

May 2020

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

May began with a shallow area of low pressure which brought cool showery weather, but high pressure built from the north-west between the 2nd and 4th, turning the weather more settled. There was plenty of warm sunny weather for most between the 5th and 9th, but showers broke out in places from the 7th onwards. Northerly winds brought a cold snap from the 10th to 15th, with wintry showers for the north and east of Scotland, and some overnight frost. There was a more changeable spell from the 16th to 23rd, but with plenty of warm sunshine at times in the south. High pressure dominated from the 24th bringing generally dry, sunny and warm weather.

The provisional UK mean temperature was 11.3 °C, which is 1.0 °C above the 1981-2010 long-term average. Mean maximum temperatures were between 2 and 3 °C above average over much of England, but only around 1 °C above average in western Scotland. Mean minimum temperatures were mostly within 0.5 °C of the long-term average. Rainfall was 47% of average, and it was an exceptionally dry month over most of England and Wales, but rainfall was above average in north-west Scotland. It was the sunniest May in a series from 1929, with 143% of average sunshine. Sunshine was relatively close to average in the north of both Scotland and Northern Ireland, but it was the sunniest May on record by a wide margin for England and Wales, with numerous sites recording over 300 hours.

The UK monthly extremes were as follows: A maximum temperature of 28.3 °C was recorded at Cromdale (Morayshire) on the 29th. A minimum temperature of -6.6 °C was recorded at Kinbrace (Sutherland) on the 3rd. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 GMT on the 23rd, 97.2 mm of rain fell at Achnagart (Ross & Cromarty). A wind gust of 63 knots (73 mph) was recorded at Capel Curig (Gwynedd) on the 22nd.

Weather impacts

The dry weather continued into May and brought reports of wildfires, grass fires and heathland fires from across the United Kingdom. In Scotland there was a large fire along the Errol River in Tayside in the first week of May. On the 4th, strong winds in the south-west resulted in the closure of Torquay's seafront and a few roads were blocked by fallen trees. Scattered showers and thunderstorms broke out on the 9th, and there was some localised flooding, particularly in Carmarthen and Gorseinon. A heathland fire broke out in Brentmoor Common, Surrey.

On the 21st and 22nd, strong winds in Northern Ireland resulted in fallen trees impacting the M1 and M2, there was flooding and debris on some coastal roads, and approximately 2,000 people were without power. In Scotland there was ferry disruption, with bridge restrictions and minor road closures due to fallen trees. Fallen trees also affected transport in Manchester and Cardiff, and on the Shrewsbury to Birmingham rail line.

Dry, sunny, settled weather returned during the last week, increasing the risk of fires again. On 31 May, a large grass and gorse fire at Belfast docks brought smoke and reduced visibility across the city, including north, west and central Belfast and Belfast International Airport.

England diary of highlights

May started off showery, but high pressure then built across the country and brought mostly warm, dry and sunny weather from the 5th to 9th. Northerly winds brought much cooler weather from the 10th to 15th, with scattered showers mainly in the east and some

overnight frosts. Westerly winds brought less settled weather at times from the 16th to 23rd, but in the last week high pressure brought warmth and almost unbroken sunshine for much of the country.

The mean temperature for May was provisionally 1.1 °C above the 1981-2010 long-term average. The mean maximum temperature was the 3rd highest in a series from 1884, but the mean minimum temperature was close to normal. It was the driest May in a series from 1862 and the sunniest in a series from 1929, with just 17% of average rainfall and 157% of average sunshine.

1st to 9th

A shallow area of low pressure brought sunshine and showers for most on the 1st, with scattered thunderstorms in the south and south-east, but the south-west stayed mainly dry. Most places had fewer showers on the 2nd, but showers became more frequent in the north-east from early afternoon. Cloud, mist and fog with light rain spread across the south and parts of the Midlands on the 3rd, with sunshine and showers in the north, the showers turning thundery over the Pennines at times. High pressure then built from the north-west bringing more settled weather. The 4th was a mainly bright, if fairly cloudy, day for most after early fog patches in central parts, with isolated showers in the north and east. The 5th and 6th were generally dry and sunny, but cloudier in the south-west where there was some persistent rain on the 5th. It continued generally sunny and increasingly warm from the 7th to 9th, but with isolated sharp showers, some of which were thundery on the 9th, particularly in the north-west.

