

Hydrological Summary

for the United Kingdom

General

July was cool and unsettled, with heavy showers that caused some flash flooding. It was the third wettest July for the UK since 1939, and in Northern Ireland and some regions of England (North West, Yorkshire and Wessex) more than double the average rainfall was recorded. Correspondingly, river flows were widely above normal, with many notably or exceptionally high in the north of England and west of the UK. Soil moisture increased during July, ending the month close to saturation at COSMOS sites in the north and west, whilst restoring exceptionally dry soils to near-normal in the south. Groundwater levels continued their seasonal recessions, except in the most responsive aquifers. Reservoir stocks increased relative to average during July, recovering deficits for England and Scotland (most notably at Daer, from 21% to 3% below average). However, deficits remained at some impoundments in Scotland, Wales and the south-west. The unsettled conditions have continued into August, and the Hydrological Outlook is for normal or above normal river flows and groundwater levels across much of the UK. However, where reservoir deficits remain, average or above average rainfall over the coming months will be needed to alleviate any concerns for the management of water resources into the early autumn.

Rainfall

An unseasonable succession of Atlantic low pressure systems kept conditions unsettled throughout July, albeit with some dry interludes. The first week, with southerly airflows, was largely dry in the south (except on the 4th), whilst Northern Ireland and western Scotland saw the first of the heavier rain on the 6th. A brief warm spell associated with a ridge of high pressure broke with intense thunderstorms on the 8th causing travel disruption (including the closure of motorway link roads in Birmingham). Low pressure systems returned, bringing frontal rain on the 10th and the 14th, and intensifying in north Wales and north-west England on the 15th. A quieter spell from 16th-21st ended with intense rainfall on the night of 22nd that affected Northern Ireland, England and Wales (e.g. 111mm was recorded at White Barrow, Devon) and there was property flooding in Northern Ireland (e.g. in Castlederg, County Tyrone). The last week was somewhat quieter, but there were further showers, heavy at times, mainly affecting the north and west. For the month as a whole, rainfall was above average across most of the UK and most notably in parts of Northern Ireland, north-west and south-west England. The monthly total for the UK was 170% of average, and Northern Ireland and the North West England region both registered their wettest July on record (in series from 1890). Following low rainfall in May and June, the three-month rainfall accumulations were moderately below average across Scotland, Wales and regions in south-east England, and moderately above average for Northern Ireland and the North West England region (at 125% and 121% of average, respectively).

River Flows

River flows began July widely below average, although near-average in many groundwater-dominated catchments. In the responsive catchments of Scotland and Northern Ireland, there were sharp increases on the 6th to near- or above-average flow, and for the next fortnight, further responses to rainfall kept flows above average. Flow magnitudes were noteworthy on the 15th in the west (when the Welsh Dee recorded its second highest July peak flow in a series from 1969) and during 22nd-24th across Northern Ireland and the north of England. Flow responses saw peaks ranking in the top three for July (e.g. Mourne on the 22nd, Ribble, Camowen, Annacloy on the 23rd, all in series of 40 years or more). By the 24th, rivers in large catchments were also seeing high ranking peak flows (e.g. those recorded on the Aire and Lower Bann were the third and tenth highest in series from 1958 and

1980, respectively). Thereafter flows generally receded, with interruptions mainly in the north and west, until month-end. With repeated responses to rainfall, mean monthly flows were notably or exceptionally high on rivers in the west and north-west (the Cree, Ribble and Welsh Dee each recorded more than twice their respective average July flows, in series of 50 years or more). The Mourne, with more than three times its average July flow (in a series from 1982), established a new monthly maximum. Elsewhere, mean monthly flows were predominantly normal or above normal, although flows for some rivers in the east of the UK were below normal. Reflecting the high flows recorded on many rivers, Northern Ireland saw new maximum daily outflows established on the 15th and 22nd-25th (in a series from 1980), and the highest outflows for the month of July since 2007. Over the three months from May to July, notably or exceptionally low river flows reflected the rainfall deficits in Scotland and north-east England, contrasting with river flows in the south that were notably or exceptionally high (the Itchen recording its third highest May-July flow in a series from 1958).

Soil Moisture and Groundwater

Soils rewetted during July, but substantial Soil Moisture Deficits (SMDs) remained in the south and east at month-end, as expected in the summer months. Accordingly, with the exception of Killyglen, levels in the Chalk receded during July and Westdean No. 3 was the only site with exceptionally high levels. Generally, levels dropped back to the above-normal or normal range across sites in the Southern and Chilterns Chalk although Dial Farm was an outlier with below normal levels. In Yorkshire, levels in the Chalk remained normal, however, the wet weather in Northern Ireland led to the highest monthly groundwater level in this series of 39 years. In the Jurassic limestones levels recessed throughout July but remained close to or slightly above the long-term average. Similarly, Permo-Triassic sandstone sites were in the normal range to above normal, although small rises in levels were recorded at Newbridge and Weir Farm. Most of the Magnesian and Carboniferous limestones sites were unchanged, with levels near the long-term average for the month. However, levels in the Carboniferous Limestone of south Wales at Greenfield Garage and Pant y Lladron rose slightly in response to above average rainfall and at the latter, the rise was sufficient for levels to move from below normal in June to above normal for July. A small recovery in levels in the Devonian sandstones at Feddan Junction during July led to a move from a record June low to levels just below normal.

July 2023



National Hydrological
Monitoring Programme



UK Centre for
Ecology & Hydrology



British
Geological
Survey

Rainfall . . . Rainfall . . .



Rainfall accumulations and return period estimates

Percentages are from the 1991-2020 average.

Region	Rainfall	Jul 2023	Jun23 – Jul23		May23 – Jul23		Feb23 – Jul23		Aug22 – Jul23	
				RP		RP		RP		RP
United Kingdom	mm %	140 170	192		231		477		1190	
England	mm %	120 181	161	5-10	200	2-5	398	2-5	945	5-10
Scotland	mm %	155 150	224	5-10	264	2-5	564	2-5	1511	2-5
Wales	mm %	177 179	223	2-5	258	2-5	569	2-5	1490	2-5
Northern Ireland	mm %	185 207	258	20-35	307	8-12	579	10-20	1237	8-12
England & Wales	mm %	128 181	170	5-10	208	2-5	421	2-5	1019	5-10
North West	mm %	208 212	282	25-40	314	5-10	563	5-10	1371	5-10
Northumbria	mm %	128 172	175	5-10	207	2-5	368	2-5	897	2-5
Severn-Trent	mm %	113 171	164	5-10	197	2-5	380	2-5	843	2-5
Yorkshire	mm %	138 202	180	5-10	208	2-5	386	2-5	897	2-5
Anglian	mm %	85 153	110	2-5	152	2-5	303	2-5	657	2-5
Thames	mm %	89 166	126	2-5	169	2-5	363	2-5	844	5-10
Southern	mm %	83 159	112	2-5	145	2-5	357	2-5	1014	15-25
Wessex	mm %	128 209	160	5-10	213	2-5	452	5-10	1080	15-25
South West	mm %	156 190	190	2-5	248	2-5	552	2-5	1396	5-10
Welsh	mm %	170 178	216	2-5	251	2-5	552	2-5	1442	2-5
Highland	mm %	155 144	235	2-5	272	2-5	624	2-5	1636	2-5
North East	mm %	116 141	167	2-5	210	2-5	414	2-5	1066	2-5
Tay	mm %	155 159	209	5-10	243	2-5	510	2-5	1445	5-10
Forth	mm %	139 149	199	5-10	231	2-5	469	2-5	1271	5-10
Tweed	mm %	138 161	186	5-10	221	2-5	416	2-5	1102	2-5
Solway	mm %	201 182	270	10-15	309	2-5	623	2-5	1668	10-15
Clyde	mm %	183 144	274	5-10	321	2-5	674	2-5	1802	2-5

