NORTHEASTWILDLIFE

Highlights of Spring 2017

by Charlotte Armitage, Nature's Calendar Officer

Summary

In general it was a warm and dry start to the year compared with 30 year averages from the Met office. This was reflected in your records with 75 out of 78 events occurring early when compared to 2001*, with some events over three weeks earlier. The exceptions were spotter flycatcher, swift, and red-tailed bumble bee first recorded which were slightly late.

*2001 is used as a benchmark year as weather conditions closely reflected the 30 year average.

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Weather

Temperature

- All months (January to June) were warmer than average and apart from January, warmer than the same month in 2016 (figure 1).
- It got as hot as 18°C in London during February 2017, and March was the joint fifth warmest month since the Met Office temperature series began in 1910.
- April did, however, see some late frosts reducing its average temperature.

Rainfall

- Mostly rainfall was below the national average. June was the big exception being the sixth wettest since the Met Office rainfall series began in 1910.
- February and March were extremely close to average with 106% and 104% of rainfall respectively.
- April was a particularly dry month with only 48% rainfall when compared with the UK average.

Figure 1. Central England Temperature 2017 compared with 1961-90 average

**Central England Temperature dataset is a record from a roughly triangular area of the UK, enclosed by Bristol, Lancashire and London.

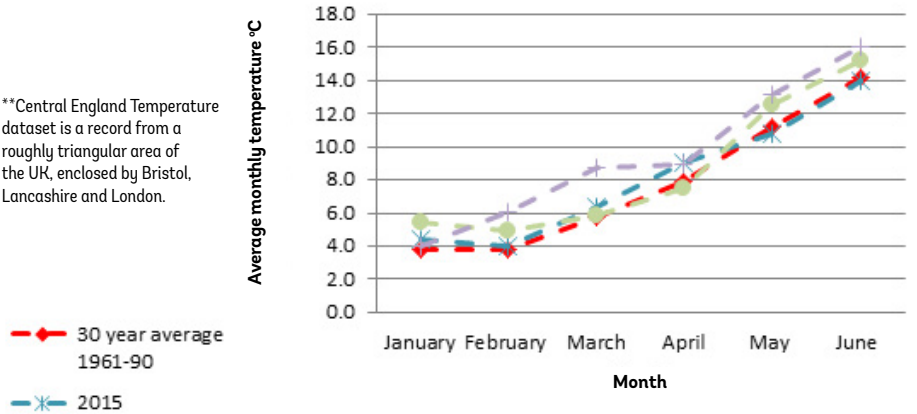
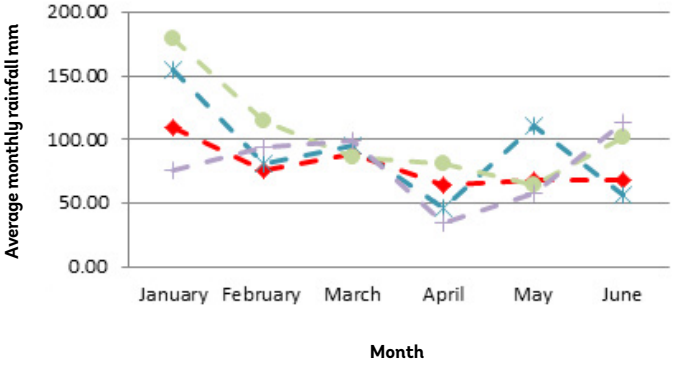


Figure 2. UK rainfall 2015-17 compared with 1961-90 average



What your spring 2017 records show

Temperature is compared to a 30 year average, but this is not possible with Nature's Calendar spring records as they've only been collected since 2000. Instead we've compared your records to the benchmark year of 2001 as weather conditions were very similar to the 30 year Met Office average.

This spring almost all events were earlier than the benchmark year with the exception of spotted flycatcher and red-tailed bumble bee, which were five days late, and swift which was also late by one day (figure 3).

Nature's Calendar explores how seasonal events are responding to climate change and some were over three weeks early this year. This included hazel flowering (29 days early) and elder budburst (26) which correlates with the warm spring that was experienced.

Figure 3. Average recording dates during 2015, 2016 and 2017 compared to the 2001 benchmark year. Negative numbers represent days earlier and positive numbers represent days later than the benchmark year.

Event	Number of days earlier or later than the 2001 benchmark year		
	2015	2016	2017
Budburst	-4.9	-9.5	-16.6
First Leaf	-5.8	-8.7	-16.5
First Flowering	-7.3	-11.9	-15.8
Amphibians first recorded	0.7	-6.0	-12.0
Insects first recorded	-11.8	-5.7	-5.5
Birds first recorded	-5.1	-5.7	-5.5
Lawn first cut	-3.0	-16.0	-13.0

Budburst and first leaf

These were the most responsive events to the warm spring which were both over 16 days earlier than average.

First flowering

The combination of an unusually dry April with frosty spells was an interesting challenge for flowering and could have affected successful fruit set in some species. Autumn 2017 fruiting records will indicate if this caused any issues.

Amphibians

This year was the earliest for amphibian events in five years with the average for all events happening 12 days earlier than the benchmark year. The average for newts was 15 days early.

Your early newt timings show how valuable your records are in spotting how climate change could affect delicate timings in nature. This spring more newts were active early in the season but was their food supply (insects, slugs and worms) too? There is a risk of food shortage if species adapt at different rates.

Insects

All insect events were earlier than the benchmark year apart from red-tailed bumble bee. This bumble bee species has been later than expected for the last three years. Three of our butterfly species were on average over three weeks earlier than the benchmark year; orange tip (25 days), holly blue (24 days) and speckled wood (22 days). Queen wasps were also seen on average 22 days earlier. The first insect on average seen this year in the UK was brimstone butterfly (21 of March) while the latest insect in our records was red admiral butterfly (26 of April).

Birds

Most bird migrating and all breeding activity was early this year when compared with 2001. Song thrush song was heard on average 30 days earlier and 41 records were received reporting that they had been heard all winter. Another notable species was fieldfare which left our shores 29 days early this year.

Your records

Sadly total recordings during spring 2017 have dropped again from around 45,000 in 2016 to 41,560. Snowdrops (1,188 records) and bluebells (1,181 records) first flowering remained our most popular events. The least recorded events were first seen nightingale (44) and turtle dove (33). Both these birds are red listed species of conservation concern so the more information we can receive the better. On a more positive note insect observations have increased since 2016.

Do you know any other nature-lovers?

From spotting the first ladybird to the last leaf, we need more volunteers. Please spread the word about Nature's Calendar and our new website where they can plot their findings, upload photos and see their records on the live maps.

naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk

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The Woodland Trust, Kempton Way, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 6LL

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