10th to 15th

A northerly outbreak brought a spell of much cooler weather, and it was often cloudier in the north and east. A band of rain spread southwards on the 10th, introducing the cold northerly flow with a maximum temperature of only 6.1 °C at Copley (County Durham), and persistent rain affected the far south for a time. It also turned windy with a gust to 60 mph at the Needles (Isle of Wight). The 11th and 12th were cool with some sunny intervals, and scattered showers mainly in the east, and a band of rain reached the north-east late on the 12th. This fizzled as it pushed southwards on the 13th, followed by a fine but cloudy day with some showers in the east. There was a widespread frost early on the 14th with a minimum of -4.6 °C at Shap (Cumbria), then the 14th and 15th were generally dry and bright with variable amounts of cloud, and just isolated showers affecting East Anglia and the south-east on the 14th.

16th to 23rd

The wind direction changed to a westerly on the 16th, which was another generally dry day with variable amounts of cloud and a few showers for the north. A north-south split prevailed on the 17th and 18th with cloudy weather and some light rain or drizzle for the Midlands and north, but some warm sunshine in the south. The warm sunny weather extended to most of the country on the 19th and 20th, following the clearance of light rain in the north early on the 19th. Santon Downham (Suffolk) reached 28.2 °C on the 20th. Some showery rain affected the spine of the country from the south Midlands northwards early on the 21st, clearing away north-eastwards before thundery outbreaks developed briefly over northern parts of East Anglia. Most places were then dry and sunny, but cloud and rain spread from the south-west late in the day. It turned very windy on the 22nd and 23rd, and overnight 21st/22nd the temperature fell no lower than 17.3 °C at London St James's Park. There was generally a mix of sunny intervals and isolated showers, but with longer spells of rain in the north-west on the 23rd, giving 32.2 mm at Honister Pass (Cumbria).

24th to 31st

High pressure spread from the south on the 24th and 25th and then stuck around for the rest of the month. The 24th started off cloudy with patchy light rain in the north and east, but it slowly

brightened up. Most places were dry and sunny on the 25th and 26th but a band of cloud reached the north-west on the afternoon of the 25th and spread south-eastwards through the country on the 26th, though tending to break up as it moved further south-east. Apart from some low cloud overnight in places, most areas had near-unbroken sunshine from the 27th to 31st inclusive. Morecambe (Lancashire) recorded 15.6 hours of sunshine on the 29th and 30th, and Waddington (Lincolnshire) also had 15.6 hours of sunshine on the 30th.

Wales diary of highlights

May was generally dry and sunny, and particularly sunny during the last week. The month started showery, and there was a brief interlude of windy and unsettled weather from the 21st to 23rd. Temperatures were mostly near or above normal but there was a cold snap with northerly winds from the 10th to 15th.

The mean temperature for the month was 1.0 °C above the long-term average, entirely due to high daytime maximum temperatures. It was the sunniest May in a series from 1929 and the second driest in a series from 1862, with 17% of average rainfall and 150% of average sunshine.

1st to 9th

A slackening area of low pressure gave a day of sunny intervals and widespread and locally heavy showers on the 1st, then the 2nd was mainly dry and bright with just a few isolated showers during the morning. The morning of the 3rd saw light rain in places, followed by a mainly dry cloudy afternoon. High pressure built from the north-west for the 4th, giving a dry sunny day, especially sunny over the north-west, and most places stayed sunny on the 5th and 6th, but the far south and south-west had more cloud, and rain affected southern coasts on the 5th. Scattered, locally thundery showers broke out on the 7th, 8th and 9th, most widespread on the 9th with 20.4 mm at Tavernspite (Carmarthenshire). The 7th was relatively cloudy, especially in the morning, but most places had plenty of sunshine on the 8th and 9th, especially near coasts.

10th to 15th

Northerly winds brought colder weather during this period. After a dry sunny start for many on the 10th, the northerlies set in, bringing an area of rain southwards although it tended to fizzle as it headed south, and some rain also affected the far south-east mid-morning. The 11th was a much cooler day, with a high of only 8.2 °C at Lake Vyrnwy (Powys) and Capel Curig (Gwynedd), but it was mainly dry with sunny intervals. There were a few isolated showers about on the 12th and 13th but most places stayed dry, and the 12th was generally quite sunny, but the 13th generally cloudier. There was a widespread frost overnight 13th/14th with a minimum of -6.2 °C at St Harmon (Powys), and the night of the 14th/15th was also frosty locally. The 14th and 15th were dry with variable amounts of cloud and some sunshine.

