Hydrological Summary for the United Kingdom

March 2026

General

March was mild overall with changeable conditions, alternating between unsettled spells and drier interludes in early and mid-month. As a whole, UK rainfall was average with a strong regional contrast marking a return to the usual rainfall gradient of the UK: northwest Britain recorded above average totals while eastern Scotland and central southern England saw below average rainfall. River flows were in the normal range to above in northwestern areas with some groundwater-dominated catchments in central southern England remaining notably high. Elsewhere, flows were generally in the normal range, with some rivers above normal in south Wales and southwest England. Groundwater levels generally decreased or remained stable during March, reflecting relatively drier conditions, but high to exceptionally high levels dominate across England. Soils remained wet in northwestern areas but began to dry across central and southern England. Reservoir stocks were stable and above average at the national scale, although a few impoundments showed residual deficits (e.g. levels rose at Grafham but remained 7% below average). The UK Hydrological Outlook indicates normal to above normal flows in western Scotland and southern England over the next three months, combined with the passage of storm 'Dave' in early April, the risk of localised flooding is elevated. With above average reservoir stocks due to a notably wet winter half-year, the water resources situation is healthy entering the summer half-year.

Rainfall

The start of March saw rainfall and some hill snow over northwest England and western Scotland with drier, settled weather elsewhere. The second week was dominated by successive Atlantic systems bringing strong winds and rain to northwest Britain, and a deep low pressure on the 12th affected much of the UK, causing power outages in Aberdeenshire and Suffolk. By the 18th, settled weather saw widespread warm conditions with reports of wildfires in North Wales. However, the mild conditions were short-lived as a cold, north-westerly outbreak signalled an unsettled end to the month, with hill snow in Scotland and strong winds and rainfall across northern UK (e.g. 93.2mm on the 24th at Honister Pass, Cumbria) causing power outages to ~3000 properties across England on the 25th. March rainfall was 102% average for the UK overall (102%). Wet conditions returned for the Highland and North West England regions (both >130% of average), with some areas receiving over 1.5 times of average. Totals were below average elsewhere, with less than half the average for parts of eastern Scotland and central southern England in stark contrast to notably wet conditions over the winter. Rainfall totals since the start of the year (January-March) was the fourth wettest for the Severn Trent, Wessex and South West England regions (all in series from 1890). Over longer accumulations, the winter half-year (October-March) was the second wettest on record for Northern Ireland (after 2016) and the sixth wettest for England as a whole (both in series from 1890).

River Flows

River flows began March widely above average for southern England and rose further after a wet end to February; the Trent and Itchen recorded their sixth highest March peak flow on the 1st (in a series from 1959 and 1994, respectively). Elsewhere, flows were mainly in the normal range but rose in response to rainfall in the first week across western Scotland and northwest England. Recessions followed until renewed unsettled conditions triggered sharp rises across central and western Britain on the 12th (the Tawe recorded its tenth highest March peak flow, in a series from 1958). Despite drier interludes mid-month, flows at groundwater-dominated catchments in central southern England remained well above average while flows in eastern Scotland declined to below normal (e.g. new daily flow minima were recorded on the Bervie from 22nd-28th). High flows returned in the last week with most catchments across northwestern Britain remaining above average at month-end. March mean flows were in the normal range to above across western Britain and remained notably high for groundwater-dominated catchments in central southern England (e.g. Lud, Coln and Itchen). In Scotland, flows were generally in the normal range but below normal for some catchments, e.g. on the Deveron and Tyne. Mean flows for the winter half-year (October-March) were widely above normal to notably high apart from northwest Scotland and East Anglia where flows were normal to below normal, notably low in some cases (e.g. Inver). The Kenwyn and Annacloy registered their highest winter-half year mean flows on record (in a series from 1968 and 1981, respectively). Correspondingly, outflows over the six-month period were the second highest on record for Northern Ireland (in a series from 1981).

Soil Moisture and Groundwater

Soils began to dry across central and southern England, with small soil moisture deficits developing in some areas. In the Chalk of southern England, groundwater levels generally began to decrease, although many sites were still in the high or exceptionally high range. Only levels at Little Bucket Farm were continuing to rise. In East Anglia and southeast England, levels increased and were typically within the normal range. In east Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, levels decreased to the above normal to normal range. Levels at Aylesby (which recorded a 48-year maxima in February) decreased but remained exceptionally high. In Northern Ireland at Killyglen, levels began to recede rapidly at the start of the month into the normal range and remained stable throughout the month. In the Jurassic Oolite at Ampney Crucis, groundwater levels continued to decline and were in the normal range by month-end. Groundwater levels in the Magnesian Limestone showed contrasting behaviour, decreasing at Brick House Farm and increasing at Aycliffe, though levels at both remained above normal. In the Carboniferous Limestone, Permo-Triassic sandstones, the Upper Greensand and the Fell Sandstone, there was a pattern of decreasing groundwater levels. Generally, levels remained in the normal range to above. In the Devonian sandstone at Feddan Junction, levels remained stable and remained in the below normal range.

National Hydrological Monitoring Programme | UKCEH | BGS British Geological Survey

Rainfall

Rainfall accumulations and return period estimates

Percentages are from the 1991-2020 average.