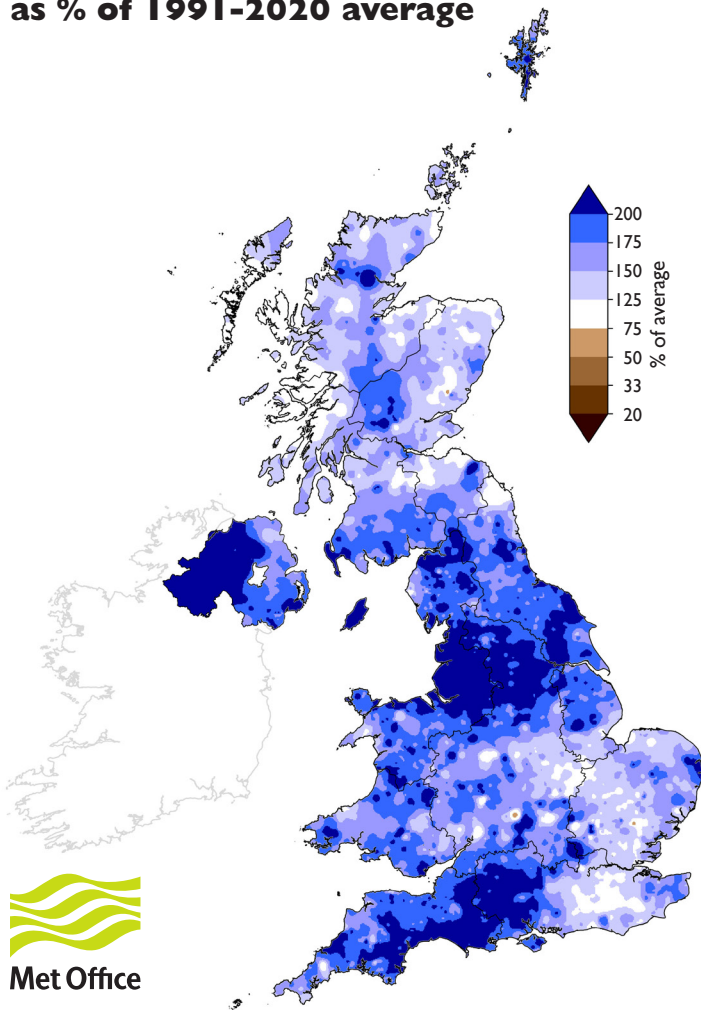
% = percentage of 1991-2020 average

RP = Return period

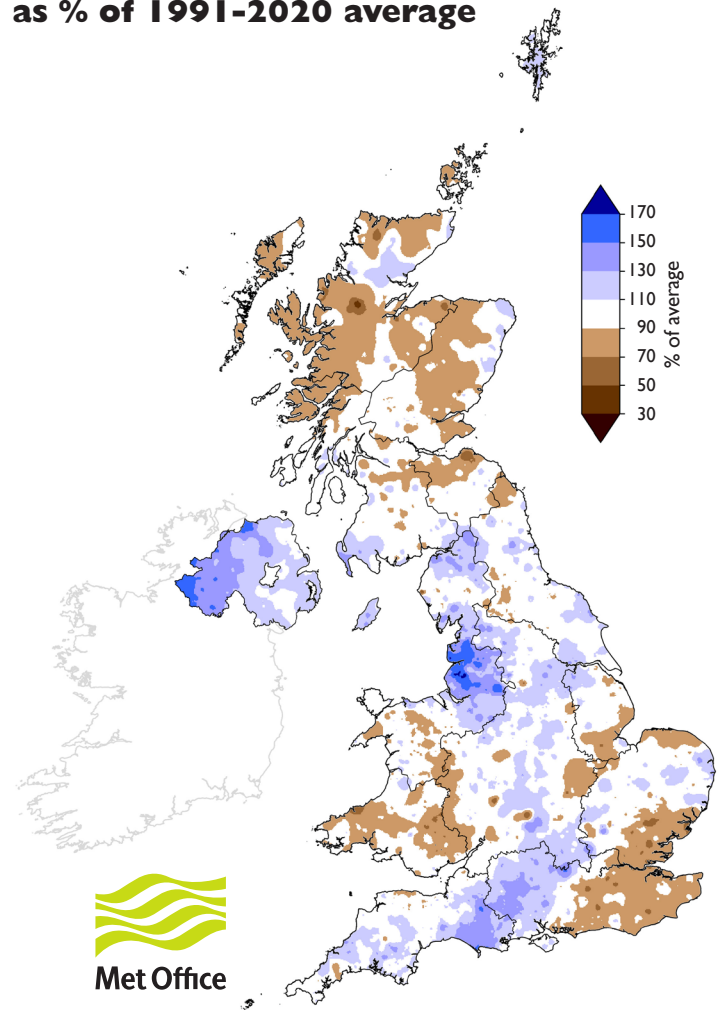
Important note: Figures in the above table may be quoted provided their source is acknowledged. Where appropriate, specific mention must be made of the uncertainties associated with the return period estimates. The RP estimates are based on data provided by the Met Office and reflect climatic variability since 1836; they also assume a stable climate. The quoted RPs relate to the specific timespans only; for the same timespans, but beginning in any month the RPs would be substantially shorter. The timespans featured do not purport to represent the critical periods for any particular water resource management zone. For hydrological or water resources assessments of drought severity, river flows and/or groundwater levels normally provide a better guide than return periods based on regional rainfall totals. Note that precipitation totals in winter months may be underestimated due to snowfall undercatch. All monthly rainfall totals since January 2023 are provisional. Source: Data from HadUK-Grid dataset at 1km resolution v1.2.0.0.

Rainfall . . . Rainfall . . .

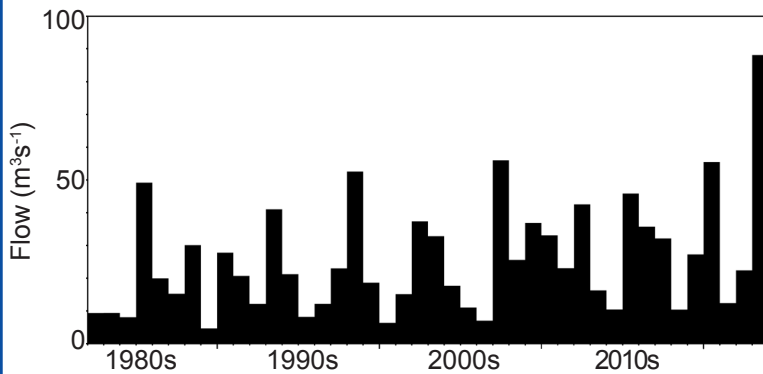
**July 2023 rainfall
as % of 1991-2020 average**



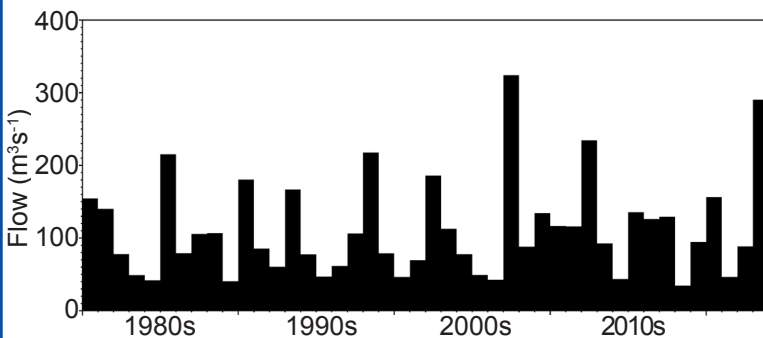
**May 2023 - July 2023 rainfall
as % of 1991-2020 average**



July mean river flows for the Mourne



July mean outflows for Northern Ireland



UK Hydrological Outlook

The Hydrological Outlook provides an insight into future hydrological conditions across the UK. Specifically it describes likely trajectories for river flows and groundwater levels on a monthly basis, with particular focus on the next three months.

