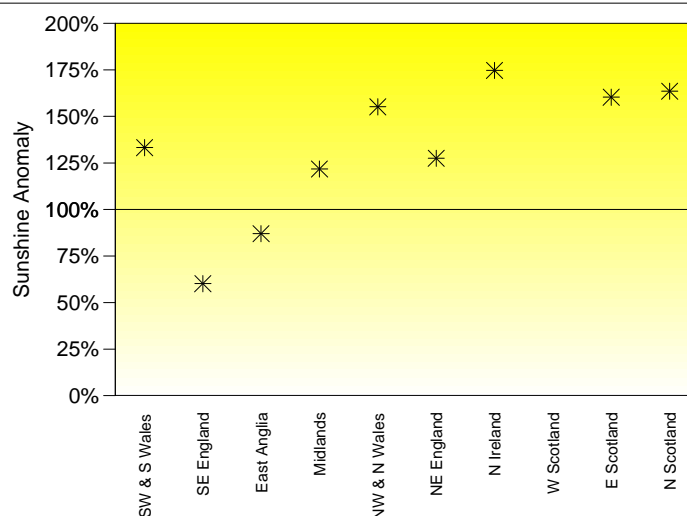
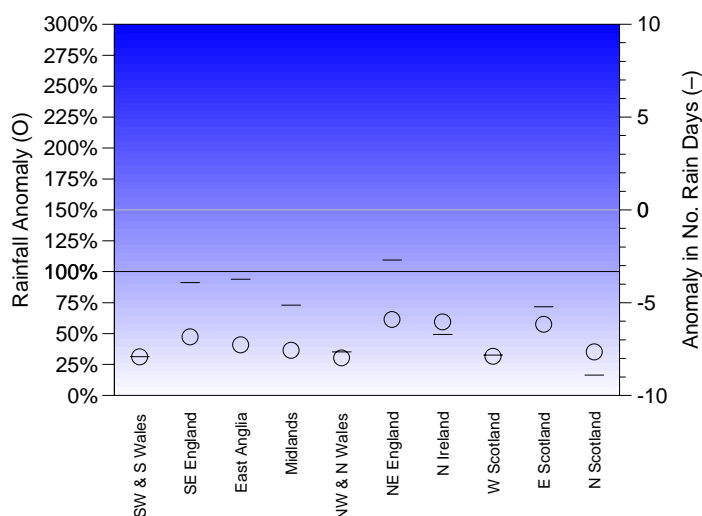


Extremes for December 2010		
Hottest:	13.4°C	Penzance Heamoor, Cornwall, 28th
Coldest:	-21.3°C	Altnaharra SAWS, Highland, 3rd
Most Rain:	48.2mm	Fyvie Castle, Grampian, 10th
Most Sun:	7.7hrs	Jersey St Helier, Channel Islands, 13th
Windiest:	62mph	Foula No 2, Shetland, 10th
Warmest:	6.1°C	Scilly St. Mary's SAWS, Cornwall
Coolest:	-3.3°C	Tulloch Bridge SAWS, Highland
Wettest:	144.1mm	Altnaharra SAWS, Highland
Driest:	6.2mm	Edgbaston, West Midlands
Sunniest:	90.2hrs	Auchincruive, Strathclyde
Dullest:	8.3hrs	Threave, Kirkcudbrightshire



December is the darkest month as the winter solstice approaches but it is rarely the coldest. Despite the wealth of folklore about snow at Christmas, it is more often green than 'white'. This year, significant falls in the run up led to picture postcard scenes for many places.

The wintry weather of late November continued into December. A piercing east wind delivered snow showers to eastern areas and day maxima were near to or below freezing in many areas. Altnaharra, Sutherland, recorded a minimum of -21.3°C (-6°F) on the 2nd while the mercury only struggled to a maximum of -14°C (7°F) during the day! Extensive disruption to transport continued, but there was a brief, slight thaw over the weekend of the 4th/5th with rain for central and southern parts. Colder conditions soon returned from the north however and light winds allowed freezing fog to develop widely. A northerly breeze cleared the fog and low cloud on the 8th and it then turned briefly milder as winds backed to the north-west. Temperatures rose to near normal values on the 10th and 11th but dropped once more after a weak cold front moved south, and high pressure began to build. After a few days of quiet weather a very wintry spell began on the 16th as a deepening depression moved from the Norwegian Sea into Scandinavia and high pressure over Greenland reasserted its dominance. A cold front moved south introducing air straight from the Arctic and there was a sharp temperature drop with rain turning quickly to snow and widespread ice forming after dark. Conditions were very hazardous for motorists and there were a spate of road accidents. Further snow fell on the 17th and was heaviest in the north and west and temperatures struggled to rise much above freezing anywhere. A small depression brought more snow to England and Wales on the 18th and this time, southern England was badly affected, with airports closed and chaos on the roads. The weather remained very cold in the run-up to Christmas, and although it became quieter, there was further snowfall for some, especially SW England on the 20th (an extra 15-25cm in places) and then the Midlands and East Anglia on the 22nd. The combination of a snow cover, clear skies and low daylight hours led to exceptionally low night-time minima. Among the many bone-chilling highlights were: -19.6°C (-3°F) at Chesham, Bucks, on the 20th, -17.8°C (0°F) at Katesbridge, County Down, on the 21st and -20.2°C (-4°F) at Altnaharra, Sutherland. Christmas Day saw a few snow flurries in the north but most places continued dry and very cold, with patchy freezing fog. The wintry spell slowly abated from the 27th as weakening Atlantic fronts pushed in from the west. The thaw presented its own collection of hazards as burst pipes led to post-Christmas misery for some, especially in Northern Ireland. Also, as milder and very moist air encountered the frozen ground it was quickly cooled to its dew point and much of the UK became shrouded in a pall of low cloud and fog from the 28th, giving a grey and gloomy end to 2010.

Mean temperatures were well below the 1971-2000 average everywhere by some 5°C, making it the coldest December in over 100 years, and the coldest calendar month since February 1986. The number of days with air frost was the highest for December for over 50 years. It was also a very dry month, the driest December since 1963, and very sunny in the west and north but dull in south-east England with only 60% of normal sunshine owing to persistent easterly and north-easterly winds.

In Europe, torrential rain brought flooding to the Balkans during the first week. Elsewhere severe cold made the headlines. Italy's island of Capri recorded its first snowfall in 25 years. Christmas Day was the coldest ever recorded in Ireland with -17.5°C (0.5°F) at Straide, Co Mayo in the west. In Russia, an ice storm in Moscow on the 23rd badly disrupted air traffic and left more than 400,000 people without electricity.

In the Americas, the "Pineapple Express" - a southwest wind bringing warm moist air off the Pacific, drenched the American west coast. Los Angeles recorded a total of 171mm of rain from the 17th-22nd, equivalent to more than one-third of its annual average. Much further north, the Mount Washington ski resort on Vancouver Island received 250cm (2.5m!) of snow in 48 hours. A gargantuan blizzard swept up the east coast of America on Boxing Day. South Carolina had its first Christmas snow since records began in 1887, while Lincoln Park and Lyndhurst, both New Jersey, recorded 74cm.

Extreme rainstorms and catastrophic flooding occurred in Australia. In Queensland four people were killed and thousands were forced to evacuate their homes as rivers overflowed their banks. On the 20th, 245 mm of rain fell over Carnarvon, and the nearby Gascoyne River reached its highest levels ever.