

Spring 2012

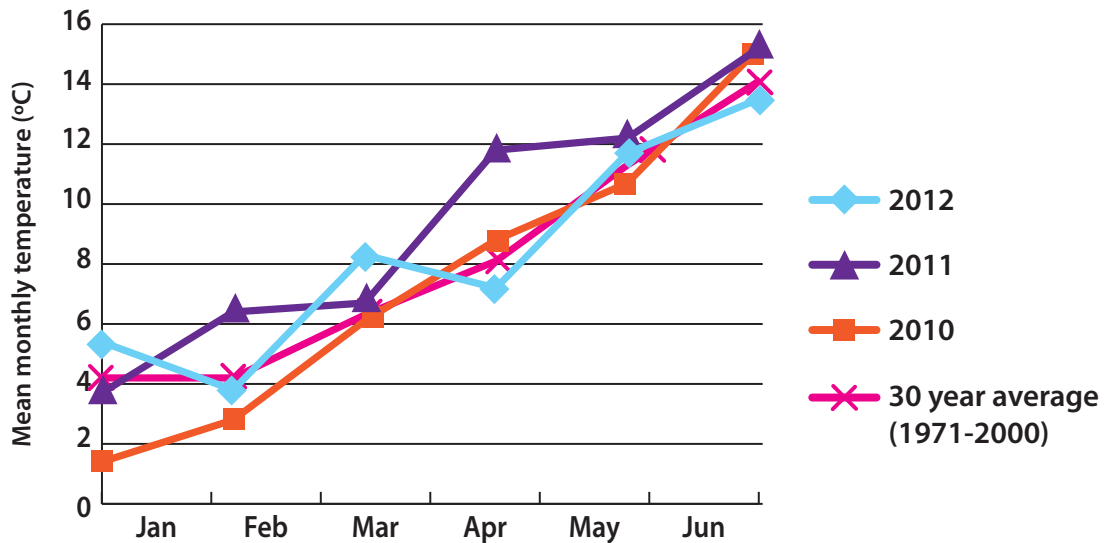
Sian Atkinson, Conservation Team

To coin a footballing phrase, spring 2012 was definitely a season of two halves – warmer and drier than usual in the first three months, colder and wetter from April to June, swinging from droughts to flooding almost overnight.

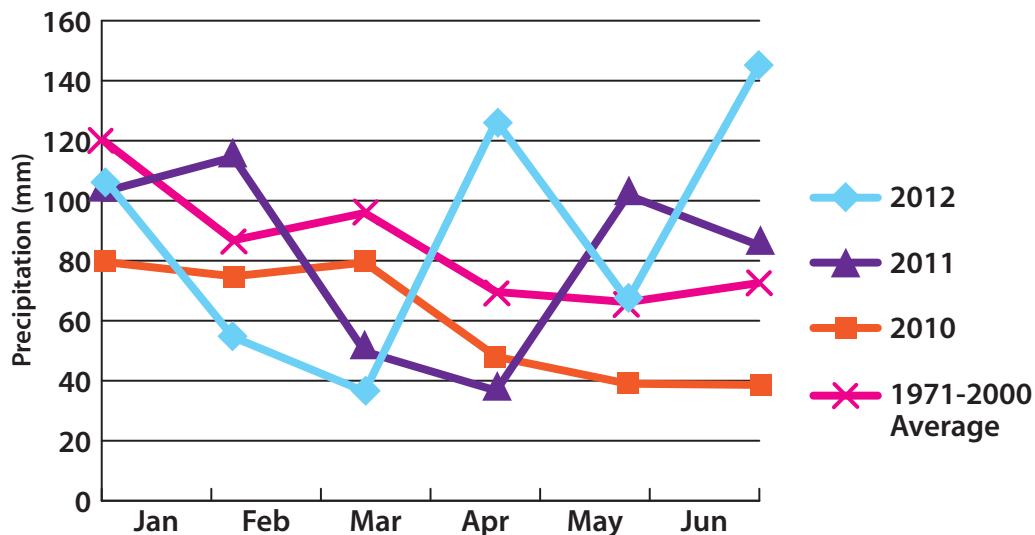
It was the mildest January since 2008, and the warmest March since 1957. In January rainfall was less than 75% of normal in eastern and southern counties, and in February and March, only a third of the normal amount of rain fell in these and other areas, including eastern Scotland.

Unusually, though, April was colder than March and the coldest April since 1989. May saw a brief warm spell, but June was the coolest since 1991. It was provisionally the wettest April on record across the UK. Much of eastern and southern England, eastern Wales and eastern Scotland recorded well over twice the normal amount, with three times normal in places. It was also the wettest June across the UK since 1910. Only the far north-west of Scotland was drier than normal.

