



# Highlights of Spring 2018



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(Nature's Calendar)

## Overview

The mild winter and early spring wildlife activity was blasted away by the cold and snow of February and March which put a halt to most new spring wildlife sightings. From April the weather became warmer and drier and spring got started again. Overall, 58 of 78 events were early compared to 2001\*. Five were the same and 15 were late. This may seem strange as the extreme cold of relatively short periods during February and March may have skewed our perception of how cold the spring was overall.

\*2001 is used as a benchmark as weather conditions closely reflected the 30 year average (1961-90).



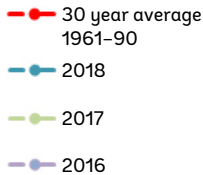
WOODLAND  
TRUST

# Weather compared with the UK 30 year average (1961-90)

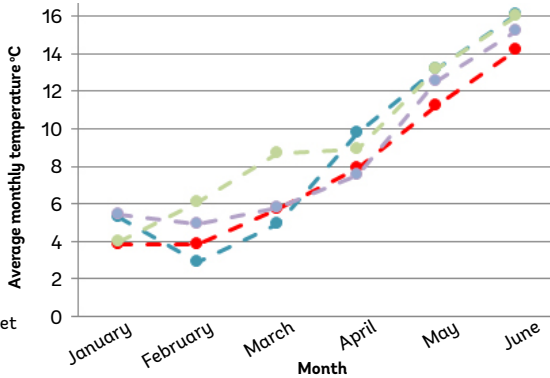
## Temperature

- January was mild, 1.5°C above average.
- Although the cold snaps in February and March felt extremely cold, each month was only 0.9°C and 0.8°C below average.
- April, May and June were all very warm, each was at least 1.9°C above average.
- June is provisionally the third warmest June for the UK since 1910.

**Figure 1.**  
Central England Temperature\*\*  
2016-8 compared with  
1961-90 average



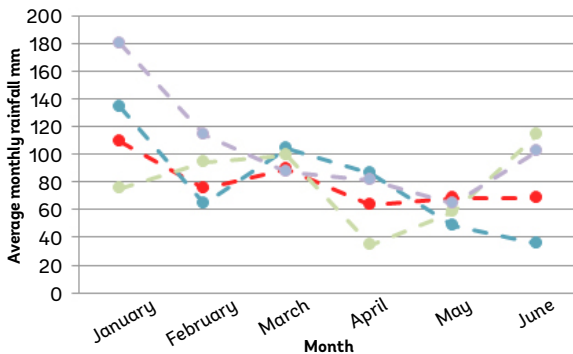
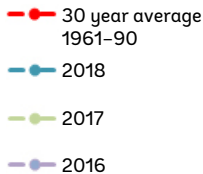
\*\*Central England Temperature dataset is a record from a roughly triangular area of the UK, enclosed by Bristol, Lancashire and London.



## Precipitation (rain and snow)

- January to March were within 22% of the average in each month.
- April precipitation was 35% higher than the average.
- May and June were very dry, 29% and 48% lower than the average for those months.

**Figure 2.**  
UK rainfall 2016-8  
compared with  
1961-90 average



## What your spring 2018 records show

Weather is compared to a 30 year average, but this is not possible with Nature's Calendar's spring records as they've only been collected in bulk 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, see Figure 3.

Figure 3. Average recording dates during 2016, 2017 and 2018 compared to the 2001 benchmark year.

| Negative numbers represent days earlier and positive numbers represent days later than the benchmark year |       |       |      |
|---|-------|-------|------|
| Event   | 2016  | 2017  | 2018 |
| Budburst  | -9.5  | -16.6 | -2.9 |
| First Leaf  | -8.7  | -16.5 | -4.9 |
| First Flowering   | -11.9 | -15.8 | -8.5 |
| Amphibians first recorded   | -6.0  | -12.0 | -2.3 |
| Insects first recorded  | -5.7  | -15.4 | 1.4  |
| Birds first recorded  | -5.7  | -5.5  | -1.5 |
| Lawn first cut  | -16.0 | -13.0 | 6.0  |

Nature's Calendar explores how seasonal events are responding to climate change, some were over three weeks early this year. This included first recorded song thrush (34 days early), hazel flowering (33 days early), last fieldfare and first turtle dove (both 25 days early). Above average temperatures in January may have caused these.

This spring the majority of events were earlier than the benchmark year. However, several insect species were noticeably late: bumble bee (17 days late), comma butterfly (16 days late), small tortoiseshell and peacock (both nine days late). These will have been delayed by the cold weather in March as this is when they normally start emerging.

### Budburst

The small average of 2.9 days early hides a range of results. Of 11 species, six were early and five were late. Elder was the earliest at 12 days early and larch was the latest at four days late. Elder budburst can start from January, and many trees must have made the most of the mild start to the year to bring the average forward by so much. Larch budburst normally starts from March so the delay is likely linked to the two cold and snowy spells in March this year.

### First leaf

First leaf results were more consistent than budburst. Of the 11 species, nine were early and two were the same as the benchmark year (hawthorn and horse chestnut). The earliest first leaf averages were pedunculate oak and ash, both ten days early. These events normally start in April so the above average temperatures in that month may have brought them forward.

### First flowering

Despite the cold February and March, first flowering dates showed the greatest advancement, probably linked to the mild January and warm April. All 15 first flower averages were early, from wood anemone which was only one day early to hazel which was 33 days early. Hazel flowering normally starts from January, many plants made the most of the mild conditions at this time.



## Amphibians

On average amphibians were early. Frogspawn was five days early and tadpoles were the same as the benchmark year. Newts were two days early.

## Insects

Insects were delayed, probably due to the cold and wet start to spring. The small average of 1.4 days late hides a comparably vast range of species results. Four species were late, one was the same as the benchmark and seven were early. Orange tip was 11 days early (April was warm and this is when orange tip start emerging) and red-tailed bumble bee was 17 days late (March was cold which delayed the normal start time).

## Birds

Again the small average hides great variety in migratory birds. Of the 13 bird species, seven were early and six were late. The turtle dove was 25 days early, this average is from only 18 records so



Turtle dove: John Bridges/WTML

may not be reliable. Spotted flycatcher, sand martin, swift and wheatear were all five days late.

Breeding bird activity was on the whole early by an average of 5.4 days. Blackbird nesting was five days early but first feeding and first juvenile were similar to the benchmark year of 2001. Nesting and feeding for blue tits and great tits were all one day early. However, song thrush singing was 34 days early, which may be linked to the warm January.

## Lawn first cut

The average for this record is late, most likely due to persistently unfavourable weather in early spring.

# Your records

Sadly, the total recordings during spring 2018 have dropped again from 41,560 in 2017 to 28,910 in 2018. Snowdrops (879 records of first flower) have remained popular. Frogspawn (719 records of first seen) and orange tip (694 records of first seen) have also been well recorded this year. The least recorded events were first seen turtle dove (18 records) and spotted flycatcher (29 records). Both these birds are red-listed species of conservation concern so the more information we can receive the better. On a more positive note, observations for last seen fieldfare and redwing have increased since 2017.

## 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 website where recorders can plot their findings, upload photos and see their records on the live maps.

[naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk)



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