



## NEWSLETTER: MAY 2024

Welcome to the third month of the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme for 2024.

### What happened in May 2023

- 116 transects were walked last May. This was our highest total ever in the monitoring scheme!
- Seven people had over 40 individual bumblebees on their walk. However, the average number was 15 (this is typical for May).
- Queens were still commonly observed last May. This is very normal.
- Six people walked their transect and recorded no bumblebees in May 2023. At this time of year, 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 *Bombus pratorum* (Early Bumblebee), *B. pascuorum* (Common Carder Bee), *B. lapidarius* (Red-tailed Bumblebee), *B. hortorum* (Garden Bumblebee) and *B. lucorum* agg.
- Top recorded in order for last May were:
  - Common Carder Bee workers (*B. pascuorum*) - recorded on 63% of all transects
  - B. lucorum* agg. - 59%
  - Common Carder Bee queens (*B. pascuorum*) - 47%
  - Early Bumblebee workers (*B. pratorum*) - 40%
  - Buff-tailed Bumblebee queens (*B. terrestris*) - 39%
  - White-tailed Bumblebee queens (*B. lucorum*) - 27%
  - Garden Bumblebee workers (*B. hortorum*) - 21%
  - Garden Bumblebee queens (*B. hortorum*) - 18%
  - Early Bumblebee queens (*B. pratorum*) - 16%
  - Red-tailed Bumblebee queens (*B. lapidarius*) - 16%
  - Red-tailed Bumblebee workers (*B. lapidarius*) - 10%
- Also spotted in smaller numbers were Heath Bumblebee queens and workers (*B. jonellus*), Large Carder Bee queens and workers (*B. muscorum*), Gypsy Cuckoo Bee queens (*B. bohemicus*), and Forest Cuckoo Bee queens (*B. sylvestris*). Tree Bumblebee workers (*B. hypnorum*) were spotted on a small number of transects in N. Ireland. One Shrill Carder Bee queen (*B. sylvarum*) was spotted on a walk in the Burren. Early Bumblebee males (*B. pratorum*) were also spotted in small numbers.
- The total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last May was 1,701 (plus 691 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* (Common Carder Bee) 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* (Buff-tailed Bumblebee) workers should be recorded as *Bombus lucorum* agg. While we can distinguish *B. lucorum* (White-tailed Bumblebee) 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.

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## Common errors last May

- By far the most common error last May was **mistakenly recording males**. Some of you will definitely see *B. pratorum* (Early Bumblebee) 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* (Early Bumblebee) males for *B. lapidarius* (Red-tailed Bumblebee) 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 with the rare species. *Bombus monticola* (Mountain Bumblebee) is habitat specific, so will only be found in upland areas with Bilberry.

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## Important food plants

Based on the casual bumblebee data submitted to us across 2023, bumblebees were spotted feeding on around 90 different plant species last May. Top plants were Bush Vetch, Dandelion, Bilberry, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Red Clover and Cotoneaster. 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>



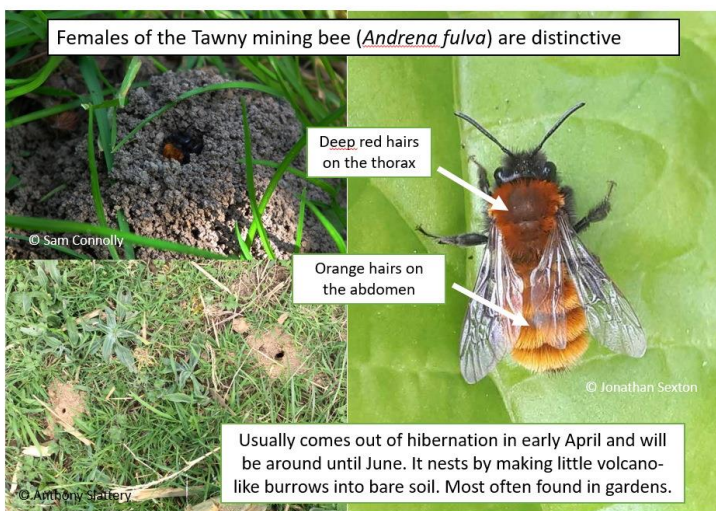
## Photo of the month

This lovely photo of *Bombus hypnorum* (Tree Bumblebee) was sent to us by Colin Stanley. This species is spreading, so keep an eye out!



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

The 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 its known from counties: Wicklow, Dublin, Kilkenny, Kildare, Tipperary, Carlow and Down. Can you add a new county in 2024?



## Interesting recent research

Hibernating bumblebees can survive underwater for a week

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2427117-sleeping-bumblebees-can-survive-underwater-for-a-week/>



## 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 (15-16<sup>th</sup> 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. This is now fully booked unfortunately.

**Save the date:** we are hoping to run a wild bee festival in Galway City on the 17-18<sup>th</sup> August. This will include various workshops and walks, including on bumblebee identification and monitoring. Booking will open closer to the time.

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## 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/>