

Hydrological summary

for the United Kingdom

General

Overall, March was windy but mild, exceptionally so late in the month across most regions. Much of Scotland was wet but most of the rest of the UK reported a relatively dry month. Nonetheless, reservoir stocks increased modestly in most of the larger pumped storage reservoirs in the English Lowlands. Early April reservoir stocks were marginally above average for England and Wales as a whole (but still relatively low at Silent Valley in Northern Ireland). In water resources terms March can often be a pivotal month. Recent years have seen substantial reservoir and groundwater replenishment continue through the spring. This year, the exceptional dry interlude which began in the third week of March may - with evaporation demands accelerating through the late spring - signal an early onset of the seasonal recession in river flows and groundwater levels; much will depend on rainfall over next four weeks or so. Overall, water resources are healthy, groundwater especially so in many areas, but a rapid deterioration in the resources outlook has been a feature of several recent springs (e.g. 1995 and 1990). In the event of large rainfall deficiencies developing into the summer, the baseflow contribution to lowland river flow will be especially beneficial.

Rainfall

Westerly airflows were relatively rare in March, certainly in relation to the recent past, and those Atlantic frontal systems which did cross the British Isles generally followed a track remote from southern England. This synoptic backcloth tended to reinforce the normal north-west/south-east rainfall gradient across the country. Early in the month weather patterns were very unsettled in Scotland - a humid airflow produced torrential rain in the West Highlands on the 6th (a 24 hr total of 93 mm was reported for Sloy) but dry conditions characterised central and southern Britain where the great majority of the March rainfall occurred between the 9th and 22nd. Thereafter high pressure dominated resulting in very meagre precipitation totals over the ensuing three weeks - in some districts (e.g. in central southern England) fog-drip provided the only contribution. Provisional March rainfall totals were low (<60%) in parts of eastern Scotland but notably high in a few parts of the central Highlands. Northern Ireland registered its seventh successive March with below average rainfall. England and Wales reported below average rainfall for all regions with very modest rainfall in south - a few localities (e.g. in parts of Gloucestershire) recording <40% of the 1961-90 average. Provisional data suggest that Scotland had its fourth wettest Jan-March period in a series from 1862. More significantly from a water resources perspective, winter half-year (Oct-Mar) rainfall totals are within the normal range throughout the UK.

River Flows

The month began with most rivers in brisk recession, and a corresponding reduction in flood risk. Runoff rates recovered in the second week in Scotland and short-lived spates were common in mid-month in southern England - the River Mole reported a new maximum March flow on the 18th. Generally steep recessions had become re-established by month end and continued well into April - by the second week flows were seasonally depressed in many impermeable catchments (e.g. the Severn and Welsh Dee basins). Runoff

totals for March showed wide spatial variations (in part due to contrasts between neighbouring impermeable and permeable catchments) but were mostly well within the normal range. Runoff totals for the year thus far are within the normal range for almost all index catchments. This is also true for the winter half-year (Oct-Mar), but in much of Scotland winter runoff was again substantially above average - for the 6th successive year in some catchments; this clustering reinforces the flow regime contrasts between the recent past and the 1970s and early 1980s.

Groundwater

High temperatures, abetted in many areas by very windy conditions, resulted in above average evaporative demands across most major aquifer outcrop areas in March. As a consequence, soil moisture deficits increased briskly, particularly from mid-month, and were well above average approaching mid-April. In the absence of a wet late spring this may be expected to signal an early end to the 2001/02 recharge season across much of the English Lowlands. Declines in groundwater levels are already evident in the more responsive Chalk wells (e.g. Rockley and Chilgrove), whilst levels continue to rise in the less responsive and/or deeper wells in the east especially. In the Chalk, seasonal recessions have begun from very much lower levels than last year - but still above the early spring average in most outcrop areas. March groundwater levels were close to the seasonal average in most major limestone aquifers. By contrast, in large parts of the slow-responding Permo-Triassic sandstones groundwater levels remain appreciably above pre-2000 maxima (e.g. in North Wales and the North West). Overall groundwater resources remain above average, as do spring outflows in most areas.

March 2002



Centre for
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NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL



British
Geological Survey
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Rainfall . . . Rainfall . . . Rainfall .

Rainfall accumulations and return period estimates


| Area | Rainfall | Mar 2002 | Jan02-Mar02 RP | Oct01-Mar02 RP | Jul01-Mar02 RP | Apr01-Mar02 RP | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| England & Wales | mm % | 53 72 | 252 110 | 2-5 2-5 | 497 98 | 2-5 2-5 | 734 102 | 2-5 2-5 | 923 101 | 2-5 2-5 |
| North West | mm % | 61 64 | 414 141 | 10-20 | 742 111 | 2-5 | 1028 105 | 2-5 | 1252 104 | 2-5 |
| Northumbrian | mm % | 54 77 | 272 128 | 5-10 | 501 110 | 2-5 | 719 106 | 2-5 | 880 103 | 2-5 |
| Severn Trent | mm % | 35 58 | 207 112 | 2-5 | 400 101 | 2-5 | 601 103 | 2-5 | 788 104 | 2-5 |
| Yorkshire | mm % | 43 63 | 221 108 | 2-5 | 425 96 | 2-5 | 643 100 | <2 | 819 100 | <2 |
| Anglian | mm % | 35 74 | 134 100 | <2 | 290 97 | 2-5 | 515 114 | 5-10 | 668 112 | 5-10 |
| Thames | mm % | 43 77 | 198 120 | 2-5 | 384 106 | 2-5 | 577 109 | 2-5 | 727 105 | 2-5 |
| Southern | mm % | 46 74 | 224 114 | 2-5 | 429 97 | 2-5 | 641 104 | 2-5 | 761 98 | 2-5 |
| Wessex | mm % | 53 75 | 257 116 | 2-5 | 477 100 | <2 | 657 98 | 2-5 | 796 95 | 2-5 |
| South West | mm % | 77 77 | 392 116 | 2-5 | 692 96 | 2-5 | 880 91 | 2-5 | 1054 90 | 2-5 |
| Welsh | mm % | 64 60 | 443 128 | 5-10 | 839 108 | 2-5 | 1133 106 | 2-5 | 1371 104 | 2-5 |
| Scotland | mm | 124 99 | 566 150 | 50-80 | 1012 121 | 10-20 | 1309 110 | 2-5 | 1501 104 | 2-5 |
| Highland | mm % | 165 102 | 710 149 | 35-50 | 1299 121 | 5-15 | 1631 110 | 2-5 | 1882 107 | 2-5 |
| North East | mm % | 61 78 | 286 118 | 2-5 | 594 112 | 2-5 | 851 109 | 2-5 | 989 102 | 2-5 |
| Tay | mm % | 114 105 | 535 154 | 30-45 | 897 124 | 5-15 | 1160 115 | 5-10 | 1319 107 | 2-5 |
| Forth | mm % | 98 104 | 439 151 | 30-45 | 733 117 | 5-10 | 973 107 | 2-5 | 1136 102 | 2-5 |
| Tweed | mm % | 65 82 | 362 147 | 20-30 | 617 117 | 5-10 | 840 108 | 2-5 | 1009 104 | 2-5 |
| Solway | mm % | 91 77 | 544 145 | 20-30 | 933 113 | 2-5 | 1222 104 | 2-5 | 1436 101 | 2-5 |
| Clyde | mm % | 157 107 | 697 154 | 50-80 | 1198 119 | 5-10 | 1559 109 | 2-5 | 1791 106 | 2-5 |
| Northern Ireland | mm % | 66 75 | 352 127 | 5-10 | 604 101 | 2-5 | 813 95 | 2-5 | 1000 94 | 2-5 |