The complete version of the Hydrological Outlook UK can be found at: www.hydoutuk.net/latest-outlook/

Period: from August 2023

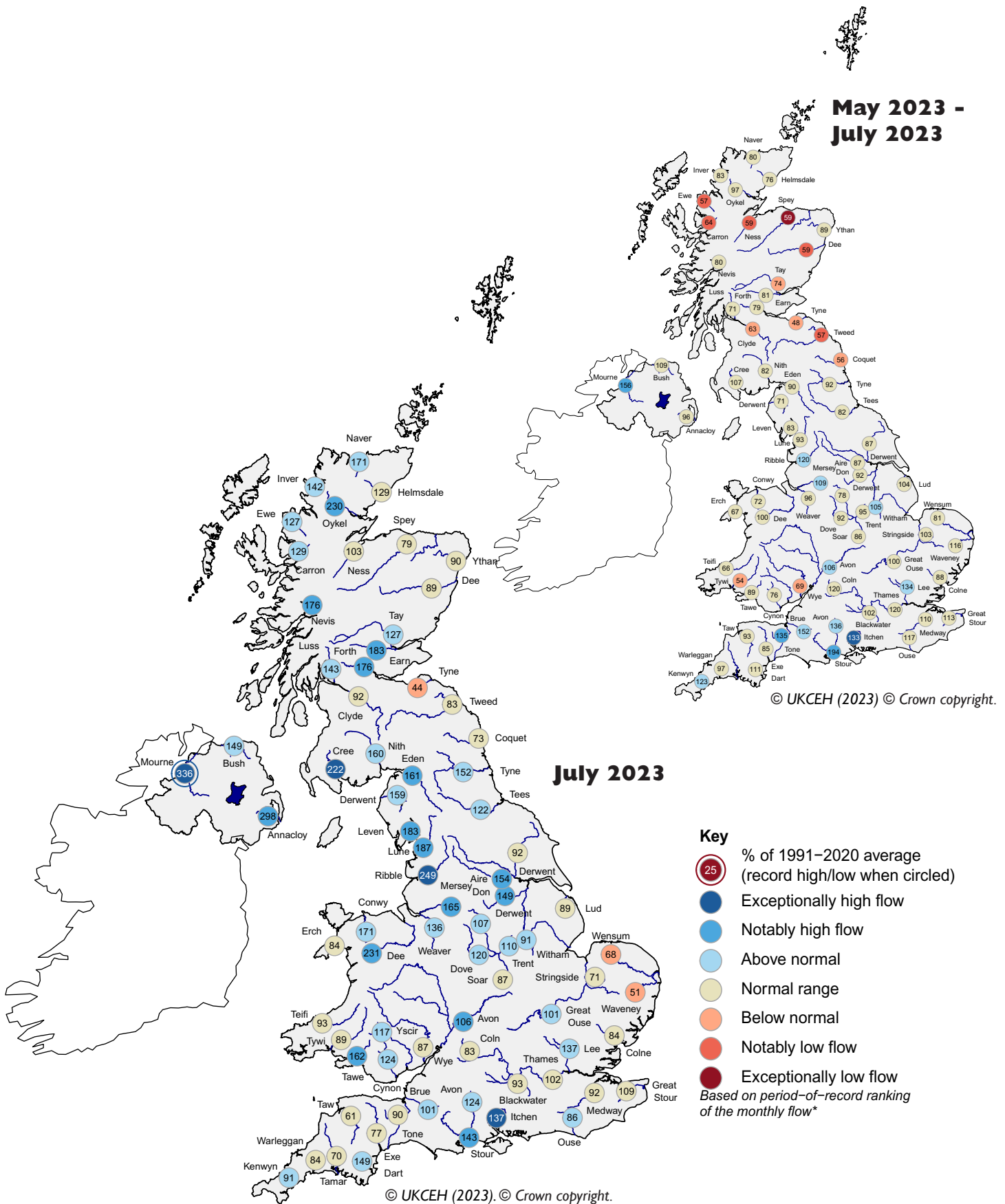
Issued: 08.08.2023

using data to the end of July 2023

Following an exceptionally wet July, river flows across the UK are expected to be normal to above normal for August, and over the next three months. Groundwater levels are likely to be within the normal range across the majority of the UK, though above normal levels are expected in southern England in August, and normal to below normal groundwater levels are likely in Wales over the next three months.

River flow ... River flow ...

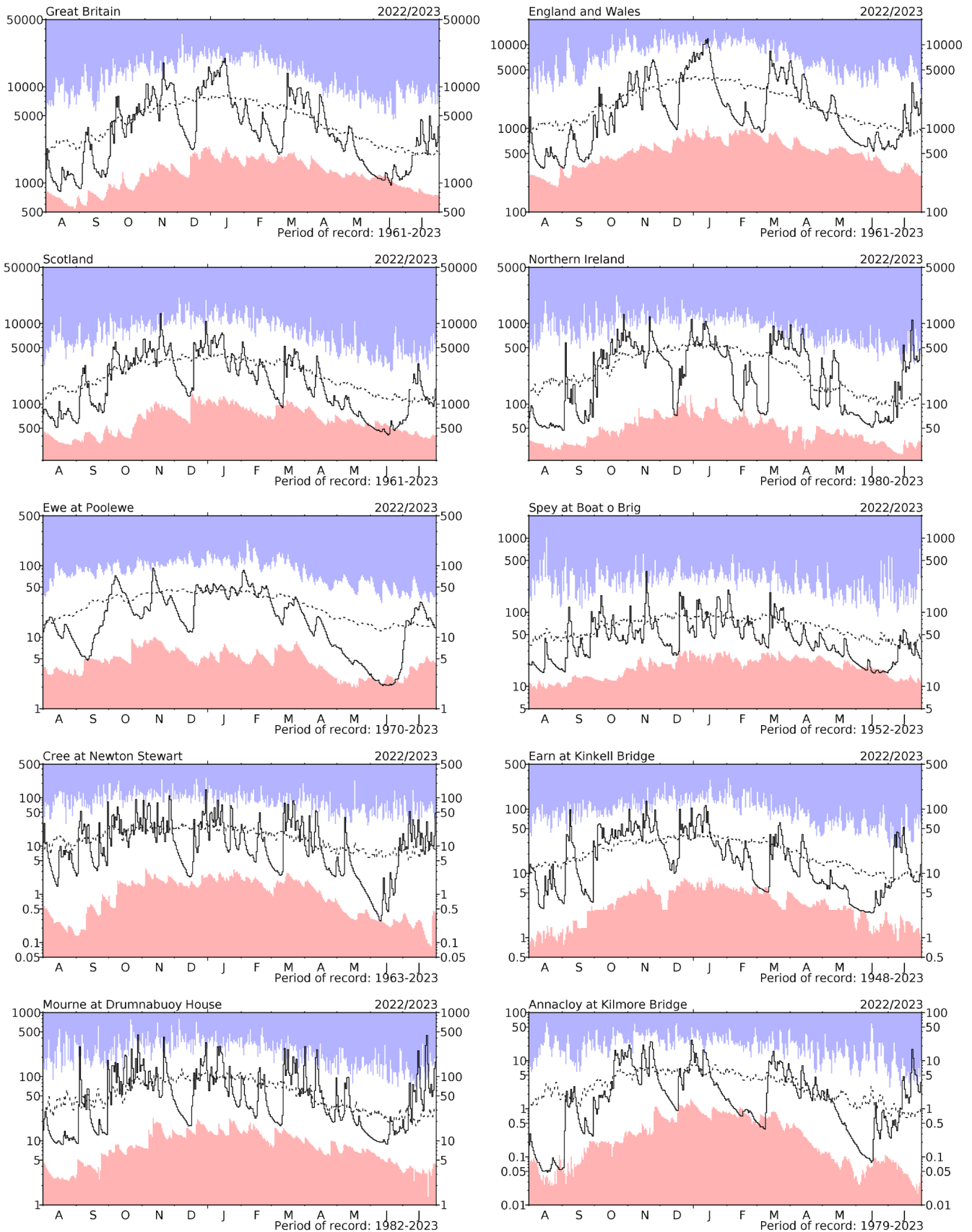
May 2023 - July 2023



River flows

*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. The categories of the spots are based on the full period-of-record data whereas the percentages are based on the 1991-2020 averaging period for consistency between rainfall and river flows. Percentages may be omitted where flows are under review.

