

Spring 2008 analysis – Kate Lewthwaite and Nick Collinson

Summary

A very warm early spring, an average March and April and above-average later spring, led to the early sightings we have become used to; although these were not as extreme as the exceptional spring of 2007 due to the mild weather not being sustained throughout the period.

Weather

January was the most striking month of spring 2008, with temperatures of 2.8°C above average. In England, the Met Office confirmed it was the 4th warmest January since 1914.

February and May were also exceptionally warm, but the other spring months were much closer to the seasonal average.

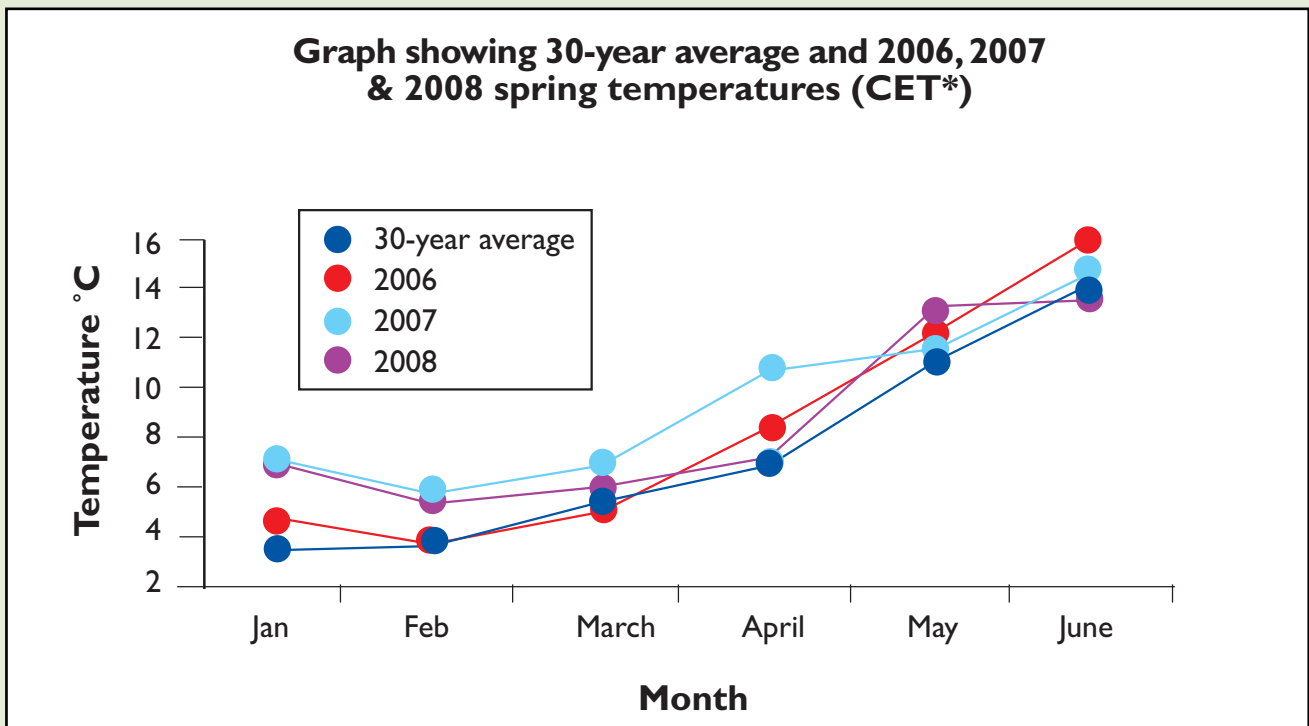


Figure 1: 2008 was another warmer than average year, except for April, but was generally cooler than 2007