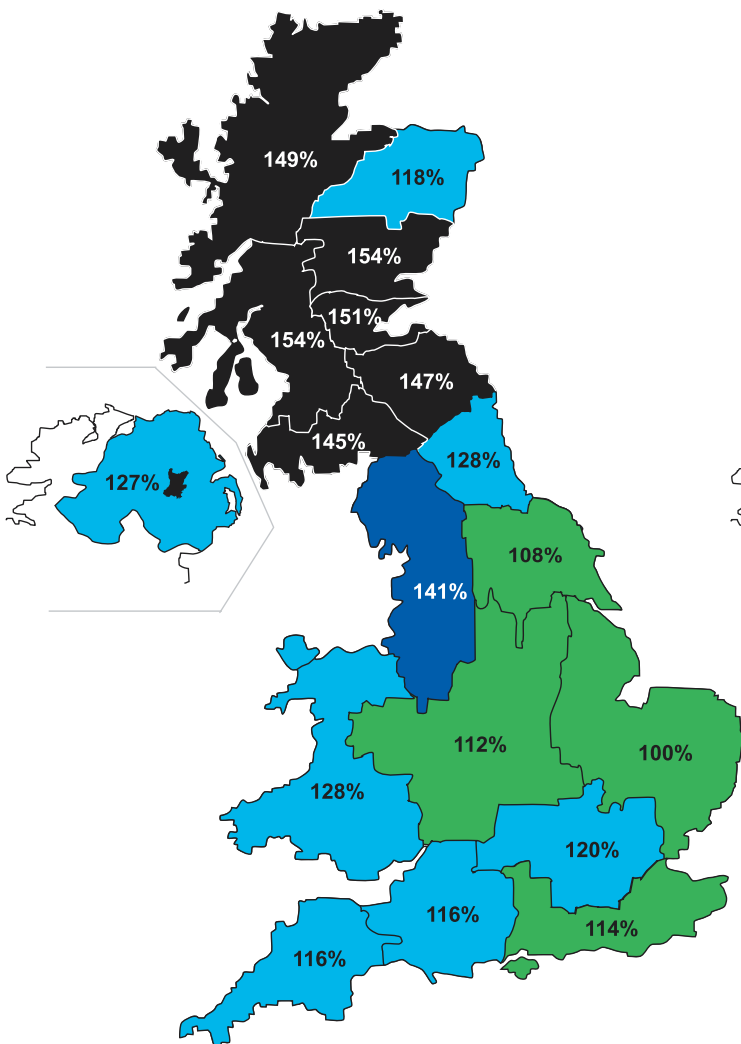
RP = Return period

The monthly rainfall figures* are copyright of The Met Office and may not be passed on to, or published by, any unauthorised person or organisation. All monthly totals since December 1998 are provisional (see page 12). The figures for England & Wales are derived by the Hadley Centre and are updates of the homogenised series developed by the Climate Research Unit; the other national figures are derived from different rain gauge networks to those used to derive the CRU data series. The return period estimates are based on tables provided by the Meteorological Office (see Tabony, R.C., 1977, *The variability of long duration rainfall over Great Britain*, Scientific Paper No. 37) and relate to the specified span of months only (return periods may be up to an order of magnitude less if n-month periods beginning in any month are considered); RP estimates for Northern Ireland are based on the tables for north-west England. The tables reflect rainfall over the period 1911-70 and assume a stable climate. Artifacts, in the Scottish rainfall series in particular, can exaggerate the relative wetness of the recent past. *See page 12.

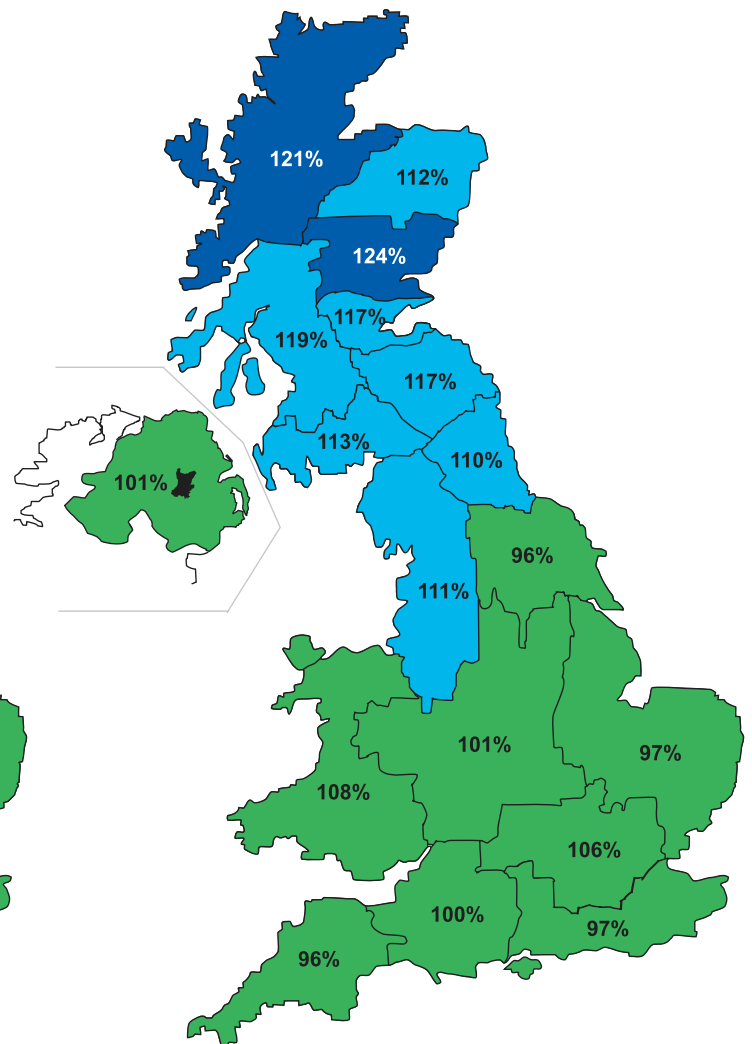
Rainfall... Rainfall... Rainfall

Key

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 00% | Percentage of 1961-90 average |  | Normal range |
|  | Very wet |  | Below average |
|  | Substantially above average |  | Substantially below average |
|  | Above average |  | Exceptionally low rainfall |



