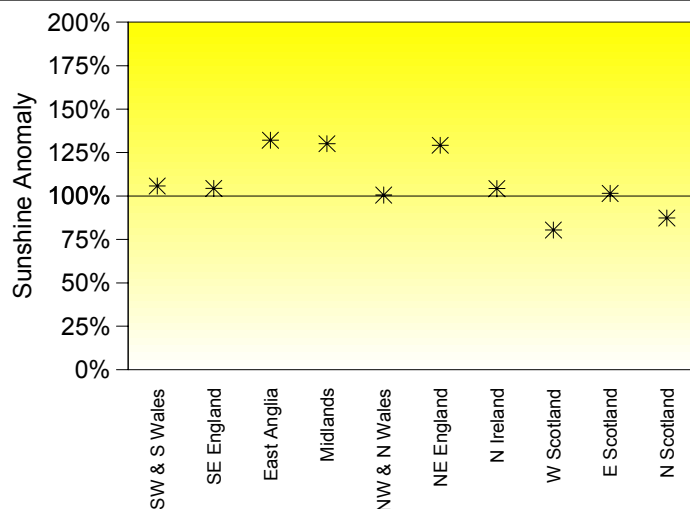
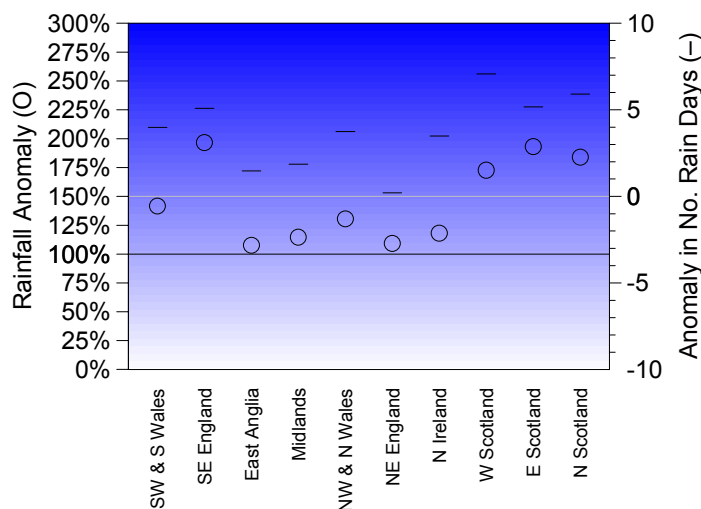


Extremes for December 2013	
Hottest:	15.6°C Achnagart, Highland, 11th
Coldest:	-4.9°C Hurn, Dorset, 5th
Most Rain:	89.4mm Cassley, Sutherland, 25th
Most Sun:	7.6hrs Guernsey Airport, Channel Islands, 9th
Windiest:	109mph Aberdaron SAWS, Gwynedd, 26th
Warmest:	9.8°C Scilly St. Mary's SAWS, Cornwall
Coolest:	3.9°C Braemar No 2, Avon
Wettest:	646.6mm Cluanie Inn No 3, Ross & Cromarty
Driest:	1.2mm Cromer, Norfolk
Sunniest:	93.8hrs Hull North, Humberside
Dullest:	7.7hrs Lerwick, Shetland



The popular imagination of Yuletide weather is one of sparkling frost and an icing sugar dusting of snow. Often the reality is one of battling with the Christmas shopping in the wind and rain, and it is comparatively rare for December to be the coldest of the three winter months.

