

The National Biodiversity Data Centre has set a challenge for farmers to record some of the amazing biodiversity found on your farm during the year. We have 40 species for you to record.

Are you up for the challenge?

Species: Common knapweed

Scientific Name: *Centaurea nigra*

Irish name: Mínscoth

Group

1 of the 367 plant species belonging to the Asteraceae family.

Irish Wildflowers at

Wildflower Knapweed, Common Irish Wild Flora Wildflowers of Ireland

How common on farms

Biodiversity surveys were carried out across 40 farms within the National Biodiversity Data Centre's 'Protecting Farmland Pollinators' EIP project (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators/>). The 40 farms were chosen to reflect farms of differing types and intensity levels. Common knapweed was recorded on four of the 40 farms.

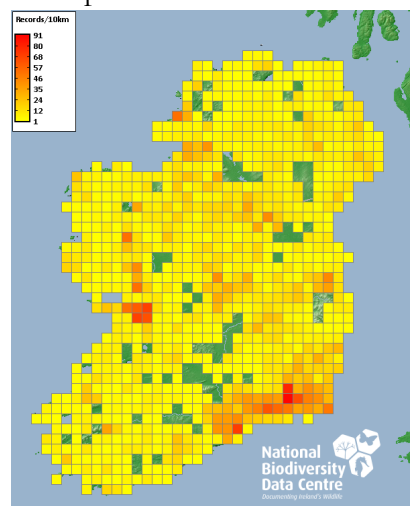


Identification Tips

- Resembles a thistle without any of the prickles.
- Reddish-purple 2-4cm flowerheads and a swollen base of blackish bracts.
- Each flower is solitary or in branched clusters.
- Grey-green lanceolate leaves grow alternatively up a stiff stem.
- Can grow to a height of 1m.

Distribution

Widespread and common.



Source: The Common knapweed records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023.

Biodiversity Tip No. 23

Encourage Common knapweed in non-farmed areas, field margins, buffer strips, etc.

Retain and maintain permanent pasture (semi-natural grassland).



Conservation Status

Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. An Irish Vascular Plant Red List was published in 2016.

It found that the Common knapweed was not threatened with extinction from the island of Ireland. Based on the Red List it is 'Least Concern'.

Management Tips

For Common knapweed:

Non-farmed areas (field margins, buffer strips, road or lane verges, etc.):

- Encourage patches of Common knapweed to flower and set seed.
- Leave Common knapweed patches until late October, as they provide a vital late food for pollinators.

Extensively grazed pasture:

- Graze pasture to maintain a diverse sward.

Low input grassland (LIG).

- Retain permanent pasture that is grazed and managed with low inputs.

Further Info

Knapweed comes from the Old Norse word 'knappr' meaning bud or knob.

It's common name is 'black knapweed' or 'hard head', as each flower is surrounded by a hard blackish whorl (in botany it's known as an involucre).

Common knapweed is a hardy perennial species and can spread easily.

They provide vital food for pollinators and are the top native plant source for nectar and pollen.

They provide (μl = microlitre):

6000 μl /day of nectar sugar

and

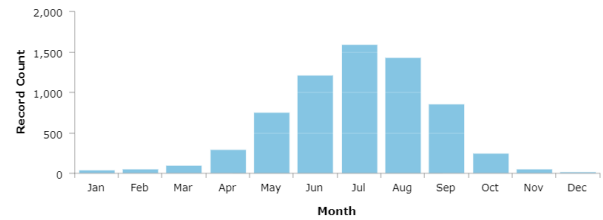
2,500 μl /day of pollen

Source: Plantlife UK.

When?

Common knapweed is in bloom from June to September.

Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland,
Common Knapweed, image, accessed August, 2023.
[Common Knapweed \(Centaurea nigra\) - Detail - Biodiversity Maps \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)

Where on the farm?

Common knapweed can be found in extensively managed pastures and meadows, also banks, roadsides, woodland rides and non-farmed areas.

They grow where the grass is not closely cropped. It is often abundant beside lakes and streams, especially where grazing animals have been fenced off from the margins.

Value

- Valuable plant for pollinators, especially bumblebees.
- Common knapweed is a positive grassland indicator plant used to assess if grassland is in 'good' condition, a sign that the grassland is semi-natural, not managed intensively and it has received only small amounts of fertilisers, herbicides, and other improvements.



White-tailed bumblebee feeding on Common knapweed.

Similar species

Can sometimes be confused with Greater knapweed and Meadow thistle.

Affected by a change in climate?

Extreme weather events, such as flooding may increase with climate change.

In wetland areas Common knapweed may be affected by increased flooding, when flood-tolerant species such as grasses and sedges increase, while wildflowers such as Common knapweed plummet.

Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:
pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie

Useful Links

Try our free online course on how to identify common bumblebees. It includes activities and quizzes to test your progress, and get feedback on answers: <https://learn.biodiversityireland.ie/courses/commonbumblebees>

There are also other free resources here:
<https://pollinators.ie/record-pollinators/id-guides/>



Six-spot Burnet moth feeding on Common knapweed.

Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your Early Bumblebee identification, you can submit your record:

- On our website at the National Biodiversity Data Centre: <https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/biodiversity-on-your-farm>



The Great Yellow Bumblebee *Bombus distinguendus*, one of our rare bumblebees depends on late flowering Common knapweed in the autumn.

[Great-Yellow-Bumblebee-Guidelines-2022-WEB.pdf](#)
(pollinators.ie)

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Bia agus Mara
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