

March 2013

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1981-2010.

UK overview

This was one of the coldest Marches in the historical series, dominated by easterly winds, with high pressure often to the north blocking the milder Atlantic air. It was especially cold during the second half of the month. There were some spells of rain, and substantial late-season snowfalls in certain areas between the 6th and the 27th, but also a lot of cold, dry weather. Many overcast days led to sunshine totals being well below average in eastern and south-eastern areas.

Temperatures for March were well below average everywhere. The UK mean temperature was 2.2 °C, which is 3.3 °C below the 1981-2010 average. It was the coldest March since 1962, and the equal second-coldest in the series from 1910. March was the coldest month of the 'extended winter', the first time this has happened since 1975, and the coldest calendar month since December 2010. The month was drier than average in the north and west, but rainfall totals were mostly near or above average elsewhere. The UK overall had 68% of average rainfall. There was 80% of the long-term average sunshine for the UK overall, but with a strong contrast between brighter western and duller eastern areas.

A maximum temperature of 17.5 °C was recorded at Trawsgoed (Ceredigion) on the 5th. A minimum temperature of -12.9 °C was recorded at Kinbrace (Sutherland) and Aboyne (Aberdeenshire) early on the 11th. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 on the 22nd, 87.0 mm of rain fell at Liskeard (Cornwall). A wind gust of 77 mph was recorded at Orlock Head (County Down) during the 22nd. At 0900 GMT on the 24th, a snow-depth of 41 cm was measured at Middleton (Derbyshire).

Weather impacts

After a quiet start to the month, there were several weather events significantly impacting the UK during March, mostly connected with low temperatures and heavy snowfall.

Between the 10th and 12th, very cold air for the time of year made its way right down to southern England. This, combined with snowfalls and strong to gale-force north-easterly winds, resulted in severe drifting for southern coastal counties of England. Motorists spent the night in vehicles in Sussex and Kent, there were several hundred collisions on the roads, schools were closed, and there was disruption at Gatwick airport. Eurostar services were severely disrupted due to heavy snowfalls in northern France. Conditions were exceptionally severe in the Channel Islands with strong winds, freezing temperatures and over 10cm of lying snow; both Jersey and Guernsey airports were closed for a time.

Heavy rain associated with weather fronts moving north caused some flooding problems in Devon and Cornwall on the 21st and 22nd, with worst affected areas including Newlyn, Penzance, Mevagissey, St Ives and Plymouth. Roads were affected by surface water flooding and a number of properties were flooded. One person died in Looe as their property collapsed in a landslide.

As the weather fronts moved further north between the 22nd and 24th, they met cold air and brought sustained heavy snowfalls to North Wales, the high ground of northern England, the east of Northern Ireland and south-west Scotland - including Dumfries and Galloway, Kintyre and the Isle of Arran, with 20 cm or more falling widely. The persistent heavy snow combined with low temperatures and strong winds to bring blizzard conditions at times and severe drifting. In these areas thousands of homes and businesses were without power

as ice brought down power lines. Hundreds of schools were closed and there was major disruption to transport. The lying snow remained un-melted and in deep drifts across high ground into early April, with farmers struggling to recover livestock buried in the snowdrifts.

Outside these events the month saw many other lower-impact events concentrated mainly across northern and eastern Scotland and eastern England, but occasionally extending to cover Northern Ireland, the West Midlands, Wales and southern England, with disruption from snowfalls and icy conditions on roads causing a number of accidents.

England diary of highlights

The month began fine and settled, and, after some frosty nights to begin with, it briefly became quite mild. However, most of the rest of the month was bitterly cold with persistent easterly winds, snowfalls at times, and day-time temperatures struggling to rise much above freezing. Persistent heavy rain in south-west England from 21st to 22nd turned to widespread heavy snow across northern England from 22nd to 24th.