January 2002 - March 2002

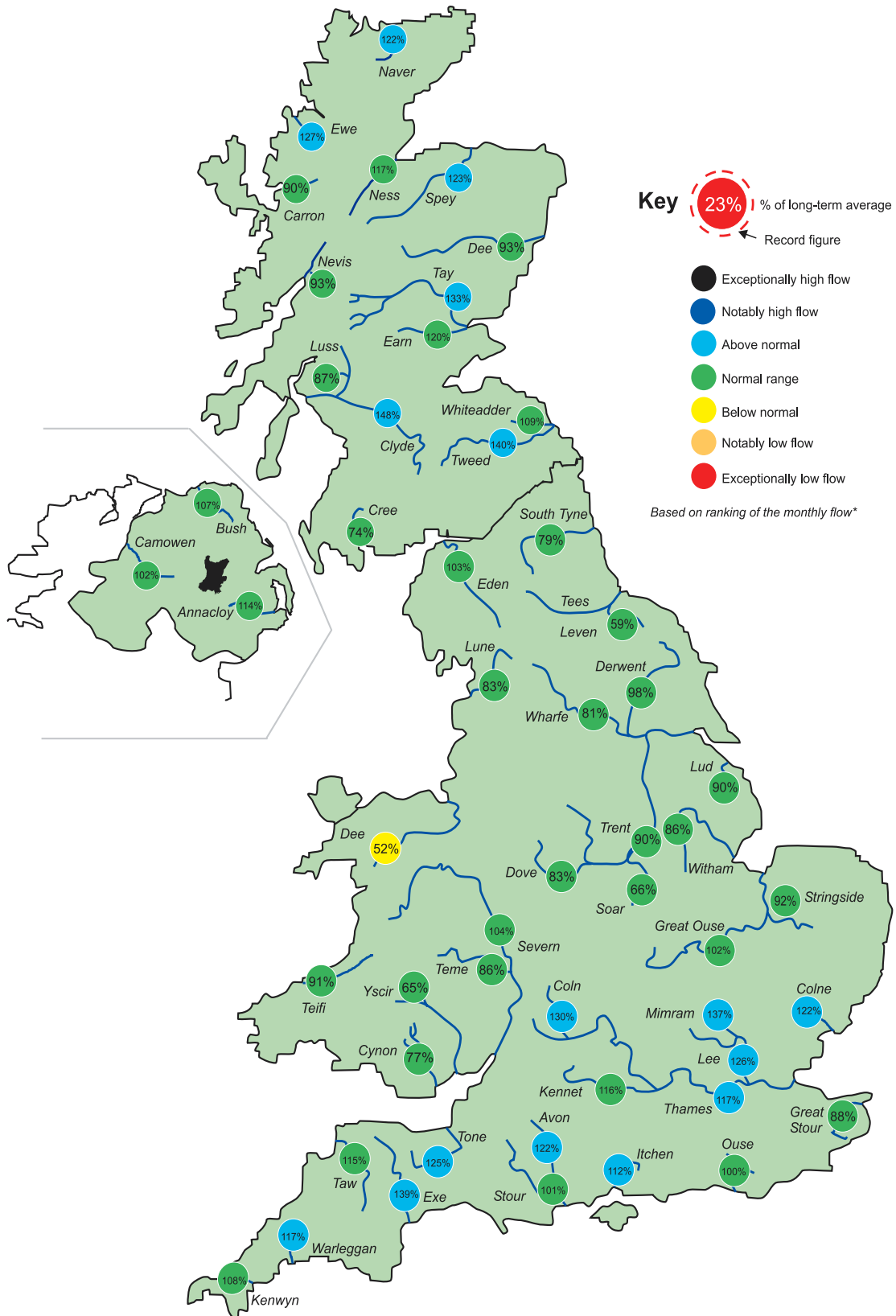


October 2001 - March 2002

Rainfall accumulation maps

The provisional Jan-March rainfall total for Britain ranks amongst the wettest ten in a 134-year series (1988, 1989, 1990, 1994 and 1995 also feature in this group). For Scotland the six-month rainfall total is also notable; elsewhere the Oct-Mar regional rainfall totals were close to the 1961-90 average. In the 12-month timeframe almost all regional totals for the UK are within 10% of the mean.

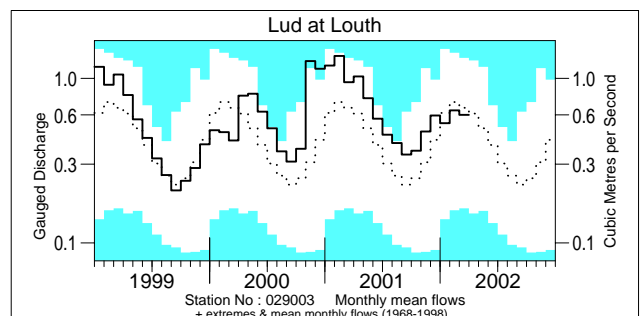
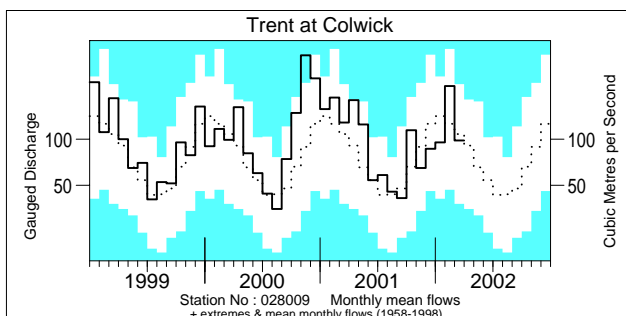
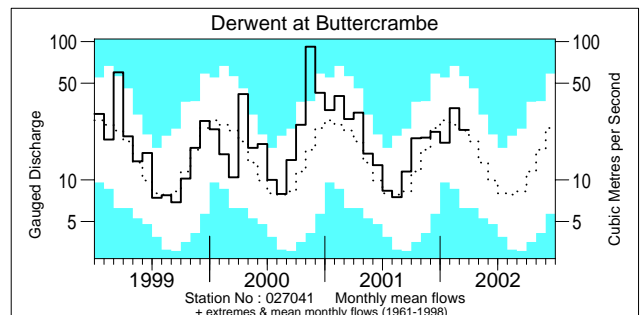
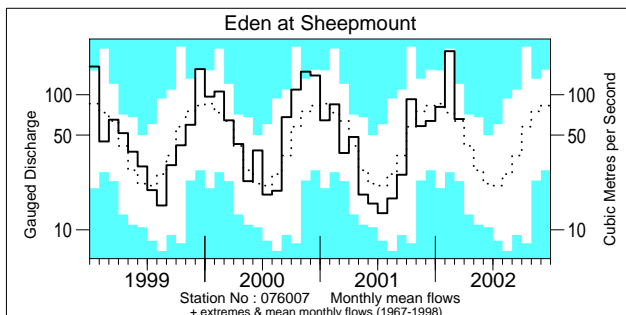
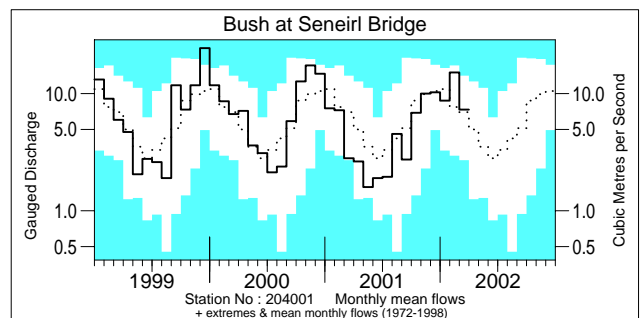
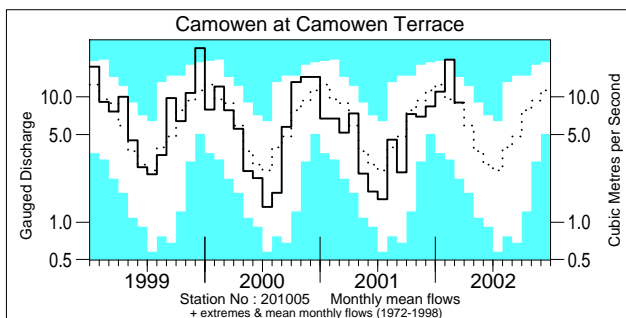
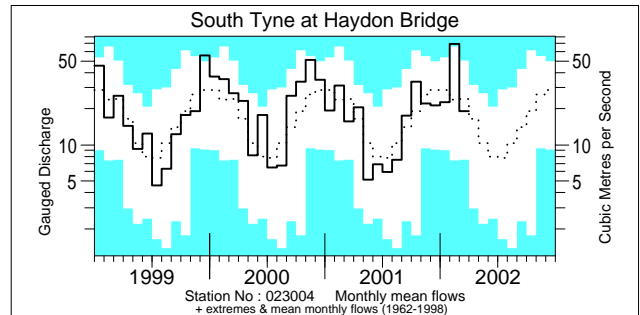
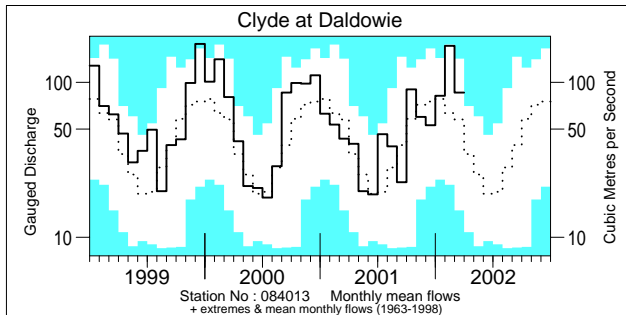
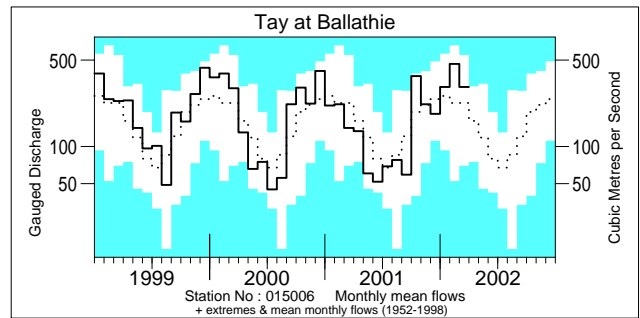
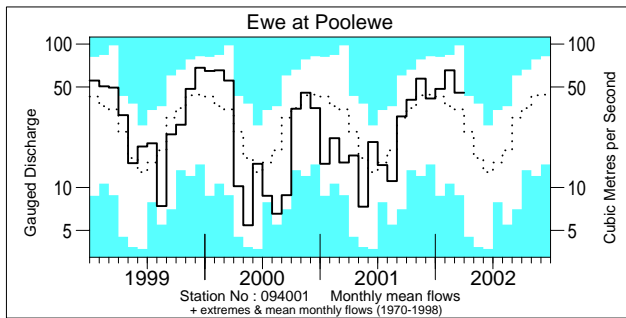
River flow . . . River flow . . .



