

March 2006

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

UK overview

Mean temperatures below average, ranging from around 1.5 °C below average across NE Scotland to around 0.5 °C below average across S Wales, SW England and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, March was actually colder than any of the three standard winter months (Dec/Jan/Feb). The last time this happened in Scotland was during 1975/76. Rainfall anomalies were quite varied across the UK, with some stations receiving over double the March average.

Altnaharra (Highland) recorded a temperature of -16.4 °C on 2nd. Scampton (Lincolnshire) reaching a high of 17.7 °C on the 26th. Dyce, Wick, Glenlivet and Grantown-on-Spey saw snow depths rising to 25 cm or more during the first week of March.

England and Wales diary of highlights

It was a cold month with spells of wintry weather and below-average temperatures. However, this was partially offset by warmer conditions during the final week of the month as winds turned south-westerly.

1st to 6th: Low pressure in the North Sea or across Scandinavia dominated the weather through this period with a cold north to north-west flow. This brought wintry showers of hail, sleet and snow, particularly to Wales and exposed parts of the north-west. Through topographical gaps (such as the Cheshire gap) and troughs some wintry showers were carried further south and east across England. On the 4th the wind also veered sufficiently for showers in the North Sea to affect eastern fringes. However, away from the north and west many parts remained dry. Southern and eastern parts enjoyed long sunny periods, with Cromer (Norfolk) recording 10 hours of sunshine on the 5th. It was cold despite the sunshine with Fylingdales (North Yorkshire) remaining below freezing all day on the 4th. It was also cold by night with Capel Curig (Gwynedd) as low as -12.4 °C on the morning of the 3rd. On the 6th showers began to fade as the lows to the east of the UK began to fill and a ridge of high pressure toppled across from the west. However, rain reached the far west later in the day.

7th to 9th: On the 7th the transient ridge gave way allowing rain in the far west to sweep eastwards across most parts. This was preceded by sleet and snow over high ground in the north. The rain was heavy in the west, with Milford Haven (Pembrokeshire) recording 27 mm in the 24 hours ending 6 p.m. on the 7th. Further belts of rain pushed north-east on the 8th and 9th with heavy, frequent and locally thundery showers following. Wales and the west bore the brunt of the rain and showers with Sennybridge (Powys) recording 22.7 mm in the 24 hours ending 6 p.m. on the 8th while Capel Curig (Gwynedd) recorded 34.8 mm in the 24 hours ending 9 a.m. on the 10th. Despite the rain this was a much milder spell with Torquay (Devon) reaching 13.7 °C on the 7th, Credenhill (Herefordshire) 14.1 °C on the 8th and Herne Bay (Kent) 12.6 °C on the 9th.

10th to 14th: Further weather fronts pushed in from west during this period but a build of pressure to the east of the UK slowed their eastwards progress with some of the fronts stalling across Wales and more western parts. As a result Milford Haven (Pembrokeshire) recorded 25.2 mm (09-21) on the 13th and Walney Island (Cumbria) recorded 23.4 mm in the 24 hours ending 6 p.m. on the 14th. The undercut of cold air initiated by the build of pressure allowed some of the rain associated with the fronts to turn to snow, particularly across Wales, Cumbria and the Pennines. There were also reports of freezing rain across parts of northern England on the morning of the 14th. Thanks to the influx of cold air from the east Fylingdales (North Yorkshire) only reach

1 °C on the 14th while in the extreme west it was much milder with Trawscoed (Ceredigion) recording 12.3 °C on the same day.

15th to 18th: The area of high pressure, initially centred across Scandinavia, migrated westward towards Iceland during this period. As a result a cold east to north-easterly flow dominated the weather, strong at times across southern parts. The flow brought wintry showers to northern England on the 15th while other parts enjoyed dry and fairly sunny conditions. By the 16th the cloudier skies had spread further south and west with the cloud thick enough, particularly in the east, to give wintry flurries and snow grains and these conditions persisted for the following few days. It was cold or very cold across most parts with Leek (Staffordshire) only reaching 1 °C on the 17th and Cottesmore (Rutland) only reaching 2.4 °C on the 18th. However, some sheltered southern and western parts had temperatures closer to normal.

19th to 22nd: The easterly flow continued to affect more southern parts during this spell but elsewhere the weather was under the influence of a north to north-easterly. Showers affected areas exposed to the wind but the change of wind direction allowed sunnier skies to develop particularly in the west. Anglesey recorded 11 hours of sunshine on the 19th with Manchester seeing around 10 hours on the 22nd. It was still rather cold, particularly in the east, although locally the sunshine boosted temperatures to near normal.