Central England Temperature Jan-Jun 2010-12 compared with 30-year average (Met Office)



UK monthly precipitation Jan-Jun 2010-12 compared with 30-year average (Met Office)



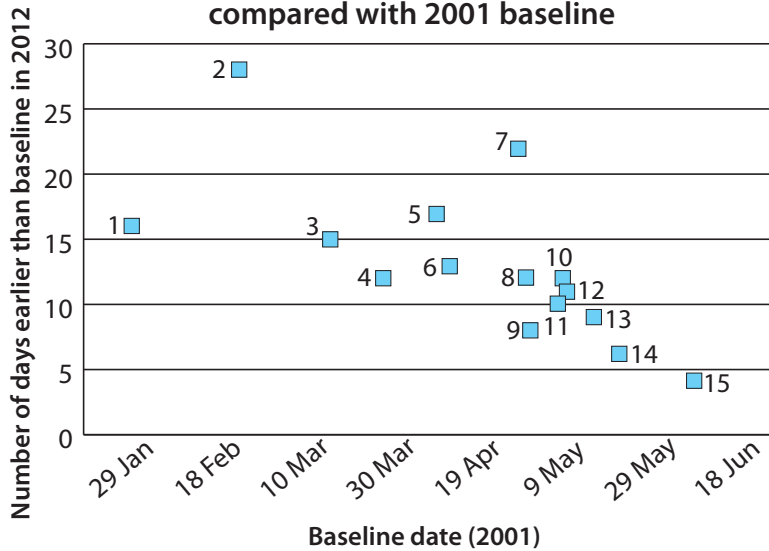
These variations are reflected in records of spring events. Most records were early compared with the baseline of 2001 (which we use because conditions that year were close to the 30-year average), but some of those that occur nearer the beginning of the year were exceptionally early, for instance, early flowering of spring flowers, and early sightings of some butterflies and migrant birds.

Spring migrant birds were seen on average four days earlier than usual, though this is not as early as the overall

average of 9 days last year. Blackcap and chiffchaff were the only birds seen earlier than last year; most other species were seen within three days either side of the baseline date. However, breeding behaviour was also earlier than last year, and in some cases earlier than any time this century, with blackbird nesting 11 days earlier and great tit nesting 11 days earlier than 2001.

Insects emerged earlier on average, but not as early as in the warm spring of 2007. There was considerable variation

Relative timing of first flowering in 2012 compared with 2001 baseline



1	Snowdrop
2	Hazel
3	Lesser celandine
4	Coltsfoot
5	Blackthorn
6	Wood anemone
7	Bluebell
8	Cuckooflower
9	Garlic mustard
10	Horse Chestnut
11	Hawthorn
12	Purple lilac
13	Ox-eye daisy
14	Elder
15	Dog rose

Male orange tip butterfly:
WTPL/Richard Becker



with some species recorded very early and others less early – comma and red admiral were 25 days and 34 days earlier than 2001, (seven days and 15 days earlier than last year) but green-veined white and speckled wood were later than 2011 by 10 days and 4 days respectively.

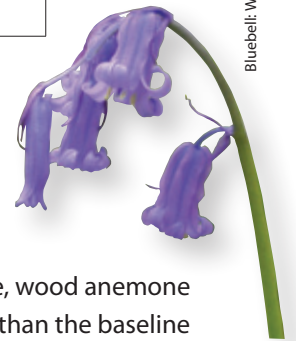
Frogspawn was first seen on average 10 days earlier than the baseline, though four days later than in 2007 and 2008, and two days earlier than last year.

Budburst occurred on average 14 days earlier than usual, compared with 16 days earlier last year, and first leaf was on average 12 days earlier than normal compared with 17 last year. Again there was considerable variation

between species, with oak and ash first leaf seven days and ten days on average later than last year, though still earlier than usual.

Early spring flowers such as celandine, wood anemone and blackthorn were all much earlier than the baseline from 2001, with lesser celandine 15 days earlier than usual, wood anemone 13 days earlier than usual, and blackthorn 17 days earlier than usual, and 6 days earlier than last year. Bluebells were recorded flowering 22 days earlier than usual – the earliest this century.

Records were down considerably on spring 2011, with 47,336 observations in total compared with 63,488 last year. A huge thank you to all those who recorded: your records are invaluable.



Bluebell: WTPL/Christine Martin

News in brief

- The team had a recent request from a forensic science researcher who wanted to know the flowering date of a particular species in a particular town in a particular year to aid with a major criminal case – an unexpected use of your data?
- Nature's Calendar is sponsoring a PhD student who will be working with us for the next four years examining the phenology of 20 plant species in relation to their temperature sensitivity and local adaptation to their environment. She will also be using her experience in citizen science to help promote our work more widely.
- Government department DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) continues to make use of your data each year as part of its UK and England Biodiversity Indicators on the timings of events in spring.

Very many thanks again for your continued support. If we could ask you to do just one more thing to help us, giving our falling number of both records and recorders, it would be to consider passing your enthusiasm for recording Nature's Calendar onto a friend or relative and help us find another expert like yourself. If you have such a person in mind, please direct them to our website naturescalendar.org.uk