River flows - March 2002

*Comparisons based on percentage flows alone can be misleading. A given percentage flow can represent extreme drought conditions in permeable catchments where flow patterns are relatively stable but be well within the normal range in impermeable catchments where the natural variation in flows is much greater. Note: the period of record on which these percentages are based varies from station to station.

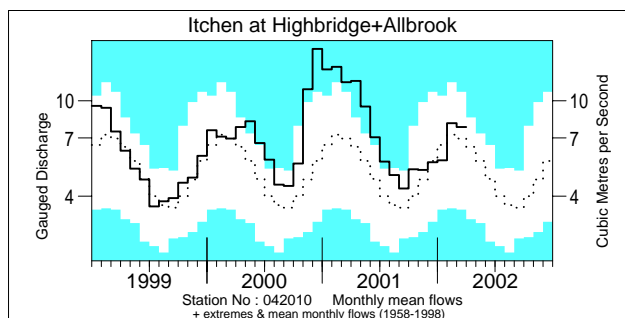
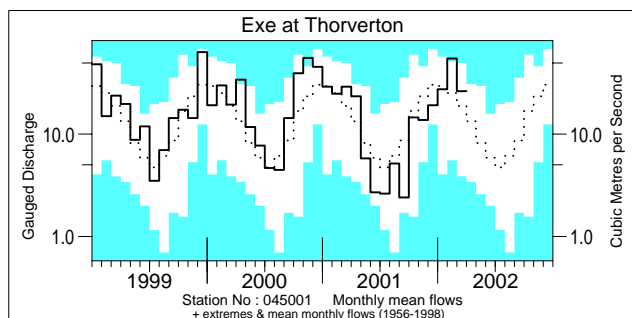
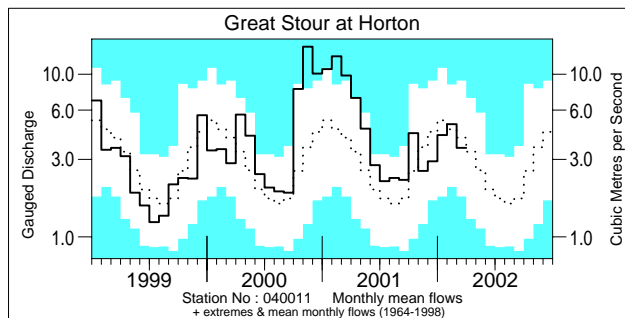
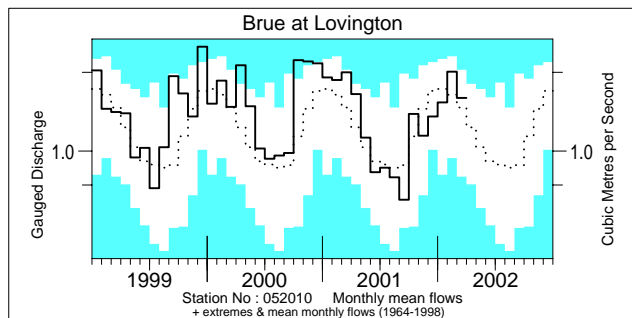
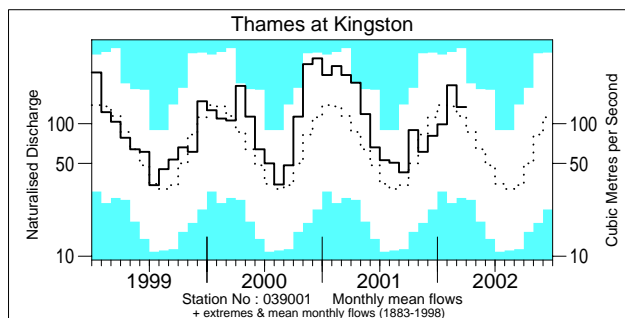
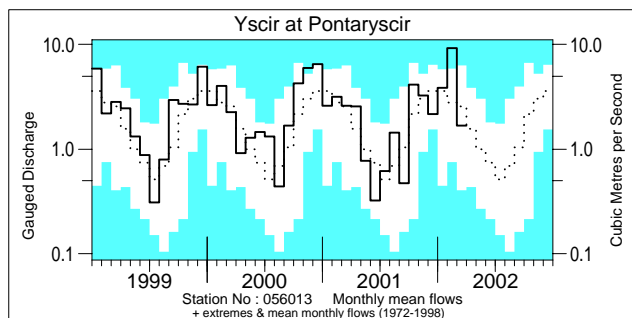
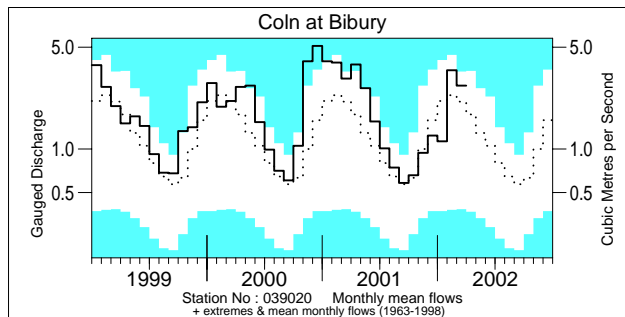
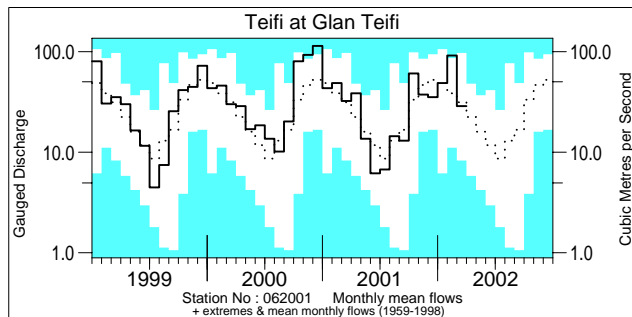
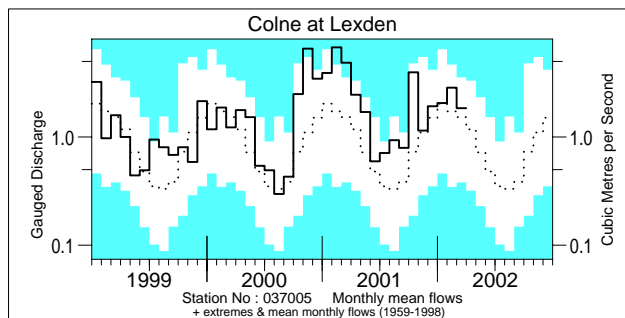
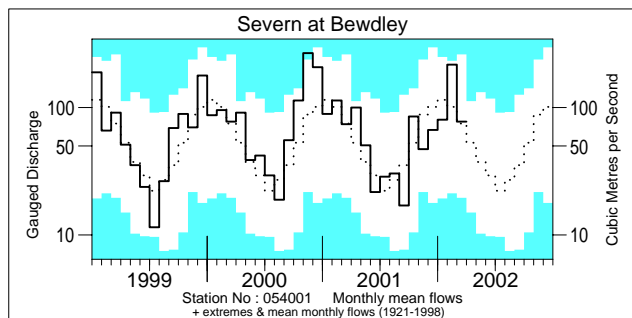
River flow . . . River flow . . .



Monthly river flow hydrographs

The river flow hydrographs show the monthly mean flow (bold trace), the long term average monthly flow (dotted trace) and the maximum and minimum flow prior to 1999 (shown by the shaded areas). Monthly flows falling outside the maximum/minimum range are indicated where the bold trace enters the shaded areas.

River flow . . . River flow . . .



