

Cold and showery at first, becoming warm, dry and sunny later

The month started with an anticyclone centred north of Scotland and west of Norway, with complex low pressure areas over the eastern Atlantic and the mainland of Europe bringing a north-easterly flow to the whole of the United Kingdom. During the 2nd the high pressure area built south-westwards across the United Kingdom, but on the 3rd receded towards Norway, allowing weak frontal systems to encroach slowly from the west. These fronts crossed all areas in the next few days. High pressure built up on the 8th, with a centre to the west of the British Isles, but it was only a temporary feature as fronts moved across all areas again in the next few days. A further short-lived high covered most of England and Wales on the 12th before another front crossed Scotland on the 14th. This front continued to move slowly southwards over all areas to affect south-east England later on the 16th, after which high pressure once more spread across much of Great Britain. Although high pressure now persisted over southern districts until the end of the month, Scotland was still troubled by frontal activity until the 22nd.

Weather

The beginning of the month was cold with showers of snow or hail in all areas of the United Kingdom. It became dry on the 2nd, but remained cold, with occasional fog in places until the 11th. On the 11th and 12th fronts again brought snow and hail showers to all areas. From then until the 17th the weather remained rather unsettled with snow or hail showers at times. Over southern districts high pressure persisted from the 18th until the end of the month, giving very dry and settled weather, but in Scotland and Northern Ireland it remained unsettled until the 22nd. The last week of the month was dry, hot and sunny everywhere except near northern and eastern coasts of Scotland and eastern coasts of England which were affected by fog. There were scattered outbreaks of thunder over Cornwall on the 3rd and the 25th, Blackpool on the 11th, in various places on the 16th and over Guernsey, Channel Isles on the 24th.

Wind

It was a quiet month with mainly light to moderate winds throughout most of the period. Some gale force winds were reported around Cape Wrath, northern Scotland between the 11th and 12th. Winds became strong in the Irish Sea on the 17th, and mainly moderate to fresh in most places on the 18th/19th and in northern areas on the 21st. For the rest of the month they remained light to moderate, but freshened somewhat on the 29th. The highest mean speed and highest gust were 54 kn and 78 kn respectively, at Cairngorm, Highland Region on the 13th. The highest gust in the south was 49 kn at London Weather Centre on the 1st. Directions were mainly easterly at first, then northerly until the 9th, after which they became mainly southerly or south-westerly until the 23rd. For the rest of the month easterlies prevailed.

Temperature

After a cold start to the month, with afternoon temperatures on the 1st some 3 °C to 4 °C below the seasonal normal, and a very warm final ten

days in most areas, mean temperatures ended up near to the average for the month as a whole. The last ten days brought a crop of record high temperatures. St Helier, Jersey had 26.2 °C on the 22nd, certainly the highest since 1949, and probably the highest since records began there in 1924. Glasgow Airport, Strathclyde had 24.2 °C on the 25th, the hottest April day since 1921. Tummel, in north-west Tayside, had a diurnal variation of 25.4 °C on the 24th. The maximum temperature recorded at Onich, Highland Region on the 25th, 26.5 °C, was the highest April value in Scotland this century. On the 21st, London had its warmest Easter Saturday since 1949. Rhoose, South Wales had its highest April temperature for 9 years whereas Valley, North Wales had its highest for 38 years. Earlier, on the 2nd, Valley had equalled its previous lowest minimum of -2.8 °C recorded in 1955. The month's extreme minimum was -9.8 °C at Lagganlia in the Highland Region on the 2nd.

Rainfall

Rainfall totals were generally very low this month, a number of places in southern England having less than 5 per cent of the April average. Only in north-west Scotland, where fronts continued to bring rain well after all other areas had become dry, was the rainfall near or above normal with over 150 per cent of average in places. Over England and Wales it was the driest April since 1957 and the fourth driest this century. Several areas in the southern counties had dry spells of 19 successive days. The rapid build up of soil moisture deficit during April gave a total by the end of the month which exceeded that for the similar date in 1976. The wettest periods over large areas were the 3rd and 4th in the west, the 5th and 6th in the east, and the 10th and 11th. The greatest fall in 24 hours was 80 mm at Achnangart, Highland Region on the 13th.

Snow

Snow fell in all areas of Great Britain on the 1st and in most northern areas on the 2nd. There were

further falls in northern Scotland and in South Wales and southern England on the 4th. North-west England had snow on the 6th and northern Scotland on the 7th. Most northern parts experienced further falls from the 11th until the 16th. Snow was lying until the 5th on higher ground in Scotland. Snow later lay only for short periods in North Wales and north-west England, and, between the 11th and the 16th, in the Highlands of Scotland.

Sunshine

The most noteworthy period for sunshine was the last ten days, during which most of England and Wales experienced over 12 hours of sunshine per day, and in Scotland during the last week. In many places records were broken. Plymouth, Devon had the sunniest April since records began in 1921 and Watnall, Nottinghamshire the sunniest for 33 years. London had about 90 per cent of the maximum possible sunshine during the last week, and the sunniest April since records of sunshine began at Kew in 1881. During the last week, however, extensive low cloud and sea fog caused coastal areas of northern and eastern Scotland and eastern England to have little or no sun.

Fog

Overnight fog formed frequently throughout the month and affected all districts at some time. Coastal fog patches were mainly in the west and north. They were persistent for a time around the Irish Sea on the 19th and again along northern and eastern coasts of Scotland and England during the last week or so. Hill fog patches occurred only occasionally in the west and south-west during the first half of the month.

Miscellaneous Phenomena

Coloured dust, probably of Saharan origin, was brought down by rain over South Wales, Devon, Somerset and Avon on the night of the 21st/22nd. A small whirlwind formed at Headington, Oxford on the 12th and caused some damage.

Table 1 District values

District	air temperature °C					mean 30 cm soil temp°C	rain- days	rainfall	sun- shine
	Highest Max*	Lowest Min*	max.	min.	mean				
			difference from average					% of average	
0 Scotland N	26.5	−9.8	+1.2	+0.3	+0.8	+0.2	−3	103	120
1 Scotland E	24.5	−6.3	+1.0	−0.2	+0.4	+0.2	−6	35	121
2 England E & NE	22.1	−4.8	+0.8	−0.9	−0.1	+0.1	−6	27	144
3 East Anglia	23.5	−5.4	+0.4	−1.3	−0.4	−0.4	−7	32	149
4 Midland Counties	22.6	−5.6	+1.4	−1.2	+0.1	−0.1	−7	16	157
5 England SE & Central S	23.7	−3.1	+1.0	−0.9	+0.1	−0.1	−8	10	151
6 Scotland W	24.2	−5.9	+1.4	0.0	+0.7	+0.2	−5	62	121
7 England NW & Wales N	23.0	−4.8	+1.4	−0.4	+0.5	+0.1	−7	24	135
8 England SW & Wales S	23.4	−6.7	+1.6	−0.3	+0.5	+0.2	−8	11	142
N Ireland	22.2	−6.8	+1.2	+0.1	+0.7	0.0	−5	47	115
Scotland	26.5	−9.8	+1.2	0.0	+0.6	+0.2	−5	74	121
England & Wales	23.7	−6.7	+1.1	−0.8	+0.1	0.0	−7	20	146

*Highest maximum and lowest minimum of District Value Stations