

Bee Walking

For some years now, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust has been using amateur volunteers to monitor bumblebee populations all over the country by undertaking regular Bee Walks. Our society has been involved for the last two years.

Our walks take place in Mandale Park, close to Rochdale town centre. It's an interesting place; once it was a landfill site, but it's now hoped to change it into a nature reserve. The walks involve moving along a fixed route about a mile long, recording all bumblebees and honey bees seen within six feet of the route. No experience or expertise is necessary.

There are only five common species of bumblebee and they are all fairly distinctive, so people quickly learn to identify them. The BCT likes walks to take place monthly from March to October, in fine weather. We walk on the closest fine day to the 27th of each month.

Our results for 2016 and 2017 can be seen below.

Numbers of Bees Each Month

<u>Month</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>
March	2	6
April	9	5
May	5	9
June	23	23
July	103	5
August	16	9
September	27	8
October	1	0
Total	186	65

<u>Species</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>
Buff-tailed Bumblebee	78	24
Red-tailed Bumblebee	21	7
Tree Bumblebee	24	4
Common Carder	39	17

White-tailed Bumblebee	3	1
Early Bumblebee	2	0
Garden Bumblebee	3	0
Gypsy Cuckoo Bee	0	1
Unidentified Bumblebees	8	5
Honeybees	8	6
Totals	186	65

Numbers started similar to those in 2016 before a major collapse in July from which the bees didn't recover, although the common carder – the latest to emerge – was affected less than the other; its numbers were down to half those of 2016, while the other major species were down to about a third. There were plenty of flowers so lack of food was unlikely to be the cause. The two other likely culprits are weather and disease.

At this stage we shall never know, but there was some bad weather in July which could have destroyed nests or prevented the bees collecting food. This year we will keep more careful notes about the weather, and watch out for bees that appear to be diseased or carrying heavy loads of parasites.

If you would like to join the Bumblebee Walks contact Pamela Jackson on rfnspublicity@gmail.com or speak to one of our members.