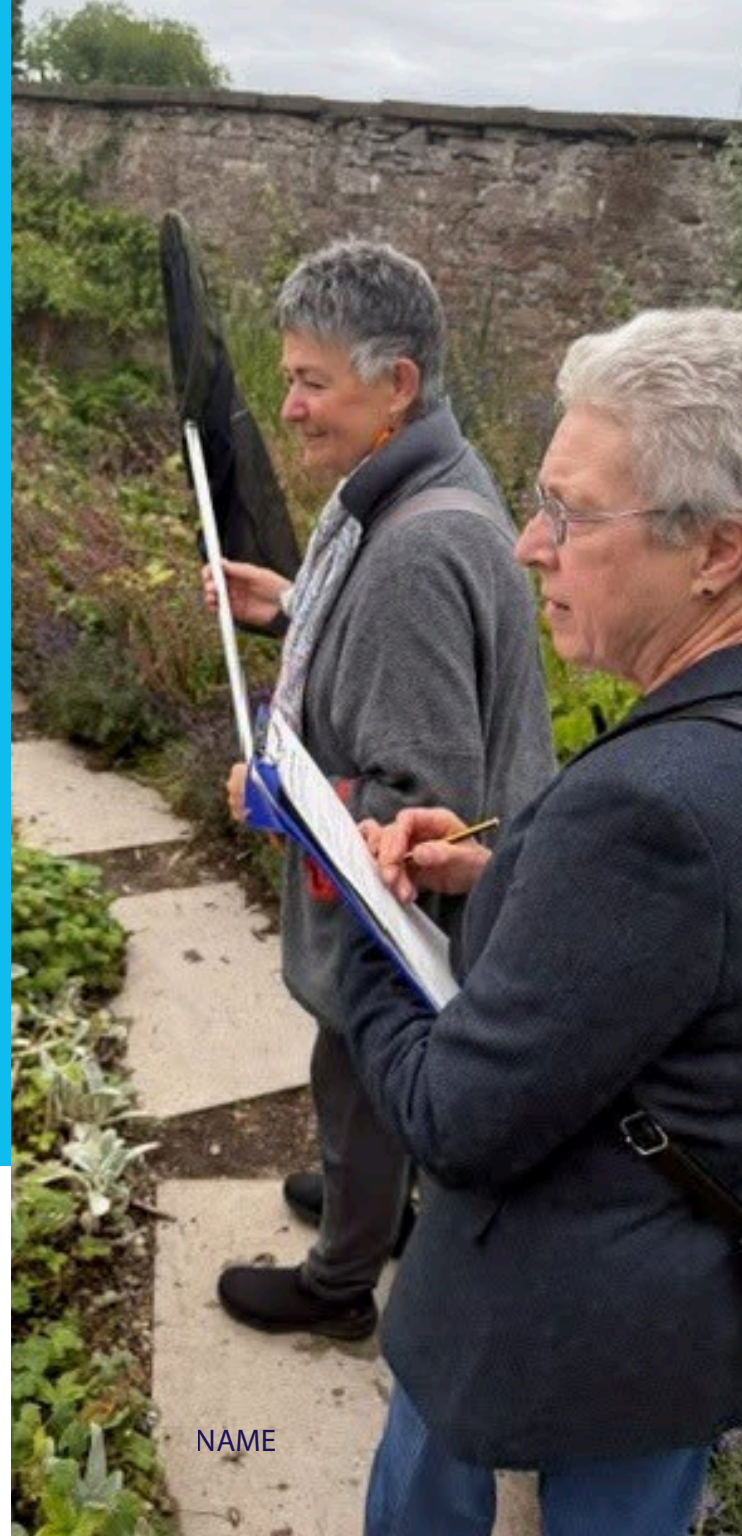
THE HIGHLAND BIG POLLINATOR COUNT

2026 RESULTS

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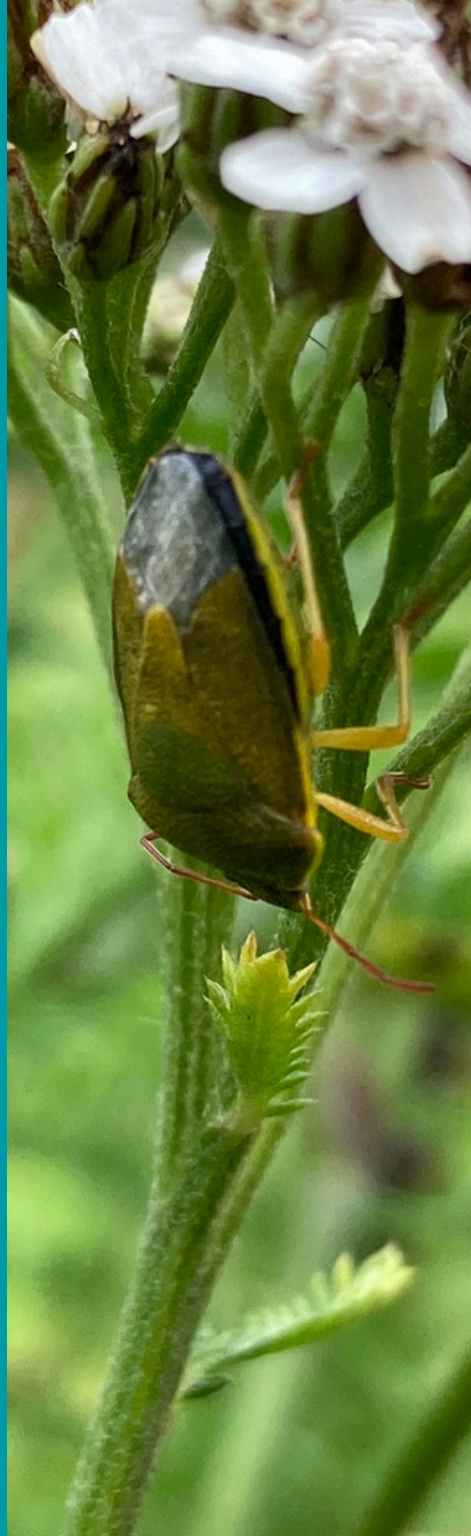


SUMMARY

Pollinator populations, essential to biodiversity and ecosystem health, continue to decline globally, including across the Highlands. This trend threatens agriculture, natural habitats, and food security, highlighting the need for monitoring and conservation to understand and support local pollinator species.

The Highland 2026 Big Pollinator Count at Wild Flower Mosaic Meadows in Highland took place between August 1st - 8th August 2026. This is the third year the project has been running and was one week earlier than the last two years.
41 wildflower meadows were counted for pollinators by members of the public in 2026. The vast majority of these sites were some of the 101 mini wildflower meadows planted by High life Highland Rangers in the 2023 growing season and listed on the Highland Environment Forum website https://www.highlandenvironmentforum.info/directory/categories/wildflower-meadow/
68 members of the public were involved in these counts.

The total area of wildflower meadow counted was 4068 m^2.
Sites varied between 1 m^2 and 400 m^2 in size.
A combined total of over 19 hours were spent counting pollinating insects. Most counts lasted 30 minutes.
Of the 41 sites, 23 were in Caithness, eleven in Ross and Cromarty, three in Sutherland, three in Inverness and one in Badenoch & Strathspey.