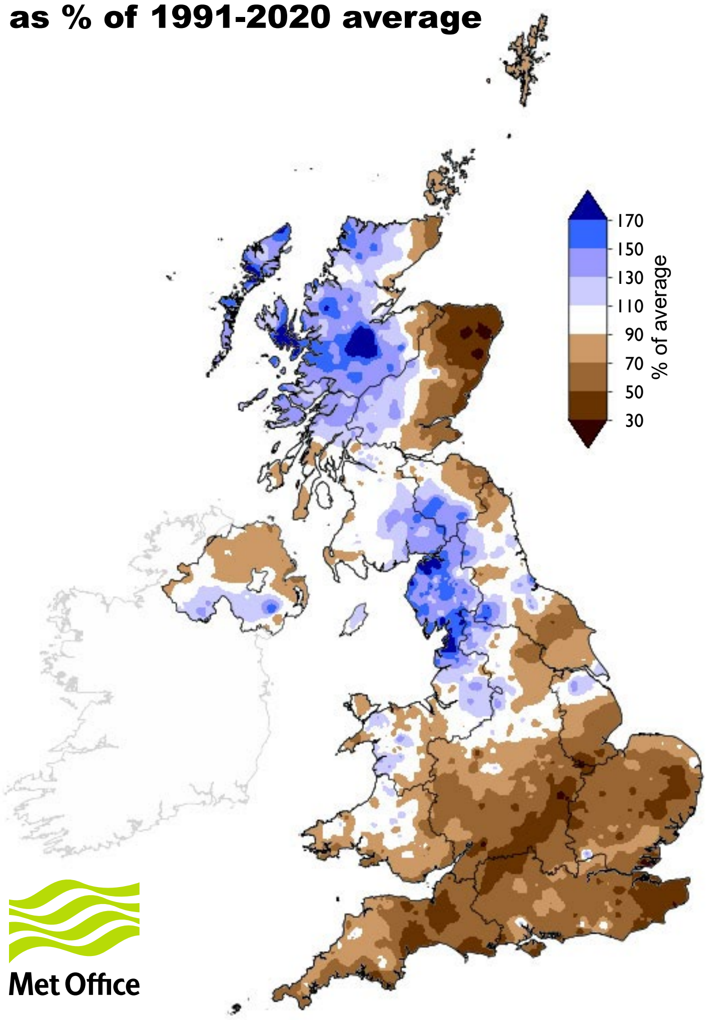
Region	Rainfall	Mar 2026	Jan26 – Mar26		Oct25 – Mar26		Jul25 – Mar26		Apr25 – Mar26	
				RP		*RP*		*RP*		*RP*
United	mm	**87**	348		760		1013		1184	
Kingdom	%	**102**	115	5-10	113	10-20	108	5-10	102	2-5
England	mm	**49**	285		609		801		914	
	%	**83**	137	15-25	127	20-30	117	8-12	106	2-5
Scotland	mm	**149**	420		930		1258		1495	
	%	**119**	95	2-5	98	2-5	97	2-5	95	2-5
Wales	mm	**95**	433		1037		1356		1592	
	%	**92**	114	5-10	119	10-20	114	8-12	109	5-10
Northern	mm	**82**	397		803		1094		1339	
Ireland	%	**94**	135	25-40	123	>100	119	50-80	116	60-90
England &	mm	**55**	306		668		877		1007	
Wales	%	**85**	132	10-20	126	20-30	116	8-12	107	2-5
North West	mm	**124**	340		851		1212		1448	
	%	**136**	106	2-5	116	10-20	116	10-20	114	10-20
Northumbria	mm	**64**	264		575		794		897	
	%	**102**	122	5-10	117	10-15	111	5-10	99	2-5
Severn-Trent	mm	**43**	277		584		751		843	
	%	**79**	151	20-35	138	30-50	121	10-15	106	2-5
Yorkshire	mm	**57**	253		586		802		889	
	%	**95**	122	5-10	125	10-20	118	8-12	103	2-5
Anglian	mm	**24**	184		399		525		594	
	%	**62**	137	8-12	126	10-15	109	2-5	95	2-5
Thames	mm	**28**	250		494		634		707	
	%	**61**	146	10-20	124	8-12	112	2-5	98	2-5
Southern	mm	**30**	317		601		791		874	
	%	**58**	156	20-35	124	8-12	120	5-10	107	2-5
Wessex	mm	**34**	353		708		865		967	
	%	**54**	156	30-50	135	20-30	119	8-12	107	2-5
South West	mm	**61**	504		1018		1268		1513	
	%	**68**	150	30-50	133	30-50	123	15-25	121	15-25
Welsh	mm	**90**	422		1006		1309		1534	
	%	**91**	117	5-10	121	10-20	115	10-15	110	5-10
Highland	mm	**214**	455		1028		1401		1672	
	%	**138**	83	2-5	90	2-5	91	2-5	90	2-5
North East	mm	**56**	331		644		828		954	
	%	**76**	131	15-25	110	5-10	99	2-5	90	2-5
Tay	mm	**112**	482		926		1216		1404	
	%	**105**	123	8-12	111	5-10	107	5-10	101	2-5
Forth	mm	**97**	311		729		967		1162	
	%	**101**	91	2-5	101	2-5	96	2-5	94	2-5
Tweed	mm	**92**	294		641		868		1039	
	%	**117**	107	2-5	104	5-10	100	2-5	96	2-5
Solway	mm	**141**	423		1005		1398		1663	
	%	**118**	100	2-5	107	8-12	108	8-12	106	8-12
Clyde	mm	**167**	471		1108		1534		1849	
	%	**111**	87	2-5	96	2-5	98	2-5	98	2-5