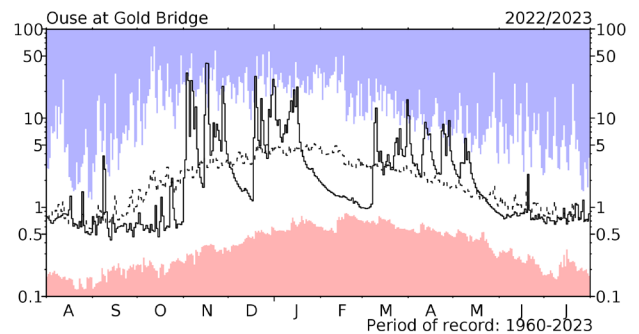
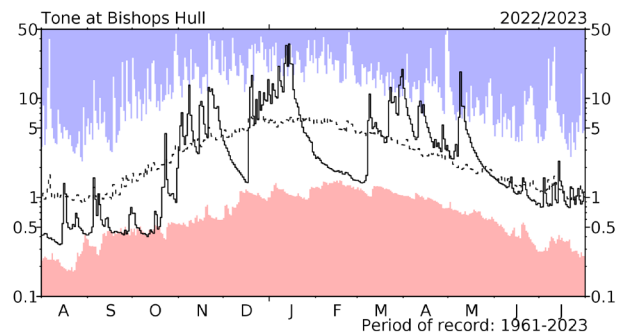
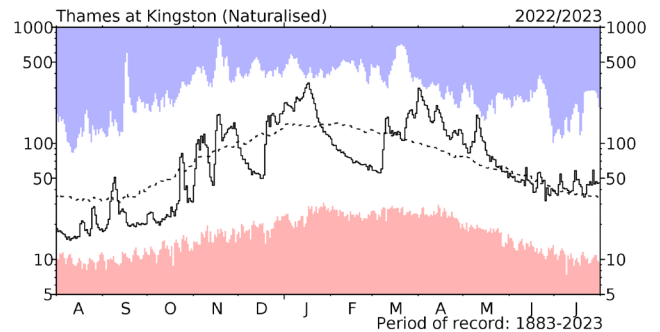
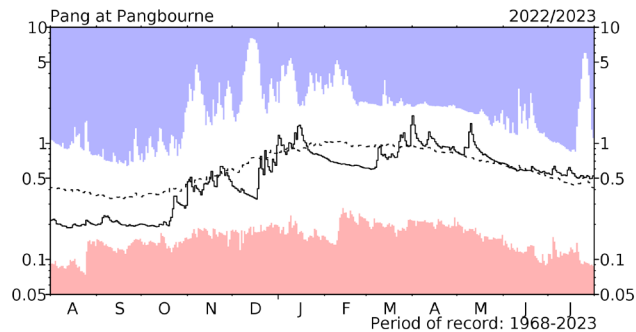
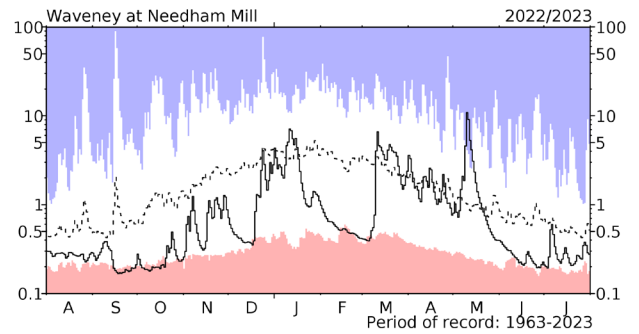
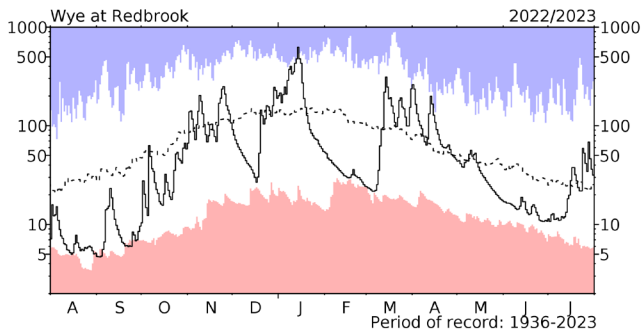
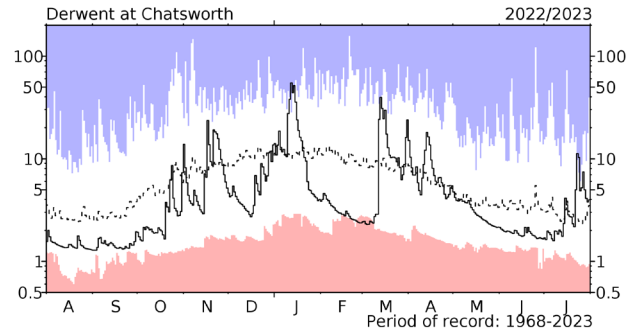
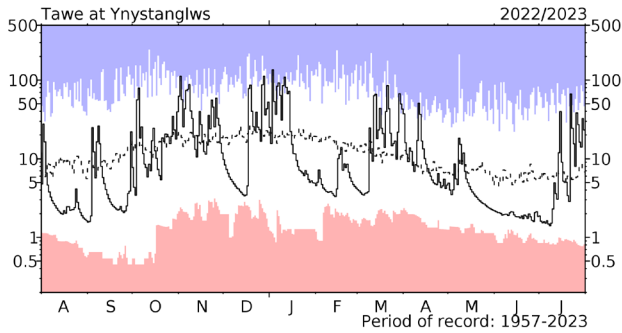
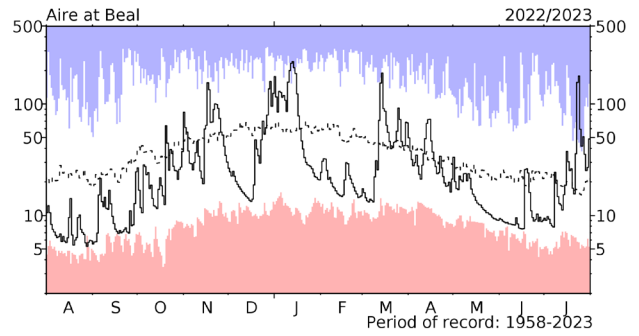
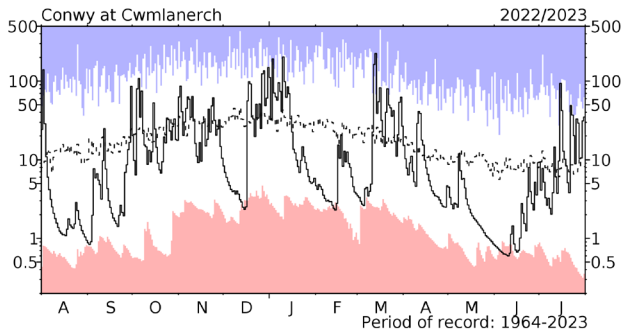
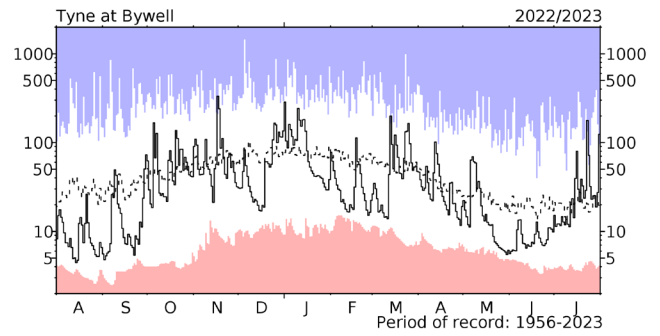
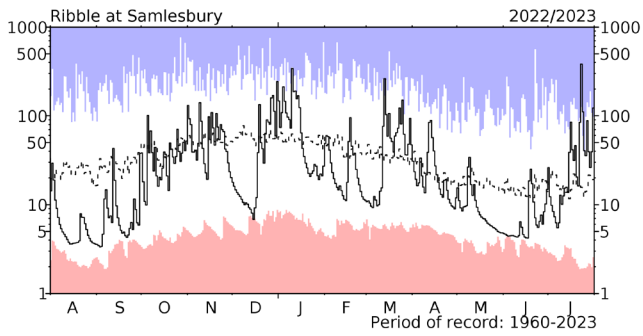
River flow ... River flow ...