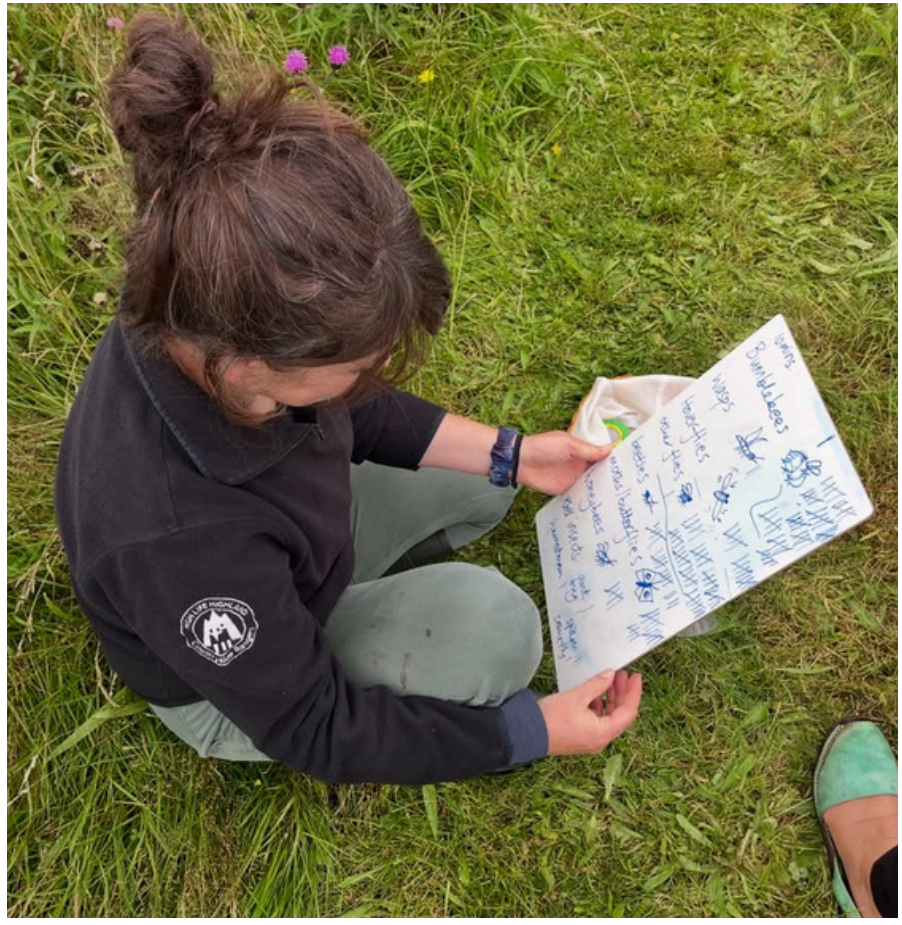
ENGAGEMENT

This year's pollinator count drew participation from 41 meadow sites across the Highlands, with the strongest representation coming from Caithness (23 sites), followed by Ross and Cromarty (11), Sutherland (3), Inverness (3) and Badenoch & Strathspey (1).

A combined total of more than 19 hours was spent observing pollinating insects, with most surveys lasting 30 minutes. Participants recorded their observations using our simple online survey form and provided details of their location, survey duration and meadow size.

Observations were grouped into ten categories: bumblebees, honeybees, solitary bees, wasps (including ichneumon wasps), hoverflies, other flies, butterflies and moths, beetles larger than 3 mm, small insects under 3 mm (such as pollen beetles), and other insects. This approach provides a clear picture of the diversity and abundance of pollinators using wildflower meadows across the region.

All observations were submitted through our simple online form, helping us build an increasingly detailed picture of pollinators in the region.





METHOD

The method was kept simple. Participating citizen scientist were asked to watch a site for 30 minutes and count all the pollinating insects they saw visiting. The results were submitted on our easy-to-access online form, taking around 2 minutes to complete.

People were also asked to record when and how long they counted for as well as the location and area in metres of the wildflower meadow.

Insects were recorded only SITTING on or LANDING on any of the meadow flowers, not whilst in flight.

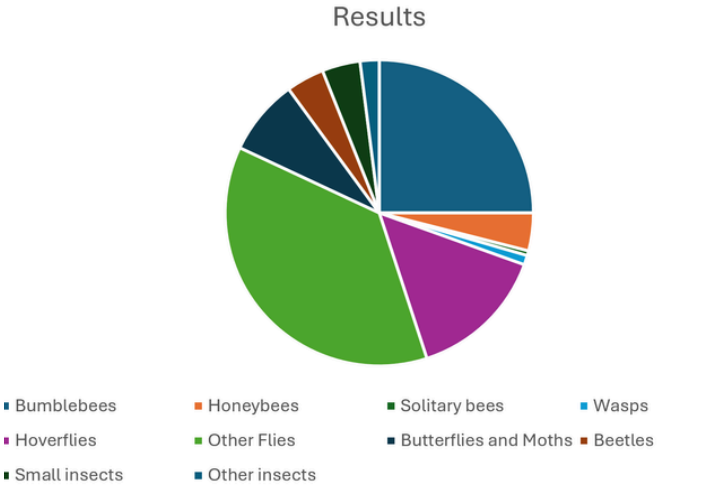
Participants were asked to divide their observations in to ten categories.

