

May 2021

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1981-2010.

May began very unsettled and unseasonably cold, with frosts in many places; it became less cold after the first week but continued with frequent rain or showers for most areas. The UK experienced a number of deep low pressure systems that resulted in a number of notably windy days. The weather settled down for the final few days of the month, when it also became much warmer.

The provisional UK mean temperature was 9.1 °C, which is 1.3 °C below the 1981-2010 long-term average, making it the coldest May since 1996. Mean maximum temperatures were up to 2 °C below normal in some areas, but mean minimum temperatures were only around 1 °C below average for most places. Nearly all areas had a wet month, with only parts of western Scotland having near or below average rainfall, and many places from eastern Scotland to Wales and south-west England had well over double their usual May rainfall, making it provisionally the UK's fourth wettest May in a series from 1862, with 171% of average. Sunshine was rather below average for most areas except Northern Ireland, with 86% of average for the UK overall.

The UK monthly extremes were as follows: A maximum temperature of 25.1 °C was recorded at Kinlochewe (Ross & Cromarty) on the 31st. A minimum temperature of -6.1 °C was recorded at St Harmon (Powys) on the 2nd. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 GMT on the 21st, 103 mm of rain fell at Mickleden (Cumbria). A wind gust of 81 knots (93 mph) was recorded at Needles Old Battery (Isle of Wight) on the 3rd. A snow depth of 1 cm was recorded at Achiltibuie (Ross & Cromarty) on the 5th.

Weather impacts

Heavy rain and strong winds on the 3rd/4th caused some road closures in Wales due to fallen trees, and trains to Ebbw Vale were affected by a fallen tree. Part of the A470 was flooded, and speed restrictions were imposed on the Britannia Bridge, the M48 Severn Bridge and the Cleddau bridge. A small number of properties suffered from temporary power loss in North Wales. Strong winds led to power faults at Southern Water sites in Winchester, leading to water outages which affected around 30,000 properties for a few days. In Cornwall the Liskeard to Looe railway line was disrupted, as was the St Mawes Ferry, and a Skybus flight was cancelled due to strong winds. Some outside dining facilities were curtailed due to the poor weather.

Rain on the 8th gave poor road conditions in Wales, with flooding affecting the M4 and the A55, as well as the Conwy Valley railway line. On the 10th/11th thundery showers in north-west England caused a suspected lightning fatality in Blackpool and flooding on the M60 between junctions 25 and 24. Further rain in the north-west of England on the 16th brought flooding to Langcliffe, Settle and Giggleswick.

With unseasonably strong winds in the south of the UK on the 20th/21st, fallen trees blocked some roads in parts of Wales, and a roof was blown off a building in Bridgend. On the 21st, rail lines in the Valleys were affected by fallen trees, and further north the Conwy Valley line was flooded. Speed restrictions were enforced on the A55 Britannia Bridge and the Cleddau Bridge. The M48 Severn Crossing was temporarily closed, and hundreds of properties suffered a loss of power. Fallen trees in parts of south-west England caused disruption on the road network, and in Christchurch the gable end of a building fell onto a road causing it to close, while there were reports of a landslide near Bude.

England diary of highlights

Most of May was very unsettled, often windy, and unseasonably cold especially during the first week. It was briefly warmer around the 9th/10th, but still with frequent rain, often heavy, and with widespread thunder on some days. Only towards the end of the month did things really settle down, with little rain and more in the way of warmth and sunshine in the closing days.

The mean temperature for May was provisionally 1.3 °C below the 1981-2010 long-term average, making it the coldest May since 1996. It was a very wet month, provisionally the fifth wettest May in a series from 1862, with 191% of average rainfall, and well over double the average over much of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Yorkshire. Sunshine was rather below average for most areas with 87% overall.

1st to 7th

The 1st began fine, but cold, with a frost in places, and a minimum temperature of -5.8 °C at Shap (Cumbria); showers, initially confined to coasts, developed widely from late morning onwards. After another bright, cold start on the 2nd, with isolated showers over northern counties and locally along the south coast, cloud increased by midday with showers occurring quite widely. All areas were cloudy and windy on the 3rd, with rain already in the west spreading quickly east to affect all counties by early evening, but turning brighter and showery later in the north-west; Needles Old Battery (Wight) recorded gusts to 93 mph. The 4th was cool, with sunny intervals and showers; the showers were fewest in the south-west, but frequent, blustery and prolonged in some other areas, also turning heavy and thundery in places with hail, and snow over hills, the maximum at Blencathra (Cumbria) struggling to 5.7 °C. The 5th started chilly, mostly sunny and dry, though showers in western areas soon spread eastwards to cover most parts, some of them wintry in the north, with thunderstorms and hail in places. The 6th started frosty for some areas, early rain in the Midlands and the south-west clearing southwards, but showers developed widely by lunchtime, wintry at times particularly over the Cumbrian hills, turning heavy with hail and thunder in places in the afternoon. The 7th was fine for many, but with isolated showers in the north; cloud increased through the morning bringing further showers, some heavy by the afternoon, but the south stayed drier, before rain reached the far south-west by early evening.

