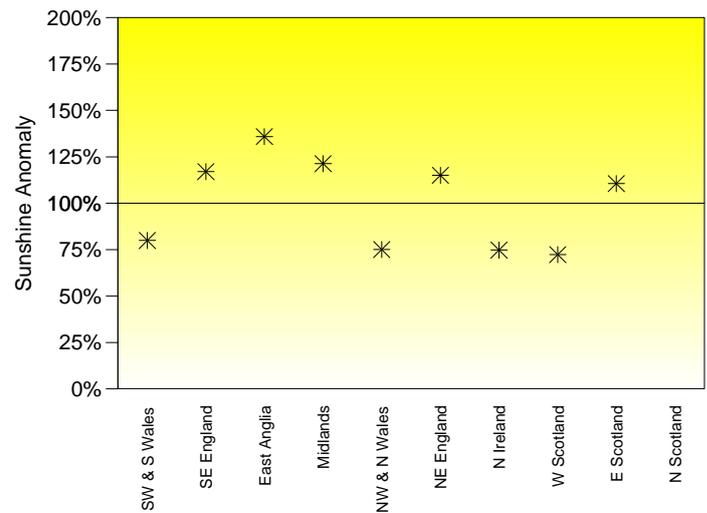
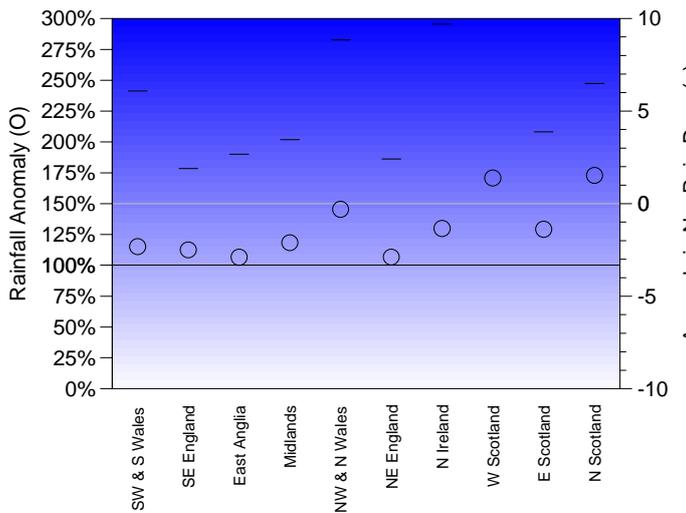


Extremes for December 2011	
Hottest:	16.0°C Plymouth / Roborough, Devon, 9th
Coldest:	-9.4°C Loch Glascarnoch, Highland, 18th
Most Rain:	85.8mm Kinlochewe, Highland, 26th
Most Sun:	7.2hrs Hastings 1, East Sussex, 9th
Windiest:	98mph Foula No 2, Shetland, 8th
Warmest:	9.2°C Carrefour-au-Clercq, Channel Islands
Coolest:	1.7°C Dalwhinnie No 2, Tayside
Wettest:	658.2mm Cluanie Inn No 3, Ross & Cromarty
Driest:	33.7mm Cambridge University, Cambridgeshire
Sunniest:	86.3hrs Hull North, Humberside
Dullest:	8.1hrs Bala, Clwyd



December is the darkest month of the year, yet is often surprisingly mild. The seas which surround our shores still retain some of their autumn warmth and January or February are usually rather colder. 2010 was a notable exception to this when ice and snow were widespread very early in the winter season, but this year reverted to the more familiar pattern of wind and rain.

