

March 2003

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

UK overview

The whole UK experienced mean temperatures well above average, with day times exceptionally above average. Most places were also very dry and exceptionally sunny.

Many stations broke their existing March sunshine records. The temperature at Altnaharra rose from -9°C to 18°C on the 17th, the greatest diurnal rise in temperature for Scotland in March.

England and Wales diary of highlights

Rather unsettled, with rain at times at first. Then for the remaining three weeks, sunny, dry and often very warm by day, but with some overnight frost and fog patches.

1st to 6th A changeable period, mostly warm with sunny spells and some rain at times. Thunder was heard in places on the 1st. A slow moving cold front gave a wet day in most areas on the 5th as a low passed to the north of the UK.

7th to 11th More unsettled and windy as vigorous depressions passed to the north-west. The 7th was particularly wet as bands of rain and showers, often heavy, crossed the region; some places reported thunder later. Thereafter there was rain at times, mainly in the north and west, with gusts of 60 knots being recorded in exposed spots. It became mainly dry in the south from the 9th, and generally warm in most areas. There were some thundery showers in northern districts on the 10th.

12th to 19th As high pressure took up residence over the North Sea, the weather became mainly very warm and sunny by day, especially inland. Dry conditions prevailed apart from some scattered showers in the north-east at first on the 12th and 13th. Fog affected coastal areas adjacent to the North Sea later in the period; this kept the temperature at Walton on the Naze (Essex) below 5 °C on the 19th. Calm and clear skies allowed overnight frost and patchy fog to develop, -6.6 °C was noted at Redesdale in Northumberland early on the 19th.

20th to 27th The anticyclone migrated to eastern Europe but maintained its influence over the region. The dry sunny theme continued, interrupted only by some scattered thundery showers in the extreme north and north-west on the 24th. Most days were very warm particularly inland, however the clear skies allowed sharp drops in temperature after dusk, with fairly widespread overnight frost, -6.6 °C being registered at Redhill Airfield (Surrey) on the 22nd. Central London's temperature rose to 20.0 °C on the 23rd. Coastal fog returned to counties adjacent to the North Sea during the 27th, while thundery rain broke out in the extreme south-west.

28th to 31st More changeable as weak fronts grazed southern districts at first, introducing a little rain before retreating. Dry sunny warm weather established itself again on the 30th and 31st as a ridge of high pressure rebuilt over the region. North Sea fog continued to plague east coast counties, which was slow to clear at times. Patchy fog also affected inland parts but generally dispersed quickly after the sun rose.

Scotland diary of highlights

Dry, warm and sunny.

Unsettled and changeable weather for the first 11 days was followed by a long anticyclonic spell. This produced many dry and sunny days, and from the 17th to the 19th, there were some exceptionally large variations in temperature. The whole of the month experienced temperatures well above average.

During the first 11 days a major area of low pressure was centred in mid-Atlantic, with south-westerly winds blowing across Scotland. Warm and humid air with gales and heavy rain in the west covered the country on the 4th and 9th, with showery weather predominating on other days. There was 44 mm of rain at Broadford on the 8th, and gusts reached 62 m.p.h. at South Uist on the 10th.

An intense area of high pressure formed over Scotland on the 12th and became slow moving in the North Sea until the 19th. The weather became sunny almost everywhere, and some very large variations in temperature developed. On the 17th, cloud from the North Sea held the maximum temperature at Edinburgh and Leuchars to 4 °C, while 16 °C was recorded at Aviemore and 12 °C near the summit of Aonach Mor. During the night the temperature at Aonach Mor fell no lower than 6 °C, while at Tulloch Bridge -6 °C was recorded. On the 17th, the temperature at Altnaharra rose from -9 °C to 18 °C. The 19th saw the minimum temperature at Cairnwell register 8 °C, compared to -6 °C at Enochdhu. Aviemore experienced a temperature range from -6 °C to 19 °C.

From the 20th to the 28th the anticyclone retreated into Europe, and mostly light south-westerly winds covered Scotland. The weather continued fine with hazy sunshine, and it was warm with the temperature reaching 19 °C at Aboyne on the 24th.

A weak cold front crossed the country overnight on 28th/29th, sweeping away the haze and introducing cooler, fresher air. However, a new anticyclone built behind the front, maintaining the generally fair weather.

Very sunny over much of the mainland. It was the sunniest March at Prestwick, Kinloss and Aberdeen, where records started in 1951, 1951 and 1942 respectively. At Eskdalemuir it was the sunniest March since 1929, and at Paisley since 1894. The first three months of the year were the sunniest on record at most stations on the mainland.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

Dry, warm and sunny.

This was a dry month, with many areas recording between 20 and 25 days when less than or equal to 1 mm of rain occurred. The period from the 12th to 30th proved the driest spell of the month throughout the province, with little or no measurable rainfall recorded, while in contrast the wettest spell of the month took place on the 7th and 8th. Sunshine durations were well above average with most areas experiencing over half the month when between five and nearly 11 hours of bright sunshine were recorded. Across Northern Ireland overall mean temperatures were above normal. Average daytime temperatures were around 3 °C above normal, which would be regarded as being rather warm for this time of year.

1st to 11th Weather conditions were unsettled during the start of March, with light to moderate rain recorded on most days. The 1st and 3rd were quite wet in the south-east of County Down, with some areas in the region recording over 25 mm of rain on the 3rd alone. The wettest spell of the month took place on the 7th and 8th. Moderate to heavy rain and showers occurred over this period, with some locally heavy downpours. Overall mean temperatures were above average, with air frost recorded on only one or two occasions, while ground frosts occurred on up to four occasions. On the whole it was a dull period, though sunny conditions prevailed on the 2nd, 5th and 6th when between five and eight hours of sunshine were recorded.

12th to 30th During this period mainly dry conditions prevailed almost everywhere. Overall temperatures were

initially close to normal. However by 15th daytime temperatures were warm for the month of March, with maximum temperatures for each day recorded in double figures throughout the period. Indeed one of the highest daytime temperatures for the month was 17.4 °C recorded on the 27th. Widespread air frosts were recorded between the 13th and 20th as well as the 23rd and 24th. Ground frosts occurred on most nights throughout this period, with severe ground frost recorded in many areas on the 13th, between the 16th and 19th and again on the 23rd. Sunny conditions prevailed on most days with many areas recording between eight and 10 hours of bright sunshine on up to nine occasions. In contrast there were only three days when two hours or less sunshine were recorded. Many areas were affected by early morning fog between the 17th and 19th and again between the 23rd and 25th.

31st Although it was another rather warm, sunny and dry day across the province, by late evening cloudy conditions brought a band of rain and showers to all areas, which would have been the first fall of rain in some places in 19 days.

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