8th to 19th

The 8th saw widespread rain, locally heavy, quickly spreading eastwards, clearing from all but the Midlands and south-west in the afternoon; it was a windy but less cold day, and remained mild overnight into the 9th, Gosport Fleetlands (Hampshire) not falling below 12.9 °C. Showers and thunderstorms affected the south-east from early on the 9th, with rain at times further north and west, while eastern counties became warm. Showers in the west early on the 10th soon spread eastwards, becoming widespread, and turning increasingly heavy and thundery during the afternoon especially in the Midlands and the north, though southern areas became drier later. Many areas began dry on the 11th, but scattered showers over the south spread to the Midlands by midday, becoming heavier and thundery, then continuing north through the afternoon, followed by further showers and thunderstorms in the Midlands and south-west. On the 12th many places started with sunshine, but rain moved into the south-west, heavy at times, while showers developed in some other areas, with hail and thunder in northern counties. After a dry start across the north on the 13th, showers developed by midday, with rain, showers and thunderstorms affecting all other areas throughout. Patchy rain in places on the 14th tended to die away, with brighter spells developing, but isolated showers over the south-west by the afternoon. The 15th was a day of rain or showers across most areas, some heavy, tending to move away northwards

later, with sunshine and scattered showers developing to the south. After starting fine on the 16th in some central, eastern and northern counties, scattered showers, heavy at times in the south, soon developed, spreading north and east with occasional thunder and hail, and strong winds on southern coasts. Some southern and western areas started fine on the 17th, but it was already showery in the north-west, and showers developed over remaining parts during the morning, with occasional thunderstorms and hail, generally moving eastwards through the afternoon. Many areas began fine on the 18th, with showers in some northern counties and in the south-west at first, soon developing elsewhere, with occasional thunderstorms and hail. The 19th began cloudy with rain over the south-east, fine elsewhere, and sunnier in the south-west; thundery showers soon developed, with isolated hail, but tending to die away and clear south-eastwards later.

20th to 26th

The next few days were chillier again. The 20th saw a vigorous depression steering strong winds and bands of rain across all parts during the morning, after a bright start in the far east; the rain became patchier in some central, southern and south-eastern counties, while Mickleden (Cumbria) was wettest with 103 mm recorded. On the 21st bands of rain, heavy at times, fell across most parts, turning showery in places later, with winds again strong in parts of the south. The 22nd started with rain in places, this moving off eastwards and introducing sunny intervals and scattered showers. It was dry early on the 23rd in the south-east, but showery elsewhere, before another frontal system carried rain eastwards through the day, turning locally heavy and persistent for many away from the far east. Early sunshine on the 24th for most areas gave way to showers over most areas, except the far north, some becoming thundery. Northern and eastern counties began the 25th with showers, these turning locally heavy and thundery during the afternoon, with more general rain crossing the south-west from late morning and then spreading along the south coast. The 26th was cloudy in the north with rain at first, brighter in the south with isolated fog patches; the rain slipped south-eastwards, turning more patchy, and cleared by late afternoon, then brighter spells developed in northern and central parts with isolated showers, and the best of the sunshine in the south-west.

27th to 31st

The 27th dawned with patchy fog in a few places; this soon cleared, and any areas of cloud along the east coast cleared by midday to leave most areas with sunny skies. The 28th was mostly cloudy, with patchy rain in some areas through the day. The 29th began rather cloudy in many areas, with fog plaguing the east coast for much of the morning, and patchy rain or scattered showers in some places, but turning generally brighter into the afternoon. The 30th was largely sunny and warm, apart from some fog clearing from central counties but persisting along the east coast. Low cloud, mist and fog early on the 31st soon burned away, then it was generally sunny and very warm, Northolt (Greater London) recording a maximum of 24.8 °C and Morecambe (Lancashire) getting 15.9 hours of bright sunshine.

Wales diary of highlights

Most of the month was cool and very unsettled, with spells of very wet and at times windy weather. It was particularly cold during the first week. Settled weather only arrived during the course of the final week.