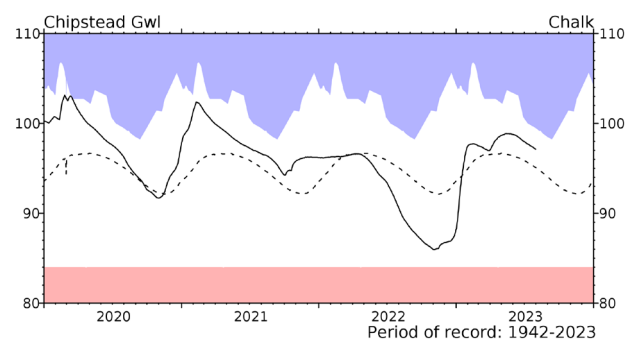
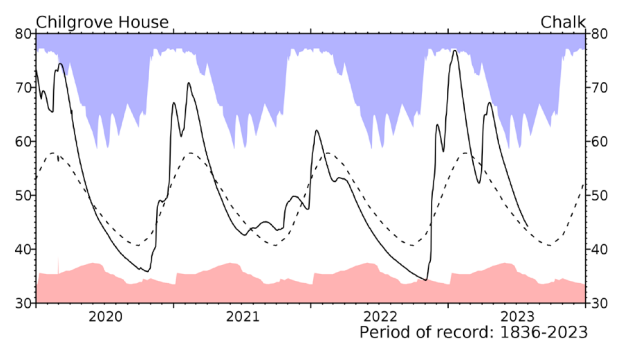
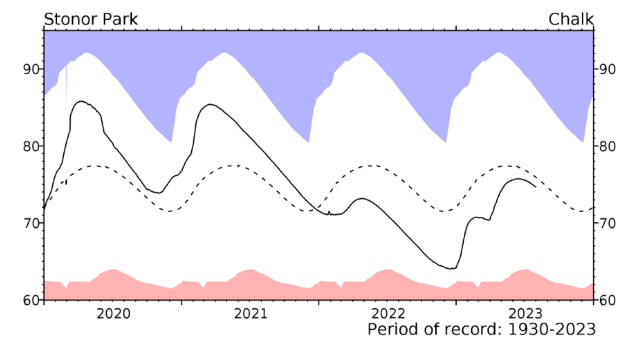
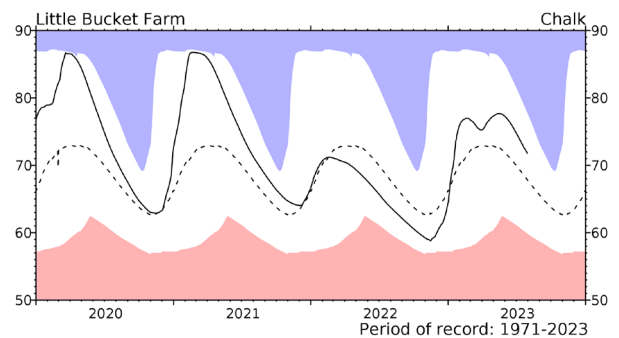
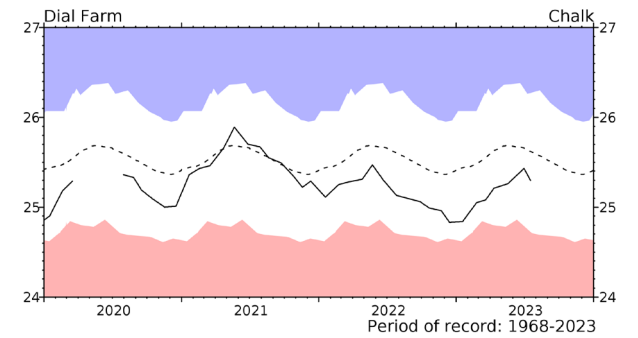
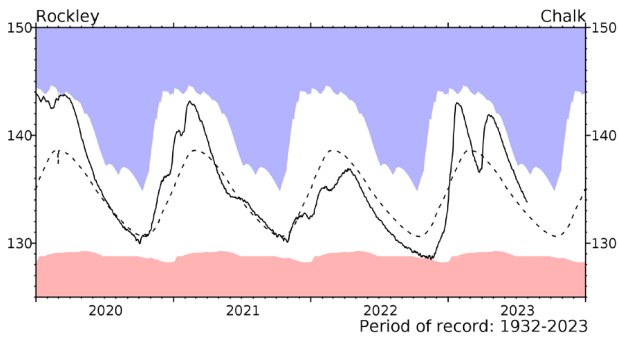
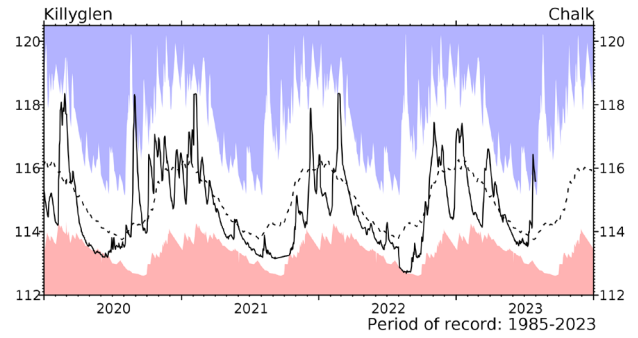
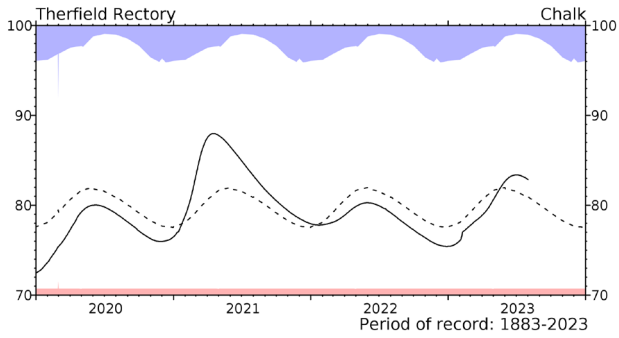
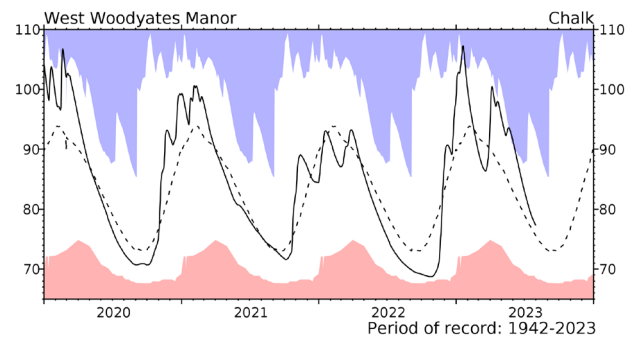
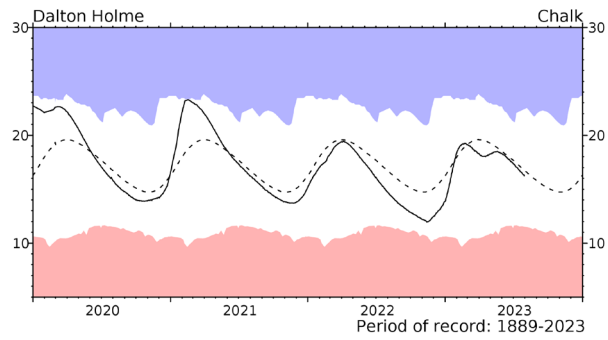
River flow hydrographs

*The river flow hydrographs show the daily mean flows (measured in $m^3 s^{-1}$) together with the maximum and minimum daily flows prior to August 2022 (shown by the shaded areas). Daily flows falling outside the maximum/minimum range are indicated where the bold trace enters the shaded areas. The dashed line represents the period-of-record average daily flow.

