



NEWSLETTER: APRIL 2024

Welcome to the second month 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 April 2023

- 110 transects were walked last April. This was our highest total ever in the monitoring scheme!
- While the maximum number of *individual* bumblebees spotted on a walk last April was 34, the average number was 8.
- Many people were still seeing only queens – not workers yet. This is very normal.
- Seven people walked their transect without seeing any bumblebees last April. It is possible to walk a zero bumblebee transect in April, depending on the weather conditions. However, where at all possible, you should try to choose a day when some bees are flying.
- A few people were lucky enough to spot 6 different queens: *B. lapidarius*, *B. lucorum*, *B. pascuorum*, *B. pratorum*, *B. terrestris* & *B. hortorum*. Most people spotted 2-5 species.
- Top recorded in order were: *Bombus terrestris* queens (recorded on 60% of all transects), *B. pascuorum* queens (60%), *Bombus lucorum* queens (43%), *B. lucorum* agg. (33%), *B. pratorum* queens (28%), *B. lapidarius* queens (25%), *B. pascuorum* workers (22%), *B. hortorum* queens (9%), *B. pratorum* workers (8%). We also had small number of sightings of queens of *B. muscorum*, *B. hypnorum* & *B. jonellus*, as well as two of the cuckoo bumblebees (*B. bohemicus* and *B. sylvestris*). There were also a very small number of *B. hortorum* workers spotted in late April.
- The total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last April was 912 (plus 344 honey bees). This is typical, but is down from April 2022, when we had lovely weather in early spring.

Tips and advice this month

- ✓ It can still be difficult to find suitable weather conditions to do your walk this month. 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.
- ✓ Typically, you start seeing more variety this month as widespread species like *B. lapidarius*, *B. hortorum*, *B. pascuorum* and *B. pratorum* come out of hibernation. The weather in March 2024 hasn't been great, so it's likely that we will still see a lot of queens this month and may not see many workers yet.
- ✓ Cuckoo bumblebees can start to appear towards the end of April 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.
- ✓ 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.

Common errors last April

- It would be very unusual to see males already, so be careful not to mistakenly identify these.
- Depending on the weather, you might start seeing workers of *B. lucorum* agg., *B. pratorum*, *B. pascuorum* or *B. hortorum*. Workers of other species are possible, but less likely.
- Be careful with cuckoo bees. Those most likely to be spotted are *B. bohemicus* and *B. sylvestris*. Send a photo to check if you're not sure.

Important food plants

Based on the casual bumblebee data submitted to us across 2023, bumblebees were spotted feeding on around 80 different plant species last April. Dandelion was by far the most common, followed by Willow, Rosemary, Berberis, Bush Vetch, Flowering Currant & Red Dead-nettle. If you're seeing something important or unusual on your walk this month, please submit a casual record and fill in the foraging box:

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/bumblebees>



Photo of the month

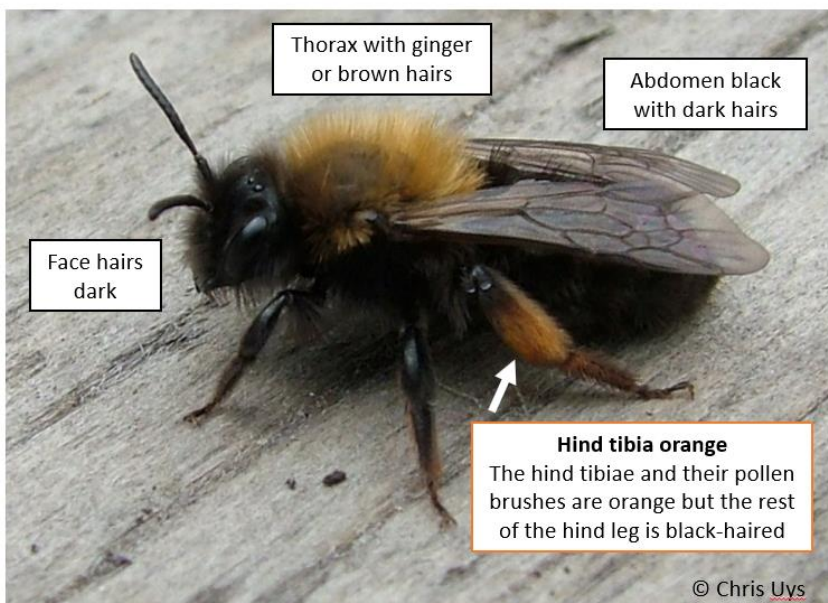
This lovely photo of a *Bombus jonellus* queen was taken by Ruth Wilson.



Other things to keep an eye out for this month - Clarke's Mining Bee

Keep an eye out for Clarke's Mining Bee (*Andrena clarkella*). This solitary bee is distinctive, but a little tricky as you need to check for the various features below to be sure. It nests by making burrows into bare soil. It forages almost exclusively on Willow and is most often recorded in April.

Females of *Andrena clarkella* are distinctive



- ✓ Large solitary bee (11-15mm long)
- ✓ Spring flight period (March-June)
- ✓ Ground nesting
- ✓ Feeds on Willow



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Interesting recent research

Bumblebees teach each other to solve puzzles

<https://www.rte.ie/news/newslens/2024/0306/1436263-bumblebees-teach-each-other-to-solve-puzzles-study/>

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

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