23rd to 31st: The 23rd started cold and frosty with a low of -5 °C in Bedford and there was plenty of sunshine through the day (10.6 hours at Coltishall). However, a southerly flow developed through the day and rain reached the West Country later in the day. This was the first indications of a transition to milder conditions and that transition continued over the next few days as the flow became predominantly a fresh to strong south-westerly. Bands of rain swept across from the west on that wind interspersed with showers and these conditions prevailed through to the end of the month. In fact Pembrey Sands (Carmarthenshire) recorded a gust of 66 m.p.h. on the 27th. Western parts again bore the brunt of the rain with Capel Curig (Gwynedd) the wettest on three consecutive days, logging 44 mm in the 24 hours ending 6 p.m. on the 26th, with 39.4 mm and 59.6 mm in the following two 24-hour periods. Capel Curing had a further 36.2 mm in the 24 hours to 6 p.m. on the 30th. Despite the belts of rain and showers it was generally warm through this period and locally very warm, notably in the east. Holbeach (Lincolnshire) reach 16.9 °C on the 25th, Scampton (Lincolnshire) reached 17.7 °C on the 26th, and Coningsby (Lincolnshire) hit 17.2 °C on the 30th. Southern and western fringes remained cooler with temperatures tempered by the wind off the sea.

Scotland diary of highlights

Cold with significant snow in many places. The last week was milder but very wet.

During the first six days low pressure in the North Sea directed a northerly airstream across Scotland. In the south the weather was dry with much sunshine but in the north there were frequent snow showers. Places such as Wick, Aberdeen and Glenlivet saw snow depths rising to 25 cm or more. It was very cold with night-time temperatures falling to -16 °C at Altnaharra on the 2nd and -10 °C near Stranraer on the 4th. The 6th was a sunny day as a ridge of high pressure advanced from the west.

On the 7th low pressure near Iceland pushed fronts across the country, bringing milder weather with some rain. During the next few days the low pressure extended south-east towards the Netherlands so that winds backed into the south-east and it became less mild. The weather was mostly cloudy with a little rain in the south and west.

On the 11th high pressure formed over Scandinavia so that cold air arrived from the east. At the same time an Atlantic front was moving east and the result was a heavy snowfall during the early hours of the 12th. The worst affected area was the south-western half of Scotland (away from the coast) and 22 cm of snow was recorded at Glasgow. The snow was accompanied by strong southerly winds with gusts of 70 m.p.h. at Barra. Mild air reached the west coast but its eastward progress was slow and further snow fell on high ground on the 13th, with 23 cm at Eskdalemuir.

By the 15th the Scandinavian anticyclone had pushed away the Atlantic fronts and cold easterly winds covered Scotland, with much cloud away from the west coast. The anticyclone transferred to Greenland by the 19th, allowing Arctic air to reach Scotland. Winds were lighter for a few days with some bright weather. However, a small disturbance moved east across the northern mainland on the 22nd, bringing a period of snow.

The end of the long cold spell began on the 24th as a complex low pressure system moved towards Scotland from the south-west and remained nearby until the end of the month. Several bands of cloud and rain moved north and east across the country, bringing much wet weather. Rainfall totals included 30 mm at Aberdeen on the 24th and 57 mm at Eskdalemuir over the 25th/26th. Temperatures rose to 15 °C on the 26th and 27th before falling to near average values.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

Very wet with temperatures slightly below average.

This March, like several recent ones, opened on a very cold and wintry note with frequent snowfalls during the first week and some hard night-time frosts. Temperatures often struggled between 3 and 5 °C by day and nights were some of the coldest of the winter with temperature values between -5 and -7 °C. Days though were very sunny.

By the 7th cloudier, milder conditions arrived with some rain and temperatures recovered to double figures and this more unsettled theme with rain or showers at times continued until the 10th. The evening of the 10th became clear and cold and frost was widespread again by the morning of the 11th with temperatures locally down to -4 °C.

Cloud thickened to bring rain to all areas late on the 11th and this continued overnight, resulting in some very wet conditions with heavy rain and flooding. By 9 a.m. on the 12th, overnight rainfall totals were between 30 and 40 mm widely and Silent Valley in the Mourne recorded 56 mm - or well over two inches in 12 hours. The unsettled, relatively milder weather continued for a few more days with still some locally large rainfall totals.

The 15th saw the return of cold air and a cutting easterly wind and showers again wintry and the morning of the 16th had reports of some localised snowfalls of 4 cm in places from North Antrim to parts of County Down. Temperatures were well down into single figures again.

The period between the 17th and the 24th was often dry, cold and quite sunny, a theme which had characterised much of the winter. Frosts were widespread at times overnight and still quite severe with minimums on some mornings down to between -5 and -7 °C.

The final week turned much milder but unsettled with periods of heavy rain - many parts had another 30 to 50 mm, resulting in ground conditions becoming waterlogged. Temperatures though recovered to 13 or locally 14 °C generally and up to 16.3 °C at Ballykelly on the 27th the highest value of the month.

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