The mean temperature was 3.6 °C below the 1981-2010 average, and this was the coldest March since 1962 and the second coldest in the series since 1910. Mean maximum temperatures were more than 7 °C lower than in March 2012; across Central England this was the coldest March for maximum temperatures in a series from 1878. It was rather drier than normal in the north-west, but rather wetter in parts of the east and south, averaging out at 103% of the long-term average rainfall overall. Eastern and south-eastern areas were notably dull, and the overall sunshine total was 71% of the long-term average.

1st to 6th:

It was generally dry on 1st, with the best sunshine in the north and west, but there was patchy drizzle for southern coasts. With high pressure dominating, it was dry with sunny spells from 2nd until 5th; frosty at night, but increasingly mild by day, Gravesend (Kent) reaching 17.1 °C on 5th. It was slightly cloudier on 6th but still generally mild.

7th to 14th:

It became more unsettled on 7th, with rain spreading from the south. Rain in southern areas, heavy at times, spread eastwards on 8th, Manston (Kent) recording 28 mm. On 9th a band of rain, sleet and snow affected central and eastern areas, and it felt chilly in an easterly wind. The 10th was much colder than of late, with a strong east wind and snow showers for eastern areas. It remained cold on 11th with strong north-east winds and snow showers, and an area of more persistent rain and snow for the Channel Islands where Jersey Airport recorded 5 cm snow-depth. Still cold, with scattered coastal snow showers on 12th, and an area of snow over the south-east and the Channel Islands where Guernsey recorded 14 cm snow-depth. After a frosty start, 13th was another cold day with frequent snow showers. The 14th began with temperatures dipping to -8.1 °C at Benson (Oxfordshire) and -8.2 °C at Shap (Cumbria), but during the day there was rain for the north-west and showers in the south-east.

15th to 21st:

It was milder but wetter on 15th with rain for many areas. A band of rain cleared from eastern areas on the afternoon of 16th, while the south-west had some showers and occasional thunder and also snow over higher ground. The 17th started with a band of rain, sleet and snow for central and southern areas spreading from the west, clearing in the afternoon. The 18th was mostly cloudy, with patchy rain in the north and scattered showers in the south-east. Any showers on 19th were confined to the coasts, inland areas remaining generally dry with sunny spells though cool. It was generally overcast on 20th with light rain for central and eastern areas, and again cool. A bright start for most on 21st, but rain, already in the far south-west by dawn, spread northwards accompanied by strengthening south-easterly winds. In the south-west the rain was heavy and Plymouth (Devon) recorded 58 mm.

22nd to 31st:

The 22nd felt bitterly cold, with strong south-east winds and a band of rain and snow spreading from the west giving significant depths on higher ground from the Midlands northwards. Snow continued in northern areas on 23rd with Bingley (North Yorkshire) recording a depth of 22 cm; it remained bitterly cold, with day-time temperatures struggling to rise above 0 °C in central areas. The snow was restricted to eastern areas on 24th and became lighter and patchier. Winds eased slightly but it remained cold. There were light and scattered snow showers on 25th in the north and north-east, with other areas brighter but remaining cold. Snow showers continued for northern and north-eastern areas on 26th and 27th in a strong easterly wind. Showers were much fewer on 28th and 29th; it remained cold with an easterly breeze but more areas saw the sun. A few more snow showers for eastern coastal areas on 30th, but remaining areas dry with sunny spells. The 31st was another dry, bright but cold day, after a minimum of -8.7 °C at Shap (Cumbria).

Wales diary of highlights

The month began fine and settled, but after a few days it turned more unsettled and colder. There was heavy rain for a time after mid-month, with significant snow in the north. The last part of the month was mainly dry but with bitterly cold easterly winds.

The mean temperature was 3.4 °C below the 1981-2010 average, and this was the coldest March since 1962 and the second coldest in the series from 1910. It was rather drier than normal in most areas, with 76% of the long-term average rainfall. Western parts enjoyed some sunny days, and overall there was exactly 100% of the long-term average sunshine.