RESULTS



A total of 2755 insects were recorded over all the sites. This equated to 2.4 insects per minute of observations or 0.035 insects seen per m2 per hour.

The greatest category of insects recorded this year were Bumblebees with 681 insects seen (25% of all recorded insects). Hoverflies made up 14%, butterflies and moths 8% and honeybees 4%. Wasps made up only 1% of all insects recorded reflecting what is suggested another nationally poor year for wasps.

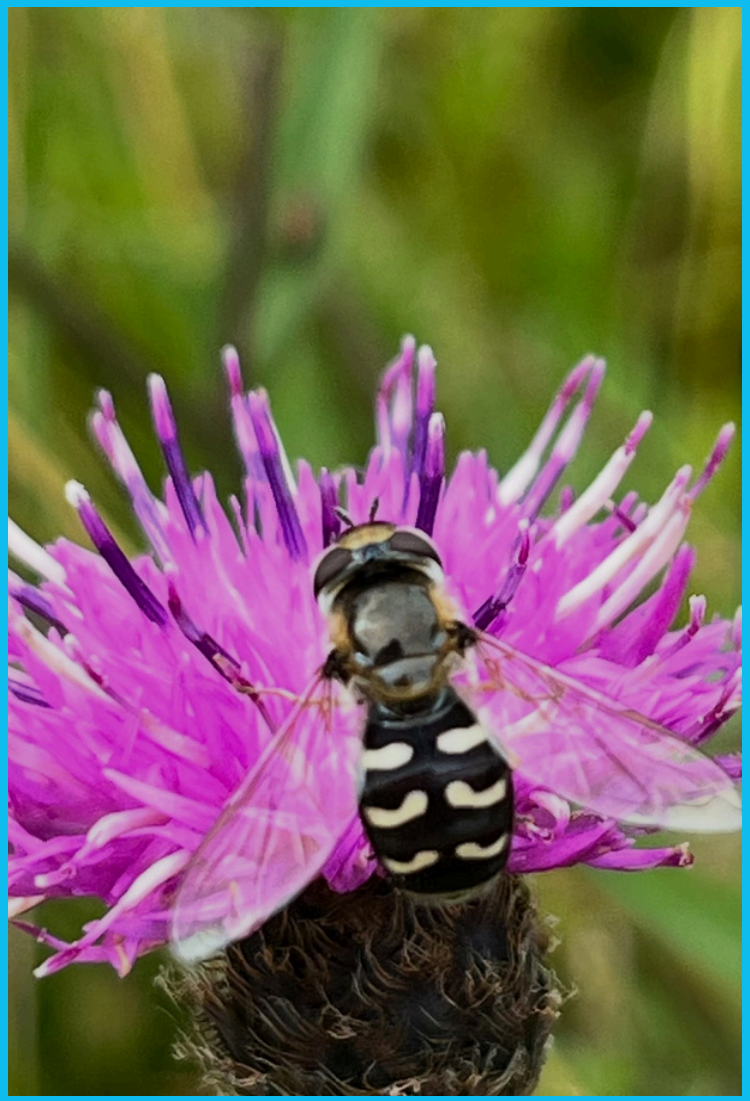


The weather during the survey period (1-8 August 2026) was generally poor across the Highlands. Warm but wet and humid conditions prevailed, with no dry days recorded. In Inverness, temperatures reached 17-19°C, with 30.7mm of rain and winds of 14-32km/h. Unlike the drought conditions seen elsewhere in the UK, weather in the Highlands was not ideal for pollinator surveys.



KEY SPECIES RECORDINGS

Citizen Scientists were asked to identify down to species level if possible or submit photographs of insects to the Ranger Service for identification.



BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS

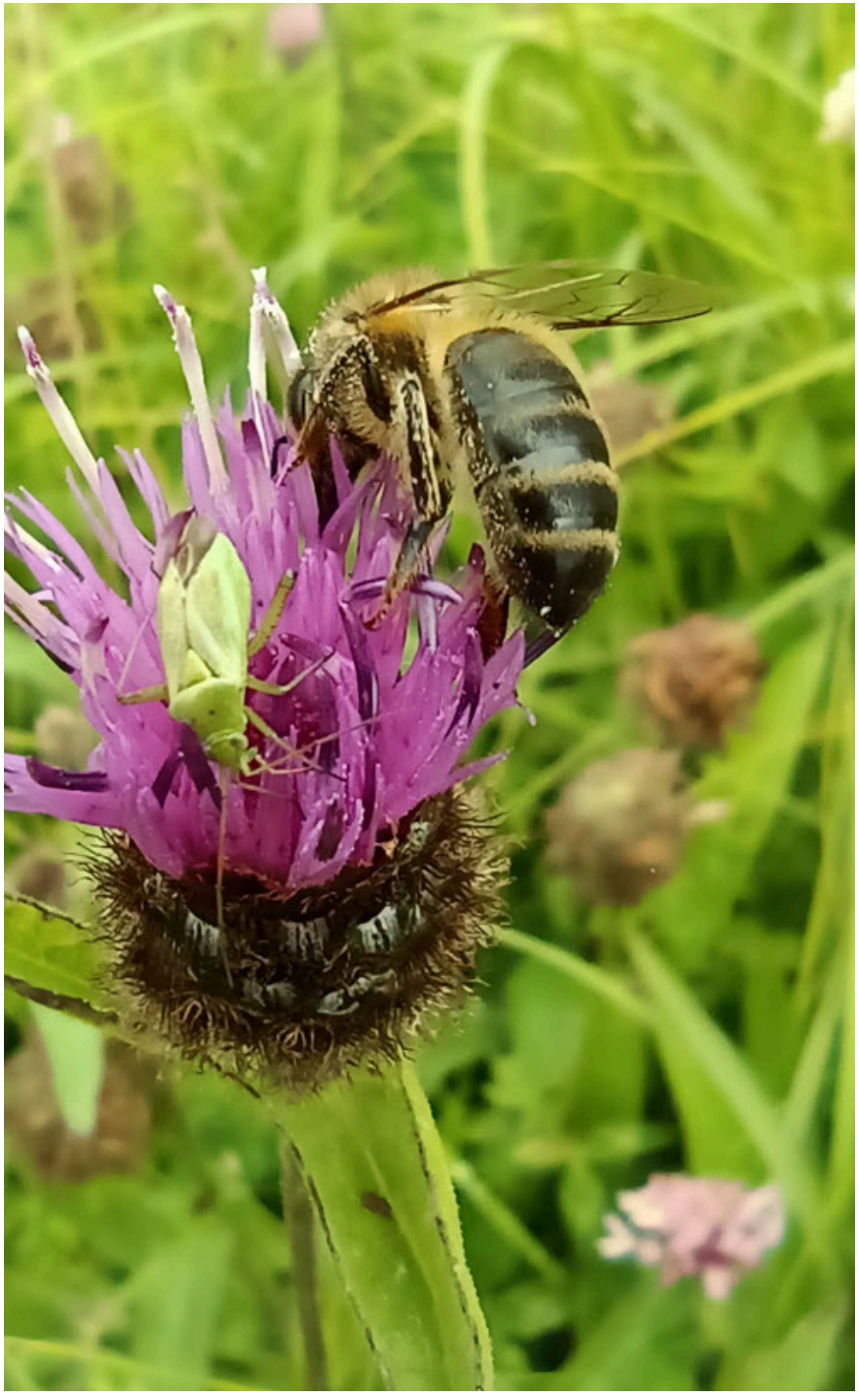
11 species recorded

- 7 red admiral — Vanessa atalanta
- 6 meadow brown — Maniola jurtina
- 4 small tortoiseshell — Aglais urticae
- 4 green-veined white — Pieris napi
- 2 speckled wood — Pararge aegeria
- 1 large white — Pieris brassicae
- 1 dark-green fritillary — Speyeria aglaja
- Silver Y moth — Autographa gamma (Kinlochewe)
- Wainscot moth sp. (Thrumster)
- Pale straw pearl moth — Udea lutealis (Newtonhill)
- Footman moth sp. (Aultbea)