Mean temperatures for the month were provisionally 1.4 °C below average. It was a very wet month, with 245% of average rainfall, easily the wettest May for Wales in a series from 1862. Sunshine totals amounted to 89% of the long-term average.

1st to 7th

The 1st began fine and frosty, but showers developed by late morning, becoming widespread and persisting through the afternoon. The 2nd started frosty, especially inland, St Harmon (Powys)

recording an overnight minimum of -6.1 °C, with a few showers across the north initially but cloudy everywhere by lunchtime with showers becoming widespread and persistent. Rain and wind spread quickly east on the 3rd, soon covering all parts, only being replaced by sunshine and scattered showers towards evening, Capel Curig (Gwynedd) recording gusts to 76 mph. The 4th continued cool and breezy with bright intervals, but also with showers, locally heavy and wintry at times. After a chilly start, the 5th brought sunshine and further blustery showers, wintry over high ground, including hail and the occasional thunderstorm, and just a brief respite mid-afternoon. There was some sunshine on the 6th, with scattered showers mainly in the north. The 7th was cold and bright, again with showers over northern areas.

8th to 19th

Though it became less cold from now on, the 8th was a very wet day, with widespread rain persisting throughout, Treherbert (Mid Glamorgan) recording 98.4 mm. The 9th was rather cloudy with scattered showers, and a longer spell of rain crossing the south and east in the afternoon. Showers fell throughout on the 10th, turning heavy in places with isolated thunderstorms during the afternoon. There were further showers throughout the 11th, becoming widespread, locally heavy and thundery, and persisting into the evening. Rain in the north at first on the 12th moved away to leave isolated showers for all; it brightened up through the morning, though showers developed again in the far north-east later, whilst rain moved into the far south late afternoon. The 13th was wet everywhere with widespread and persistent rain. The 14th started with patchy rain over many parts, this dying away during the morning, then brighter spells developed with showers and isolated thunderstorms. The 15th began with rain over most parts, heavy in places, this moving off north-eastwards before showers developed with occasional thunderstorms. It was briefly fine in the north on the 16th before showers, already in central and southern counties, moved north and east, with occasional thunderstorms and isolated hail showers, but with some sunshine in western parts later. The 17th was largely dry and bright, with scattered showers in the north at first, and isolated showers developing elsewhere, these mostly clearing eastwards through the afternoon. After a fine start for most on the 18th, showers in the south and south-west spread north and east to remaining parts, with isolated thunderstorms during the afternoon. The 19th was mainly sunny to start, with only isolated showers, but cloud increased over most parts with further showers developing, mostly inland, with occasional thunderstorms in the far north and east for a time.

20th to 25th

The 20th was dull and very windy, with rain, patchy at first, but becoming heavy at times across all parts throughout the day. The 21st continued with rain, heavy at times, across all parts, and was again windy. The 22nd was brighter, largely dry in the south-west, but with showers moving south-eastwards across other areas during the morning, clearing away in the afternoon. All areas were cold and wet on the 23rd, with widespread and persistent rain, only clearing the west by evening, Lake Vyrnwy (Powys) struggling to a maximum of only 7.9 °C. Most places were wet again on the 24th with showers or longer spells of rain, clearing away east by early evening. The 25th was bright but rather cloudy, with showers across the south from late morning, locally heavy during the afternoon.

26th to 31st

The 26th brought some sunshine, but with isolated showers in central and southern parts at first, and cloud increased in some northern and central parts later. It was bright on the 27th, and became warmer, with cloud and rain skirting the west coast by early evening. The 28th was overcast, with rain affecting all parts at times throughout. The 29th was cloudy too, with light scattered showers through the day. After early patchy fog cleared central parts on the 30th, and an overnight minimum no lower than 14.0 °C at Milford Haven (Dyfed), it was generally sunny and

warm, with Porthmadog (Gwynedd) recording a maximum of 23.6 °C, and Aberdaron (Gwynedd) having 15.4 hours of bright sunshine. After low cloud and mist in the east early on the 31st, it was sunny and warm almost everywhere.

Scotland diary of highlights

The weather during most of May was unsettled, cool, and often windy, with spells of rain throughout apart from the last few days. It was unseasonably cold during the first week and around the 20th-24th. The final five days were much warmer and more settled.

The mean temperature for the month was 1.2 °C below the long-term average, with more frosts than average. Scotland had 130% of average rainfall, with more than double the average in some eastern parts but below the average in the west. Sunshine totals were 80% of average; it was dullest relative to normal on the eastern side.