16th to 23rd

The weather warmed up during this week as winds blew mainly from a westerly or south-westerly direction, while turning less settled. The 16th was another dry day, and generally brightened up after a cloudy start. The 17th and 18th had variable amounts of cloud, and remained dry except for occasional light rain mostly in the far north-west. After a cloudy start to the 19th, most places became sunny but low cloud lingered along some coasts, especially in the west and south-west. The 20th was another sunny day, and much warmer with a high of 26.4 °C at Hawarden (Clwyd). After a bright start to the 21st, rain spread from the south-west late in the day, and it turned wet and windy overnight. The 22nd and 23rd had scattered blustery showers and some sunny intervals, and the wind gusted to 73 mph at Capel Curig (Gwynedd) on the 22nd.

24th to 31st

High pressure spread from the south on the 24th and then persisted for the rest of the month. The 24th started off cloudy, but brightened up from the south-west, and the 25th was sunny and warm after clearance of early low cloud in some places. A weak frontal system brought a cloudy morning on the 26th with some drizzle in the far west briefly, but the cloud broke up as it headed south-eastwards, with sunshine developing. It was increasingly warm with near-unbroken sunshine from the 27th to 31st inclusive, with 15.3 hours of sunshine at St Harmon (Powys) on the 29th and 30th, and a maximum of 28.0 °C at Porthmadog (Gwynedd) on the 31st. The night of the 27th/28th was notably warm in places, with the temperature falling no lower than 14.8 °C at Mumbles Head (West Glamorgan).

Scotland diary of highlights

It was often showery during the first half of the month, increasingly warm until the 9th, but there was a cold snap from the 10th to 15th, when the north-east in particular saw some wintry showers, and with some overnight frosts. There was a wet and windy interlude on the 22nd/23rd, but the last week was increasingly dry, sunny and warm with high pressure.

The mean temperature for May was 0.8 °C above the long-term average. Rainfall was 90% of average, and sunshine was 119% of average. Southern counties had a dry sunny month, but sunshine was closer to normal in the north, and it was wetter than average in the north-west.

1st to 9th

A shallow area of low pressure brought a mainly cloudy day on the 1st with widespread, locally heavy showers, and isolated thunderstorms for the east and south. It remained mostly cloudy on the 2nd after a bright start in the south, with isolated showers. The far north-east had a sharp frost early on the 3rd with a minimum of -6.6 °C at Kinbrace (Sutherland), and showers were more widespread and locally thundery on the 3rd. Pressure rose over the following days, but the 4th was still quite cloudy for most, with showers in the east. The 5th and 6th were generally dry and sunny, but the 6th was cloudy in Fair Isle and Shetland. A band of showery rain spread from the south-west on the 7th after a dry sunny start in many areas, and there were scattered showers mainly in the north on the 8th, though the Shetland Islands stayed dry and sunny. Rain affected the north-west on the 9th, spreading east across other northern areas, while other parts had sunshine and scattered showers, the showers thundery in the north-east late on, but it stayed dry and sunny in the south-west.

10th to 15th

A northerly outbreak brought colder weather during this period. A rain belt introducing the northerly winds cleared the south early on the 10th, followed by sunshine and scattered showers, and some of the showers were wintry with hail, though the south-west stayed mainly dry. Braemar (Aberdeenshire) only reached 5.0 °C. There were generally fewer showers on the 11th, these mostly in the north-east, with some sunny intervals. Rain spread southwards through the country on the 12th, with sleet and snow on higher ground, and wintry showers affected the Northern Isles and north-east later. The 13th was mostly cloudy with a few wintry showers for the north and east, and a weak front pepped up the showers on the 14th. Most places had further showers on the 15th, most frequent in the north and west. During this period nights were sometimes frosty inland.

16th to 23rd

The weather turned warmer but more changeable with westerly and south-westerly winds. The 16th was another cloudy showery day, and then fronts brought cloud on the 17th and 18th with rain at times. The 19th was a drier day for most, but rain affected the west and north at times. Rain cleared the north on the 20th leaving a dry sunny day in the south-east, though it stayed cloudier towards the north-west, with a high of 24.2 °C at Aviemore (Highland). A band of showery

rain spread north-eastwards on the 21st, followed by a window of dry and sunny weather, before persistent rain spread eastwards through the country overnight. It was generally wet and windy on the 22nd and 23rd, especially in the west; on the 22nd Achnagart (Ross and Cromarty) recorded 97.2 mm of rain, and Loch Glascarnoch (Ross & Cromarty) reported gusts to 71 mph.