% = percentage of 1991-2020 average *RP = Return period*

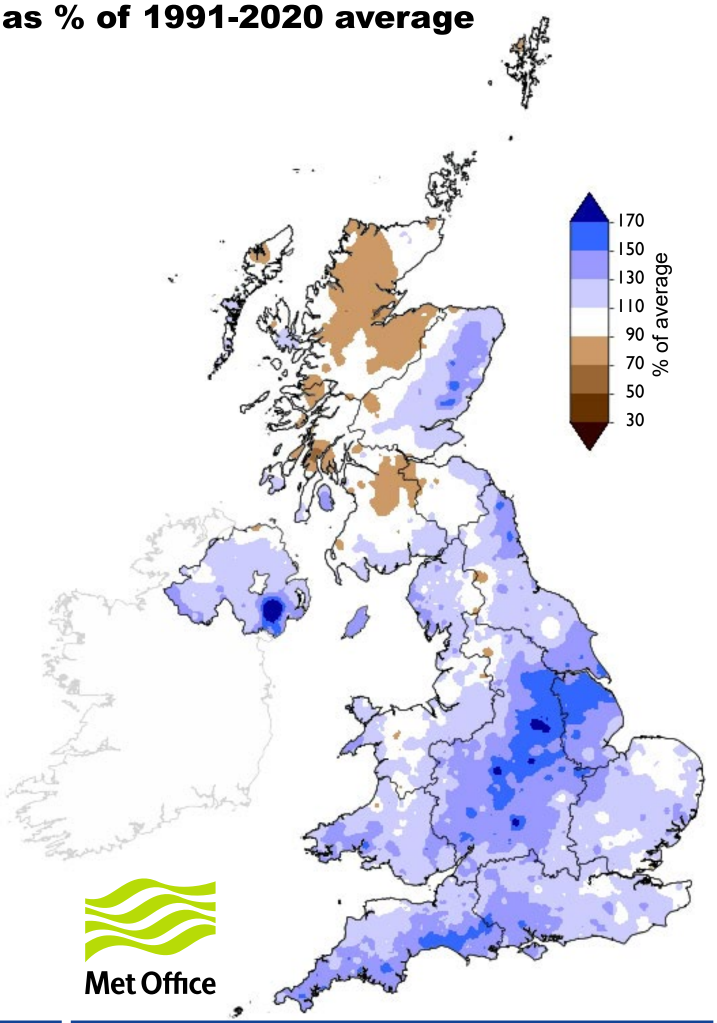
Important note: Figures in the above table may be quoted provided their source is acknowledged. Where appropriate, specific mention must be made of the uncertainties associated with the return period estimates. The RP estimates are based on data provided by the Met Office and reflect climatic variability since 1890; 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 2025 are provisional. Source: Data from HadUK-Grid dataset at 1km resolution v1.3.1.0.

Rainfall

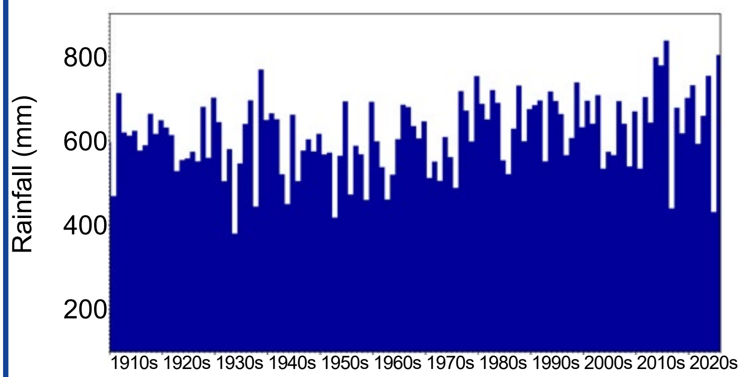
March 2026 rainfall as % of 1991-2020 average



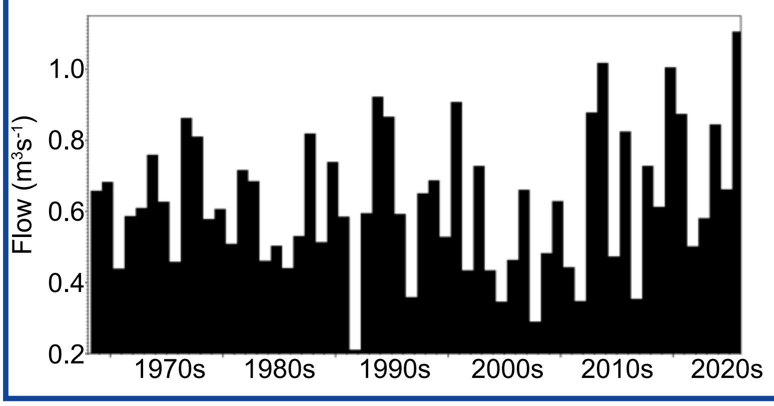
October 2025 - March 2026 rainfall as % of 1991-2020 average



October - March rainfall for Northern Ireland



October - March average flows on the Kenwyn



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.

