

## **Biodiversity of bumblebees on Irish farms**

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International research has shown that, globally, bumblebees have been hit hard by changes in agriculture over the last fifty years. Part of this Ag-Biota research project is investigating how bumblebee populations are faring on Irish farms under a range of management. Veronica Santorum, in the University of Limerick, has highlighted some worrying absences during her surveys. There are few bumblebees flying on farms, on average, only three bees per 100 meters of hedgerow, and these would tend to be of only one or two widespread and common species- the stripy ones of children's books and a foxy brown bee, whereas we actually have 18 bumblebee species altogether in Ireland.

A bee that would be regarded as very common has been completely missing from Irish farms for the two years that the survey was carried out. Older farmers and bee-keepers are familiar with this missing bee, a black bee with a red tail, so it must have been common enough on farms at one time. This highlights a problem; there is no historical information available that tells us what the situation was for bees on farms in the past. The Ag-Biota project has provided us with a baseline for bumblebees on farms for the present day, against which the effects of agri-environmental schemes such as REPS can be monitored into the future. Ongoing research aims to provide recommendations for the conservation of these important insects in the agricultural landscape, so that they will retain their place as a part of Ireland's wildlife.