BUMBLEBEES

600 bublebees counted (235 identified to species level)

- 148 common carder — Bombus pascuorum
- 51 white-tailed bumblebee — Bombus lucorum
- 25 garden bumblebee — Bombus hortorum
- 8 buff-tailed bumblebee — Bombus terrestris
- 2 red-tailed bumblebee — Bombus lapidarius
- 1 gypsy cuckoo bumblebee — Bombus bohemicus



HOVERFLIES

Of the numerous hoverflies (a very difficult family to identify at species level) . No hoverflies were identified to species level in 2026

SOLITARY BEES

- **7 heather colletes (mining bee) — Colletes succinctus (Farr Glebe)**

DAMSELFLIES & DRAGONFLIES

- **7 emerald damselfly — Lestes sponsa (Newtonhill)**
- **Additional dragonflies and damselflies were noted but not identified to species level.**
- **(No other Odonata were confirmed to species level.)**

BEETLES

- **C35+ common red soldier beetle — Rhagonycha fulva**
- **Additional beetles recorded but not identified to species level.**

WASPS

- **Possible ichneumon wasp — Amblyteles armatorius (Thurso Cemetery)**

FLIES & OTHER INSECTS

- **Several red-thighed St Mark's fly — Bibio pomonae**
- **Various plant bugs recorded across multiple sites**
- **Fox moth caterpillar — Macrothylacia rubi (Inverness Botanic Gardens)**

2024-2026 STATS

Metric	2026	2025	2024
Survey sites	41	56	39
Observation hours	19.17	26.75	18.75
Meadow area surveyed	4,068	2,149	1,010
Volunteers	68	130	123
Insects recorded	2,755	2,865	1,312
Insects per minute	2.4	1.78	1.16
Insects per m² per hour	0.035	0.05	0.07
Bumblebees	681 (25%)	538 (19%)	197 (15%)
Hoverflies	398 (14%)	594 (21%)	312 (20%)
Honeybees	114 (4%)	116 (4%)	92 (7%)
Wasps	32 (1%)	131 (5%)	26 (2%)
Butterflies & moths	213 (8%)	191 (7%)	n/a

The exceptionally wet weather during the survey period appears to have had a significant impact on participation and pollinator activity. Forty-one surveys were submitted in 2026, compared with 56 in 2025, and total observation effort fell from 26.75 to 19.17 hours. Despite this, participants surveyed a much larger area of meadow than in previous years, covering 4,068 m² compared with 2,148.5 m² in 2025.

Although the total number of insects recorded remained high at 2,755, the density of insects observed declined, from 0.050 insects per m² per hour in 2025 to 0.035 in 2026. This suggests that the poor weather affected pollinator activity and detectability.

The overall composition of insect groups was broadly similar to previous years, but bumblebees showed a marked increase, accounting for 25% of all insects recorded compared with 19% in 2025 and 15% in 2024. In contrast, hoverflies declined from 21% to 14% of records and wasps from 5% to just 1%. Honeybee proportions remained unchanged at 4%, although this is considerably lower than the 7% recorded in 2024. Butterflies and moths remained relatively stable at 7-9% of observations across all three years.

As the survey samples different sites and observers each year, and represents only a small snapshot of Highland wildflower meadows, these trends should be interpreted with appropriate caution

CONCLUSION

Despite the wet weather in the first week of August 2026 in the Highlands, we can say the Big Pollinator Count results were impressive. It certainly seems a good year for bumblebees. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to go out and look for insects on their chosen sites, especially all the families and children who part. It is greatly appreciated and we hope you enjoyed it.

The results demonstrate just how important wildflower meadows, no matter how small, are to insects and the health of Nature in the Highlands.

It was encouraging to see so many people giving their time to support nature

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THANK-YOU

Thanks to everyone who took part in this year's Big Highland Pollinator Count and we hope you can help again in 2027.