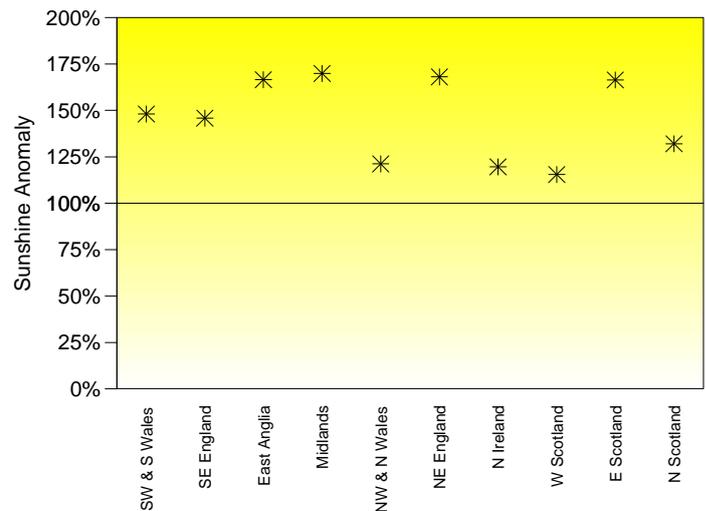
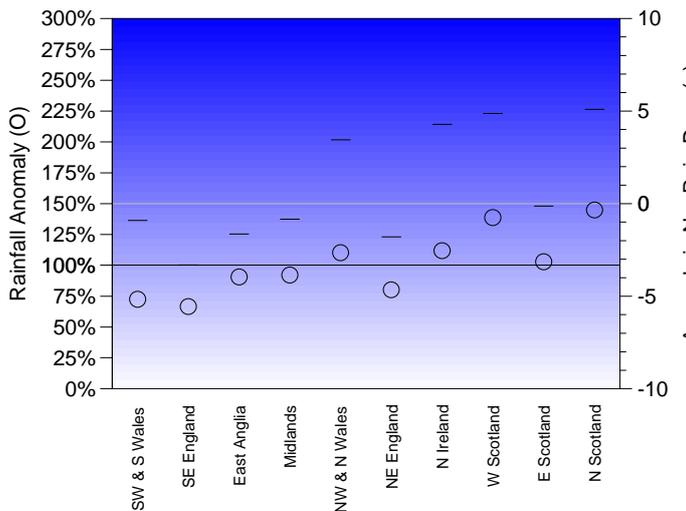


Extremes for December 2014	
Hottest:	15.3°C Credenhill, Hereford and Worcester, 18th
Coldest:	-9.0°C Katesbridge, County Down, 29th
Most Rain:	50.6mm Cluanie Inn No 3, Ross & Cromarty, 9th
Most Sun:	7.4hrs Camborne, Cornwall, 3rd
Windiest:	82mph South Uist Range, Western Isles, 10th
Warmest:	9.5°C Scilly St. Mary's SAWS, Cornwall
Coolest:	1.5°C Braemar No 2, Avon
Wettest:	366.7mm Capel Curig SAWS, Gwynedd
Driest:	30.9mm Linton-on-Ouse, North Yorkshire
Sunniest:	87.9hrs Wittering, Cambridgeshire
Dullest:	13.3hrs Lerwick, Shetland



December is the darkest but rarely the coldest of our winter months, since the seas around our shores are still relatively warm. In some years, conditions are more closely akin to those of late autumn - and "White Christmases" are rare away from the Scottish mountains. Rather more common are umbrellas turned inside-out and waves battering our western coasts in very stormy weather - a notable feature of the last two Decembers.

December began on a quiet, cold and cloudy note under high pressure. A cold front moving south-east overnight 4th/5th introduced a much more vigorous westerly airflow and rain overnight on the 6th/7th was followed by cold air, wintry showers and thunder in the north. A ridge brought overnight frost on the 8th/9th before more wind and rain hurried in from the North Atlantic. The 10th was cold and very stormy in the north. 30,000 homes lost power in the Western Isles, and early in the day winds were gusting to 100mph on Cairngorm summit in a temperature of -5°C (23°F)! It was the south's turn to take a battering early on the 12th and - the very exposed - Needles Old Battery (Isle of Wight) recorded a gust of 88mph. The unsettled westerly regime persisted in the run-up to Christmas. A feature of the weather during this period was brilliantly sunny days (notably 13th, 16th and 19th) interspersed with mild, cloudy 'warm sector' weather where temperatures widely exceeded 13°C (55°F). A spring-like 16°C (61°F) was achieved at Prestatyn (Denbighshire) on the 22nd. Snow was conspicuous by its absence except for on northern hills. By Christmas Day, drier, brighter and colder conditions were becoming more prevalent. Rain crossing England and Wales on Boxing Day turned to snow on its northern edge, giving Christmas card scenery in parts of the north Midlands, Wales and northern England but creating some transport problems. Sheffield was particularly badly hit. The closing days of 2014 saw the chill becoming more widespread with hard night frosts, icy roads and scattered wintry showers in eastern areas. The mercury dropped to -7.6°C (18°F) at Benson (Oxfordshire) early on the 29th, but by New Year's Eve, milder air had reasserted for most.

Temperatures were a little above normal nationwide during December, crowning a year of record warmth for the UK. It was a wet month in the north and west of Scotland, but many east-coast counties and southern England were drier than normal. Sunshine was well above average for most, reflecting the mobility of the weather systems. Interestingly, Lerwick (Shetland) reported six days of thunder and Stornoway (Western Isles) a remarkable seven days - making December 2014 the most thundery month in 100 years of records! The cause was likely the vigorous convection resulting from frequent bouts of cold, polar maritime air encountering seas which have retained much of their warmth following the mild autumn.

In Europe's Czech Republic during December, thick freezing fog, followed by freezing rain, resulted in widespread icing on the 2nd. The Czech transportation infrastructure suffered widespread disruption as power lines collapsed - and over 100,000 passengers across the country experienced delays and cancellations. Unusual winter storms also hit North Africa. In Setif, Algeria, snow on the 10th caused the closing of many arterial and trunk roads, leading to the isolation of mountainside villages. In Morocco, the national route linking Midelt with Azrou was blocked by snow in Timhdit, a village in Ifrane. Even heavier falls blanketed the Atlas Mountains on the 31st with Sétif recording 35cm.

Pollution, combined with stagnant air across northern India and Pakistan, led to widespread fog and smog 18th - 22nd. Very dense fog enveloped the capital, Delhi, and other parts of northern India, causing massive travel chaos. Visibility at the airport runways in Delhi dropped to below 50m and many flights were delayed. Dozens of trains were also cancelled and road traffic was reduced to a crawl. Several cold-related deaths were reported. Srinagar City recorded a minimum temperature of -1.8°C (29°F) on the 21st.

In Japan, severe blizzards 17th-18th resulted in at least eleven fatalities. More than 2m of snow accumulated in some areas - blocking roads and throwing public transport into chaos. Avalanches presented a further hazard. Winds gusting to 90mph caused a tidal surge.

In South America, over 60mm of rain poured over Montevideo (Uruguay) in less than half an hour on the 26th, making this the worst storm registered there in the last 50 years. The storm pulled down trees and power-lines and flooded streets of the capital - forcing the evacuation of residents.