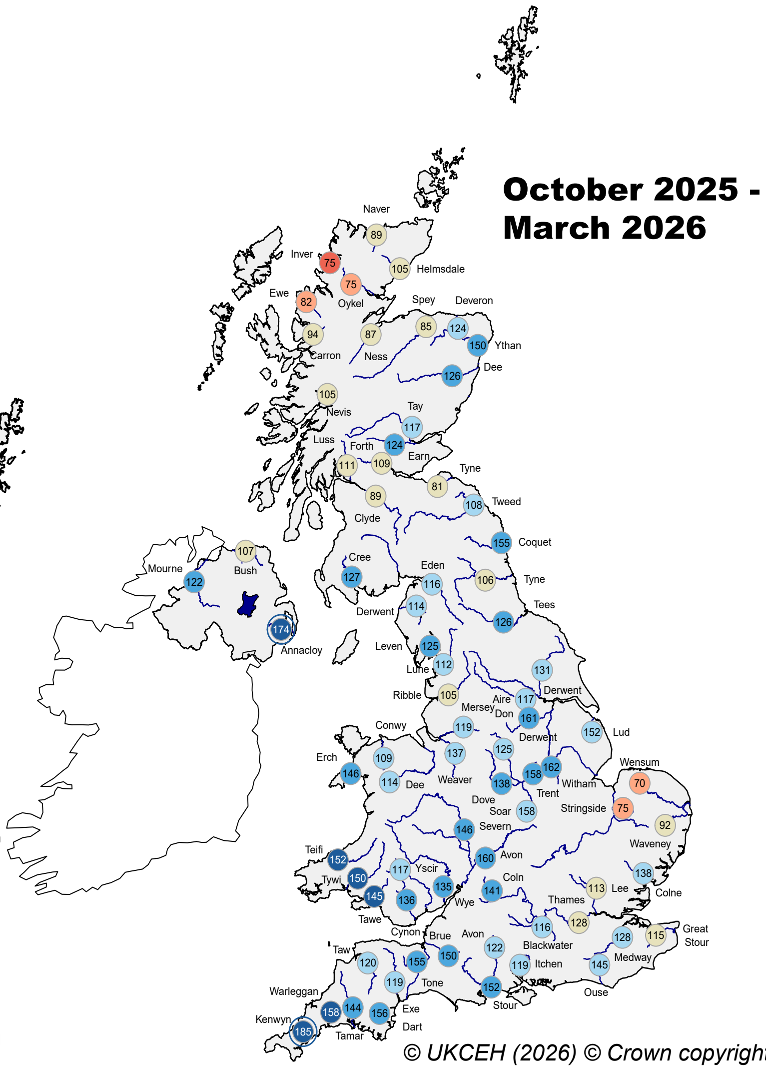
The complete version of the Hydrological Outlook UK can be found at: www.hydoutuk.net/latest-outlook/

Period: from April 2026
Issued: 09.04.2026
using data to the end of March 2026

Low rainfall across much of England and Wales has led to river flows that are normal in most areas, while higher rainfall in western Scotland and north-west England means that river flows in these areas are above normal. These patterns are expected to persist through April, with flows in much of England, Wales and Northern Ireland likely to decline to the normal or below normal ranges. Groundwater levels are likely to remain high through April and decline to normal over the following months.

River flow

October 2025 - March 2026



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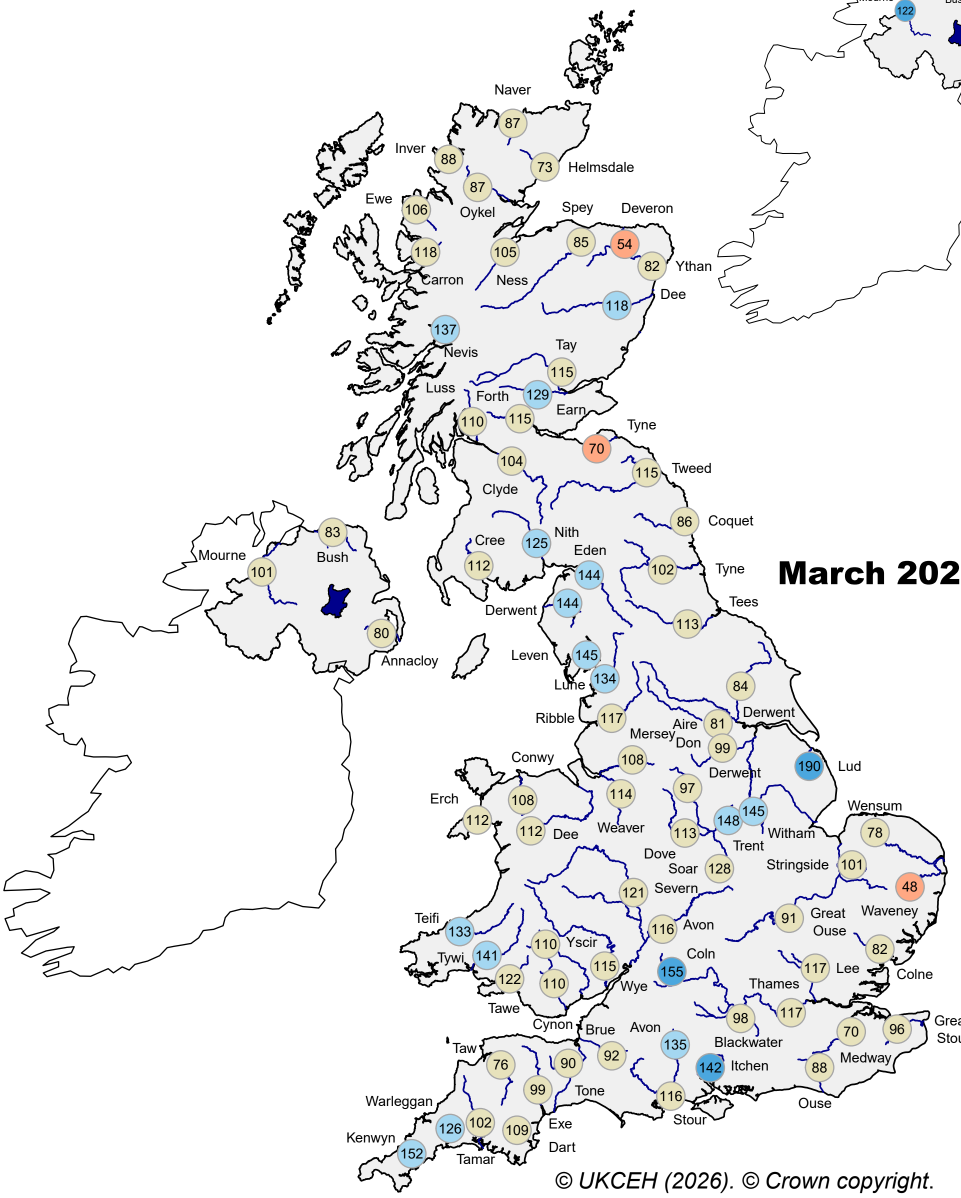
March 2026



