

December 2020

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

The first week of December was unsettled and turned increasingly cold, with low pressure becoming slow-moving and giving spells of rain, with sleet and snow over high ground and locally to low levels. It turned milder from the 8th, while remaining generally wet. A south to south-westerly type dominated from the 13th to 23rd bringing bands of rain interspersed with brighter showery weather, with strong winds at times. It became colder during the last week, with widespread wet and windy weather from Storm Bella on the 26th, and cold and unsettled weather continued during the last few days with lying snow penetrating to low levels in some counties.

The provisional UK mean temperature was 4.3 °C, which is 0.5 °C above the 1981-2010 long-term average. Mean maximum temperatures were about 0.5 °C below average in Northern Ireland, but up to 0.5 °C above in most other parts of the UK. Mean minimum temperatures were close to average in Northern Ireland but 0.5 to 1.0 °C above average elsewhere. Rainfall was 135% of average overall, and was near average over much of western Scotland and Cumbria but generally above average elsewhere, with parts of eastern Scotland, East Anglia and Gloucestershire seeing more than twice the normal rainfall. Sunshine was 93% of average, and it was sunnier than average in central southern England, the Midlands and East Anglia, but sunshine was well below normal in Wales, north-west England and most of Scotland.

The UK monthly extremes were as follows: A maximum temperature of 14.9 °C was recorded at Prestatyn (Clwyd) on the 18th. A minimum temperature of -10.2 °C was recorded at Dalwhinnie (Inverness-shire) on the 30th. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 GMT on the 27th, 109 mm of rain fell at Honister Pass (Cumbria). A wind gust of 92 knots (106 mph) was recorded at Needles (Isle of Wight) on the 27th. A snow depth of 18 cm was recorded at Loch Glascarnoch (Ross & Cromarty) on the 31st.

Weather impacts

Snow caused disruption in some places between the 2nd and 5th. On the 2nd there were hazardous driving conditions on the Isle of Lewis, and on the 3rd, bus services in Caithness were delayed due to ice, and there were delays and closures on the M8, A77 and A8. There were delays to rail services in the Carstairs area, on some Edinburgh routes and on the Borders line. A number of schools were closed on the 4th in Highland and South Lanarkshire. Across Yorkshire and the east Midlands snow caused road closures and some school closures on the 4th. On the 4th and 5th a number of roads were flooded in Cambridgeshire and parts of Essex and south Suffolk, with some schools closed due to flooding in Suffolk. There was flooding on the rail line at Polegate and on the A27 in Sussex. On the 8th, persistent rain led to localised travel impacts in Merseyside and five properties were flooded in Liverpool.

On the 11th, there was flooding on the rail line and roads around Laurencekirk and on the route between Forres and Elgin. Further rain contributed to flooding across Pembrokeshire on the 13th. There was flooding on the rail lines between Tenby and Pembroke and between Llanelli and Swansea. On the 16th the south-west was hit by flooding, causing disruption, cancellations and closures on the railways and a number of roads. Trains between Newquay and Par were suspended due to flooding, and the A30 was closed near Bodmin due to debris being washed onto the road. On the 18th, further flooding caused disruption across the south-west. There was flooding on the A30, the A388, and minor roads, and the Newquay to Par rail line was disrupted

again. The Fowey River overtopped its banks. In Wales, on the 18th there were reports of flooding between Aberdare and Fernhill, and along the River Teifi, and a tree blocked the railway line between Pembroke Dock and Tenby.

On the 23rd and 24th flooding caused widespread travel disruption across the Midlands, and the M1, A5 and M50 were closed due to flooding. Between then and the 27th, exacerbated by the passage of Storm Bella, there was considerable disruption in eastern England due to flooding, with evacuation of properties in Wellingborough and in north Bedfordshire. A number of roads were closed in various areas, including the A14, M1, A251 and parts of the A1. Some trains to Ashford and the Spirit of France ferry service were delayed, and strong winds brought down trees blocking roads and rail lines, with the QE2 bridge closed too. There was widespread flooding in Gloucestershire, with a number of properties flooded in the Forest of Dean, Stroud and Turley. Fallen trees and debris across Devon and Cornwall made driving conditions dangerous. On the 27th, parts of the M5 and the M48 Severn Crossing were closed due to strong winds.

