

Monthly Weather Report

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March 1961 — *Mild and unusually dry*

Weather during the month was generally anticyclonic. Pressure was highest over western Europe and southern England during the first two weeks, to the west of Ireland from the 17th to the 22nd and to the south-west of the British Isles during most of the rest of the month.

The weather pattern over the country was remarkably constant during the first half of the month, an anticyclone being situated to the south of the British Isles during the whole of that time with disturbances from the Atlantic moving round its northern flank. It was sunny and dry over the greater part of Britain, although Northern Ireland and northern Scotland were generally cloudy with occasional rain. Day temperatures were well above the average, but there was frost and fog at night. A moist southerly airstream became established on the 3rd as the centre of the anticyclone moved eastward across northern France. It lasted about a week and brought sea fog and low cloud to many southern and western coastal districts. In Cornwall, sky was obscured by fog on the 8th and 9th, although most of the county had had 8–10 hours sunshine daily during the first six days of the month. Afternoon temperature at Aberdeen on the 8th reached 18°C, whereas in parts of Devon, Cornwall and South-Wales the corresponding temperatures in sea fog were about 10°C lower. Fog was fairly widespread on the 9th and tended to persist throughout the day inland as well as on the coast.

Somewhat cooler air from the Atlantic spread eastwards across the country on the 10th, but the change was short-lived as on the following day a mild airstream from the south-west brought slight rain or drizzle to many districts. The anticyclone, which was over the Bay of Biscay on the 13th, moved eastward, becoming centred over northern France on the 15th, and over the Low Countries on the following day. Winds over southern England progressively backed first to the south, and then to the south-east, and weather became steadily warmer. The 16th was the warmest day of an unusually warm week for March with afternoon temperatures at many places exceeding 20°C.

There was a marked change in the general weather pattern on the 17th as the anticyclone over Europe declined and another formed in mid-Atlantic. This latter system moved slowly eastward and a cold northerly airstream spread over the British Isles bringing showers to most districts with sleet or snow at times even in southern England. Day temperatures on the 18th were generally about 10°C lower than two days previously, but still about normal for March. A deepening depression moving south-east from Iceland towards Denmark gave north-westerly gales along the east coast on the 20th with occasional wintry showers in Scotland and northern England; a gust of 70 kt was recorded at Lerwick. North-westerly winds with bright periods and occasional showers persisted over most of the country for two more days as the anticyclone to the west of Ireland drifted south-east towards Cornwall. By the 23rd, winds had backed to west fairly generally and temperatures were again above the average; in parts of eastern England 16°C was exceeded and there was more than 11 hours of sunshine.

Day temperatures remained above average on the 24th and 25th though there was frost at night. Cold northerly winds, however, again spread across the whole country on the 26th and reached gale force over a wide area with severe gales in Scotland. Wind speed in gusts exceeded 60 kt at many places and reached 74 kt at Lerwick. Showers of sleet and snow occurred locally. Milder weather with westerly winds returned to most places on the 28th, but cold northerly winds were resumed in Scotland during the last two days of the month with periods of moderate snow in places.

Pressure and Wind — Mean pressure was above the average everywhere except in the extreme north of Scotland, the deviation at 9h ranging from -0.4 mb at Lerwick to +13.0 mb at Scilly. Surface winds were generally between south and south-west until the 6th, becoming mainly southerly until the 9th, and generally south-westerly again until the 15th, backing to between south and south-east the next day. Three days of westerly winds on 23rd–25th interrupted a spell of north-westerlies which lasted from 17th to 27th, after which winds were westerly until the end of the month. Wind reached gale force on 20 days in Scotland and on the 1st–3rd, 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th, 12th, 15th, 16th, 20th, 24th–26th and 29th (15 days) in England and Wales. Gales were widespread, and severe in Scotland, on the 26th.

Temperature — Mean temperatures exceeded the 1921–50 average by 2.3°C in England and Wales; 2.5°C in Scotland, where for the main centres of population it was the warmest March, with the exception of 1938, for about 100 years; and 2.7°C in Northern Ireland. The mildest days occurred around the 9th in northern Scotland, where afternoon temperatures exceeded 19.5°C at a number of places, but around the 16th elsewhere. The coldest period was around the 27th and 31st in northern and eastern Scotland but around the 20th elsewhere in the British Isles.

Extremes included: (England and Wales) 22.8°C at Goldington on the 16th, -6.1°C at West Raynham on the 1st; (Scotland) 20.0°C at Halkirk on the 9th, -6.7°C at Halkirk on the 31st; (Northern Ireland) 17.8°C at Tollymore Park on the 17th, -1.7°C at Loughall on the 28th.

Precipitation — The general rainfall expressed as a percentage of the 1916–50 average was 25 in England and Wales, where it was the driest March since 1944; 95 in Scotland; 59 in Northern Ireland. Less than 5 per cent of the average rainfall occurred in south Devon, Dorset, the Vale of Taunton, the London Area, Kent and in the lower Severn, Wye and Usk valleys, while rainfall was less than 25 per cent of the average over the greater part of southern and central England, South Wales, the Vale of York, the Angus coast and eastern Down. The average was exceeded in north-west Scotland generally while in western Inverness-shire and Ross more than 150 per cent of the average was recorded. Periods of 15 or more consecutive days without measurable rain occurred in very many places, and in some parts of southern England as many as 30 days — from late February to late March — were rainless.

Snow or sleet occurred locally in Scotland on 14 days; it was reported from many places around the 16th–20th and during the last few days of the month. In England and Wales snow and sleet showers were widespread on the 19th and 20th and also occurred locally on the 18th, 21st and 30th. Thunder was reported from one place or another in Scotland on 9 days and in England and Wales on the 18th and 21st.

Sunshine — The general sunshine expressed as a percentage of the 1921–50 average was 128 in England and Wales, 88 in Scotland and 85 in Northern Ireland. Sunshine was above 150 per cent of the average over most of the London area, being 169 per cent of the average locally in Central London where it was the sunniest March since at least 1928.

Fog — In England and Wales, early morning fog occurred at one place or another on the 1st, 3rd–17th, 25th and 29th–31st (20 days); it was widespread on the 8th–10th. In Scotland, morning fog was reported on 14 days.

Miscellaneous Phenomena — The aurora was visible in Scotland on 8 nights; it was seen as far south as Ronaldsway on the night of the 5th/6th.