1st to 7th

Some places were frosty, particularly across the south, early on the 1st; showers, wintry at times with snow and hail, soon became widespread and persisted through the day. Many areas started the 2nd with a frost, and there were showers over the north and east initially but increasingly widely through the day. A few places in the Borders and across the far north saw frost early on the 3rd, with Kinbrace (Sutherland) down to -5.9 °C, while persistent rain already in the west spread quickly to all parts except the north-east by the afternoon, but it turned brighter with showers in the south by evening; it was cold, with Dalwhinnie (Inverness-shire) struggling to a maximum of only 5.0 °C, and windy too with Machrihanish and Islay (Argyll) both recording gusts to 54 mph. The 4th continued cool and wet, with widespread showers or longer spells of rain, some of the showers heavy and thundery in places, and snow over the hills. There was early sunshine for central and southern counties on the 5th, but frequent blustery showers in the north, wintry at times, with the occasional thunderstorm, spreading south to most parts, and a light covering of fresh snow accumulating at Achiltibuie (Ross & Cromarty). Southern areas started very frosty on the 6th, a day of widespread showers, wintry at times, with hail and thunder. On the 7th, showers were slightly fewer but soon developed across all areas, turning heavy in places with hail and thunder, clearing away from the west by early evening.

8th to 19th

The north had an early frost on the 8th, while rain, already across the south-west, spread quickly north and east to reach all parts by mid-afternoon, clearing from the south-west at the same time. Most areas started dry on the 9th, but showers or longer spells of rain already across the north soon developed over all regions, heaviest and most frequent in the west. Most areas had showers throughout the 10th, heavy and thundery in places during the afternoon. A band of rain moved north from central areas on the 11th, reaching the north coast by lunchtime, while further south, after some sunny intervals, cloud increased and an area of showery rain and thunderstorms crossed north over the border in the evening. The 12th started very wet in some central, eastern and northern parts, and showers, heavy at times, with thunderstorms and hail embedded, continued to circulate, easing by evening as it turned misty with low cloud in the north-east. The 13th was rather cloudy, with just isolated showers, but an area of heavier showers and thunderstorms developed over the Borders and parts of the south-west late in the day. The 14th saw patchy rain in the north and north-east at first, and some showers in the south-west, with brighter spells developing in some areas by the afternoon. The 15th started fine, though cloudier in parts of the south-west and the Northern Isles, with isolated showers at times, and patchy drizzle with low cloud and mist affecting the Northern Isles. The 16th started fine for the majority, with isolated showers in the south-west at first, though showers became more widespread and frequent, especially in southern, western and central counties. On the 17th, a line of showers

soon developed along the spine of the mainland, tending to spread further east, with a few thunderstorms, while western areas saw some sunny intervals but with showers also here later. Some areas had isolated showers to start the 18th, with cloud increasing elsewhere through the morning as showers developed over many parts, some thundery during the afternoon. The 19th started sunny in southern and some central parts, but with scattered showers further north; cloud soon increased elsewhere with further showers developing, and isolated thunderstorms in the east.

20th to 26th

On the 20th, rain already affecting the far south-west spread steadily north and east, heavy at times with strong winds, though turning patchy as it got further north and north-east; the rain was persistent in central and southern parts, Threave (Kirkcudbrightshire) recording 57.2 mm, while the far north remained bright. The 21st was mainly cloudy, except in the Northern Isles, the north-west and the far west, with rain and showers for most areas through much of the day and remaining windy. There were scattered showers in southern and north-eastern parts at first on the 22nd, these becoming more widespread over the Central Highlands and north-east, while the far north, west and south-west remained largely dry. Central parts had scattered showers at first on the 23rd, before a broad band of locally heavy rain moved north and east during the morning to affect all but the far north and north-east by the end of the day. It was mainly dry for the south for most of the 24th, but rain, locally heavy, over the north, slowly spread south to reach the Borders in the evening. Showers affected all parts during the 25th, some locally heavy and thundery during the afternoon. On the 26th, though starting sunny in the Inner Hebrides, rain in the north and north-east moved south and west through the day, turning more showery, with cloud breaking in some central and southern parts, though remaining cloudy and breezy in northern areas with a few spots of drizzle.