Across parts of northern England on the 26th and 27th snow and ice caused a number of road traffic accidents, with power outages due to strong winds. Following this, snow and ice caused some disruption. In the north-west the A537 and the A5209 were blocked due to snow. In Yorkshire and the West Midlands, snow caused disruption to public transport links with some road closures, cars were abandoned in places, and fallen trees blocked roads.

England diary of highlights

It was a generally unsettled month, dominated by low pressure. It was quite cold during the first week and more especially during the last week, when northerly winds blew frequently and there was snow to low levels for some counties, but the middle fortnight was mild with predominantly south to south-westerly winds.

The mean temperature for December was provisionally 0.5 °C above the 1981-2010 long-term average. Rainfall was 150% of average, and parts of East Anglia, Gloucestershire and a few other places had over twice the normal rainfall amount, but rainfall was near normal in some central southern parts and in the north-west. Sunshine was 98% of average, but anomalies varied widely, with less than half the normal sunshine amount in east Cumbria.

1st to 7th

A ridge of high pressure gave a bright frosty start for many inland areas on the 1st, followed by a mainly sunny day for central and eastern areas with showers down the east coast. A band of cloud and light rain spread into northern and western parts on the afternoon of the 1st, and this cleared south-eastwards on the 2nd followed by brighter weather with isolated showers. The 3rd was a wet day with rain and sleet at low levels and snow over higher ground, especially in the north, turning more showery across the south-west during the afternoon. Further rain and sleet, with snow penetrating to low levels in some places, spread across the north and Midlands on the 4th, with brighter weather and showers, wintry at times, in other areas. A slow-moving low pressure area brought showers at times for the south and south-west and coastal parts of the north-east between the 5th and 7th. There was further rain over the west Midlands and central southern parts on the 5th, clearing southwards, and some light rain over the north on the 6th. Elsewhere, particularly East Anglia and central southern and south-eastern England, frost and fog became increasingly widespread.

8th to 12th

It remained unsettled, while turning milder. An area of rain moved slowly southwards through northern counties on the 8th, where it turned less cold, with showers for the south-west and widespread frost and fog for East Anglia and central southern and south-eastern parts. The 9th

was mainly cloudy, with rain clearing the south-east and East Anglia, otherwise mainly dry until a belt of rain spread into western parts, with strong to gale force winds in exposed parts of the south-west. Fog was slow to clear in parts of the south-west on the 10th, with light rain or drizzle at times, and more general rain spread from the south-west the following night, clearing eastern parts on the 11th followed by a mainly cloudy day with showers and longer spells of rain. It was bright with scattered showers for central, southern and south-western counties on the 12th, but rain was slow to clear northern and eastern districts.

13th to 23rd

A mild, changeable south to south-westerly type prevailed for most of this period. There was fog in the Vale of York and parts of the south-west early on the 13th, with bands of rain crossing the country from west to east during the day. The 14th and 15th had showers and longer spells of rain over the west and south, particularly in the north-west on the 14th, but also some sunny intervals, and some eastern parts stayed dry. A broad area of rain spread eastwards through the country on the 16th, with gales locally in exposed parts, especially in the west. The 17th saw a return to sunshine and showers, the showers mainly in the west and south, and mostly dry bright weather for central and eastern parts. More rain spread from the south-west for the 18th, though most eastern counties stayed mainly dry. Sunshine and showers on the 19th and 20th, the showers locally thundery at times in the south. Rain spread north-eastwards on the 21st and it turned very mild in the south with highs of 14.6 °C at Yeovilton (Somerset) and Exeter Airport (Devon). The following night was also very mild in the south, with a minimum of 11.8 °C at Swanage (Dorset). Northern parts were cooler on the 22nd, with some bright spells at first, but the south remained mild with some light rain and drizzle. More general rain spread from the south-west late on the 22nd and lasted in many areas through the 23rd, most persistent through the south Midlands and East Anglia.