River flow ... River flow ...

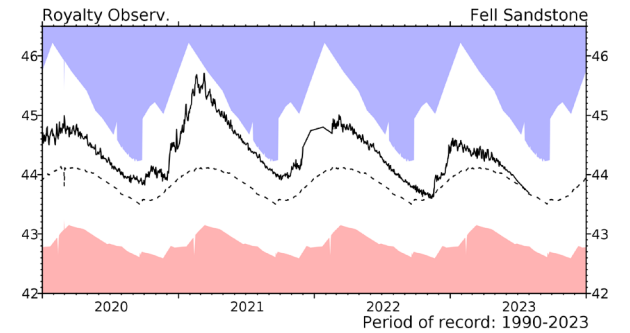
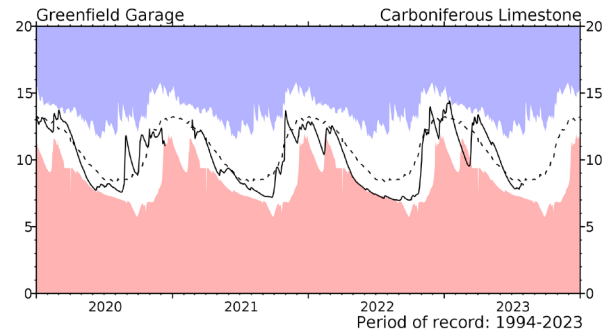
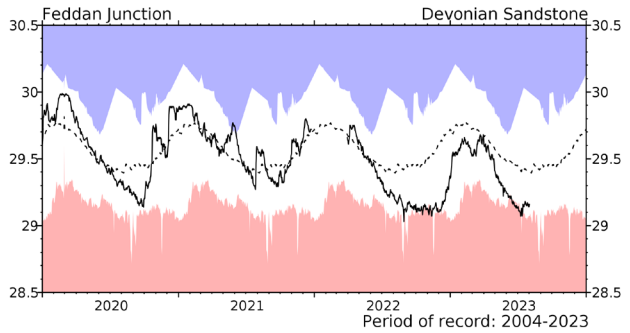
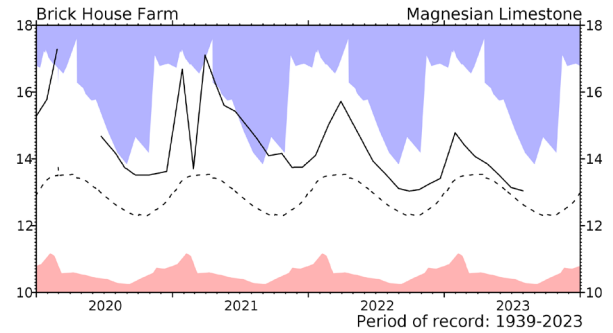
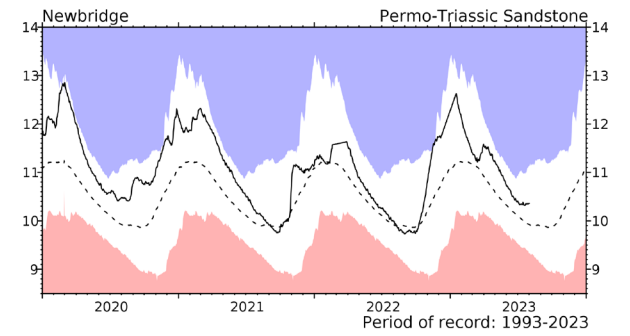
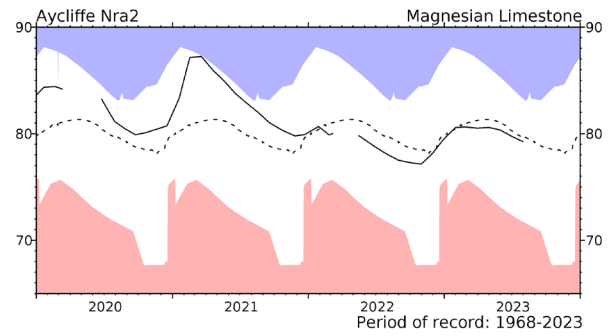
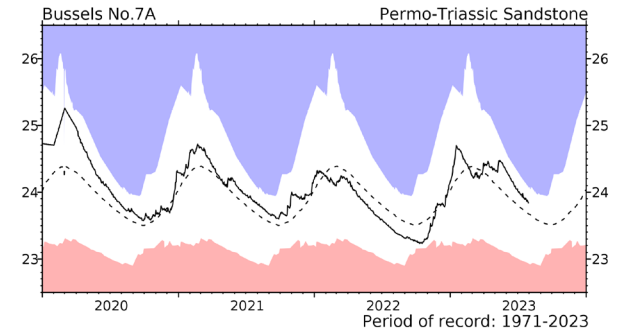
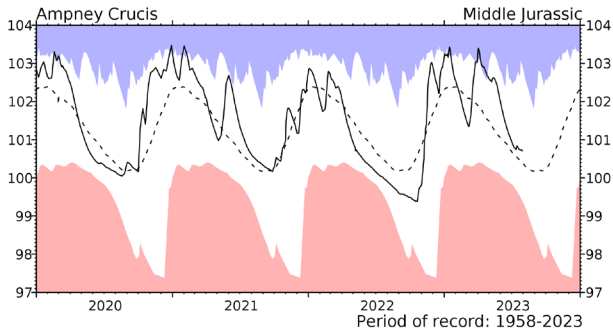
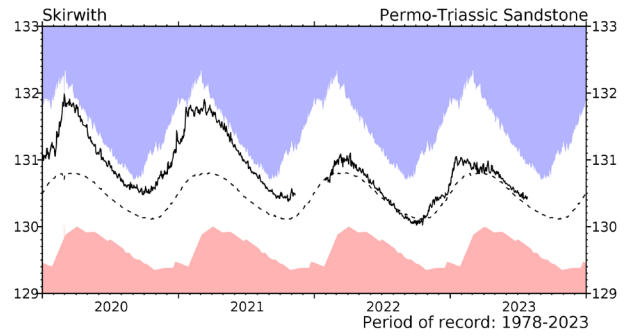
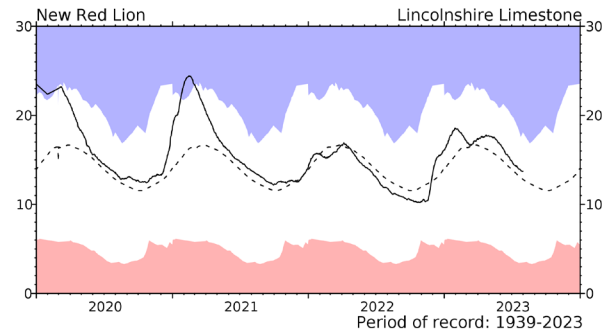
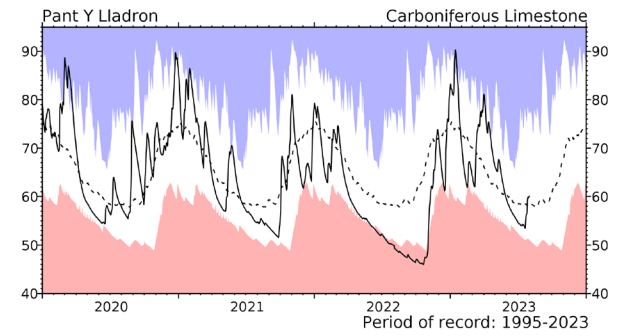
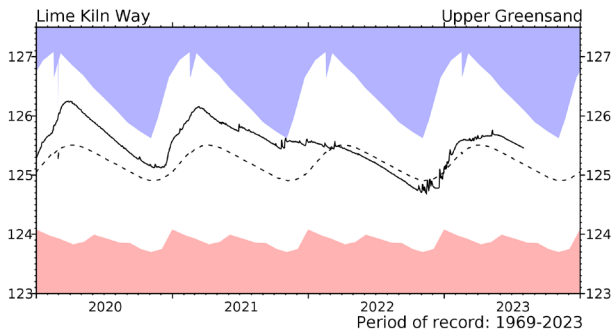


