



Up to five invertebrates found in churchyards across England and Wales.

All Saints Church, Beeston Regis

Bumblebees were the most reported insect in England's churchyards and burial grounds in this year's Churches Count on Nature survey.

The results come from a recent nature-count conducted by local communities from 3 to 11 June 2023.

Volunteers from across the country took part in [Churches Count on Nature](#), an opportunity for local communities to come together to record the wildlife found in churchyards and burial grounds. Part of Love Your Burial Ground Week, it was [held by the Church of England in collaboration with Caring for God's Acre, the Church in Wales and A Rocha UK](#).

Such spaces form unique habitats for nature. Having escaped the plough, development, and the intensive use of chemicals, these locations have remained undisturbed for centuries. As a result, churchyards host an abundance of wildlife; often featuring flower-rich grassland and lichen-encrusted memorials, as well as being home to most of the ancient yew trees in the UK. Participants conducted a survey of the wildlife in their chosen patch and recorded the numbers and types of plants, insects and animals found there.

Though we are a nation of gardeners, the insects that share our shrubberies can often pass us by - from the colourful British crab spider nestling in flower blooms to the busy hummingbird hawkmoth swooping across churchyards at dusk.

Liam Taylor, a data manager at Caring for God's Acre, said of this year's findings: "We are really pleased that over 300 of the records submitted using [iNaturalist](#) (an app developed to record nature observations) during the week were of invertebrates.

"There is a tremendous amount of diversity in the species recorded - over 150 different taxa [groups within species]. So far, the records coming in show the top invertebrates spotted to be bumblebees, ladybirds and aphids.

"Over the last century, bumblebees have been in decline mainly because of large-scale changes to the way the countryside is managed. Some of the rarer bumblebee species forage only around 500 metres to 1 kilometre from the nest, so churchyards must be both flower-rich and diverse to provide enough flowers to sustain the colony each year. These records are showing how valuable, when managed sensitively, many of our churchyards are for bumblebees!"



David Smart

Harriet Carty, Director of Caring for God's Acre, explained just how many people are involved in keeping these spaces special.

"We estimate that well over 150,000 volunteers help manage these green oases. Their work includes repairing boundary walls, cutting the grass, enhancing the wildflower areas, looking after trees and surveying the memorials and wildlife.

"This has been a week-long celebration of these precious places with the aim of encouraging people to discover more about them."

The Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher, who is the Church of England's Lead Bishop for Environmental Affairs, said: "As I read the Gospels, I'm struck by just how much nature is noticed by Jesus. We can join with him in seeing our lilies of the field, the thistles in crops, and the birds of the air.□

"As Christians, we have a responsibility to care for God's creation, and participating in Churches Count on Nature is just one way in which we can demonstrate that care."

Events ranged from biodiversity 'nature counts' in churchyards, to memorial recording and tours in urban cemeteries.□ Individuals took part by recording the wildlife in their local burial ground using the iNaturalist app or by attending an event near them.

This year, over 400 counting activities took place and records are starting to come in.

Churches Count on Nature 2024 will be held from Saturday June 8 to Sunday June 16.

## Learn more

- [View the map](#) of events that took place.
- [Watch the webinars](#) held by the Church of England as part of Churches Count on Nature.
- Churches Count on Nature is an annual event run collaboratively by [the Church in Wales](#), [Caring for God's Acre](#) and [A Rocha UK](#) with the Church of England.

Environment

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