Notable runoff accumulations (a) January 2002 - March 2002, (b) October 2001 - March 2002

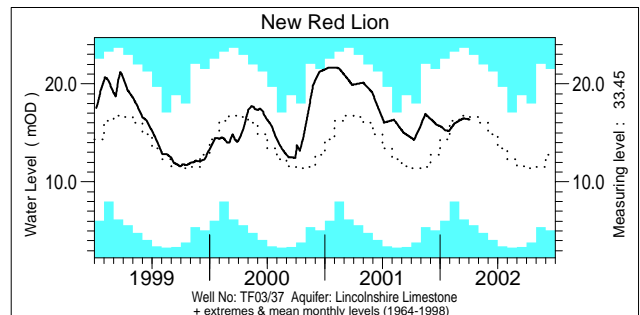
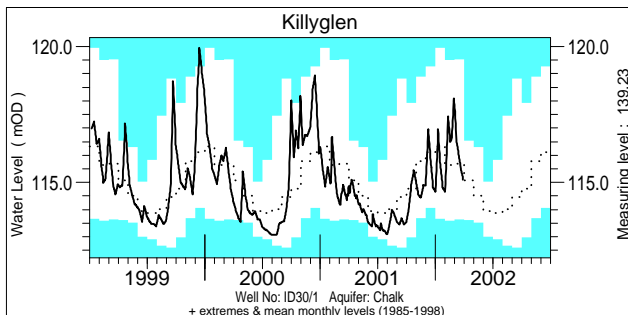
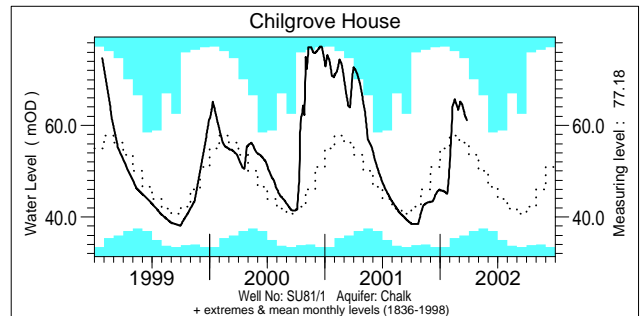
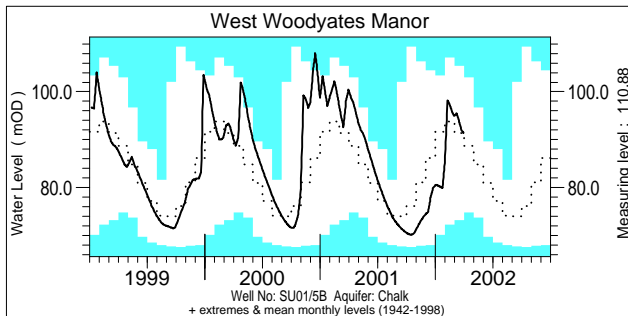
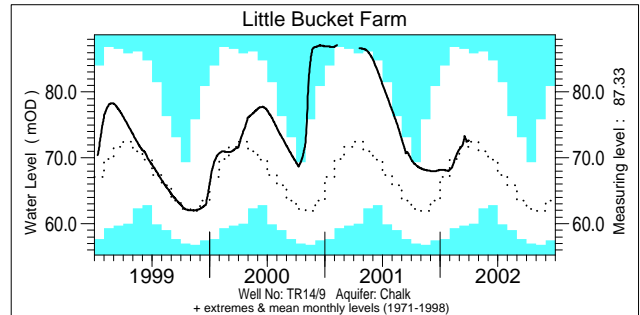
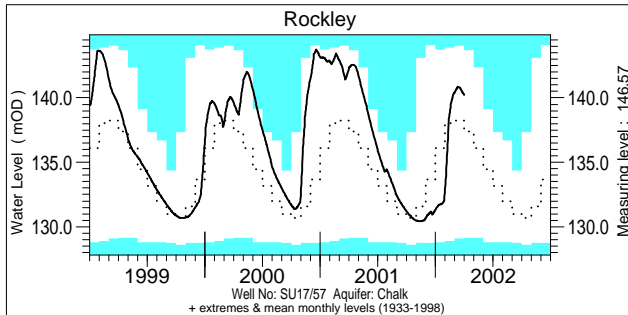
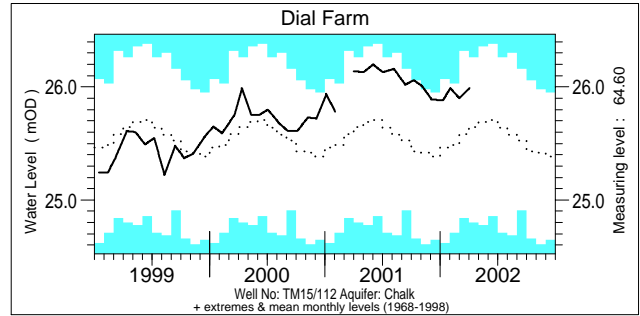
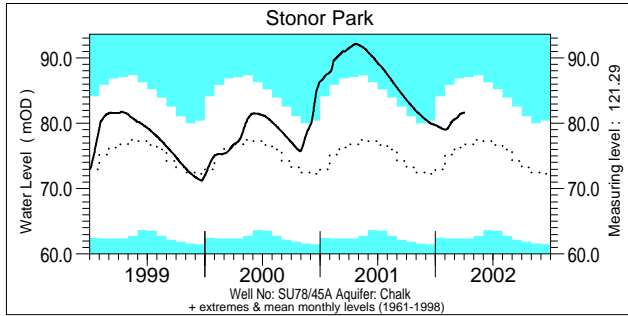
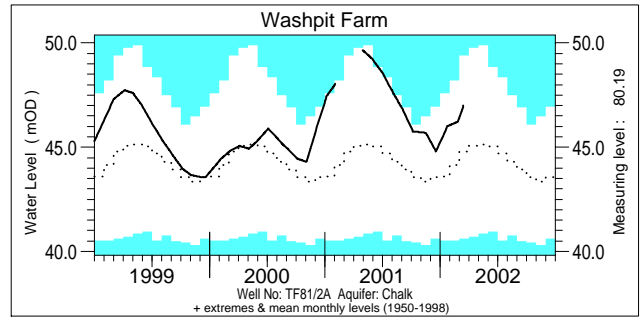
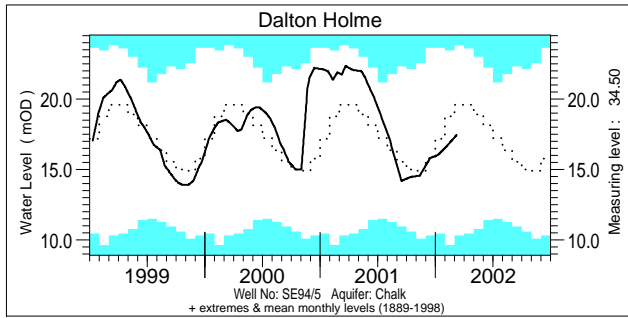
| River | %Ita | Rank |
|----------|------|-------|
| (a) Spey | 133 | 47/50 |
| Tay | 147 | 48/50 |
| Tweed | 144 | 39/42 |
| S Tyne | 138 | 38/40 |
| Wharfe | 143 | 46/47 |
| Mole | 132 | 24/28 |
| Exe | 143 | 44/46 |
| Yscir | 156 | 30/30 |

| River | %Ita | Rank |
|---------|------|-------|
| Cynon | 164 | 43/44 |
| Dee | 150 | 64/65 |
| Lune | 157 | 40/42 |
| Eden | 151 | 33/35 |
| Clyde | 161 | 38/39 |
| Naver | 154 | 25/25 |
| Camowen | 126 | 24/29 |

| River | %Ita | Rank |
|----------------|------|-------|
| (b) Deveron | 136 | 36/40 |
| Mimram | 145 | 44/48 |
| Kenwyn | 71 | 3/34 |
| Leven(Glasgow) | 129 | 37/38 |
| Carron | 122 | 21/23 |
| Ness | 122 | 24/29 |

