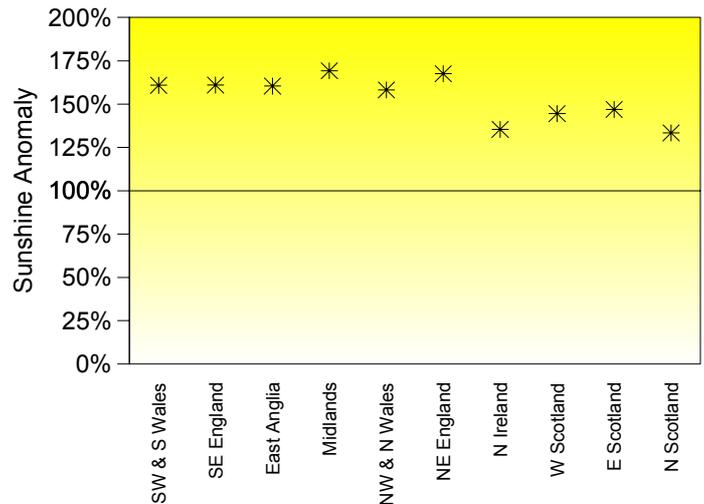
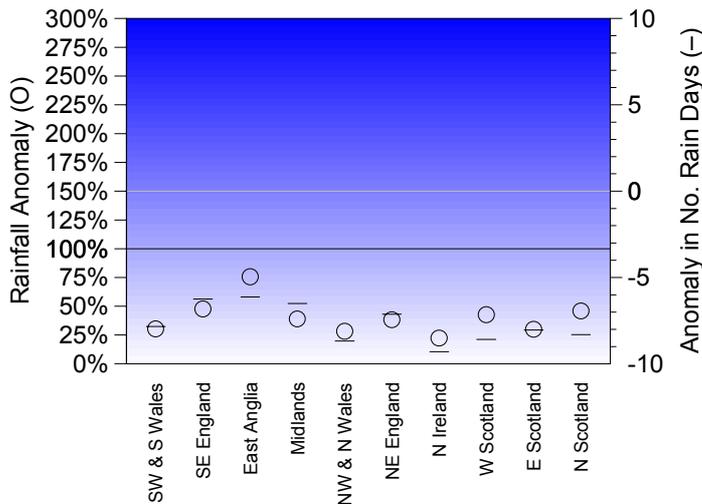


Extremes for March 2012	
Hottest:	23.6°C Aboyne, Grampian, 27th
Coldest:	-8.5°C Braemar No 2, Avon, 18th
Most Rain:	44.2mm Kinlochewe, Highland, 19th
Most Sun:	12.6hrs East Malling, Kent, 27th
Windiest:	67mph Sule Skerry MAWS, Orkney, 6th
Warmest:	10.5°C Portchester, Hampshire
Coolest:	6.3°C Dalwhinnie No 2, Tayside
Wettest:	195.0mm Cluanie Inn No 3, Ross & Cromarty
Driest:	6.8mm Killowen, County Down
Sunniest:	226.1hrs Radstock, Somerset
Dullest:	69.4hrs Lerwick, Shetland



March marks the beginning of the meteorological spring. Snow and frost may still occur but the sun is rapidly waxing - and its heat becomes appreciable on a fine day. Settled spells in spring are often notable for their high diurnal temperature ranges - from chilly nights to balmy afternoons. Such was the case this year in what was an outstandingly dry and sunny month.

March began quiet and dry. A cold front swept in from the west on the 3rd giving a short spell of rain - and the 4th saw widespread rain over England and Wales which turned to sleet in places. A ridge led to cold, bright weather for the next couple of days before more fronts raced south-east on the 7th bringing rain followed by wintry showers with snow on northern hills. Pressure then rose strongly in the south so that although Atlantic systems continued to affect the north at times, the trend was for settled weather. By the 11th, it felt decidedly spring-like where the sun broke through - and maxima in parts of eastern England exceeded 13°C (55°F). For the following week, high pressure was centred over the UK although copious cloud kept conditions warm rather than hot. However, after a brief unsettled spell 17th/18th, pressure began to rise once more and come to dominate for the remainder of the month. Nights were often chilly with frosts, but with more sunshine, daytime temperatures soared: By the 22nd maxima began to exceed 16°C (61°F) and as the brilliantly sunny skies persisted over the following week, temperature records tumbled across Scotland. Maxima exceeded 21°C (70°F) in places, with 23.6°C (74°F) at Aboyne, Aberdeenshire on the 27th, marking a very warm day for mid summer, let alone March! By the 29th, the anticyclone which had persisted so long began to recede westwards into the North Atlantic allowing weak fronts to approach Scotland from the north. The 31st saw a weak cold front move south, bringing very little of the much-needed rain but more cloud and a sharp drop in temperature. Mean temperatures and sunshine for March were well above normal everywhere, and it was again a very dry month, exacerbating the drought conditions in parts of eastern and southern England. Ireland also experienced record warmth in the latter half of March. The maximum temperatures of 22.2°C (72°F) at Belmullet and 18.8 °C (66°F) at Cork Airport on the 27th were the highest ever for March in 50 years of records.

Across the Atlantic, severe thunderstorms on the 2nd generated one of the worst March tornado outbreaks in U.S. history. A preliminary count of 120 tornadoes left massive destruction across the Midwestern and Southeast states where 39 people were killed and hundreds of homes and businesses destroyed. In Clark County, Indiana, an EF-4 tornado, with winds whipping up to 175 mph, left a 49 mile long path of total devastation, a swath including the unfortunate town of Henryville. From the 12th onwards, central and eastern states sweltered in extraordinary early spring warmth. The onset was spectacular; at International Falls, Minnesota, temperatures reached a low of -26°C (-14°F) on March 9th and then soared to a high of 26°C (79°F) on the 18th - just nine days later! Boston sizzled in 28.5°C (83°F) on the 22nd - its earliest 80°F temperature since 1921. More than a dozen major cities established new all-time highs for March, including Detroit and Lansing, both Michigan, where the mercury hit 30°C (86°F) on the 22nd. Quebec City, Canada, also smashed the March record with 18.5°C (65°F). However the early heat triggered violent thunderstorms across the Southeast USA on the 24th. Hail, in places the size of golf balls, covered the ground 15cm deep in some communities from south-western Virginia through Georgia into South Carolina; Hail also 'hit' the headlines in the 50th state of America, Hawaii which recorded its largest ever hailstone, collected in the Aikahi area. The official measurements were 110mm long and 50mm wide!

A major dust and sandstorm swept over wide areas of the Middle East on 17th/18th. The strong winds and very low visibility spread quickly south-eastwards, enveloping Baghdad, Iraq, through to Kuwait. The choking, blinding airborne dust sent hundreds of people to hospital in Saudi Arabia where schools were shut. The storm disrupted flights through Yemen and in Kuwait, 277 residents on the island of Failaka were evacuated. In Australia, New South Wales recorded its wettest week on record to the 4th March, after a slow moving rain-band delivered a state-wide average of 124mm. Numerous rainfall stations and entire catchments broke records during the event, which culminated with a daily fall of 187mm at Charlotte Pass on the 2nd. Wodonga, Victoria, recorded 88mm within just a few hours and this, astonishingly, broke the previous March monthly record of 84mm set in 1926. An estimated 70% of New South Wales was affected by flooding on the 5th when 13,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes. Thousands of wolf spiders near Wagga Wagga sought higher ground, spinning webs in fields and trees to avoid the deluge!