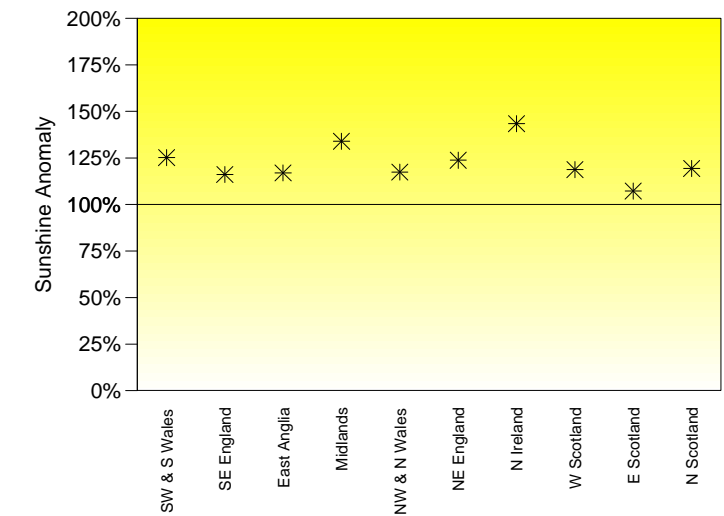
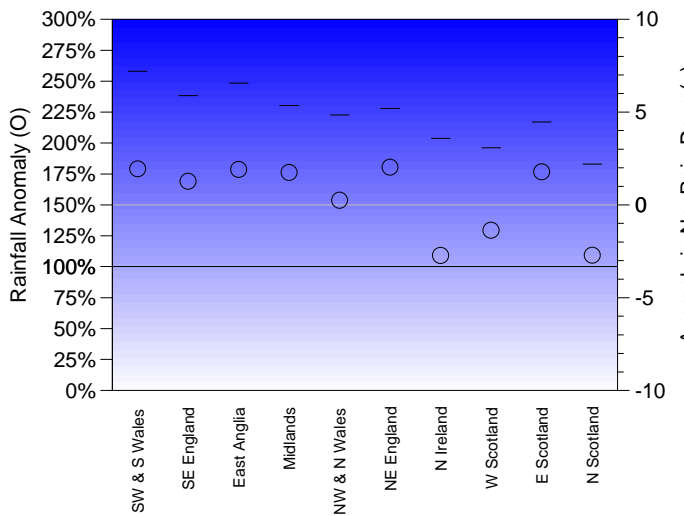


Extremes for December 2012	
Hottest:	19.9°C Oxford, Oxfordshire, 24th
Coldest:	-12.9°C Braemar No 2, Avon, 6th
Most Rain:	88.8mm Tyndrum No 3, Perthshire, 20th
Most Sun:	7.9hrs Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd, 10th
Windiest:	81mph Sule Skerry MAWS, Orkney, 22nd
Warmest:	9.1°C Scilly St. Mary's SAWS, Cornwall
Coolest:	0.7°C Loch Glascarnoch, Highland
Wettest:	493.0mm Capel Curig SAWS, Gwynedd
Driest:	54.0mm Swaffham, Norfolk
Sunniest:	86.9hrs Portchester, Hampshire
Dullest:	18.1hrs Aviemore, Highland



A dusting of fresh snow, sparkling frost and the sound of carols coming through the crisp winter air... Such is the traditional image of December but the reality is often very different. It is more common to have a 'green' Christmas than a 'white' one, and in very few winters is December colder than January or February. Notable recent exceptions were 1981-82 and 2010-11. This year the Yuletide season was marred for many by the ravages of flood and virus.

