

Is the UK's weather getting more extreme?

The weather often forms the topic of the nation's favourite conversation and the extreme events of 2018 certainly kept us talking. We witnessed blizzards, torrential rain, thunder storms, blazing sunshine and droughts, all of which led us to question whether these extremes are getting more pronounced. Here's a summary of just a few of 2018's events

The Beast from the East

At the end of February sudden stratospheric warming of a large mass of cold air above the North Pole (known as the polar vortex), disturbed the jet stream and allowed cold air from Russia to blow towards the UK. Britain was hit by sub-zero temperatures and heavy snowfall; an event known as the Beast from the East.

As the Met Office issued a severe weather warning, some rural areas experienced temperatures as low as -12°C , the lowest ever daily maximum temperature in the UK was recorded at -4.7°C and 40cm of snow fell in some regions.

Thousands of people were trapped overnight in vehicles on motorways, trains and their passengers were stranded and flights were cancelled. Thousands of schools shut, community centres opened to provide shelter for the homeless, the NHS cancelled non urgent operations and there was a shortage of food in some supermarkets. The military were deployed to help clear the snow and to help medical staff get to work. In total 10 people lost their lives.

Summer Heatwave

Warmer ocean waters pushed the jet stream further north, meaning it took a more northerly track over the UK, creating an area of high pressure which did not shift for weeks, blocking cooler air from the Atlantic.

The summer of 2018 was the joint hottest on record for the UK as a whole, tied with 1976, 2003 and 2006. The country's hottest May on record was followed, in June, by 16 consecutive days of temperatures above 28°C and Scotland recorded its warmest ever day at 33.2°C . Just 47mm of rain fell between 1st June and 16th July, making it the driest start to summer on record since 1961, when modern records began.

Many people took the opportunity to sunbathe or spend time in the garden and there was a rise in the number of British people taking domestic holidays.

The higher temperatures did pose a health risk and the Met Office issued a health warning, urging people to stay out of the sun. There were nearly 700 more deaths than average recorded during the 15 day peak of the heatwave in June and July in England and Wales.

The heatwave led to falling water levels in reservoirs and the dry conditions contributed to a series of large fires on the Lancashire moors. There were also warnings that food prices could rise.

Named Storms

Weather conditions in the UK are massively influenced by the location of the jet stream. Variations in the jet stream cause Atlantic depressions to deepen and drive the development of storms, as they are steered towards the UK.

In 2015 the Met Office began to name storms that had the potential to cause an amber (be prepared) or red (take action) warning. By the end of 2018, the UK had been affected by 10 named storms, compared to 7 in 2017 and 8 in 2016.

Name	Date of Impact
Eleanor	2nd - 3rd January
Fionn	16th January
David*	18th January
Georgina	24th January
Emma**	1st March
Hector	13th - 14th June
Ali	19th September
Bronagh	20th - 21st Sept
Callum	12th - 13th Oct
Deirdre	15th - 16th Dec

* Named by Meteo France

**Named by Portuguese Met Service

Each of these storms have brought widespread destruction to the UK. Wind gusts reaching up to 100 mph have felled trees, damaged buildings, caused extensive power outages and resulted in severe travel disruption. Heavy and persistent rainfall caused river levels to rise rapidly resulting in flooding to homes and businesses. In September two people lost their lives during Storm Ali.