24th to 31st

The weather turned progressively colder, while remaining mostly unsettled. Most places were sunny on the 24th but with rain showers in the far south-west, and wintry showers in eastern counties, which continued near the east coast early on the 25th. The 25th started with a widespread frost and was mostly sunny in the south-east, with 7.1 hours of sunshine at Oxford, but turned cloudier from the north with wintry showers developing in the north-west. Milder, cloudier weather established on the 26th and a belt of rain spread into the north during the day, spreading south-eastwards through remaining areas during the following night. Strong winds associated with Storm Bella brought a gust to 106 mph at Needles (Isle of Wight), and 109.0 mm of rain fell at Honister Pass (Cumbria). The rain cleared the south-east on the 27th followed by scattered showers, these heavy and wintry at times in the north-west. Wintry showers affected southern, south-western and eastern coastal counties on the 28th, with mist and fog slow to clear in some areas. Rain and sleet moved in from the North Sea overnight 28th/29th, turning increasingly to snow as it spread inland, and this spread over the Midlands and south-west during the day on the 29th with 8 cm of lying snow reported at Buxton (Derbyshire), with rain showers following behind into eastern areas. The 30th was cold with a high of just -1.9 °C at Carlisle (Cumbria); the south-east and parts of the north saw some sunshine, but scattered wintry showers affected the north-west and more general rain affected the south-west with snow over high ground. Topcliffe (North Yorkshire) fell to -7.5 °C early on the 31st, which was a generally bright day but with wintry showers persisting over the south-west and through the Cheshire Gap, and an area of rain, sleet and snow spread into the north after dark.

Wales diary of highlights

The first and last weeks of December were cold and unsettled, with some snowfalls in places, mainly on high ground, especially during the last week. The middle fortnight was much milder, while continuing unsettled with south to south-westerly winds.

The mean temperature for December was 0.4 °C above the long-term average. It was a dull wet month, with 155% of average rainfall and 69% of average sunshine, but not as dull as the Decembers of 2015 and 2018.

1st to 7th

A few places started frosty on the 1st, then cloud increased, giving patchy light rain during the afternoon. Some light rain and drizzle lingered until early afternoon on the 2nd, then it brightened up with isolated showers. A deep depression brought a wet day for all parts on the 3rd, with rain and sleet at low levels and snow on the hills. The 4th was brighter and more showery, but further persistent rain, sleet and snow spread to all parts bar the south by evening. A band of rain and sleet moved westwards early on the 5th, tending to break up and turn more showery with most places brightening up later. The 6th and 7th had fairly widespread frosts, with some scattered showers, but it was sunny in places on the 6th with 5.6 hours at Valley (Gwynedd).

8th to 12th

The 8th started off mainly showery, and longer spells of rain spread from the north during the day. The next few days were cloudy with rain at times, while it turned somewhat milder. A band of rain spread from the west on the 9th, with strong winds in exposed parts of the south and west. The 10th was cloudy with some light rain and drizzle, then a band of rain crossed the country overnight into the 11th, clearing away leaving a mainly cloudy day with showers merging at times into longer spells of rain. The 12th was brighter with scattered showers.

13th to 23rd

A mild changeable south to south-westerly type dominated. The 13th was very wet with areas of persistent and locally heavy rain crossing the country, turning more showery late in the afternoon. The 14th and 15th had some sunshine mixed with showers and longer spells of rain. It was wet and windy on the 16th, with gales locally, the persistent rain mostly clearing by mid-afternoon. The 17th started off bright with scattered showers, clouding over into the afternoon with showers merging into longer spells of rain. The 18th was wet, the rain turning particularly heavy around midday and persisting through the afternoon, with 71.8 mm at Llyn-y-Fan Blaenau (Carmarthen). It was also very mild, with a minimum of 10.4 °C at Milford Haven (Dyfed) and a maximum of 14.9 °C at Prestatyn (Clwyd). The 19th and 20th had bands of showers, these locally thundery on the 19th, and sunny intervals. The 21st started with light rain and mist and fog in places, clearing away during the morning, but persistent rain reached central and southern parts in the afternoon. After a cool start to the 22nd in the north with pockets of frost in rural areas, with some brighter spells at first, it was cloudy, and patchy fog developed later in the afternoon. The 23rd started cloudy and mainly dry, but it turned very wet with strong winds at times and gales locally.

