

# MONTHLY WEATHER REPORT

# MARCH

# 1981

COMPILED FROM RETURNS OF OFFICIAL AND VOLUNTARY OBSERVERS

VOLUME 98

NUMBER 3

## Exceptionally wet and dull over England and Wales; mostly mild.

During the first three days of the month a deep depression filled as it drifted from south of Ireland across south-west England to France while its front returned southwards over all districts. On the 4th a small anticyclone moved south-eastwards from the North Channel to France. Over the next week a series of fronts moved north-eastwards across the British Isles although in the south clearances of cloud and rain were twice delayed by cold front waves. On the 13th a depression travelled slowly eastwards across Wales and central England and for the next three days pressure was low over the North Sea.

Between the 17th and the 19th a deep depression moved from Iceland across Shetland and away north-eastwards while its waving front remained over the north of England and Northern Ireland. From the 20th to the 28th further fronts were brought across all areas as depressions passed quickly north-eastwards over or to the north-west of the United Kingdom although on the morning of the 22nd a vigorous low crossed central England. During the last three days a ridge of high pressure built across western and northern districts while an area of low pressure moved from the Bay of Biscay into France and fronts affected the Channel Islands and the southern half of England and Wales.

### Weather

Very unsettled and often windy weather continued throughout the month in most areas. Showers or longer periods of rain were frequent and sometimes heavy while snow fell from time to time, mostly in the north. Thunderstorms and hail occurred occasionally, mainly over the south of Britain on the 1st and 2nd and between the 12th and the 17th. The last three days of the month were dry and quite sunny over western and northern parts of the United Kingdom although there was some persistent fog over coasts. Southern districts were generally very mild and whilst the north was rather cold at times most places had some warm days during the last week.

### Wind

For much of the month winds were fresh or strong at times and, particularly over exposed coasts and hills, reached gale or severe gale force on a number of occasions. Wind directions were mostly from between south and west but in the far north they were occasionally easterly. A fishing vessel and all hands were lost off Dunnet Head (Highland Region) on the 18th when gusts of up to 68 kn were recorded in the area. On the 22nd, when gusts of up to 65 kn were recorded along the south coast of England and in the Channel Islands, widespread minor damage was caused to property in south-east England while a giant wave swept a boy to his death from the garden of his home at Bexhill (Sussex). Winds were lighter, generally, between the 2nd and the 4th and during the last three days of the month when directions were mainly north-easterly and between the 14th and the 16th when they were mostly north-westerly.

### Temperature

Mean temperatures ranged from just below the March normal in the extreme north of Scotland to as much as 2 to 3 °C above normal over much of central and southern England where average night minima were particularly high for the month.

Cold weather in the north-east spread southwards to the rest of the United Kingdom on the 2nd and 3rd. Between the 6th and the 13th it was exceptionally mild at times, particularly in central and eastern districts where maxima of at least 14 °C occurred on several days. The night of the 7th/8th was one of the mildest for early March this century over parts of England with minima of 11 to 12 °C. Temperatures were then rather variable although it was mostly rather cold in the north. Many places had some warm or very warm days during the last week when temperatures exceeded 16 °C. However, eastern and southern districts became rather cold during the last two or three days of the month.

### Rainfall

This was the second wettest March over England and Wales for more than 250 years, only March 1947 being wetter. Rainfall totals were above average in all districts, much of Wales and parts of northern, eastern and southern England having more than 300 per cent of average while over the west of Lancashire and a part of South Wales around Black Mountain and the Brecon Beacons there was more than 400 per cent. Only over Scotland, except parts of the south, most of Northern Ireland and here and there elsewhere was there less than 200 per cent of average.

All areas had showers or longer periods of rain or, mainly in the north, snow. Rainfall was heavy and prolonged at times and on twelve days of the month totals of 50 mm or more were recorded somewhere in Britain, mostly over high ground in the west. Exceptionally heavy rainfall on the 9th and 10th caused widespread flooding, especially in South Wales and south-west England where villages were isolated, homes evacuated and the Paddington to Penzance railway line cut near Exeter. On the 21st and 22nd, when very heavy rain fell over Wales and parts of western and northern England, there was further flooding in the north and west of Wales while a landslip blocked the Cambrian coast railway. At Waen Sychlwch on Black Mountain (Dyfed) 397.4 mm

of rain was recorded from the 5th to 13th and 206.6 mm on the 21st and 22nd out of a monthly total of 768.9 mm (437 per cent of average). At Princetown Prison (Devon) in a period 109 hours from the 6th to the 11th there were only four hours without rain. Thunderstorms and hail occurred widely over England and Wales on 12th when at Alport Low (Derbyshire) 22.2 mm of rain fell in 11 minutes from 1419 GMT while 12 mm diameter hailstones were reported at Newbury (Berkshire).

### Snow

There were showers or longer periods of snow, mostly in the north, during the first week and between the 15th and the 23rd whilst southern districts had little or none. Except over the higher ground snow soon thawed. Some high-level roads in the east of Scotland were blocked by heavy snow on the 1st and several roads in Scotland, Cumbria and Northumberland were closed by drifts on the 22nd.

### Sunshine

Not surprisingly, in view of the extensive rain, sunshine was below average in all areas except parts of Shetland, western and eastern Scotland. Several places in the Midlands, East Anglia and south-east England had less than 50 per cent of average. The London Weather Centre with 52.9 hours of sunshine had its dullest March since records began in 1929. There were few sunny days, the first two weeks being particularly dull over England and Wales.

### Fog

Overnight fog formed on a few occasions but only early on the 31st was it at all widespread. Hill and coastal fog occurred frequently during the first two weeks and the last ten days of the month.

### Miscellaneous Phenomena

A funnel cloud was observed over the Severn Estuary near Chepstow on the 1st and some damage was reported at Beachley (Gwent).

**Table 1 District values**

District	air temperature °C					mean 30-cm soil temp °C	rain-days	rainfall	sunshine
	Highest Max*	Lowest Min*	max.	min.	mean				
	difference from average					% of average			
0 Scotland N	18.7	-4.7	0.0	+0.1	0.0	+0.1	+5	140	93
1 Scotland E	16.7	-6.8	+0.8	+1.0	+0.9	+0.9	+5	188	100
2 England E & NE	18.2	-1.5	+1.5	+2.2	+1.8	+1.6	+11	279	55
3 East Anglia	19.0	-1.3	+1.5	+3.2	+2.4	+1.7	+13	234	50
4 Midland Counties	17.2	-1.2	+1.2	+3.2	+2.2	+1.8	+10	247	53
5 England SE & Central S	18.3	-0.8	+1.4	+3.5	+2.5	+1.8	+12	251	53
6 Scotland W	16.5	-6.8	+0.7	+1.0	+0.8	+0.6	+7	182	91
7 England NW & Wales N	15.8	-1.5	+0.9	+2.4	+1.7	+1.5	+9	289	69
8 England SW & Wales S	17.8	-1.2	+1.0	+2.7	+1.8	+1.6	+10	277	66
N Ireland	15.7	-1.8	+1.0	+1.3	+1.1	+1.1	+6	186	81
Scotland	18.7	-6.8	+0.5	+0.7	+0.6	+0.5	+6	170	95
England & Wales	19.0	-1.5	+1.3	+2.9	+2.1	+1.7	+11	263	58

\*Highest maximum and lowest minimum of District Value Stations