



NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2024

Welcome to the start of the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme for 2024.

In excellent news, **2023 was the best year we have ever had within the scheme!** **Ninety-two** 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 in taking part, we are getting very close to this target!

What happened in March 2023

- 88 transects were walked last March.
- Twenty-three people walked their transects and recorded no bumblebees. This is higher than normal and reflects the poor weather in March 2023.
- Nine walks had 10 or more *individual* bees last March, and the average number spotted was 4. This was slightly below normal.
- One walk recorded six different queens last March and six walks recorded 4-5 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 55% of all transects)
 - B. lucorum* queens (35%)
 - B. pratorum* queens (25%)
 - B. pascuorum* queens (19%)
 - B. lucorum* agg. (10%)
 - B. lapidarius* queens (6%)
 - B. hortorum* queens (6%)

There were also a very small number of *B. jonellus* and *B. hypnorum* queens spotted.

- The total number of individual bumblebees counted by everyone last March was 350 (plus 186 honeybees). This was slightly below average for March.

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.
 - ✓ This month, you are going to predominantly see queens. Of the bumblebees spotted across all walks last March, over 95% 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.
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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: <https://monitoring.biodiversityireland.ie/>
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Important food plants

Based on the casual bumblebee data submitted to us across 2023, bumblebees were spotted feeding on around 30 different plant species last March. The top plants were Dandelion & Garden Heather, followed by Willow, Rosemary, Lesser Celandine, 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 terrestris* queen was sent to us by Catherine Ryan.



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



female



male

This **solitary bee** was first spotted in Ireland by Mary Molloy in Harold's Cross, Dublin in March 2022. 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! It is most likely to be spotted in Dublin, but you never know...

Interesting recent research

Bumblebees learning to fight off invasive hornets in Britain

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240206-the-bees-learning-to-fight-off-invasive-hornets>

Workshops and upcoming events

Information on any relevant workshops and events will be released across the year. We are planning to have a **recorders weekend in the Burren (15-16th June)** for bumblebee and butterfly monitoring scheme volunteers. We'll be based at the Michael Cusack Centre in Carron for a series of walks and talks. It's free to come along, but you need to email to let me know if you plan to attend, so that we can keep track of numbers.

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

2023 was our most successful year to date, with 92 transects that were walked at least 6 of the 8 months (this was up from 90 in 2022). Some new volunteers joined the scheme during the year and their data will hopefully come fully on board from 2024. **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

Dr Úna FitzPatrick, All-Ireland Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme Coordinator
ufitzpatrick@biodiversityireland.ie

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