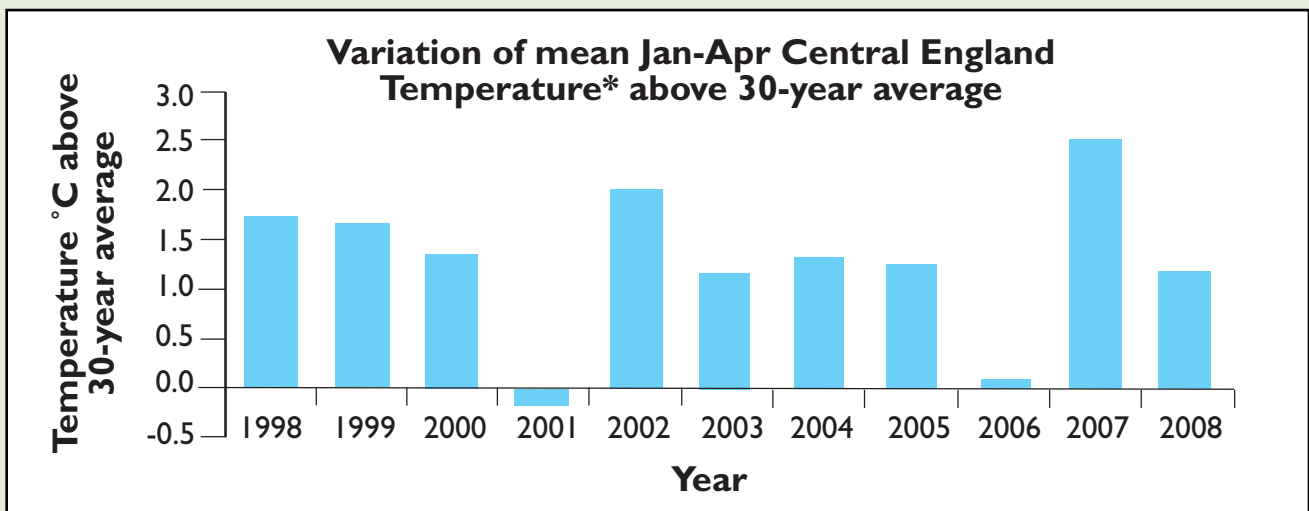


Figure 2: 2008 was 1.2°C above average, but not as warm as the exceptional 2007

*CET – Central England Temperature is representative of a roughly triangular area of the UK enclosed by Bristol, Lancashire and London. We use it because it is the longest available instrumental record of temperature – with monthly records dating back to 1659.



WTPL/Gerald Steward

Phenology

With a spring consisting of average or above average temperatures, we would expect phenological timings to be early, but not as strikingly early as 2007. For each group overall that was indeed the case.

Birds

All migratory events except blackcap were earlier than 2001 (our benchmark year that represents the 30-year temperature average). However, the majority were not as early as 2007; this is as would be expected, given unlike 2007, 2008 spring temperatures did not remain above average throughout. Also 2007 was the mildest spring on record. Resident bird breeding activity overall showed the same pattern. So bird activity was early, but was typical of a warm year, and not showing anything exceptional.



WTPL/Christine Martin

Insects

Average insect sightings were all earlier than the 2001 benchmark but not as early as in recent warm years - many were probably affected by relatively cool (ie near the seasonal average) temperatures in March and April.



WTPL/Pete Holmes

Amphibians

All sightings were earlier than the 2001 benchmark. Frogspawn was especially early, probably affected by the very mild temperatures in January and February.



WTPL/John Webb

First leaf and budburst

All events were earlier than the 2001 benchmark, but most weren't as early as 2007. Budburst dates were more similar to 2007, but first leaf was probably delayed by the relatively cool March and April temperatures.



WTPL/Ann Tomlin

Plants and trees flowering

All events were earlier than the 2001 benchmark; early season events like flowering in colt's-foot, hazel and snowdrop showed the earliest responses, again probably responding to the mild January and February conditions.



WTPL/David Rodway

Group and event	Comparison with 2001	Comparison with 2007
Migrant bird arrival	4.8 days earlier	0.5 days later
Resident birds breeding	5.8 days earlier	2.9 days later
Insects	12.2 days earlier	10.9 days later
Amphibians	13 days earlier	1.5 days later
First leaf	7.3 days earlier	5.4 days later
Budburst	9.7 days earlier	0.9 days later
Plant and tree flowering	13.3 days earlier	3.2 days later

