

December 2006

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1961-1990.

UK overview

Mean temperatures, 1 to 2 °C above average across the UK, which confirmed that 2006 was the warmest year on record for most areas (areal series back to 1914). Very wet over most of western Scotland and also parts of north-west England and north Wales, with many stations reporting over double the average rainfall. In contrast, some eastern coastal areas saw below average rainfall, with well below average rainfall in the Aberdeen area. Sunshine exceptionally above average across much of eastern Scotland and north-east England.

England diary of highlights

Wet and windy start and end to month. Mean temperatures, rainfall and sunshine were all above average for December.

1st to 7th: Unsettled conditions affected most of the British Isles with strong to gale force south-westerly winds predominating, bringing in Atlantic frontal systems and producing a lot of rain in places. The 3rd, in particular, was very stormy with a gust of 78 m.p.h. being recorded at Plymouth. On the 7th, heavy and squally showers moved across parts of the country with a tornado affecting parts of London. At least the south-west winds ensured mild conditions with a temperature of 15 °C being recorded at Teignmouth (Devon) and Yeovilton (Somerset) on the 4th.

8th and 9th: The weather became a little quieter for a time over the British Isles, low pressure clearing from south-eastern parts on the morning of the 8th and introducing a much less strong north-westerly wind ahead of a transient ridge of high pressure later on the 9th. Frost occurred in places on the morning of the 9th.

10th to 14th: A return to mild, unsettled and often windy conditions again as strong to gale force south-westerly winds re-established themselves across the British Isles, the strongest winds and the wettest conditions occurring in western areas. On the 13th, Shap (Cumbria) saw 56 mm of rainfall whilst 70 m.p.h. winds affected parts of northern England, leading to a spate of overturned vehicles. Once again it was mild, Weybourne (Norfolk) recording 14 °C on the 11th whilst overnight temperatures fell no lower than 11-13 °C during the early hours of the 14th - a record for some places.

15th to 18th: Frontal system, lying across central parts of the UK initially, soon moved away into the continent with a much gentler westerly developing for a time, followed by a ridge of high pressure. A little wet snow was observed for a short time over higher parts of the south-east as the frontal system cleared away on the 15th. A frontal system did affect parts of the south-west on the 18th, Saunton Sands (Devon) recording 19 mm of rainfall.

19th to 26th: A very quiet period of weather was observed as a large, slow-moving area of high pressure formed over southern parts of the British Isles. Fog or freezing fog was a problem in places, especially central and eastern England on the 19th with Marham (Norfolk) recording a maximum temperature of -2 °C in persistent fog. Similarly, Topcliffe (W Yorkshire) recorded a maximum temperature of -2.2 °C on 20th. By the 21st the fog was causing major problems at various airports around the country, particularly Heathrow where delayed and cancelled flights threatened to disrupt many Christmas journeys.

27th to 31st: The anticyclone began to move away into the continent on the 27th, allowing a frontal system to make inroads in some western areas and bring some rain and somewhat milder temperatures. As the rain moved erratically eastwards, some freezing precipitation was observed for a time over higher parts of the Pennines during the early hours of the 28th. By the 29th, windy conditions again affected all parts of the British Isles, especially western and southern areas, whilst Chivenor (Devon) recorded a maximum temperature of 14 °C. The year ended with a very windy spell as an area of low pressure developed and tracked across central Scotland during New Year's Eve. This produced some very strong winds generally across the country, especially over northern England (approx. 105 m.p.h. gust at Great Dun Fell, northern Pennines) and led to the cancellation of many New Year celebrations across northern England.

Wales diary of highlights

Wet and windy start and end to month. Mean temperatures and rainfall above average.

1st to 7th: Unsettled conditions affected most of the British Isles with strong to gale force south-westerly winds predominating, bringing in Atlantic frontal systems and producing a lot of rain in places. The 3rd, in particular, was very stormy with gusts of 86 m.p.h. being recorded at Pembrey Sands and 85 m.p.h. recorded at the Mumbles. On the 4th, 66 mm of rain was recorded in 12 hours at Capel Curig and during the early hours of the 5th, 11 mm of rain was recorded in one hour at Trawscoed. It was also stormy again across south Wales on the 7th, with a gust of 88 m.p.h. being recorded at the Mumbles.

8th to 9th: The weather became a little quieter for a time over the British Isles, with low pressure clearing from south-eastern parts on the morning of the 8th and introducing a much less strong north-westerly wind ahead of a transient ridge of high pressure later on the 9th. Frost occurred in places on the morning of the 9th.

10th to 14th: A return to mild, unsettled and often windy conditions again as strong to gale force south-westerly winds re-established themselves across the British Isles, the strongest winds and the wettest conditions occurring in western areas. During the 10th and 11th, 115 mm of rain was recorded at Capel Curig in the 24-hour period up to 0600 UTC on the 11th, with a gust of 70 m.p.h. recorded at Aberdaron.

15th to 18th: Frontal system, lying across central parts of the UK initially, soon moved away into the continent with a much gentler westerly developing for a time, followed by a ridge of high pressure. 24 mm of rain was recorded at Capel Curig on the 15th.

19th to 26th: A very quiet period of weather was observed as a large, slow-moving area of high pressure formed over southern parts of the British Isles. Fog or freezing fog was a problem in places, especially central and eastern parts of Wales with daytime temperatures remaining below freezing in places. By the 21st the fog was causing major problems at various airports around the country including Cardiff Airport.