Groundwater... Groundwater



Groundwater levels (measured in metres above ordnance datum) 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 mean and the highest and lowest levels recorded for each month are calculated with data from the start of the record to the end of 2019. Note that most groundwater levels are not measured continuously and, for some index wells, the greater frequency of contemporary measurements may, in itself, contribute to an increased range of variation.

Groundwater... Groundwater



Groundwater... Groundwater

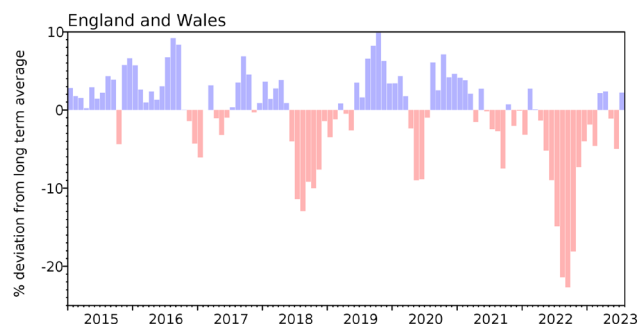


Groundwater levels - July 2023

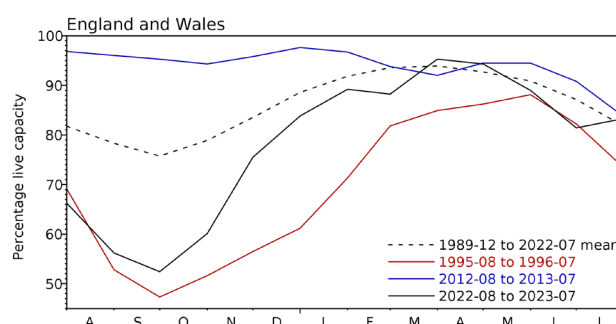
The calculation of ranking has been modified from that used in summaries published prior to October 2012. It is now based on a comparison between the most recent level and levels for the same date during previous years of record. Where appropriate, levels for earlier years may have been interpolated. The rankings are designed as a qualitative indicator, and ranks at extreme levels, and when levels are changing rapidly, need to be interpreted with caution.

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



Percentage live capacity of selected reservoirs at end of month

Area	Reservoir	Capacity (MI)	2023 May	2023 Jun	2023 Jul	Jul Anom.	Min Jul	Year* of min	2022 Jul	Diff 23-22
North West	N Command Zone •	124929	80	63	68	5	23	1984	53	15
	Vyrnwy	55146	92	89	87	10	45	1984	57	30
Northumbrian	Teesdale •	87936	77	66	76	3	45	1989	73	4
	Kielder (199175)		93	89	98	9	66	1989	82	15
Severn-Trent	Clywedog	49936	99	85	91	6	50	1976	66	25
	Derwent Valley •	46692	67	70	79	7	43	1996	45	34
Yorkshire	Washburn •	23373	93	76	78	5	50	2022	50	28
	Bradford Supply •	40942	84	66	73	2	38	1995	47	26
Anglian	Grafham (55490)		94	94	94	5	66	1997	78	16
	Rutland (116580)		93	91	91	4	74	1995	83	8
Thames	London •	202828	97	95	97	11	73	1990	75	22
	Farmoor •	13822	99	98	99	3	84	1990	89	11
Southern	Bewl	31000	98	92	87	11	45	1990	64	23
	Ardingly	4685	100	91	77	-7	57	2022	57	20
Wessex	Clatworthy	5662	97	83	73	0	43	1992	60	13
	Bristol •	(38666)	97	87	81	6	53	1990	62	19
South West	Colliford	28540	68	61	57	-19	43	2022	43	13
	Roadford	34500	68	62	57	-19	46	1996	60	-3
	Wimbleball	21320	96	84	75	-2	49	2022	49	26
	Stithians	4967	94	83	73	3	39	1990	44	29
Welsh	Celyn & Brenig •	131155	85	76	71	-16	65	1989	65	6
	Brienne	62140	96	86	90	1	64	2022	64	26
	Big Five •	69762	88	74	73	-3	41	1989	54	19
	Elan Valley •	99106	90	76	76	-5	53	2022	53	23
Scotland(E)	Edinburgh/Mid-Lothian •	97223	89	82	87	4	51	1998	77	10
	East Lothian •	9317	100	91	89	-1	72	1992	80	9
Scotland(W)	Loch Katrine •	110326	78	72	85	9	53	2000	88	-3
	Daer	22494	73	62	77	-3	54	2021	71	6
	Loch Thom	10721	83	70	70	-14	55	2021	82	-12
Northern	Total+	• 56800	93	80	92	14	54	1995	77	15
Ireland	Silent Valley	• 20634	94	80	92	18	42	2000	73	19