Key

- 25 — % of 1991−2020 average (record high/low when circled)
- Exceptionally high flow
- Notably high flow
- Above normal
- Normal range
- Below normal
- Notably low flow
- Exceptionally low flow

*Based on period−of−record ranking of the monthly flow**

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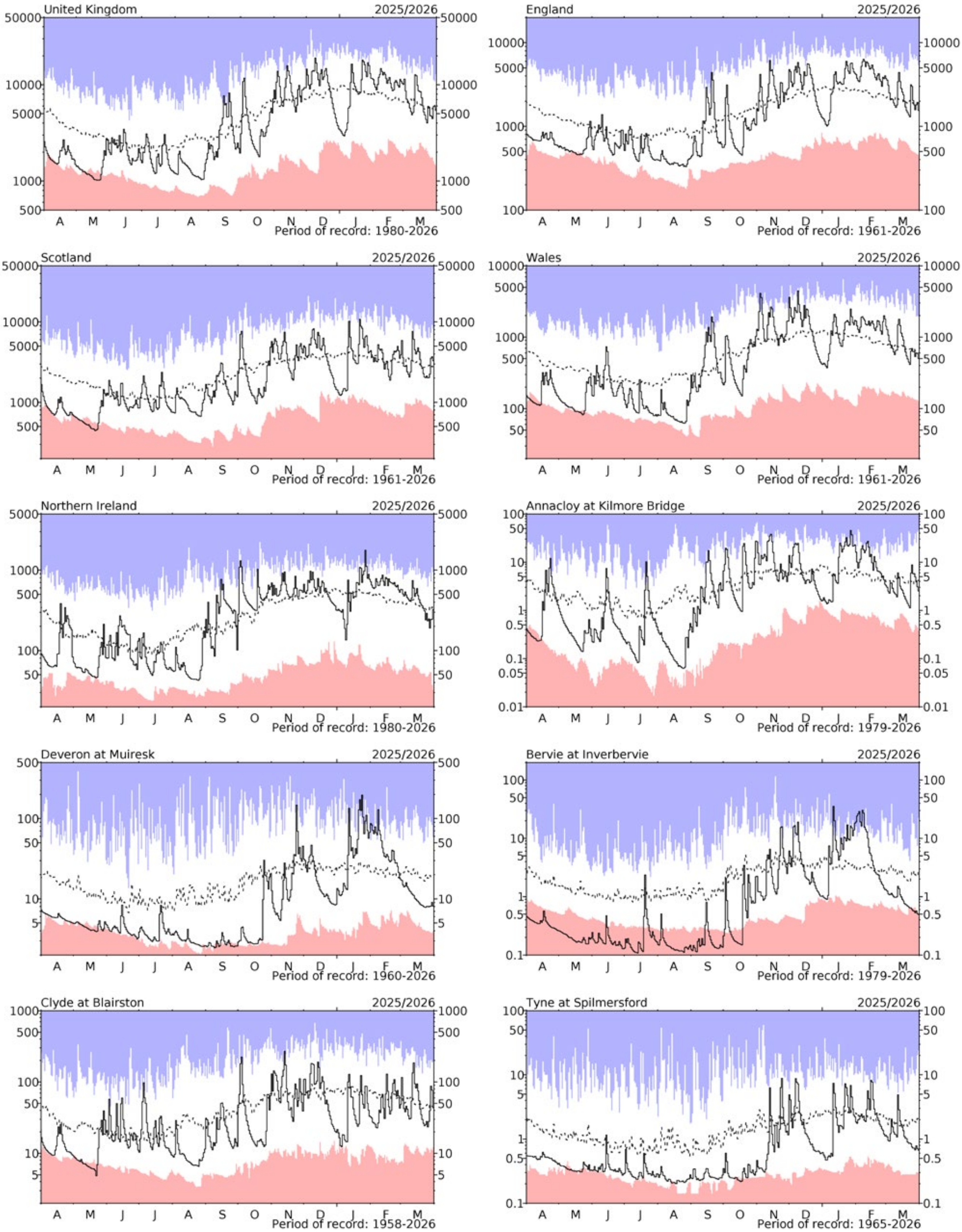
River flows

*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.