December started quiet with high pressure over Ireland, but a rapidly deepening depression zipped east to Scandinavia 4th/5th. The combination of rapid drop in pressure, a north-westerly gale and a high spring tide led to a storm surge and inundation along the east coast - though thanks to improved sea defences - there was no repeat of the devastating floods of January 1953. Nevertheless, the thoroughfares of a number of coastal towns were left underwater, cliff falls led to several coastal properties collapsing into the sea, and the strong winds caused considerable property damage. There was a gust of 93mph at Altnaharra (Sutherland), and a lorry driver died after his HGV toppled onto several cars in West Lothian. A brief incursion of Arctic air led to snow showers in the north, but quiet weather soon resumed from the 7th - and fog caused flight delays at several airports on the 11th. As Continental high pressure gave way on the 13th, the weather became mild and increasingly stormy. It remained so all the way through to Christmas - with constant bands of rain, interspersed with brighter, showery conditions. This was merely the prelude to a remarkably deep depression which brought heavy rain and gales nation-wide on the 23rd and 24th. Thousands of homes in southern England were left without power through the Christmas holiday, as gusts of up to 90mph felled power lines and trees. Euston station was bought to a standstill late on the 23rd, as was Gatwick airport on the 24th when flooding from the nearby river Mole caused a power cut at the North Terminal. Ferries braving the Bay of Biscay ran into serious difficulties, and a passenger from Portsmouth to Bilbao was airlifted to hospital after suffering neck injuries resulting from a fall during the rough crossing. The central pressure of this low plunged more than 50mb in 24 hours as it tore across the Atlantic in a screaming jet stream, making it officially a 'bomb', according to meteorological terminology. The lowest pressure was 929mb off western Scotland early on Christmas Eve. Christmas Day and Boxing Day were quieter and colder for most, but some areas, especially Kent, were still affected by flooding from the storm with people having to rely on local pubs for Christmas lunch. Another deep depression gave further wind and rain early on the 27th, though this was less intense than its predecessor, and the weather remained very disturbed right through to year end. Dumfries and Galloway experienced severe flooding as the river Nith burst its banks.

The month as a whole was very mild for all of the UK, with daytime temperatures typically 2°C above normal. It was also very wet, with many places receiving double their average rainfall. It was the windiest December since records began (in 1969). Despite the rain and wind, paradoxically, all of England and Wales - and especially the Midlands and the east - enjoyed rather more sunshine than usual.

The hurricane-force storm "Xaver" hit northern Europe on the 5th, leaving tens of thousands of homes without power and causing the biggest tidal surge in decades. In Germany, residents of Hamburg woke up to find the historic fish market flooded. Two sailors were reportedly swept overboard from a ship off the southern Swedish coast. The Oeresund road and rail bridge which links the Danish capital Copenhagen with the Swedish city of Malmo, was closed and there was major disruption to flights and ferry services. Another wave of storms struck over the Christmas period. On the 26th families were forced from their homes as violent storms swept across Italy, causing avalanches and power cuts. In the Italian Alps, heavy snow stranded people in their cars, while hundreds of tourists were unable to reach their hotels in the Puster Valley after roads were blocked. Train travel between Italy and the Swiss Canton of Valais was also paralysed as blizzards felled trees over the railway tracks. In southern Italy, sea storms halted ferries, cutting off Sardinia and islands in the Bay of Naples. Further southwest, the Canary Islands experienced severe flash flooding 2nd-3rd. In the 24 hours ending 0600 GMT on the 3rd, 195 mm of rain fell at Valverde in Tenerife.

A winter storm dropped 23cm of snow across the northeast USA on the 17th, causing more than 600 flight cancellations at Newark and Boston airports. On Christmas Eve, 400,000 customers in eastern Canada and 390,000 in the US lost electricity after a severe ice storm. Most were still without power on Christmas Day, with Michigan worst hit. Trees were left encased in ice while many streets were blocked by fallen branches and festooned with yellow safety tape where live power lines collapsed. Flights suffered massive disruption. Then a blizzard on the 29th sent temperatures plummeting still further in central Canada. In Winnipeg, Manitoba, readings hovered around -31°C (-25°F) all afternoon, with wind chill making it feel like a bone-chilling -50°C! In South America, 14th-26th saw an intense heat wave in northern Argentina and Uruguay. Temperatures peaked at 38°C (100°F) on Boxing Day, prompting thousands of people to dive into rivers and lakes to cool off. Unfortunately a cluster of swimmers along the Parana River in Argentina, was met by a school of piranhas - which attacked - leaving at least 70 injured. The extended period of heat forced more energy usage, putting a strain on Argentina's power grid and resulting in numerous blackouts. In Western Australia 12th-16th, Perth experienced a run of five days with temperatures above 35°C (95°F). The 14th peaked at a sweltering 40°C (104°F) - providing punishing conditions for participants in the third Ashes test match.