

## Spring 2009

### Weather



We use 2001 as our spring benchmark, as that year saw average monthly Central England Temperatures (CET) from January to June consistently very close to the 30-year average (1961-90). This year, 2009, saw a very cold start with January CET 0.81°C below the 30-year average. Preceding months were also consistently colder than those leading up to 2001. Average monthly CET in December 2008 was 1.15°C below the 30-year average and 2.3°C colder than December 2000. However, temperatures picked up rapidly in 2009 with the March to May average CET 1.46°C warmer than in 2001. Average monthly CETs from January to June were most similar to those experienced in 2003 (see Figure 1).

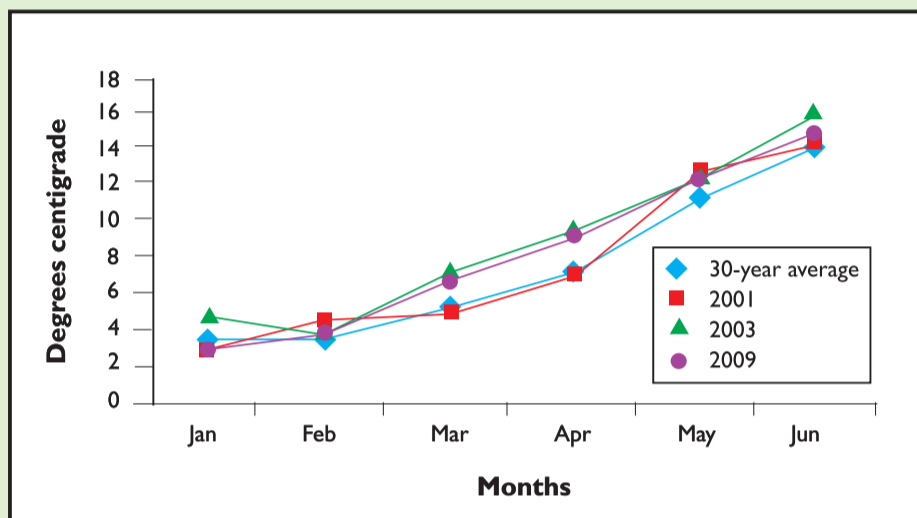


Figure 1. Average monthly Central England Temperature (°C)

### Events

Interestingly, despite the cold, on average snowdrops first flowered on 29 January 2009, seven days earlier than in 2001. This may be consistent with the idea that a warmer autumn (eg in 2000) may delay flowering in early spring until plants have experienced a sufficient period of low winter temperatures.

Unsurprisingly, given the warm weather from March onwards, late spring events were also more advanced (eg on average: speckled wood butterfly emerged on 22 April, 20 days early; and blue tits were first seen feeding young on 9 May, six days early).

The extent to which similar temperatures in 2003 and 2009 were reflected in records of tree-related events was eerie. On average, comparing both years with 2001, budburst was precisely 11.9 days earlier, whilst first leaf was early by 12.6 days in 2003 and 12.5 days in 2009.

### Climate variability

As mentioned in relation to last autumn's results, the dawning realisation that climate change is happening seems to have led many people to falsely expect each successive year to be warmer than the last. Indeed, an article recently published in Science, one of the world's most illustrious journals, suggests that global climate temperatures have not changed significantly over the last ten years. However, step back and look over a longer timeframe and the trend for a warming world remains clear for all to see.

In the UK, the average January to June CET during the last decade has varied from year to year but has always been higher than the 30-year average. Responses of spring events to temperature have been consistent over the ten years but it is too short a period in which to detect a general trend in the timing of spring. However, when your mass observations are looked at in combination with our long-term records, the trend for earlier spring events over the years is very apparent.

For some people, climate variability will no doubt be sufficient for them to deny that climate change is happening. But for the Woodland Trust, it further emphasises the need to embrace that we live in an uncertain world and act accordingly, rather than live life in the hope that a preferred future will come true. We all need to live within the planet's means, urgently reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, and sustain our environment by working with the grain of nature. As the UK is one of the least wooded countries in Europe, this means the Woodland Trust believes there is a need to double our native tree cover. This would help create landscapes that not only allow as many species as possible to adapt in response to change but also improve air and water quality, alleviate flooding, conserve soil, support food production and safeguard the nation's health.



### Volunteer of the Year award

Dr Anne Phillips from Walsall in the West Midlands won the Trust's regional Volunteer of the Year award.

She began observing nature as a schoolgirl in the 1930s, noting in her diaries the dates of first sightings of wild flowers in her area.

In 1976 she started recording 39 annual events more systematically, 27 of which demonstrate a significant response to warmer temperatures by occurring earlier in warmer years.

Recent analysis of her observations shows that horse chestnut and silver birch are now leafing an average of 12 days earlier, blackbirds are nesting 14 days earlier, and frogspawn and tadpoles are appearing 16 days earlier.

She has submitted records from 1947 to the present day and the UKPN database contains an amazing 2050 of her records. Her data has been used for many years by students for dissertations and post graduate projects.

Anne is one of our longest serving and most dedicated recorders and richly deserves this award.