Year	UK Average 2001	UK Average 2005	UK Average 2006	UK Average 2007	UK Average 2008	England Average 2008	Wales Average 2008	Scotland Average 2008	NI Average 2008
Tree and shrub first leaf									
Ash	10 May	7 May	5 May	30 Apr	2 May	1 May	5 May	11 May	11 May
Beech	2 May	24 Apr	28 Apr	19 Apr	27 Apr	26 Apr	28 Apr	4 May	1 May
Silver birch	22 Apr	12 Apr	23 Apr	11 Apr	16 Apr	15 Apr	18 Apr	29 Apr	26 Apr
Horse chestnut	15 Apr	5 Apr	18 Apr	4 Apr	6 Apr	5 Apr	4 Apr	20 Apr	13 Apr
Elder	30 Mar	13 Mar	29 Mar	8 Mar	3 Mar	2 Mar	9 Mar	9 Mar	12 Mar
Hawthorn	3 Apr	24 Mar	9 Apr	18 Mar	13 Mar	11 Mar	18 Mar	3 Apr	17 Mar
Pedunculate oak	6 May	24 Apr	3 May	16 Apr	26 Apr	25 Apr	21 Apr	7 May	3 May
Rowan	23 Apr	14 Apr	23 Apr	13 Apr	15 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	28 Apr	19 Apr
Sycamore	23 Apr	12 Apr	24 Apr	11 Apr	18 Apr	18 Apr	20 Apr	26 Apr	22 Apr
Grasses									
Lawn first cut	1 Apr	13 Mar	2 Apr	9 Mar	11 Mar	10 Mar	13 Mar	11 Apr	21 Mar
Meadow foxtail flowering	18 May	8 May	14 May	29 Apr	6 May	7 May	2 May	18 May	15 May
Birds – migrants									
Cuckoo	5 May	30 Apr	29 Apr	29 Apr	30 Apr	29 Apr	2 May	2 May	7 May
House martin	1 May	29 Apr	25 Apr	25 Apr	26 Apr	26 Apr	28 Apr	27 Apr	26 Apr
Swallow	25 Apr	20 Apr	17 Apr	19 Apr	20 Apr	20 Apr	18 Apr	26 Apr	19 Apr
Swift	10 May	5 May	4 May	4 May	5 May	5 May	5 May	4 May	3 May
Bird activity									
Blackbird nesting	27 Mar	20 Mar	27 Mar	18 Mar	20 Mar	19 Mar	19 Mar	26 Mar	22 Mar
Blackbird feeding young	27 Apr	20 Apr	27 Apr	20 Apr	22 Apr	22 Apr	27 Apr	29 Apr	2 May
Rooks nesting	12 Mar	4 Mar	9 Mar	3 Mar	27 Feb	27 Feb	28 Feb	27 Feb	26 Feb
Blue tit nesting	4 Apr	28 Mar	5 Apr	26 Mar	29 Mar	28 Mar	5 Apr	8 Apr	2 Apr
Blue tit feeding young	15 May	11 May	16 May	6 May	10 May	10 May	20 May	15 May	14 May
Song thrush first heard	19 Mar	11 Feb	14 Feb	8 Feb	6 Feb	4 Feb	2 Feb	21 Feb	18 Feb
Flowering									
Blackthorn	3 Apr	17 Mar	9 Apr	11 Mar	10 Mar	8 Mar	17 Mar	12 Apr	25 Mar
Bluebell	25 Apr	12 Apr	27 Apr	9 Apr	10 Apr	9 Apr	9 Apr	28 Apr	22 Apr
Lesser celandine	15 Mar	26 Feb	18 Mar	23 Feb	19 Feb	18 Feb	14 Feb	16 Mar	29 Feb
Horse chestnut	10 May	30 Apr	6 May	21 Apr	3 May	2 May	30 Apr	13 May	8 May
Hawthorn	11 May	30 Apr	8 May	20 Apr	30 Apr	30 Apr	2 May	15 May	10 May
Snowdrop	4 Feb	20 Jan	31 Jan	21 Jan	21 Jan	21 Jan	19 Jan	25 Jan	21 Jan
Amphibians									
Frogspawn	12 Mar	6 Mar	15 Mar	26 Feb	26 Feb	27 Feb	9 Feb	7 Mar	2 Mar
Tadpoles	10 Apr	30 Mar	10 Apr	26 Mar	30 Mar	30 Mar	14 Mar	7 Apr	3 Apr
Insects									
Bumblebee (red-tailed)	7 Apr	6 Mar	6 Apr	22 Mar	19 Mar	18 Mar	17 Mar	10 Apr	7 Apr
7-spot ladybird	1 Apr	13 Mar	22 Mar	6 Mar	12 Mar	12 Mar	27 Mar	21 Mar	18 Mar
Butterflies									
Orange tip	8 May	26 Apr	3 May	16 Apr	29 Apr	28 Apr	30 Apr	7 May	3 May
Peacock	14 Apr	29 Mar	14 Apr	19 Mar	2 Apr	1 Apr	3 Apr	20 Apr	3 Apr
Red admiral	7 May	7 Apr	22 Apr	16 Mar	27 Mar	26 Mar	17 Apr	25 Apr	23 Apr
Small tortoiseshell	14 Apr	27 Mar	13 Apr	25 Mar	2 Apr	1 Apr	30 Mar	21 Apr	1 Apr

Table showing UK average dates for a selection of spring events 2005-2008. 2001 is shown as our marker 'normal' year.