24th to 31st

A northerly outbreak on the 24th brought sunshine and scattered showers, with wintry precipitation over high ground. After a widespread overnight frost, the 25th was generally cloudy with patchy light rain. Storm Bella arrived on the 26th, bringing heavy rain from the north during the afternoon and strong winds, with gusts to 83 mph at Aberdaron (Gwynedd). It was cooler on the 27th with scattered showers, some of which were wintry especially on high ground. The showers persisted into the 28th, then died out ahead of a line of rain which persisted along the west coast, and Lake Vyrnwy (Powys) recorded 9 cm of lying snow. Further wintry showers for the west coast early on

the 29th were followed by an area of rain, sleet and snow which moved south through the country. It was cold again on the 30th and 31st with some sunshine and scattered wintry showers, mainly in the west. St Harmon (Powys) fell to -7.5 °C overnight into the 31st, and Libanus (Powys) only reached 0.6 °C on the 31st.

Scotland diary of highlights

December started and ended cold, and there was snow locally to low levels around the 4th and more widely during the last week of the month. The middle fortnight was mild and unsettled, windy at times, with a predominantly south to south-westerly airstream.

The mean temperature for the month was 0.6 °C above the long-term average, mainly due to a high mean minimum temperature. Rainfall was generally near normal in the west and above normal elsewhere, and Scotland as a whole had 120% of average rainfall. Sunshine was 87% of average, and the Northern Isles and parts of the far north were sunnier than average, but sunshine was generally below normal elsewhere.

1st to 7th

Frontal systems brought cloud and bands of generally light rain on the 1st, these moving south-eastwards and clearing away mid-afternoon, but more light rain moved in from the west during the night. This cleared eastern parts early on the 2nd, leaving a day of sunshine and scattered blustery showers, these wintry and locally thundery on high ground, but parts of the north-east stayed dry. Southern areas were cloudy with occasional rain and sleet on the 3rd, while further north there was sunshine, with some wintry showers in the west. Rain, sleet and snow, with thunder locally, moved westwards through the morning of the 4th, followed by showers, and further rain, sleet and snow spread to the south-east and Borders late in the day. Showers and longer spells of rain or sleet affected most parts early on the 5th, becoming confined to central and eastern areas by mid-afternoon. The 6th and 7th had showers, some wintry, near northern and eastern coasts, with some frost and fog early on the 7th, but western areas were brighter and Tiree (Argyll) recorded 6.1 hours of sunshine on the 6th. An area of persistent rain moved into eastern counties late on the 7th.

8th to 12th

Rain spread from the east to all parts overnight into the 8th, with further showers and longer spells of rain during the day. From the 9th to 12th it was generally cloudy, while turning progressively milder. The 9th and 10th had light rain and drizzle, though with some bright spells around the Moray Firth and parts of the Northern Isles on the 9th. A significant band of rain reached western parts late on the 10th, and spread eastwards overnight into the 11th, becoming slow-moving in eastern areas on the 11th, but with a dry slot developing in central areas ahead of more rain spreading in from the west. The 12th had widespread rain and drizzle, but it tended to fizzle out and become confined to central and eastern parts.

13th to 21st

A mild, unsettled south to south-westerly type dominated during this period. Rain spread north-eastwards through all parts on the 13th, and the 14th had widespread showers and longer spells of rain, turning generally lighter by dusk. Showers were frequent in the south on the 15th, but more scattered elsewhere. Another belt of rain spread from the south-west overnight into the 16th, clearing north-eastwards during the day, before more rain moved into western counties later, with gales in exposed parts. The 17th saw sunshine and scattered showers, staying sunny and dry in the north-east, but further rain spread into the west by dusk and affected most parts on the 18th, though barely reaching the far north-east. It was very mild on the 18th with a high of 14.2 °C at Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens; the following night was also very mild with Great Cumbrae

(Buteshire) not falling below 9.2 °C. It was generally showery on the 19th and 20th, the showers heaviest and most frequent in western and northern counties. Rain in the west early on the 21st spread steadily east, becoming widespread by afternoon, but clearing away east into the evening.