1st to 5th:

The first four days were dry: it was generally cloudy on 1st but sunny for most areas on 2nd, 3rd and 4th. There were further sunny spells on 5th, and it became warmer with 15.0 °C at Bala (Gwynedd).

6th to 16th:

The 6th was cloudy, with patchy rain moving from the south-west towards the north in the morning and further rain later. It was overcast with rain on 7th. Patchy rain and showers on 8th but with brighter spells on the west coast. The 9th brought scattered showers but it was brighter in the south. It was overcast and cooler on 10th. After a minimum of -5.1 °C at Lake Vyrnwy (Powys), it was cold on 11th with frequent showers, wintry in places. A showery morning on 12th, but it brightened up in the afternoon though feeling colder. The 13th was cool too, with sunshine and showers. After a cold night, -8.7 °C at Sennybridge (Powys), there was patchy rain or showers on 14th. It became milder on 15th, but overcast at times with rain spreading east, followed by rain again on 16th but some sunshine later..

17th to 23rd:

The 17th was sunnier, with showers mainly in western areas. On 18th showers developed in the north with more sunshine in the south. Sunshine and showers again on 19th and 20th. A band of rain, falling as snow on higher ground, moved in through the day on 21st, with 35.2 mm recorded at Milford Haven (Pembrokeshire). Strong easterly winds on 22nd saw further rain and sleet, with snow in mid and north Wales all day, and a snow-depth of 6 cm was recorded at Hawarden Airport (Flintshire). This continued into 23rd, with 10 cm snow-depth recorded at Sennybridge (Powys).

24th to 31st:

The period 24th to 31st was much drier, but continued very cold for the time of year, with easterly winds and day-time temperatures struggling to rise much above freezing. Minima of -6.4 °C were recorded at both Whitechurch (Dyfed) on 28th and Trawsgoed (Dyfed) on 30th. It was mostly fine over this period with sunny

spells, and only a few isolated wintry showers inland. Lying snow remained un-melted in deep drifts across higher ground.

Scotland diary of highlights

The month began fine and settled, but after the first week it became more unsettled and colder, most of the rain falling in the south and east. From mid-month, rain and mostly snow affected south-eastern areas in a cold easterly wind, with deep lying snow across the high ground (such as the Cairngorms). The second half of the month was very cold everywhere, but northern and western areas enjoyed dry, bright and sunny days in lighter winds.

The mean temperature was 2.8 °C below the 1981-2010 average, and it was the coldest March since 1962. It was drier than normal in most areas, especially the north and west, with less than 20% of the long-term average rainfall widely. For Scotland overall it was the driest March since 1969, while for Northern Scotland it was among the driest Marches in the series from 1910. North-western parts were sunny, but eastern areas were dull. The overall sunshine total was 95% of the long-term average.

1st to 6th:

It was mainly dry and bright on 1st, and mostly dry again but with some scattered showers in the north on 2nd and 3rd. It was mild in the south-east on 2nd with temperatures approaching 13 °C in places, but cooler air to the north spread southwards on 3rd. It was dry but mostly cloudy on 4th, and continued fine and settled on 5th with some brightness in the south. The 6th was mostly dry but patchy rain edged into the west.

7th to 13th:

Rain spread across the country from the west on 7th, mostly clearing to the north-east by dusk. There was rain again for most areas on 8th, only the far north staying dry, and it felt cold in the easterly wind. Outbreaks of rain in the east on 9th spread west later in the day. Most areas had snow showers on 10th but it was drier and brighter in the north-west, then a very cold night with a minimum temperature of to -12.9 °C at Aboyne (Aberdeenshire). Frequent snow showers in the east on 11th but becoming mainly confined to the south-east later. Another cold night, with -11.9 °C recorded at Saughall (Ayrshire) early on 12th; the day was dry and mainly bright in the south but with scattered snow showers in the north. Dry and bright to the south on 13th but scattered snow showers again in the north and north-east.