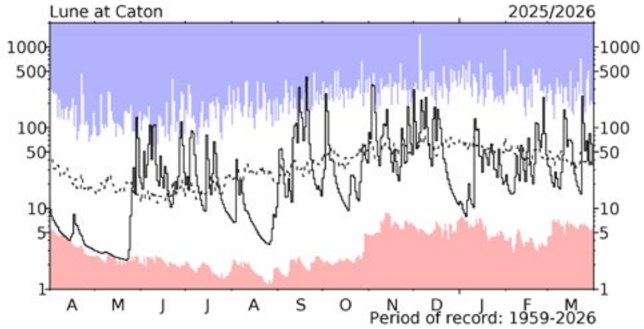
River flow

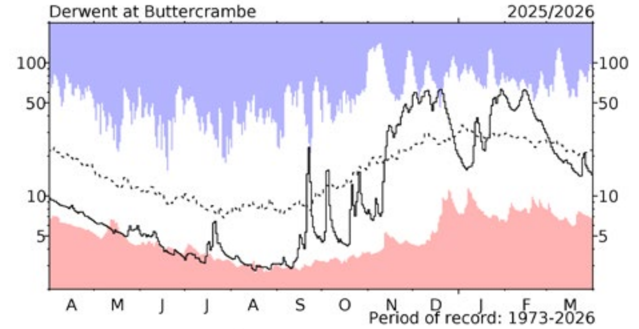


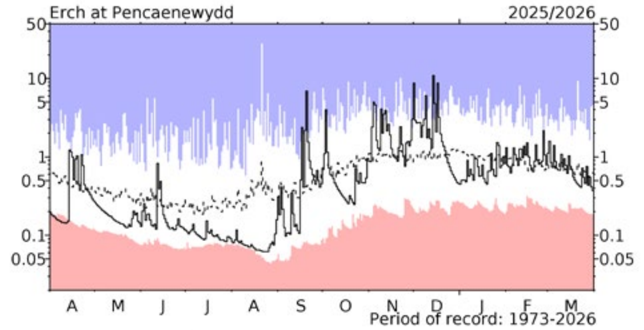
River flow hydrographs

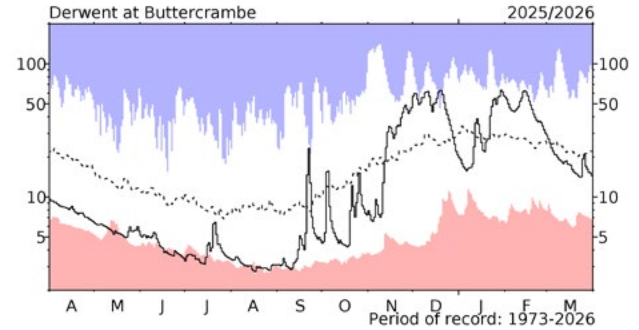
*The river flow hydrographs show the daily mean flows (measured in m^3s^{-1}) together with the maximum and minimum daily flows prior to April 2025 (shown by the shaded areas). Daily flows falling outside the maximum/minimum range are indicated where the bold trace enters the shaded areas. The dashed line represents the period-of-record average daily flow.

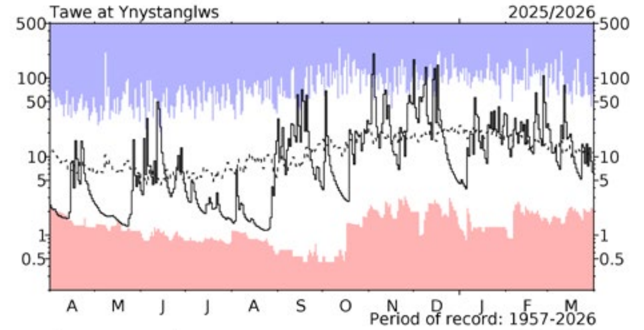
River flow

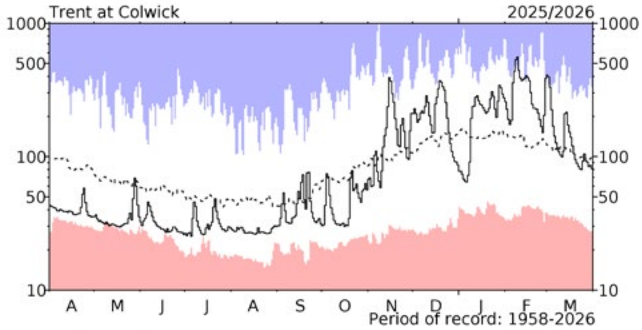

Lune at Caton
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1959-2026

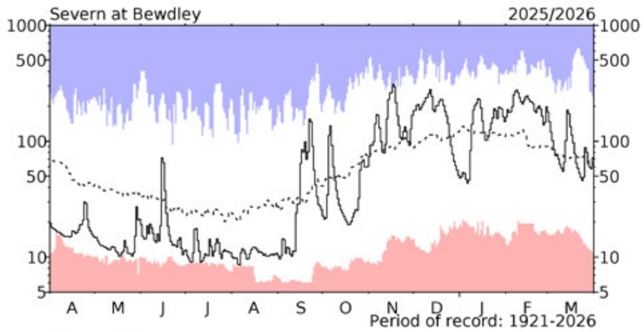

Derwent at Buttercrambe
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1973-2026

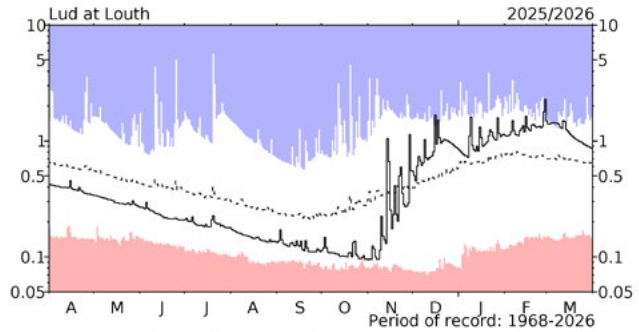

Erch at Pencaenewydd
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1973-2026

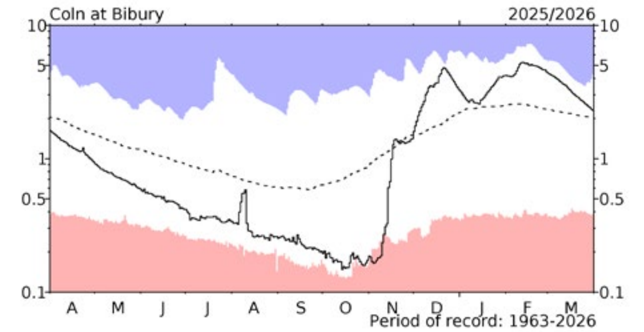

Derwent at Buttercrambe
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1973-2026

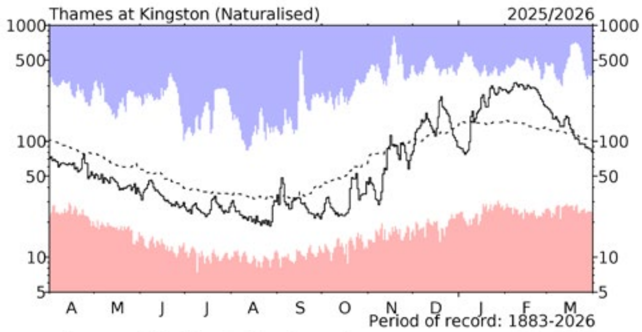

Tawe at Ynystanglws
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1957-2026