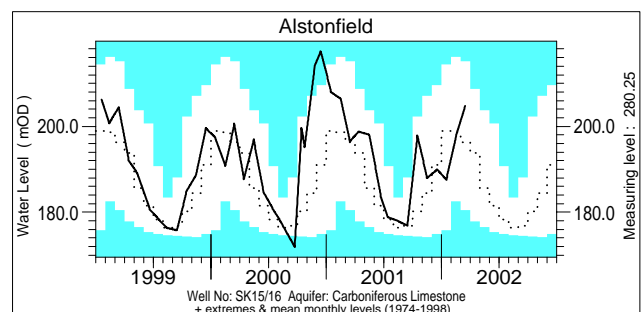
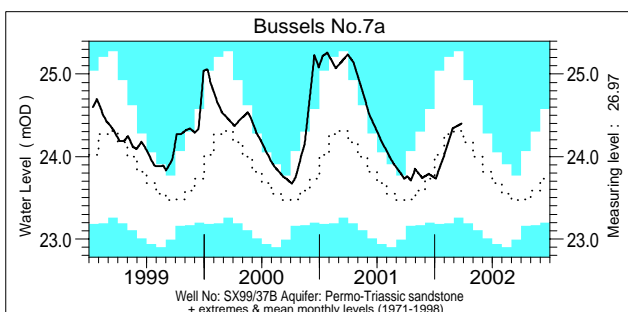
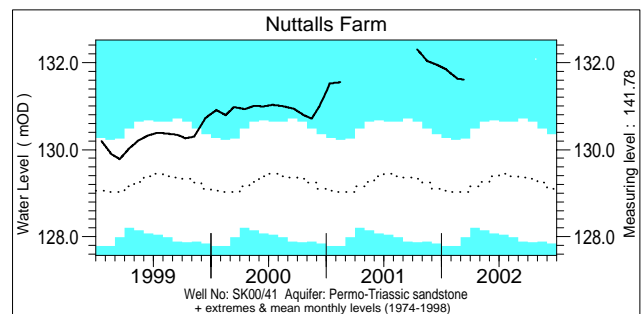
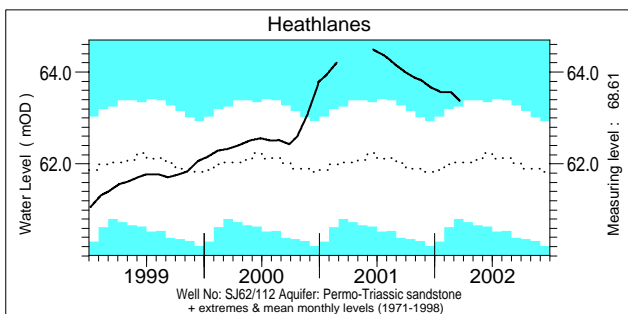
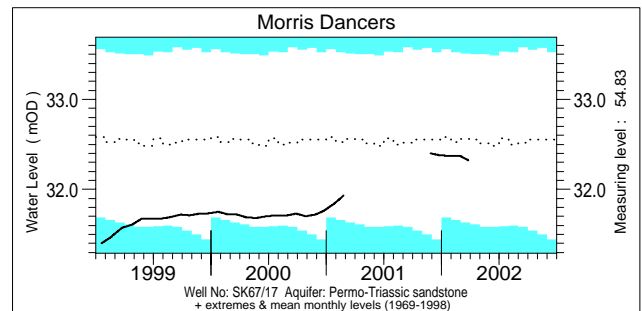
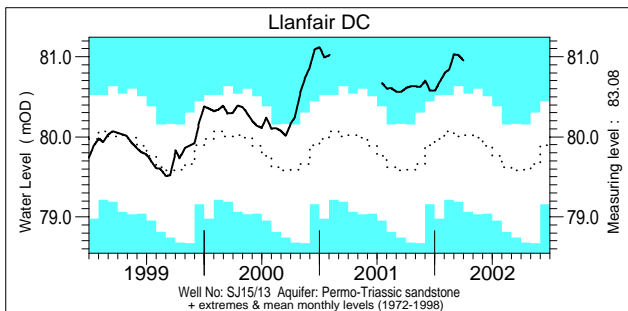
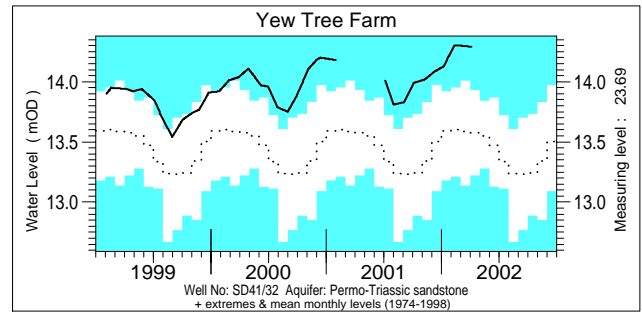
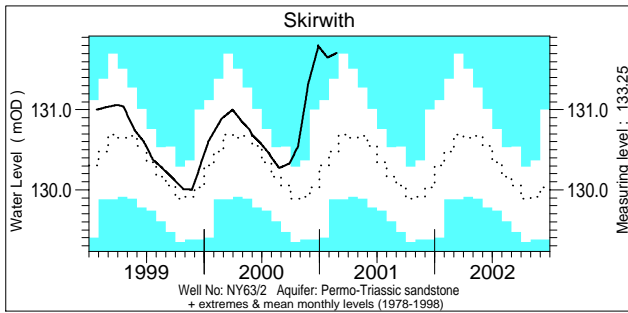
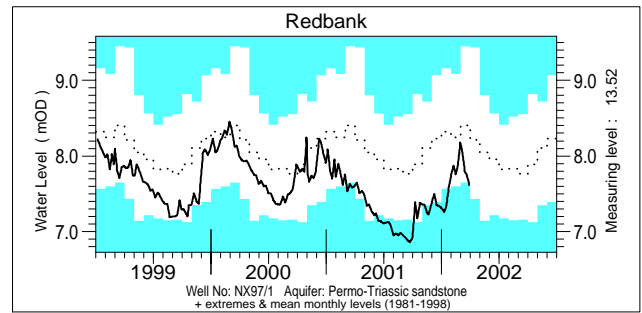
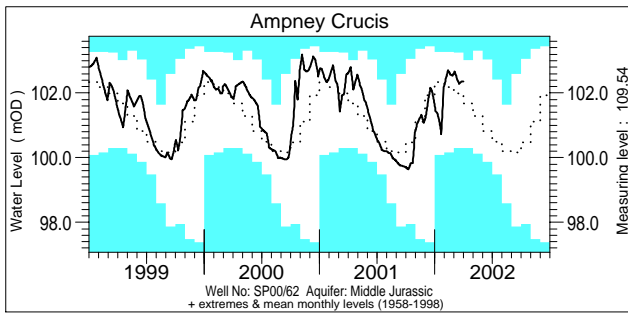
Ita = long term average
Rank 1 = lowest on record

Groundwater... Groundwater



Groundwater levels normally rise and fall with the seasons, reaching a peak in the spring following replenishment through the winter (when evaporation losses are low and soil moist). They decline through the summer and early autumn. This seasonal variation is much reduced when the aquifer is confined below overlying impermeable strata. The monthly max., min. and mean levels are displayed in a similar style to the river flow hydrographs. Note that most groundwater levels are not measured continuously – the latest recorded levels are listed overleaf.