27th to 31st: The anticyclone began to move away into the continent on the 27th, allowing a frontal system to make inroads in western parts and bring some rain and somewhat milder temperatures. By the 29th, windy conditions again affected all parts of the British Isles, especially western and southern areas, with the year ending with a very windy spell as an area of low pressure developed and tracked across central Scotland during New Year's Eve. This produced some strong winds for a time across Wales.

Scotland diary of highlights

Mean temperatures again above average. Also a very wet month for much of Scotland, most of the rain concentrated in the first fortnight and lasted a few days. A drier month across the north-east, and also exceptionally sunny. Aberdeen Airport smashed their December sunshine record with around 90 hours.

The month started with sunshine and showers, the showers mainly in the west. Wet and windy weather arrived on the night of the 2nd with heavy rain in the west producing 40 mm at Tyndrum during the day then another

87 mm overnight. The river Tay burst its banks. Showers eased for a time on the 4th with another band of lighter rain crossing overnight. Mild overnight temperatures, up to 12.5 °C in the south.

The 5th was a bright, showery day, then drier on the 6th. Showers returned on the 7th through to the 9th, most frequent over Northwest Scotland.

The 10th was another very wet day across western areas, with 84.4 mm falling at Tyndrum (midnight to midnight), but with a significant rain shadow, resulting in only 0.2 mm at Aberdeen. It was also very mild, with temperatures reaching 13 °C in many areas during the evening. The 11th saw blustery showers in the west with snow at high levels. The east was mainly dry and clear. Rain or blustery showers on the 12th, mainly in the west, with 20 to 30 mm falling quite widely. An exceptionally wet day on the 13th for much of the west and also the Central Highlands, with over 50 mm at Glasgow Bishopton. Widespread flooding was reported with 16 severe flood warnings issued by SEPA. Very mild, with Dyce reaching 14.1 °C. After a very wet night in the south and west, the persistent rain became more confined to the southwest on the 14th, though remaining areas were mostly cloudy with some showers. Less mild, and very windy in Shetland with Lerwick recording a gust of 70 knots.

Then a more settled spell of weather developed from the 15th with just a few showers in north and west. Similar on 16th, then mainly dry on 17th and 18th with an early frost. On the 19th cloudy conditions prevailed to the north and west of the Great Glen and at times through the Central Lowlands with occasional rain across Shetland. Across much of the north-east and the south, bright, sunny or clear spells and a widespread frost. The 20th was again mainly dry and bright with a frost early and late.

The 21st through to the 24th were mainly dry with gales in the north but a frost and some fog patches further south. Christmas Day was generally cloudy with some mist and patchy fog. However, the north-east was mainly clear and frosty. Aboyne fell to around -9 °C. The period 26th to 28th was mainly dry. Cloudy and mild in west, but clear and frosty in north-east.

The 29th became wet and windy in many areas, though some parts of the far north stayed dry. Gales were severe over the Western Isles, with gusts up to 59 knots at Tiree. Mild with Edinburgh reaching 12.7 °C. The severe gales soon eased on 30th but gusts of 60 knots at Inverbervie at 0100, 61 knots at Kirkwall at 0500 and 64 knots at Lerwick at 0700. Then sunny spells but showers affected the west. A colder day, with temperatures only reaching 8 °C.

The 31st started dry and bright with frost in the north-east. Heavy rain pushed north during the day, followed by blustery showers. Winds reached gale force during the afternoon, with severe gale westerly winds over the Central Belt. Highest gust 76 knots at Machrihanish.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

An unsettled first half of the month, then a settled spell but a wet and windy end. Mean temperatures, rainfall and sunshine were all above average for December.

The 1st and 2nd were bright with some showers and quite windy. Wet and windy weather arrived on the night of the 2nd clearing to blustery showers on 3rd. This turned out to be a windy day with a gust of 66 knots recorded at Killowen.

The 4th through to the 9th were bright days with showers, these mostly in the south and west. Temperatures up to 8 °C.

A cloudy, wet and very mild south-westerly airstream persisted through the 10th, with temperatures 10 to 13 °C at midnight. A showery day on the 11th, with the showers mainly in the north and west. Cooler than of late, with daytime temperatures of 5 to 7 °C. Rain cleared east early on the 12th, then sunny spells and blustery showers. Strong to gale force winds. The 13th was cloudy with rain at times. It was mild with fresh to strong

south-west winds. Another cloudy day on the 14th with further rain, but a few brighter spells developed. It was less mild but winds were lighter.

The period from the 15th through to the 26th was much more settled due to an area of high pressure. However there was extensive mist and fog as well as frost. On the 16th, the minimum temperature at Katesbridge was minus 2.7 °C. Extensive mist and fog, with light winds on the 18th. These conditions persisted through the 19th with freezing fog in places, although the Antrim coast saw clear, bright or sunny spells. The 20th too remained foggy in many areas, notably around Belfast where the Harbour Airport remained below freezing all day. Christmas Day was mainly cloudy with some mist and patchy light drizzle. Temperatures generally in the range 3 to 6 °C.

A band of heavier rain reached the west late on the 26th and spread east on the 27th, followed by drier weather. St Angelo recorded 17.6 mm. Drier and brighter on 28th. The 29th was windy with south to south-easterly gales accompanied by outbreaks of rain. A brighter less windy spell in the afternoon saw temperatures reach 13.3 °C at Newry. Gales returned later in the evening. The 30th was mainly dry with showers in the west. On the 31st, heavy rain crossed all parts during the morning, then heavy blustery showers. Gale force southerly winds reached severe gale southwest during the evening, with gusts of 61 knots at Orlock Head and Ballykelly.

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