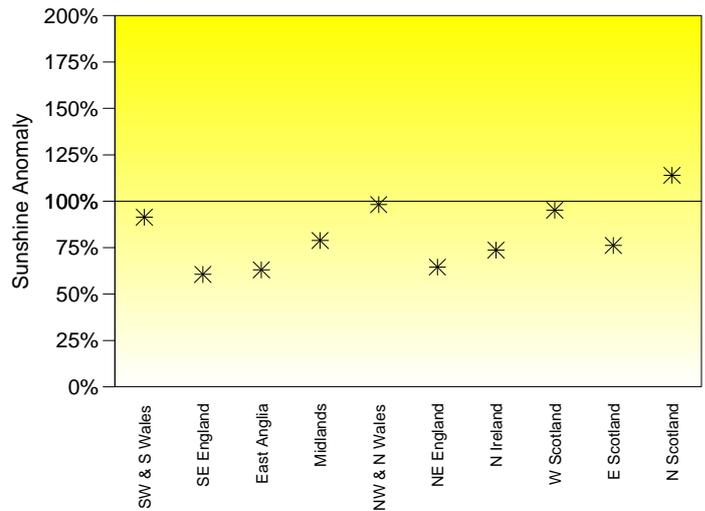
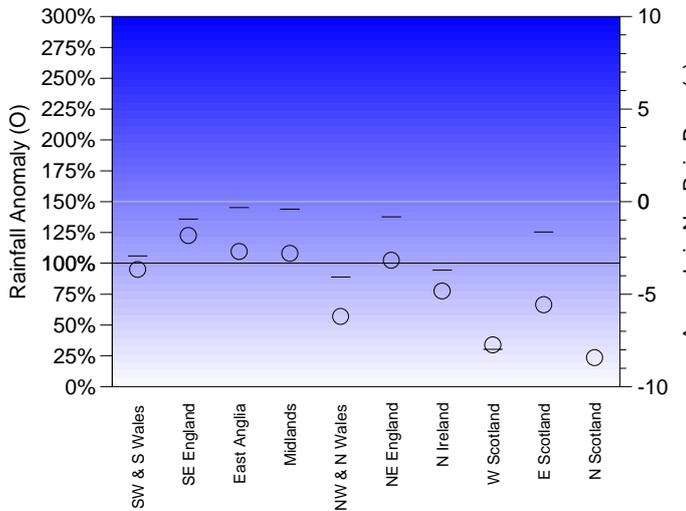


Extremes for March 2013	
Hottest:	17.5°C Trawscoed SAWS, Dyfed, 5th
Coldest:	-12.9°C Aboyne, Grampian, 11th
Most Rain:	62.0mm Katesbridge, County Down, 22nd
Most Sun:	12.2hrs Stornoway, Western Isles, 29th
Windiest:	77mph Orlock Head, County Down, 22nd
Warmest:	6.9°C Scilly St. Mary's SAWS, Cornwall
Coolest:	0.5°C Shap SAWS, Cumbria
Wettest:	156.6mm Murlough, County Down
Driest:	14.9mm Fair Isle, Shetland
Sunniest:	167.5hrs Radstock, Somerset
Dullest:	24.7hrs Yeovilton, Somerset



March marks the start of the meteorological spring, but is a notoriously capricious month - and snow falls as frequently as in February. As JRR Tolkien commented in 1944, "Still very cold. Snow last night. But there is no mistaking the growing power of a March sun. Clumps of yellow crocuses are out and the white-mauve ones beginning; green buds are appearing..." Last year unusual warmth brought on the green buds, but this year, frost and snow kept them very firmly dormant.

The month began quietly beneath high pressure. Winds turned south-easterly on the 4th and 5th and it briefly became warm. Temperatures rose above 16°C (61°F) for the first time in 2013 and Gravesend (Kent) achieved 17.1°C (63°F) on the 5th. This glimpse of spring was short-lived and the only one of the month. The weather subsequently turned unsettled before very cold easterlies chilled northern areas on the 9th and reached most other parts the following day. By the 11th, temperatures were struggling to rise above freezing. Conditions were especially harsh in the Channel Islands where blizzards disrupted transport and 200 houses in Jersey were left without power after flying debris, falling trees and ice on cables brought down overhead lines. There were also fears for the Island's famous potato crop after the snowfalls and followed an unusually damp winter. On the mainland, Sussex and Kent were worst affected and hundreds of motorists were left stranded by drifts and forced to overnight in their cars. By the 13th, the bitter continental influence had relaxed as winds turned northerly, but there were still snow showers and hard night frosts. An Atlantic depression brought slightly milder if disturbed weather 15th - 19th but heavy showers still fell as snow over the higher ground. By the 20th very cold easterlies had returned with a vengeance as a huge belt of high pressure (in excess of 1050hpa), stretched from northern Scandinavia to Greenland. Atlantic fronts also pushed in from the south-west, and at their interface heavy and persistent rain caused flooding across Devon and Cornwall on the 21st and 22nd. A classic snow situation followed as the fronts stagnated - and North Wales, northern England, the east of Northern Ireland and south-west Scotland bore the brunt of the wintry blast. Thousands of homes and businesses were left without power as ice felled power lines, and the Isle of Arran was cut off by the worst conditions in living memory. Heavy snow combined with strong winds created enormous drifts on high ground, burying livestock to the anguish of hill farmers. From the 24th it became drier, but very cold east-north-easterly winds prevailed until month end with further snow flurries in the east.

Overall, it was the coldest March since 1962, and the joint second coldest since records began in 1910. Unusually, it was a colder month than the December, January or February that preceded it - the first time this has happened since 1975. Easter was the coldest on record. The north and west were relatively dry but rainfall totals were near or above average elsewhere. It was a very dull month in eastern and south-eastern areas, reflecting the dominance of easterly winds.

Severe late season snowstorms also affected Europe during March. Blizzards struck northern France 11th-12th dumping 25-30cm of snow and packing gusts of over 60mph. More than 100,000 homes were left without power. In Belgium, drifting caused massive traffic disruption with buses and trains cancelled in Brussels and other major towns - and international services on the Eurostar suspended. Colossal snowfalls affected western Russia and the Ukraine 24th-25th. The total snow depth at Moscow airport reached 76cm by the 26th - the highest for March for more than 20 years. In the Ukraine, amidst a state of emergency, the army was deployed and tanks used to drag buses and other vehicles out of massive snowdrifts after 50cm of fresh snow blanketed the capital, Kiev. The blizzard conditions led to power cuts in 600 towns, caused traffic chaos and prompted many residents to take to skis. Heavy snow also blanketed regions of Romania.

A severe blizzard swept over northern Japan on 1st and 2nd. Worst affected was the island of Hokkaido where more than 30cm of fresh snow fell at the Wakkanai Airport. A hill town in northern Honshu, Sukayu, recorded a momentous snow depth of 550cm (5.5m!), with houses literally buried beneath the snow. A high-speed Japanese bullet train was derailed in the storm in Akita prefecture.

Meanwhile in the USA, several southern states were hit by powerful winds and massive hail on 18th -19th. Much damage occurred in the Jackson area, where hail as big as baseballs was observed. One tornado was confirmed in Georgia and two more in Alabama. Easter Sunday (31st) saw severe thunderstorms accompanied by more baseball sized hail - this time across the Deep South and Texas. In South America, landslides triggered by heavy rains killed at least 24 people in the mountains above Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on the 15th. Worst hit was Quitandinha, a suburb of Petropolis, where dozens of homes were demolished by landslides. The trigger was 420mm of rain which fell on the mountainous region in just 24 hours - double the rainfall average for the month.