14th to 23rd:

Rain or showers for most areas on 14th, and more rain spread from the west later in the day. The 15th began dry for some areas, especially the east, but more rain and showers spread from the west later. Rain in the south on 16th moved north through the day and turned to sleet or snow on the highest ground. Showers for most areas on 17th, turning to sleet or snow on higher ground. Rain in the east on 18th turned to snow later in the day, but it was drier further west. Snow, heavy at times, continued through the night and all day on 19th for most of the south and east. A drier day in the south on 20th as snow moved north of the central belt, but again it was drier in the west. By 21st it felt very cold in a fresh easterly wind, with snow showers mainly in the north-east and the Northern Isles. It snowed for most of 22nd in the south-west, heavy at times, with snow showers in the north-east too. On 23rd the west had frequent snow showers, with blizzard conditions at times but gradually easing later in the day, while lighter showers of rain, sleet and snow fell in the north-east.

24th to 31st:

It was mainly dry in the west on 24th and 25th, but with wintry showers in the east. Sleet and snow showers were more widespread on 26th and 27th across most areas. From 28th onwards it was much drier with only a few scattered wintry showers in places, and remaining cold, with a succession of very cold nights, especially in

the Highlands, lowest minima being -10.2 °C at Dalwhinnie on 29th, -10.7 °C at Tulloch Bridge on 30th, and -12.5 °C at Braemar on 31st. It was dry and fine everywhere by 31st.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

The month began fine and settled, with frost by night, but after a few days it became more unsettled with rain or showers. There were some particularly heavy bursts of rain in the south and east. The second half of the month brought persistent easterly winds. From 22nd to 24th, heavy snowfalls occurred across the hills of County Down and County Antrim, with severe drifting. The final few days remained cold but were more settled.

The mean temperature was 2.8 °C, which is 3.1 °C below the 1981-2010 average. It was the coldest March since 1962 and the equal-second coldest in the series from 1910. It was drier than normal in the north and west, but wet in the south-east, with overall 95% of the long-term average rainfall. It was a dull month overall with the sunshine total 64% of the long-term average.

1st to 5th:

Many places had light rain on the morning of 1st, but fine, dry conditions soon returned, until 5th, albeit with limited sunshine. Where cloud did break overnight there was frost in places.

6th to 17th:

Rain, heavy at times, spread to all areas from the south on 6th. After a mainly dry day on 7th, rain spread into all areas in the early hours of 8th, persisting for most of the day as easterly wind strengthened. Much of 9th continued dull and wet, but it brightened up slightly later in the day. The 10th was mainly dry and overcast but there was some rain for a time during the morning. It was brighter and drier from 11th to 13th, but showers on the coast moved inland from time to time, falling as snow on high ground as winds turned more northerly. A dry morning on 14th preceded a spell of rain for most parts. Further rain spread quickly through all parts early on 15th, clearing for a time but leaving heavy showers for most. Night frosts returned on 16th and showers continued, heavy along the east coast, but by 17th became less heavy.

18th to 26th:

The 18th started dry but rain spread to north-eastern coastal areas during the afternoon and easterly winds set in once again. Mainly overcast on 19th, with further showers, most frequent and heavy down the east coast. Brighter on 20th but a band of heavy thundery showers affected many parts during the afternoon. Overcast but mainly dry on 21st, easterly winds strengthening with a gust of 69 mph recorded at Orlock Head (County Down). An area of rain, quickly turning to snow, pushed west in the strong to gale-force easterly winds into all areas in the early hours of 22nd, accumulating at all levels and giving deep drifts in County Antrim which led to widespread disruption to homes, businesses and livestock; Ballypatrick Forest recorded a depth of 41 cm. The wind eased but snow showers continued through 23rd and 24th, heaviest in the east. Showers continued on 25th and 26th, with snow flurries on high ground.

27th to 31st:

A band of rain and snow affected the south-east early on 27th, later giving way to widespread showers, some falling as snow. Starting showery again on 28th, but the showers became gradually less frequent as high pressure was once again taking control. The 29th to 31st were largely dry and bright, but temperatures continued well below average with night frosts.

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