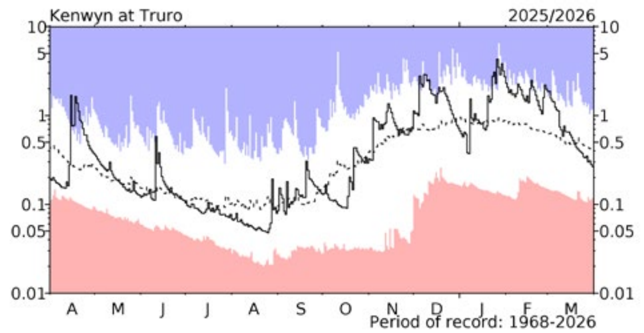

Trent at Colwick
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1958-2026

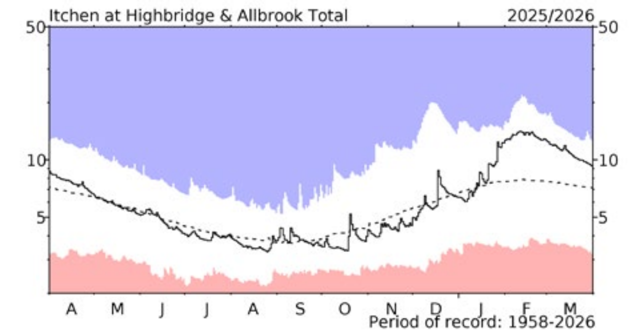

Severn at Bewdley
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1921-2026


Lud at Louth
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1968-2026

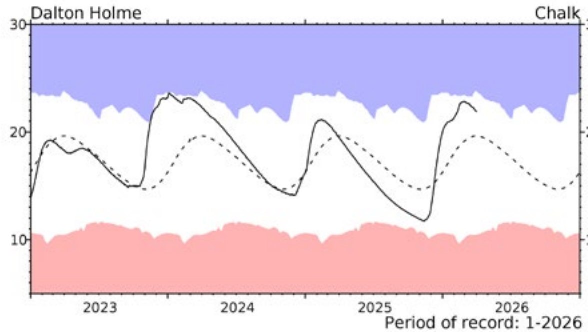

Coln at Bibury
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1963-2026

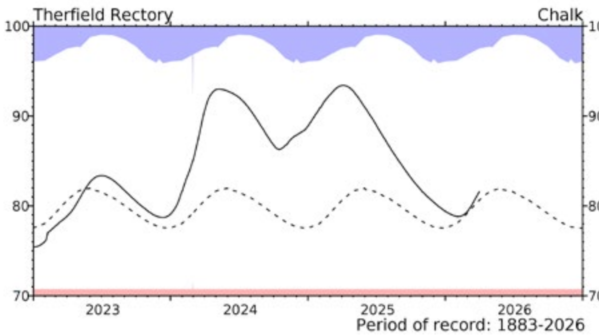

Thames at Kingston (Naturalised)
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1883-2026

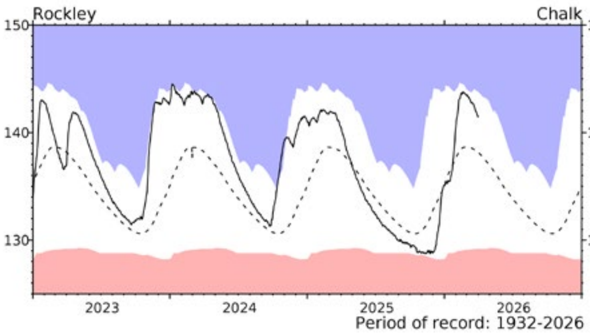

Kenwyn at Truro
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1968-2026

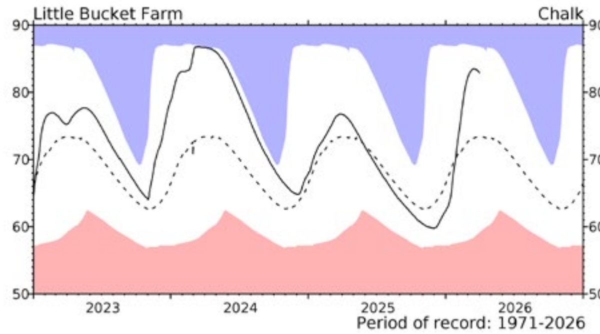

Itchen at Highbridge & Allbrook Total
2025/2026
A M J J A S O N D J F M
Period of record: 1958-2026