Groundwater . . . Groundwater

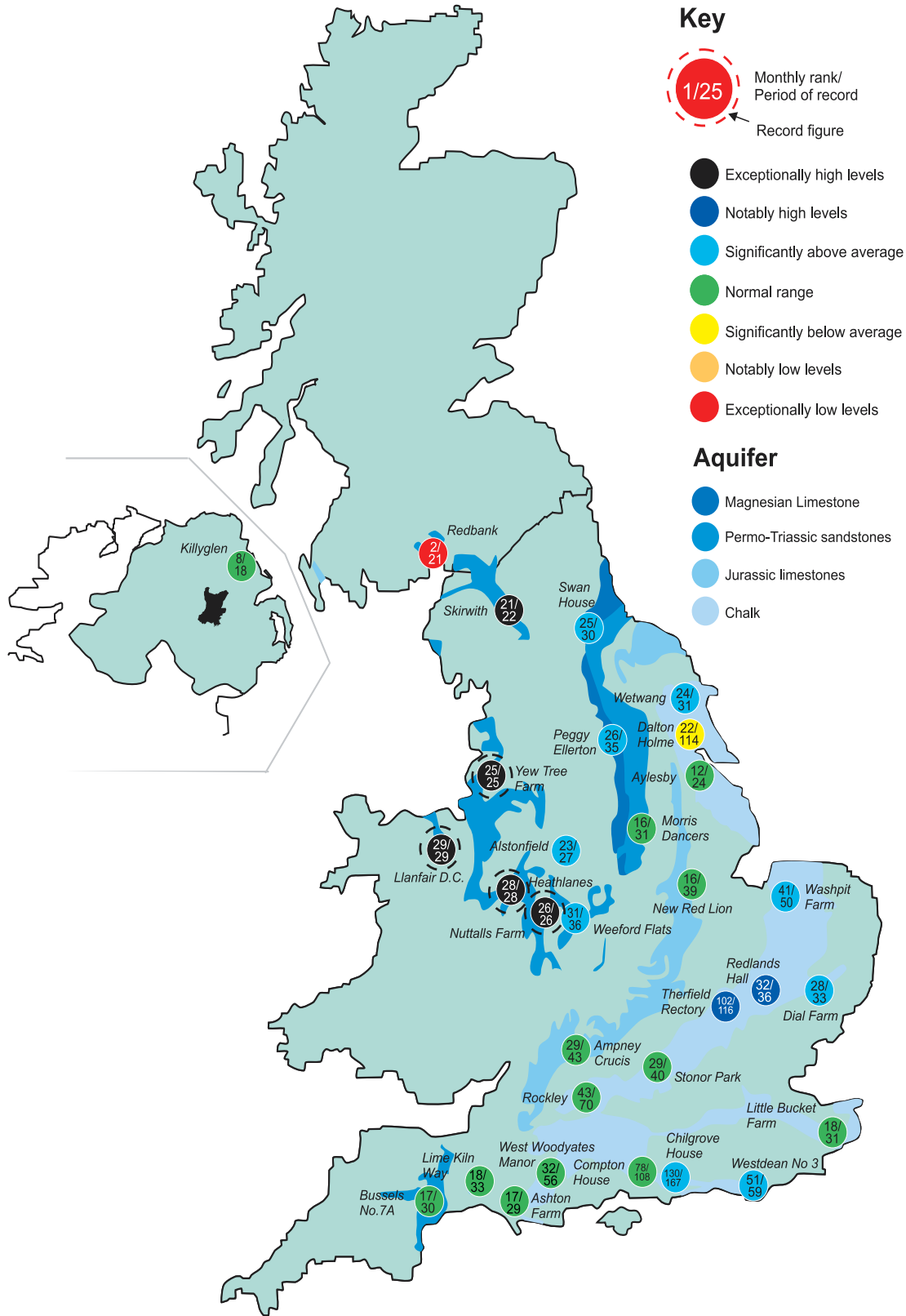


Groundwater levels March 2002 / April 2002

| Borehole | Level | Date | Mar. av. | Borehole | Level | Date | Mar. av. | Borehole | Level | Date | Mar. av. |
|--------------------|--------|-------|----------|-----------------|--------|-------|----------|----------------|--------|-------|----------|
| Dalton Holme | 17.47 | 08/03 | 19.52 | Chilgrove House | 61.11 | 25/03 | 55.52 | Llanfair DC | 80.95 | 01/04 | 79.96 |
| Washpit Farm | 46.99 | 14/03 | 44.86 | Killyglen | 115.11 | 28/03 | 115.65 | Morris Dancers | 32.32 | 26/03 | 32.40 |
| Stonor Park | 81.65 | 02/04 | 76.82 | New Red Lion | 16.36 | 03/04 | 16.67 | Heathlanes | 63.37 | 20/03 | 61.97 |
| Dial Farm | 25.99 | 02/04 | 25.58 | Ampney Crucis | 102.35 | 02/04 | 102.03 | Nuttalls Farm | 131.61 | 12/03 | 129.25 |
| Rockley | 140.24 | 02/04 | 138.41 | Redbank | 7.62 | 28/03 | 8.36 | Bussels No.7a | 24.40 | 25/03 | 24.34 |
| Little Bucket Farm | 72.67 | 31/03 | 71.80 | Skirwith | 131.13 | 22/03 | 130.65 | Alstonfield | 204.73 | 15/03 | 196.24 |
| West Woodyates | 91.39 | 31/03 | 90.75 | Yew Tree Farm | 14.29 | 05/04 | 13.60 | | | | |

Levels in metres above Ordnance Datum

Groundwater... Groundwater

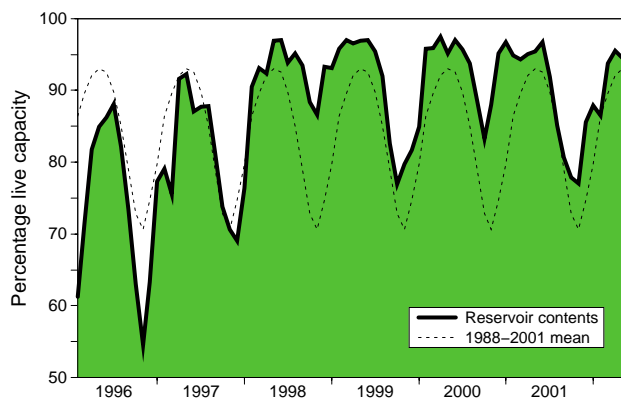


Groundwater levels - March 2002

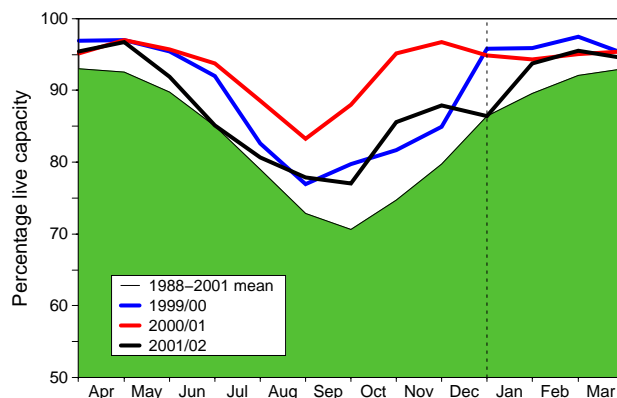
The rankings are based on a comparison between the average level in the featured month (but often only single readings are available) and the average level in each corresponding month on record. They need to be interpreted with caution especially when groundwater levels are changing rapidly or when comparing wells with very different periods of record. Rankings may be omitted where they are considered misleading. (Note: Redbank is affected by groundwater abstraction)

Reservoirs . . . Reservoirs . . .

Guide to the variation in overall reservoir stocks for England and Wales



Comparison between overall reservoir stocks for England and Wales in recent years



These plots are based on the England and Wales figures listed below.

