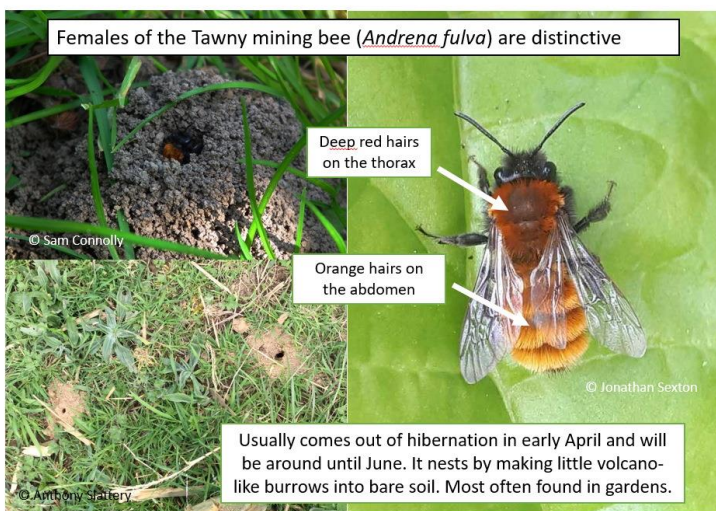
Photo of the month

This lovely photo of a *Bombus hortorum* queen was sent to us by Carol Gilroy. You can clearly see the long face.



Other things to keep an eye out for this month - Tawny Mining Bee

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, Carlow and Down. Can you add a new county in 2023?



Interesting recent research

Sunflower pollen is good for bumblebee health!

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2368862-the-spiky-shape-of-sunflower-pollen-may-clear-bee-guts-of-parasite/>

Workshops and upcoming events

Information on any relevant workshops and events will be released across the year.

Save the date: we are hoping to run a wild bee festival in Tralee on the 12 & 13th August. This will include various workshops and walks, including on bumblebee identification and monitoring. Booking will open closer to the time.

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/>