

## NEWSLETTER: MAY 2026

Welcome to the third month of the Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme for 2026.

### What happened in May 2025

- 127 transects were walked last May. This is one of our highest totals ever in the monitoring scheme!
- Eleven people had over 50 individual bumblebees on their walk. One person had 235 towards the end of the month! However, the average number was 20 (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 2025. At this time of year, you should try your best to choose a day when some bees are flying.
- Many people spotted a good diversity of species on their May walk in 2025. The most common combination seems to have been Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*), Common Carder Bee (*B. pascuorum*), Red-tailed Bumblebee (*B. lapidarius*), Garden Bumblebee (*B. hortorum*) and *B. lucorum* agg.
- Top recorded in order for last May were:
  - Common Carder Bee workers (*B. pascuorum*) - recorded on 69% of all transects
  - B. lucorum* agg. - 65%
  - Common Carder Bee queens (*B. pascuorum*) - 45%
  - Early Bumblebee workers (*B. pratorum*) - 42%
  - Buff-tailed Bumblebee queens (*B. terrestris*) - 32%
  - White-tailed Bumblebee queens (*B. lucorum*) - 30%
  - Garden Bumblebee workers (*B. hortorum*) - 22%
  - Garden Bumblebee queens (*B. hortorum*) - 16%
  - Red-tailed Bumblebee workers (*B. lapidarius*) - 13%
  - Early Bumblebee males (*B. pratorum*) - 11%
  - Early Bumblebee queens (*B. pratorum*) - 7%
- Also spotted in smaller numbers were Tree Bumblebee queens, workers and males (*B. hypnorum*); Heath Bumblebee queens and workers (*B. jonellus*); Large Carder Bee queens and workers (*B. muscorum*); Red-tailed Bumblebee queens (*B. lapidarius*); and Shrill Carder Bee queens (*B. sylvarum*) in the Burren. Small numbers of Forest Cuckoo Bee queens (*B. sylvestris*) were also spotted. Buff-tailed Bumblebee males (*B. terrestris*), White-tailed Bumblebee males (*B. lucorum*) and Common Carder Bee males (*B. pascuorum*) were spotted in very small numbers.
- The total number of individual bumblebees spotted by everyone last May was 2,485 (plus 745 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.
- ✓ It can be 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*, *B. terrestris* or *B. pascuorum* 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 distinguendus* (Great Yellow Bumblebee) is restricted to grassland habitats in the west.

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## Important food plants

Based on the casual bumblebee data submitted to us across 2025, bumblebees were spotted feeding on around 70 different plant species last May. The top plant was Bush Vetch. This was followed by Chives, Comfrey, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Bramble, Red Clover, Catmint, Dandelion & Raspberry. 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 hortorum* queen (Garden Bumblebee) was sent to us by Lynne Gillespie

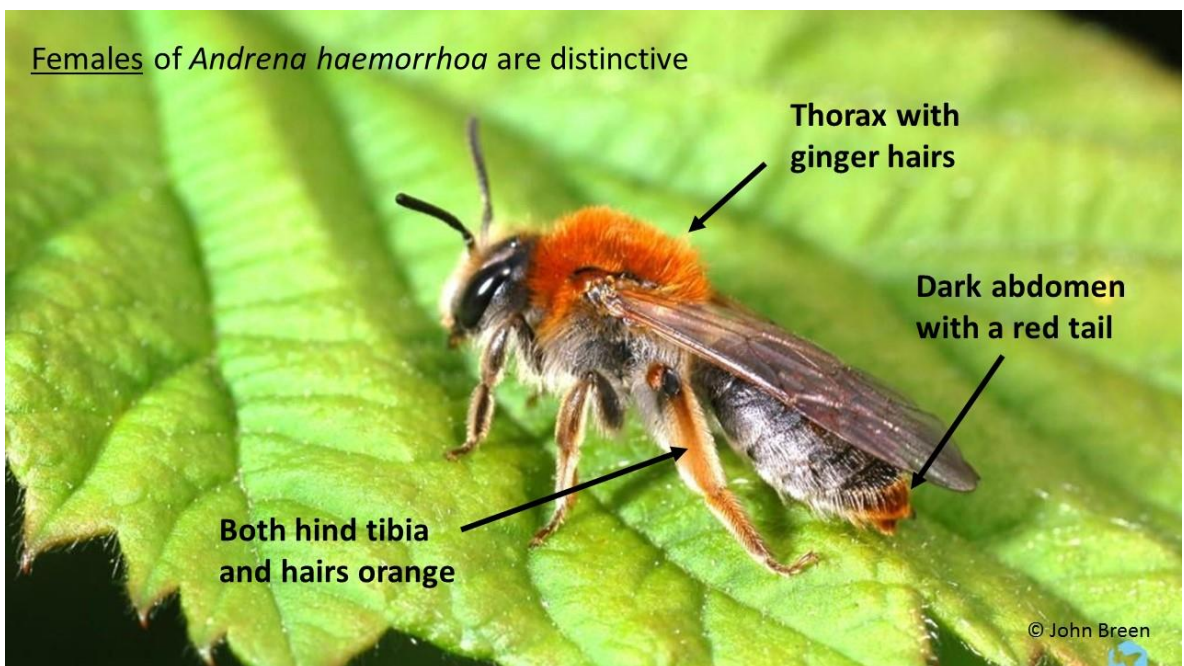


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### Other things to keep an eye out for this month - Orange-tailed Mining Bee

The Orange-tailed Mining Bee (*Andrena haemorrhoa*) is another of our more distinctive mining solitary bees. It is common and can be found in most habitats. You need to check for the orange-haired thorax, red-tipped abdomen plus orange hind legs.

Females of *Andrena haemorrhoa* are distinctive



## Interesting recent research

Bumblebees can perceive rhythm, despite their brains being the size of a sesame seed

<https://theconversation.com/bumblebees-can-perceive-rhythm-despite-their-brains-being-the-size-of-a-sesame-seed-279659>

## Workshops and upcoming events

Information on any relevant workshops and events will be released across the year. More details in coming months.

## 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

2025 was our most successful year to date, with 104 transects that were walked at least 6 of the 8 months. Some new volunteers joined the scheme during the year and their data will hopefully come fully on board from 2025. **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 at least **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](mailto:ufitzpatrick@biodiversityireland.ie)

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