27th to 31st

Patchy fog in some central parts early on the 27th cleared by mid-morning, with cloud burning off through the day to leave all parts with sunshine. The north and east were sunny on the 28th, while other areas were cloudy, with patchy rain affecting the south. Fog plagued the east coast on the morning on the 29th; otherwise it was generally cloudy with scattered showers. The east coast had persistent fog in places on the 30th, other areas being largely sunny, but cloud formed in central parts during the afternoon with very isolated light showers; Stornoway (Western Isles) had 15.9 hours of sunshine. Low cloud, mist and fog for the east coast on the 31st didn't clear in some spots until the afternoon, all other areas being sunny and warm with Kinlochewe (Ross & Cromarty) reaching 25.1 °C, after South Uist Range (Western Isles) had recorded a minimum of 13.1 °C.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

May was unsettled almost throughout, with only the occasional dry day, and generally cool, apart from a fine and warm end to the month.

The mean temperature for May was 1.0 °C below the 1981-2010 average. It was a wet month, particularly towards the south, with 161% of average rainfall. Sunshine was 105% of average.

1st to 7th

Some places were frosty early on the 1st, with -4.5 °C recorded overnight at Katesbridge (Down); showers, initially confined to the west, soon became widespread and lasted through the day. Western parts started the 2nd with a frost, and the day was often bright although scattered showers developed by the afternoon. There was widespread rain and strong winds on the 3rd, this rain clearing eastwards by lunchtime, replaced briefly by sunshine and scattered showers before more general rain again from late afternoon. The 4th was cool and breezy with sunshine and showers, wintry at times, with hail and isolated thunderstorms. After a cold start, the 5th was

a day of sunshine and blustery showers, with sleet or snow over higher ground, occasionally with hail and thunder, Trassey Slievenaman (Down) recording a maximum of only 6.6 °C. The 6th and 7th were cold again, with some sunshine, and just scattered showers.

8th to 19th

The next several days were less cold. The 8th began wet with widespread and locally heavy rain, clearing east by midday then turning much brighter with scattered showers. Showers on the 9th were heaviest and most frequent in the west, with some thunderstorms during the afternoon. The 10th was rather cloudy, with showers, which became widespread from late morning and through the rest of the day, some turning heavy and thundery during the afternoon. The 11th was mostly fine, with just isolated showers in the west around late afternoon. The 12th started fine for most, cloudier in northern and western counties with rain at first, then showers developed over most parts, some of them heavy with hail and the occasional thunderstorm. Some morning sunshine on the 13th preceded a cloudier afternoon with scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms. After a fine start on the 14th, a few showers developed through the morning, becoming more widespread and frequent in western parts during the afternoon, occasionally with thunderstorms, moving away northwards later. Most areas saw rain on the morning of the 15th, heavy in places, moving northwards and dying out during the afternoon, leaving drier weather by evening. On the 16th, isolated showers over central and eastern parts became more widespread through the middle part of the day, these tending to move away southwards later with sunny spells developing. The 17th brought sunshine and a few showers. After a fine dry start on the 18th, cloud increased through the morning, with scattered showers developing and occasional thunderstorms by the afternoon with isolated hail. Many areas started sunny on the 19th, but it was cloudier towards the north-west with scattered showers, cloud soon building elsewhere during the morning with showers for a time.

20th to 23rd

The 20th started very wet, as a broad area of rain, some heavy, spread across all parts through what was also a windy day, giving 56.4 mm of rainfall at Ballypatrick Forest (Antrim) and gusts of 62 mph at Orlock Head (Down). It was again wet to start with on the 21st, the rain heavy at times, this moving southwards during the morning and tending to die away, with sunny intervals developing in parts of the north, but winds remaining strong. The 22nd saw some sunshine, but with showers feeding in from the north initially and then the west later. The 23rd started wet, with widespread and locally heavy rain clearing east by mid-afternoon but followed by sunshine and heavy showers and thunderstorms.

24th to 31st

After a fine start on the 24th, scattered showers developed from late morning until late in the afternoon. Some sunshine on the 25th, with just scattered showers over the west. The 26th was dry and largely sunny, after early fog patches in the far north. Local fog patches soon cleared on the 27th, then most places were bright for a while, but cloud increased, with rain reaching the west around noon and spreading to all but the east coast by early evening. The 28th was generally dull with patchy rain throughout, followed by a mild night with Castlederg (Tyrone) and Magilligan (Londonderry) getting no lower than 11.4 °C. The 29th was cloudy at first with well-scattered showers, but it turned brighter from late morning. Most places were sunny and warm on the 30th, with more cloud and very isolated showers in the far west, and Magilligan reached a maximum of 23.0 °C. The 31st was largely sunny, with Katesbridge (Down) recording 14.2 hours of sunshine.