() figures in parentheses relate to gross storage

• denotes reservoir groups

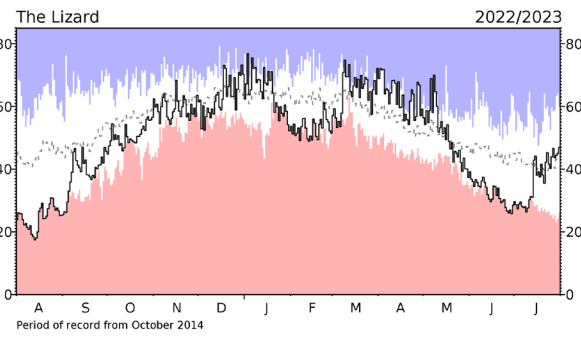
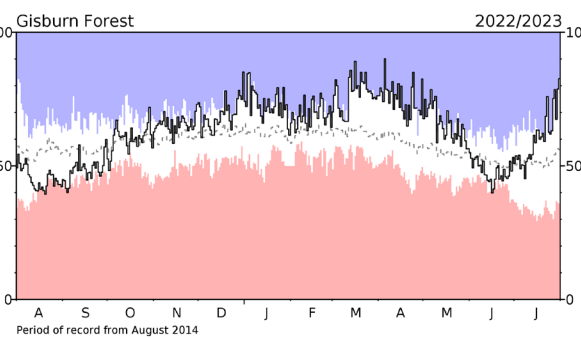
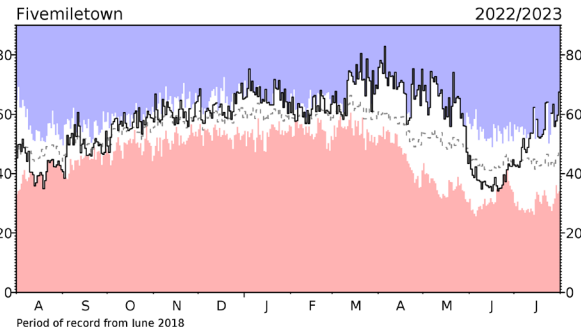
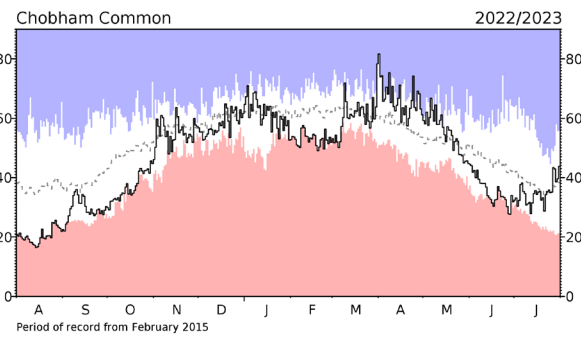
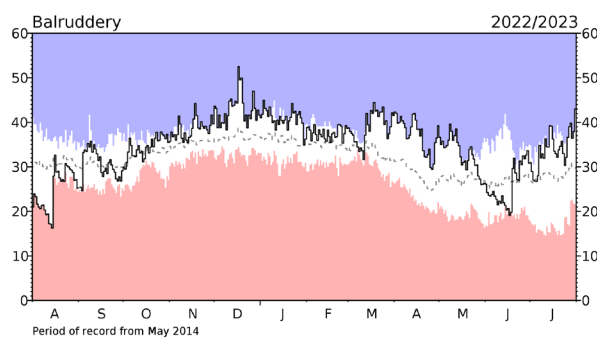
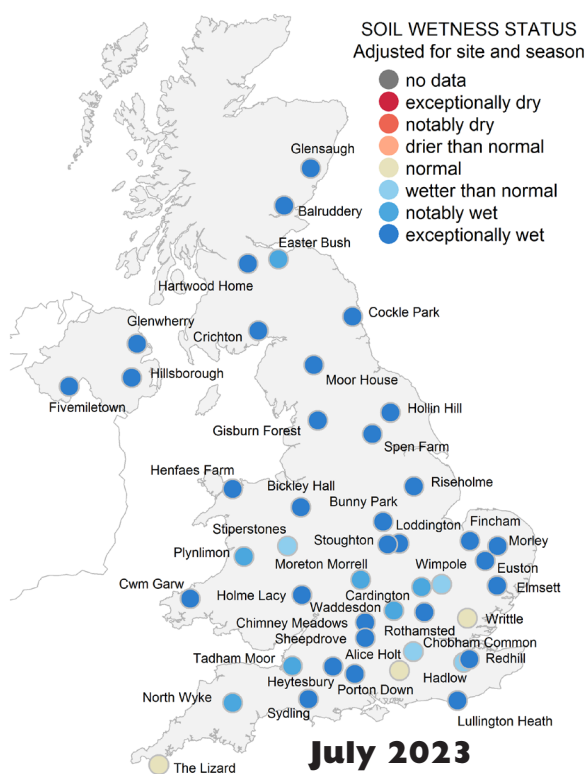
*last occurrence

+ excludes Lough Neagh

Details of the individual reservoirs in each of the groupings listed above are available on request. The percentages given in the Average and Minimum storage columns relate to the 1988-2012 period except for West of Scotland and Northern Ireland where data commence in the mid-1990s. In some gravity-fed reservoirs (e.g. Clywedog) stocks are kept below capacity during the winter to provide scope for flood attenuation purposes. Monthly figures may be artificially low due to routine maintenance or turbidity effects in feeder rivers.

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Soil Moisture . . . Soil Moisture



The high levels of rainfall in July led to soil moisture levels rising throughout the month at all COSMOS-UK sites. At the end of the month, soils at some sites are nearing saturation, particularly in Northern Ireland (e.g. Fivemiletown), Scotland (e.g. Balruddery) and Northwest England (e.g. Gisburn Forest). At other sites however, the increase in precipitation restored soil moisture from June's exceptionally dry levels to near normal levels for this time of year, particularly for sites in the South of England (e.g. Chobham Common and The Lizard) and at Sourhope in the Scottish Borders.

Overall, soil moisture levels rose throughout July due to high amounts of precipitation and mild temperatures.

Soil moisture data

These data are from UKCEH's COSMOS-UK network. The time series graphs show volumetric water content as a percentage in black together with the maximum and minimum daily values for the period-of-record of the sites. The dashed line represents the period-of-record mean VWC. For more information visit cosmos.ceh.ac.uk.

NHMP

The National Hydrological Monitoring Programme (NHMP) was started in 1988 and is undertaken jointly by the [UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology](#) (UKCEH) and the [British Geological Survey](#) (BGS). The NHMP aims to provide an authoritative voice on hydrological conditions throughout the UK, to place them in a historical context and, over time, identify and interpret any emerging hydrological trends. Hydrological analysis and interpretation within the Programme is based on the data holdings of the [National River Flow Archive](#) (NRFA; maintained by UKCEH) and [National Groundwater Level Archive](#) (NGLA; maintained by BGS), including rainfall, river flows, borehole levels, and reservoir stocks.

The Hydrological Summary is supported by the Natural Environment Research Council award number NE/R016429/1 as part of the UK-SCAPE programme delivering National Capability.

Data Sources

The NHMP depends on the active cooperation of many data suppliers. This cooperation is gratefully acknowledged. A location map of all sites used in the Hydrological Summary can be found on the [NHMP website](#). River flow and groundwater level data are provided by the Environment Agency (EA), Natural Resources Wales - Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru (NRW), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and, for Northern Ireland, the Department for Infrastructure - Rivers and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. In all cases the data are subject to revision following validation (high flow and low flow data in particular may be subject to significant revision).

Details of reservoir stocks are provided by the Water Service Companies, the EA, Scottish Water and Northern Ireland Water.

The Hydrological Summary and other NHMP outputs may also refer to and/or map soil moisture data for the UK. These data are provided by the Meteorological Office Rainfall and Evaporation Calculation System (MORECS). MORECS provides estimates of monthly soil moisture deficit in the form of averages over 40 x 40 km grid squares over Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The monthly time series of data extends back to 1961.

Rainfall data are provided by the Met Office. To allow better spatial differentiation the rainfall data for Britain are presented for the regional divisions of the precursor organisations of the EA, NRW and SEPA. The areal rainfall figures have been produced by the Met Office National Climate Information Centre (NCIC), and are based on the HadUK-Grid 1km resolution gridded data from rain gauges. The majority of the full rain gauge network across

the UK is operated by the EA, NRW, SEPA and Northern Ireland Water; supplementary rain gauges are operated by the Met Office. The Met Office NCIC monthly rainfall series extend back to 1836 and form the official source of UK areal rainfall statistics which have been adopted by the NHMP. The gridding technique used is described in Hollis, 2019 available at <https://doi.org/10.1002/gdj3.78>

Long-term averages are based on the period 1991-2020 and are derived from the monthly areal series.

The regional figures for the current month in the hydrological summaries are based on a limited rain gauge network so these (and the associated return periods) should be regarded as a guide only.

The monthly rainfall figures are provided by the Met Office NCIC and are Crown Copyright and may not be passed on to, or published by, any unauthorised person or organisation.

For further details on rainfall or MORECS data, please contact the Met Office:

Tel: 0370 900 0100
Email: enquiries@metoffice.gov.uk

Enquiries

Enquiries should be directed to the NHMP:

Tel: 01491 692599
Email: nhmp@ceh.ac.uk

A full catalogue of past Hydrological Summaries can be accessed and downloaded at:

<http://nrfa.ceh.ac.uk/monthly-hydrological-summary-uk>

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