24th to 31st

A weak frontal system brought a band of cloud and light rain north-eastwards through the country on the 24th, especially affecting the north, but it brightened up from the south. After a dry and sunny morning for most on the 25th, cloud increased from the west, with rain reaching northern and western parts by late afternoon, spreading south-eastwards but becoming lighter and more patchy. The 26th was dry and sunny except in parts of the north-west, where it was cloudier with isolated showers. Cloud and light rain cleared away on the 27th leaving mostly sunny dry weather, but cloud increased from the west late on, with an area of rain spreading into the west and heading into northern counties. The rain cleared away north-eastwards by midday on the 28th, leaving another dry sunny day. After early fog around the Moray Firth, most places were again dry and sunny on the 29th with a high of 28.3 °C at Cromdale (Morayshire). The Western Isles had a warm night overnight 29th/30th with South Uist (Western Isles) falling no lower than 15.8 °C. The 30th and 31st were dry and sunny apart from some early morning low cloud along the east coast, with 16.5 hours of bright sunshine at Kirkwall (Orkney) on the 31st.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

Showery and dry sunny weather types dominated during the first half of May, and it turned warm from the 5th to 9th, but there was a cold snap from the 10th to 15th. It was more unsettled and sometimes wet and windy between the 16th and 23rd, but the last week was generally dry, sunny and warm.

The provisional mean temperature for May was 0.9 °C above the 1981-2010 average. It was a dry sunny month with just 42% of average rainfall and 124% of average sunshine. Sunshine was well above average in the south but nearer average in the north.

1st to 9th

A shallow low pressure system brought sunshine and widespread, locally heavy, showers on the 1st, with isolated thunderstorms for the east during the afternoon. High pressure slowly built from the north-west between the 2nd and 4th, with sunshine and just a few scattered showers on the 2nd and 3rd, and by the 4th it was dry and sunny, following patchy fog and overnight frost in places. It stayed dry and sunny and was increasingly warm on the 5th and 6th. A band of showers cleared north-eastwards early on the 7th followed by sunshine and isolated showers. The 8th started cloudy with a little rain, again brightening up with sunshine and light showers, and there was further warm sunshine on the 9th with isolated showers, thundery in the far south.

10th to 15th

Northerly winds brought a cold spell during this period. A band of cloud and patchy light rain spread slowly southwards on the 10th, followed by sunshine and scattered showers, and Trassey (County Down) only reached 8.0 °C. The 11th was mainly dry, sunny and cool, but cloud increased from late afternoon, bringing isolated showers into the far north-west. Another cool start on the 12th was followed by sunshine and scattered showers, and the 13th started cloudy with some light rain or showers but brightened up in the afternoon. Clearing skies resulted in a widespread frost overnight 13th/14th with Katesbridge (County Down) falling to -6.1 °C, only 0.4 °C short of Northern Ireland's record lowest May temperature. The 14th started off sunny, then clouded over from the north during the afternoon with isolated showers. The 15th was mostly cloudy with a few light showers.

16th to 23rd

The weather turned warmer but less settled. It was mainly cloudy on the 16th with a few light showers, and rain spread from the west from late afternoon. It was generally dull and wet on the 17th and 18th, with areas of rain moving in from the west at times. The rain was mostly confined to the north-west on the 19th, while other areas were cloudy with isolated showers. As pressure continued to rise, the 20th was generally brighter with temperatures widely into the low 20s Celsius. After a bright start on the 21st, a depression brought wet and windy weather from the south-west in the afternoon, producing 21.0 mm of rain at Trassey. It was wet and very windy on the 22nd and 23rd, mostly dull and wet on both mornings, turning brighter and more showery for the afternoons, and Orlock Head (County Down) recorded gusts to 66 mph on the 23rd.

24th to 31st

High pressure spread from the south on the 24th and persisted for the rest of the month. The 24th started off cloudy with a little rain in places but brightened up in the afternoon. After a dry sunny start to the 25th, a band of rain spread from the west from early afternoon. The 26th was a dry and sunny day, and the 27th was also mostly sunny but there was some light rain early and late in the day, mainly in the north. It continued generally warm and sunny from the 28th to 31st inclusive, apart from a cloudier afternoon on the 29th. Armagh and Magilligan (County Londonderry) both reached 25.0 °C on the 28th, and Magilligan and Killylane (County Antrim) did not fall below 13.4 °C overnight 28th/29th. Aldergrove (County Antrim) recorded 14.3 hours of bright sunshine on the 31st.