22nd to 31st

The weather turned colder from the north. The 22nd was a brighter day with isolated pockets of frost, and scattered showers in the north and west. The 23rd had a belt of rain, heavy in places, in the south, dying away from mid-afternoon, otherwise mainly dry with scattered showers in the far north-east and north, which turned wintry at times. A northerly outbreak on the 24th brought a cold sunny day to most counties but there were wintry showers in the north and east. A widespread frost away from the north on the 25th was followed by a cloudy day with a little rain, and more persistent rain reached the north-west from mid-afternoon. Storm Bella brought a wet and windy day on the 26th, with gusts to 66 mph at South Uist (Western Isles) and Dundrennan (Kirkcudbrightshire), and 69.0 mm of rain at Tyndrum (Perthshire). The rain cleared by dawn on the 27th, which was a day of wintry showers, heaviest and most frequent in the west and south. The 28th was bright and cold for most, but with rain, sleet and snow persisting along the west coast and wintry showers for the east coast, and Drumalbin (Lanarkshire) only reached -0.5 °C. The 29th saw further wintry showers around coasts, but it was dry and sunny inland with widespread frost. Dalwhinnie (Inverness-shire) fell to -10.2 °C early on the 30th, the month's lowest temperature, followed by a mostly cold sunny day before cloudier weather and scattered wintry showers spread from the north-west. An area of rain, sleet and snow spread from the north on the 31st, with 18 cm of lying snow at Loch Glascarnoch (Ross & Cromarty).

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

The month started and ended cold, but was generally mild and wet between the 8th and 21st. There was some sleet and snow in places during the last week and more locally in the first week.

The mean temperature for the month was 0.1 °C below the 1981-2010 average. Rainfall was 113% of average and sunshine was 93% of average. Sunshine was above average in the south-east, but below average in the west and north.

1st to 7th

It was dull with occasional drizzle on the 1st, then chilly on the 2nd with sunshine and scattered blustery showers. The 3rd was colder still, with scattered wintry showers mainly in the north and west. Wet and windy on the 4th with rain, sleet and snow spreading to all parts by late morning, with gusts to 69 mph at Orlock Head (County Down). The 5th started with showers and longer spells of rain in the west, but these died away leaving a mainly sunny day. It remained sunny and cold on the 6th and 7th with some frost and fog patches, which were slow to clear in some places. Lough Navar (County Fermanagh) and Edenfel (County Tyrone) only reached -1.6 °C on the 6th, Edenfel falling to -4.9 °C early on the 7th.

8th to 12th

Milder, unsettled weather took over from the west during this period. It was generally cloudy on the 8th with widespread showers, and temperatures recovered to near the seasonal average. It was cloudy from the 9th to 11th, and rain spread from the west late on the 9th, with a further band of rain spreading from the west from midday on the 10th. The rain was more patchy on the 11th, and this cleared by the 12th leaving a sunny day with just a few isolated showers in the west, with 5.6 hours of sunshine at Katesbridge (County Down).

13th to 21st

Southerly and south-westerly winds brought frequent wet and windy weather. It was very wet on the 13th, and very mild overnight into the 14th with Killowen (County Down) not falling below 8.4 °C. The 14th and 15th both had some sunshine and just isolated showers, but a band of rain moved in overnight into the 16th, and Trassey (County Down) recorded 34.3 mm of rain. The rain persisted for much of the day on the 16th, with an organised area of rain sweeping north-eastwards. The 17th had sunshine and isolated showers in the morning, but rain spread from the south-west during the afternoon. Further rain belts crossed the country on the 18th, but it was mild with a high of 12.3 °C at Magilligan (County Londonderry), and Ballywatticock (County Down) did not fall below 8.4 °C overnight into the 19th. The 19th had frequent showers and longer spells of rain, but showers were more scattered on the 20th with some sunshine in between. There were outbreaks of rain on the 21st, clearing away after dark.

22nd to 31st

The weather turned generally colder during this period. The 22nd and 23rd were mostly cloudy and dry, but scattered showers developed in the far west and north-west late on the 23rd. A northerly outbreak brought sunshine and scattered showers on the 24th. After a frost in places overnight, the 25th was generally cloudy with patchy light rain mainly in the afternoon. Rain and strong winds associated with Storm Bella spread from the north during the afternoon of the 26th. This was followed by colder brighter weather on the 27th with frequent wintry showers, then a band of persistent rain, sleet and snow spread from the north-west overnight and persisted for most of the day on the 28th. It continued cold on the 29th and 30th, with wintry showers on the 29th, and fewer showers on the 30th. After a widespread frost, an area of rain, sleet and snow spread from the north on the 31st, giving 4 cm of lying snow at Ballypatrick Forest (County Antrim).