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Great weather events: Temperatures records fall in summer 2003

Between January and May, air temperatures were generally above average, exceptionally so in March, but it was during June that things really started to warm up.

Temperatures were well above average with England and Wales having the warmest mean temperatures since 1976. Shepshed in Leicestershire recorded the highest temperature of the year to that point (30.5 °C on 22 June).

Fire risk increases



[Map showing heatwave across Europe in July 2003](#)

In July the weather was very warm across all parts of the country, even the Northern Isles were 3 °C above the average mean for July. Rainfall mainly fell in showers associated with thunderstorms, and the local nature of this type of precipitation meant that many areas seeing little or no rain began to get very dry. The risk of fire arose as the temperatures climbed and vegetation came under stress.

In response, the Met Office issued the first Fire Hazard Forecast to fire services, alerting them to the increased risk of blazes on grass and scrubland. The decision to issue a forecast was vindicated by an outbreak of 20 grass fires during 12 and 13 July.

Reminders of 1976

The highest temperature of the month was recorded at Wisley (33.6 °C) on the 15th, and Maidenhead had its warmest July day since the long hot summer of 1976. A more unsettled period of weather followed during the second half of the month when Atlantic depressions brought thundery rain to parts the country, and a spell of cooler weather was hot on its heels.

However, the Met Office was already forecasting the return of high pressure in early August, bringing hot conditions with it.

Records fall

The cooler weather was still in evidence at the very beginning of August but by the 3rd, very warm and sunny conditions had arrived across all parts of the UK, and rainfall was well below, or exceptionally below average. The Scottish temperature record was broken on the 9th with 32.9 °C being recorded at Greycrook in the Scottish Borders. The next day it was the turn of the UK temperature record to fall when 38.5 °C was recorded at Brogdale (near Faversham). In contrast to the weather in south-east England, Carlton (Cleveland) measured 48 mm of rain in only 15 minutes - and 2 cm of hail on the ground - during a torrential downpour that day!

During the heatwave, which lasted until the 13th, temperatures topped 30 °C somewhere in the country for 10 successive days, reaching more than 35 °C in many places on the 6th, 9th and 10th. New station records were set on the 5th at Anglesey (33 °C) and Rocquaine, Jersey (35 °C).

[More about the record temperatures of August 2003](#)

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