

— BIODIVERSITY — on your Farm

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: Buff-tailed Bumblebee

Scientific Name: *Bombus terrestris*

Irish name: Bumbóg Earr-Dhonnbhúí

Group

1 of 21 bumblebee species in Ireland. The Buff-tailed Bumblebee is one of our six most common bumblebees.

Check out our Bumblebee poster:

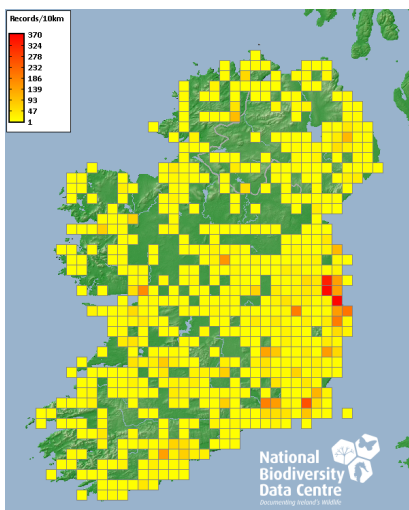
https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SE-29-NBDC-Bee-Poster-2019_EMAIL.pdf

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. Recorded as White-tailed Bumblebee complex *B. lucorum* agg. on 39 of the 40 farms.

Distribution

Widespread and very common.



Source: The Buff-tailed Bumblebee records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023.



Buff-tailed Bumblebee (Queen). Note: One orange/yellow band on the thorax and on the abdomen bands. Queens have a buff or off-white tail.

Identification Tips

- A large bumblebee, queens can be 20 mm in length.
- Queens can be distinguished from the very similar White-tailed bumblebee *B. lucorum* by their dark yellow-orange banding and buff coloured tail.
- It is not possible to distinguish the Buff-tailed bumblebee workers from those of the White-tailed bumblebee.
- Often the earliest queen to emerge from hibernation.

Biodiversity Tip No. 28

Ivy is a vital source of food for bumblebees in the autumn.

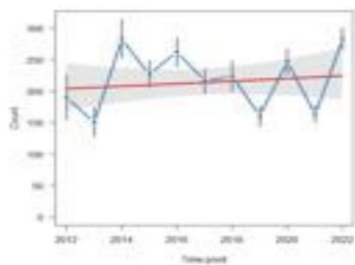
The new queens are building up their fat reserves before winter hibernation.



Conservation Status

Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. An Irish Bee Red List was published in 2006. Based on the Red List the Buff-tailed Bumblebee is 'Stable'.

Data from the All-Ireland Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/surveys/bumblebee-monitoring-scheme/>) suggest that the Buff-tailed Bumblebee numbers remains stable. Volunteers within this citizen science scheme have been helping assess changes in bumblebee abundance since 2012.



Bombus

Source: Report on the All-Ireland Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme. 2012 to 2022.

Management Tips

Food for the Buff-tailed Bumblebee:

On the farm:

- Retain, maintain and restore native species-rich hedgerows.
- Maintain or create field margins and non-farmed areas, encourage native wildflowers from spring to autumn, this bumble has a short tongue and will feed on a wide range of flowers [Pollinators A5 Flyer Farmland.indd](#)
- Retain, maintain, restore or create permanent pastures and meadows, they're a valuable habitat for pollinators and biodiversity [Celebrating-Irish-Meadows-flyer.pdf \(pollinators.ie\)](#)
- Reduce pesticide and fertiliser use.

In the garden:

- You could [Pledge-your-Garden-for-Pollinators WEB.pdf](#)

Nest sites:

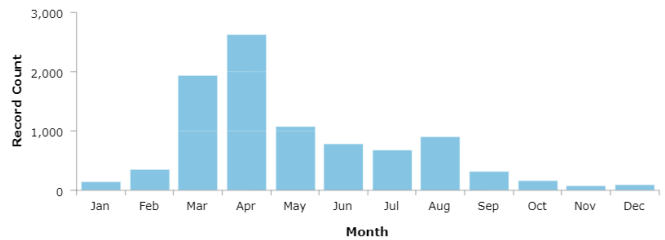
- Leave some areas of tussocky grass and undisturbed areas, especially at the base of hedgerows and around stone walls.

When?

Flight period is March to October. Queens can appear early in spring, one of the first bumblebees to be seen flying.

The new mated queen will go into hibernation in the autumn.

Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*), image, accessed September 2023, [Bombus \(Bombus\) terrestris - Detail - Biodiversity Maps \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)

Where on the farm?

Found in most habitats, hedges, field margins, non-farmed areas, meadows and pastures, woodland edges, glades, and gardens.

Value

- Provide valuable 'pollination service'.
- Cross pollination of our wildflowers, helping them stay resilient and boosting their fruiting ability for wildlife and the next generation.
- Health and wellbeing: There's nothing better than hearing a bumblebee buzzing or watching it move from flower to flower while feeding. So, it's fair to say, it give us that 'feel-good' factor.

Further Info

The Buff-tailed Bumblebee are a social bee, nesting underground in old burrows, or under stones and colonies can be large with 500 workers.

As with other social insects, the queen emerges from hibernation in spring and starts the colony by laying a few eggs that hatch as workers; these workers tend the young and nest. Males emerge later and mate with new females who are prospective queens. Both the males and old queen die in the autumn, but the new queens hibernate.

Similar species

The Buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) queens and males can be distinguished from the White-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum*), but the workers of *B. terrestris* and *B. lucorum* cannot be reliably separated by sight. Workers of either species are recorded as *B. lucorum* *agg.* (aggregate).

Affected by a change in climate?

Most bumblebees are cool-weather creatures. As climate is predicted to change, they may need to move further north.

They may also be affected by a change in flowering periods.

If winters are milder, some bumblebees may stay active and not hibernate.

Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:

pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie

The Farmland Pollinator Officer post is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as one of its contributions to assisting implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025.



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta
agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service

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/>

Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your Buff-tailed 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>