Percentage live capacity of selected reservoirs at start of month

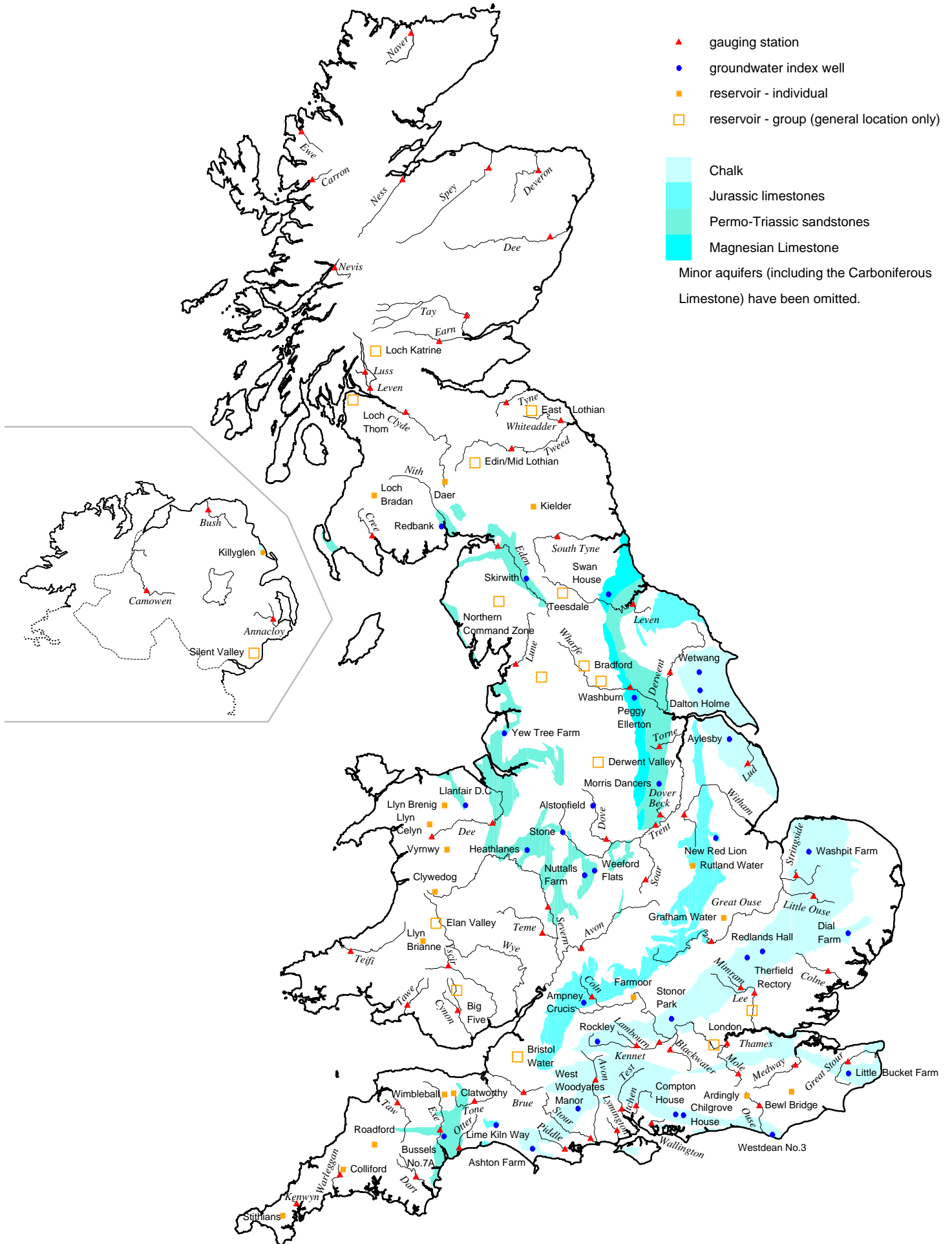
| Area | Reservoir | Capacity (MI) | 2001 | | | | | 2002 | | Min. Apr | Year* |
|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|------|------|------|-------|------|------|-----|----------|-------|
| | | | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | Apr | | |
| North West | N Command Zone | • 124929 | 75 | 84 | 84 | 100 | 100 | 97 | 77 | 1993 | |
| | Vyrnwy | 55146 | 86 | 91 | 88 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 64 | 1996 | |
| Northumbrian | Teesdale | • 87936 | 96 | 83 | 84 | 99 | 100 | 97 | 77 | 1996 | |
| | Kielder | (199175) | (80) | (95) | (89) | (100) | (96) | (92) | 81 | 1993 | |
| Severn Trent | Clywedog | 44922 | 73 | 100 | 87 | 96 | 100 | 94 | 86 | 1996 | |
| | Derwent Valley | • 39525 | 99 | 86 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 98 | 54 | 1996 | |
| Yorkshire | Washburn | • 22035 | 89 | 92 | 91 | 95 | 97 | 91 | 70 | 1996 | |
| | Bradford supply | • 41407 | 86 | 90 | 90 | 99 | 100 | 96 | 59 | 1996 | |
| Anglian | Grafham | (55490) | (93) | (88) | (88) | (87) | (87) | (89) | 77 | 1997 | |
| | Rutland | (116580) | (80) | (81) | (82) | (84) | (89) | (92) | 74 | 1992 | |
| Thames | London | • 202340 | 90 | 87 | 86 | 87 | 88 | 92 | 88 | 1990 | |
| | Farmoor | • 13830 | 92 | 91 | 77 | 79 | 88 | 87 | 84 | 1992 | |
| Southern | Bewl | 28170 | 74 | 74 | 75 | 90 | 97 | 98 | 58 | 1989 | |
| | Ardingly | 4685 | 72 | 73 | 86 | 100 | 100 | 100 | | | |
| Wessex | Clatworthy | 5364 | 67 | 72 | 84 | 97 | 100 | 100 | 82 | 1992 | |
| | Bristol WW | • (38666) | (61) | (59) | (61) | (70) | (99) | (98) | 71 | 1992 | |
| South West | Colliford | 28540 | 60 | 62 | 64 | 72 | 78 | 82 | 58 | 1997 | |
| | Roadford | 34500 | 73 | 73 | 72 | 84 | 94 | 94 | 37 | 1996 | |
| | Wimbleball | 21320 | 52 | 54 | 58 | 76 | 100 | 100 | 78 | 1996 | |
| | Stithians | 5205 | 32 | 29 | 33 | 49 | 78 | 88 | 52 | 1992 | |
| Welsh | Celyn and Brenig | • 131155 | 94 | 97 | 94 | 100 | 100 | 98 | 72 | 1996 | |
| | Brienne | 62140 | 100 | 100 | 94 | 100 | 98 | 97 | 90 | 1993 | |
| | Big Five | • 69762 | 97 | 95 | 93 | 99 | 97 | 94 | 78 | 1993 | |
| | Elan Valley | • 99106 | 100 | 100 | 99 | 100 | 100 | 97 | 89 | 1993 | |
| East of Scotland | Edinburgh/Mid Lothian | • 97639 | 89 | 90 | 89 | 92 | 100 | 98 | 71 | 1998 | |
| | East Lothian | • 10206 | 97 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 95 | 1990 | |
| West of Scotland | Loch Katrine | • 111363 | 85 | 93 | 88 | 99 | 100 | 99 | 88 | 2001 | |
| | Daer | 22412 | 91 | 100 | 97 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 93 | 2001 | |
| Northern Ireland | Loch Thom | • 11840 | 84 | 93 | 93 | 100 | 100 | 98 | 93 | 2001 | |
| | Silent Valley | • 20634 | 54 | 43 | 39 | 46 | 57 | 59 | 57 | 2000 | |

() figures in parentheses relate to gross storage • denotes reservoir groups

* last occurrence - see footnote

Details of the individual reservoirs in each of the groupings listed above are available on request. The featured reservoirs may not be representative of the storage conditions across each region; this can be particularly important during droughts. The minimum storage figures relate to the 1988-2002 period only (except for West of Scotland and Northern Ireland where data commence in 1994 and 1993 respectively). In some gravity-fed reservoirs (e.g. Clywedog) stocks are kept below capacity during the winter to provide scope for flood attenuation purposes.

Location map . . . Location map



National Hydrological Monitoring Programme

The National Hydrological Monitoring Programme was instigated in 1988 and is undertaken jointly by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Wallingford (formerly the Institute of Hydrology - IH) and the British Geological Survey (BGS). Financial support for the production of the monthly Hydrological Summaries is provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Environment Agency (EA), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), the Rivers Agency (RA) in Northern Ireland, and the Office of Water Services (OFWAT).

Data Sources

River flow and groundwater level data are provided by the regional divisions of the EA (England and Wales) and SEPA (Scotland), data for Northern Ireland are provided by the Rivers Agency and the Department of the Environment (NI). In all cases the data are subject to revision following validation (flood and drought data in particular may be subject to significant revision).

Reservoir level information is provided by the Water Service Companies, the EA, the West of Scotland and East of Scotland Water Authorities, and the Northern Ireland Water Service.

The National River Flow Archive (maintained by CEH Wallingford) and the National Groundwater Level Archive (maintained by BGS) provide the historical perspective within which to examine contemporary hydrological conditions.

Rainfall

Most rainfall data are provided by The Met Office (address opposite). To allow better spatial differentiation the rainfall data for Britain are presented for the regional divisions of the precursor organisations of the EA and SEPA. Following the discontinuation of The Met Office's CARP system in July 1998, the areal rainfall figures have been derived using several procedures, including initial estimates based on MORECS*. Recent figures have been produced by The Met Office, National Climate Information Centre (NCIC), using a technique similar to CARP. An initiative is underway with The Met Office to provide more accurate areal figures and, since October 1999, to include more raingauges in the analysis. A significant number of additional monthly rainfall totals are currently being provided by the Environment Agencies; over the coming months further monthly raingauge totals will be included for selected regions. Until the access to these additional

data has stabilised the regional figures (and the return periods associated with them) should be regarded as a guide only.

*MORECS is the generic name for the Meteorological Office services involving the routine calculation of evaporation and soil moisture throughout Great Britain.

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The National Hydrological Monitoring Programme depends on the active cooperation of many data suppliers. This cooperation is gratefully acknowledged.

Subscription

Subscription to the Hydrological Summaries costs £48 per year. Orders should be addressed to:

Hydrological Summaries
National Water Archive
CEH Wallingford
Maclean Building
Crowmarsh Gifford
Wallingford
Oxfordshire
OX10 8BB
Tel.: 01491 838800
Fax: 01491 692424

Selected text and maps are available on the WWW at <http://www.nerc-wallingford.ac.uk/ih/nrfa/index.htm>
Navigate via Water Watch

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