December 2012 saw sharp contrasts in weather - with a dry and cold first fortnight being replaced by mild, very unsettled conditions for the remainder of the month. The 1st was dry and bright, but a band of rain overnight 2nd / 3rd was preceded by snow in the north - and this settled in places including Glasgow. Another icy blast occurred on the 5th and rain turned to snow - which settled in parts of the Midlands and the south early in the morning. The 7th also saw some wintry flurries but the deepest chill was reserved for the 10th - 14th as an anticyclone, near Iceland on the 9th, became established over the UK by the 11th. The morning of the 12th was greeted by widespread freezing fog which coated trees spectacularly in rime but also caused numerous road traffic accidents and disruption at airports including Gatwick. Even central London saw the mercury slump to -4°C (25°F) and minima below -8°C (18°F) were widespread. By the 13th milder air had reached the south-west, and a more widespread thaw set in the next day as rain swept northwards preceded by snow over northern hills with blizzards in the Highlands. A couple of milder, showery days followed and by the 19th, hopes of a white Christmas were fading as a very disturbed spell of weather began. From then until month end, the UK was bombarded by a relentless series of fronts and depressions with strong winds and heavy rain featuring almost daily. Extensive flooding affected the south-west in the run up to Christmas, and travellers faced disruption on rail services. Six villages in Cornwall were flooded and 80 homes were evacuated in Wellington, Somerset. In Braunton, North Devon, the river Caen burst its banks, inundating shops and homes. By the 23rd, more than 100mm had fallen in parts of south-west England, south Wales and eastern Scotland. On the 27th, lightning is thought to have set fire to several properties in Dorset and the Thames Barrier was raised due to the swollen river and in anticipation of a high tide. There were frequent gales during this period but it was often very mild with temperatures above 10°C (50°F) both by day and night. On the 22nd, for example, 15.0°C (59°F) was recorded at Westonzoyland, Somerset.

Mean temperatures for December were close to the long-term average with the mild second half offsetting the earlier cold spells. While sunshine was a little above normal it was very wet everywhere and provisionally the wettest December since 1999. The soggy end to the year has made 2012 the second wettest year ever for the UK - remarkable when the concern last Spring was of imminent drought and hose pipe bans.

A large area of southeast Europe was gripped by severe winter weather during December. Blizzards blocked roads, stranded villages, disrupted power supplies and shut down airports in the Balkans. Snowdrifts and avalanches blocked roads in northern Montenegro, where 1m of snow fell overnight 11th-12th. Across the border in south-western Serbia, heavy snowfall isolated more than a dozen villages. At least nine deaths across the region were attributed to the freeze, as temperatures dropped to as low as -15°C (5°F). Further south, in Kosovo heavy snow cut off villages in the west and closed schools. Snow even blanketed Podgorica on the Adriatic coast and closed its airport on 12th. Blizzards swept Romania over the following week and by the evening of December 19th several key roads were closed leaving 10,000 residents in Botosani County marooned. In the Ukraine temperatures plunged to -23°C (-9°F) and the snow lay >50cm deep.

In Japan widespread "sea-effect" snowfalls gave Sapporo a 27cm snow cover by 11th with 50cm at Asahikawa. On the 26th a major winter storm in eastern Canada delivered a record-breaking snowfall to Montreal and parts of Quebec. 45-50cm had fallen in and around Montreal by the 27th surpassing the previous one-day record of 43cm set in March 1971. In contrast, in South America, on the 10th, western and northern Argentina and much of Paraguay baked under temperatures >40°C (104°F); in the Argentina Cuyo, 43.1°C (109°F) was recorded at La Rioja with 43.5°C (110°F) at Catamarca.

In the Pacific, on the 6th typhoon Bopha tore through the southern Philippines with winds as high as 130mph. The storm caused 418 fatalities with many other people reported missing. On entering the open South China Sea, Bopha was upgraded to a "super typhoon", with Category 5 equivalent sustained winds of 160mph. Also on the 6th, three people were killed and several injured after a tornado hit New Zealand's largest city of Auckland. The tornado ripped concrete slabs from a building site and dropped them onto a truck. Slow-moving Tropical Cyclone Evan brought destructive winds and torrential rain to the Pacific state of Samoa 12th - 13th. At least two people were killed and there was widespread damage as the capital Apia was struck by the worst storm in 20 years. In Pago Pago, in American Samoa, winds toppled trees and power lines, as crops and buildings were destroyed by mean winds of >90mph.