The first week was dominated by a north-westerly flow and polar maritime air. With relatively warm sea temperatures, there was marked instability and plenty of showers, especially in the north and west - where they frequently fell as snow. 15cm was measured at Eskdalemuir, Dumfries and Galloway, at 0900 on the 5th and 6th. A rapidly deepening depression moved east near northern Scotland on the 8th and a major storm affected northern Britain. Gusts reached 164mph on Cairngorm and 145mph on Aonach Mor. Even at lower levels and further south, there were gusts in excess of 70mph e.g. 74mph at St Bees Head, Cumbria. Disruption and damage was widespread. More than 300 passengers were stranded on the Rotterdam-Hull ferry off the East Yorkshire coast, the Forth road bridge was closed and a wind turbine was wrecked and burst into flames at Ardrossan, Ayrshire. After two bright cold days, the weather once more turned unsettled on the 12th with several deep depressions passing close to the UK. A rapidly deepening low moved east along the English Channel overnight 15th/16th, but the strongest winds affected northern France, leaving most of the South coast unscathed. Much of England had heavy rain on the morning of the 16th and this turned to snow over higher ground. There followed two days of bright, frosty weather with a peppering of wintry showers, but mild conditions became well established by the middle of the third week. Northern Britain remained unsettled, but the south came under greater influence from the Azores High - keeping the rain at bay. Santa's sleigh would definitely have struggled this year and Christmas Day was grey and extraordinarily mild - with widespread maxima of 11-14°C (52-57°F) Similar values were recorded on Boxing Day and 15.5°C (60°F) was achieved at Fyvie Castle, Aberdeenshire - remarkable for this time of year and for so far north. The 28th saw more stormy weather in the north with gusts of 79mph at Tyree and South Uist. On the 30th snow fell on northern hills ahead of a warm front but the old year ended on a very mild and damp note in the ensuing warm sector.

Mean temperatures for December were well above average and it was a massive 5°C (9°F) warmer than December 2010. Air frosts were conspicuous by their absence over England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It was a very wet month in northern and western Scotland, Northern Ireland and north-west England, but totals were close to normal elsewhere. Sunshine was well above average over the Midlands and eastern England but well below across Northern Ireland, western Scotland and some western parts of England and Wales, reflecting the dominance of westerly winds.

Northern Europe experienced a stormy December. A record-high wave of 20.4m was measured off Co Donegal on the Irish coast at the peak of a severe North Atlantic storm which skirted Ireland en route to northern Scotland on 13th-14th. Another severe storm 'Joachim' struck Western Europe on December 15th-17th. Heavy rain and snow, combined with gusts as high as 94mph caused travel disruption and hundreds of thousands of power outages across northern and western France, Germany, and Switzerland. The Austrian and Swiss Alps welcomed the snowfall - where resorts had started their winter ski season unusually dry and barren. Another fierce Atlantic Storm 'Dagmar' pounded Scandinavia on 25th-26th, cutting off electricity to 265,000 residents across Norway, Finland and Sweden. Trains were halted and roads were closed in the worst storm to hit the region since 2001. The highest winds were in Norway with means of 100mph and gusts of 145mph.

In the United States, a severe wind storm caused damage in California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming 1st-2nd. The ferocious Santa Ana winds toppled thousands of trees, knocked power out to hundreds of thousands of homes and blew over trucks in California and Utah. Gusts over 140 mph were measured on the Sierra Crest mountain ridge. In the east, a winter storm on the 7th unleashed a widespread swath of 90mm rainfall from the central Appalachians to New England. Washington, D.C. received 79mm rain that day, more than it typically receives during a whole December! A major winter storm brought blizzards to the Southern Rockies and Central Plains on 19th-20th. New Mexico received 61cm of snowfall and many highways were closed from New Mexico to Kansas, stranding hundreds of holidaymakers. Heavy rains caused a mudslide on the 8th that flooded 3500 homes and killed six people about 200 miles south of Bogota, Colombia.

On the 16th tropical Storm Washi made landfall over the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. 142mm of rain fell at Lumbia Airport in just 12 hours causing rivers to swell and burst their banks. Entire villages were destroyed, and at least 1257 residents perished in landslides - with thousands more injured. In northern Australia, Tropical Cyclone Grant brought heavy rain and destructive winds to the Tiwi islands north of Darwin on Christmas Day. The storm also caused flash flooding in the Northern Territory, knocking a freight train from a bridge and destroying large parts of a major highway. Further south, large hailstones shattered glass in cars and buildings in Melbourne and a tornado touched down in nearby Fiskville.