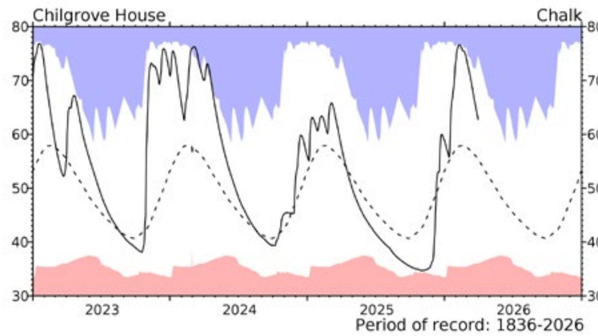
Groundwater

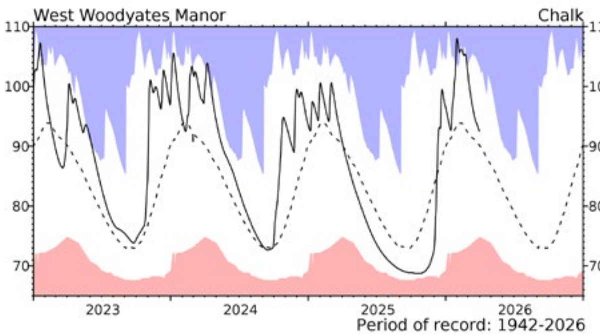


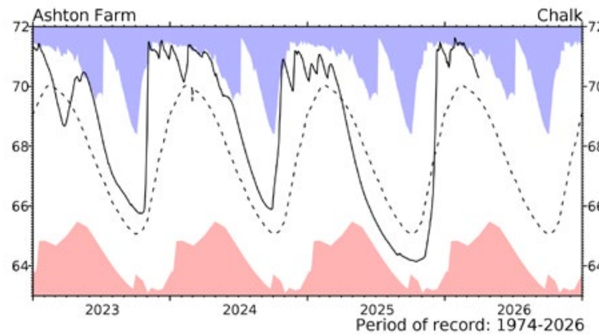


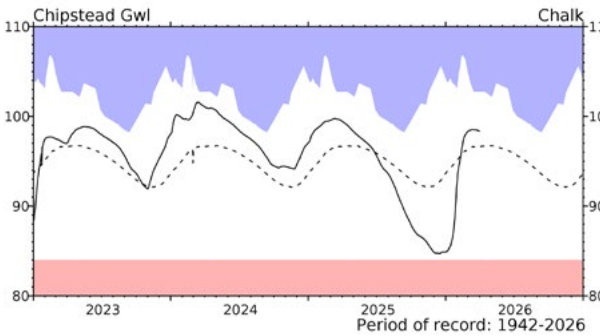


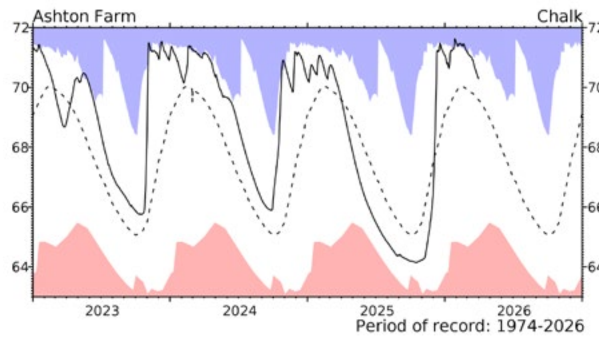


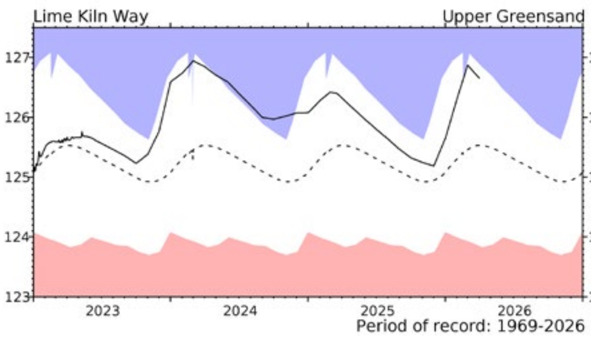






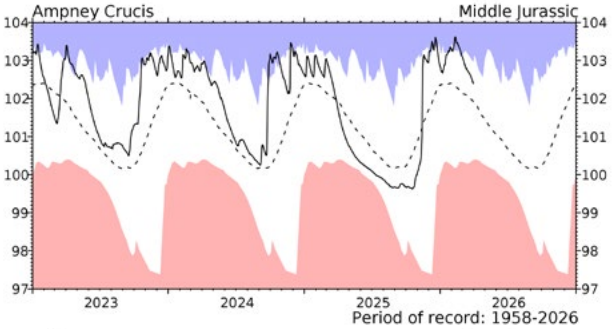


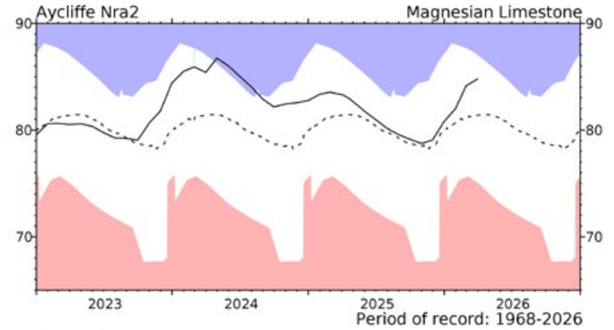


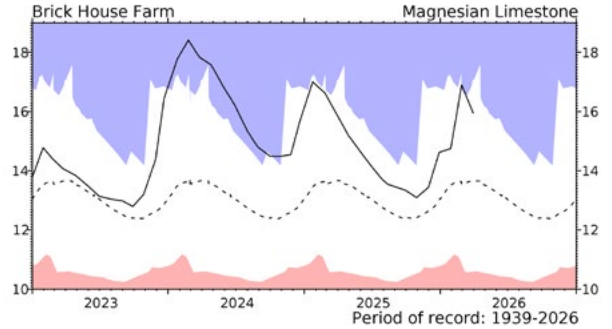


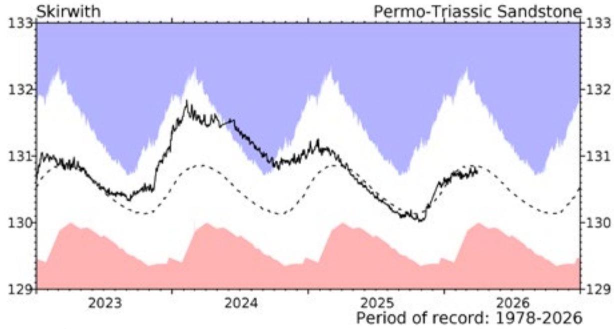
Groundwater levels (measured in metres above ordnance datum) normally rise and fall with the seasons, reaching a peak in the spring following replenishment through the winter (when evaporation losses are low and soil moist). They decline through the summer and early autumn. This seasonal variation is 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 2022. 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.

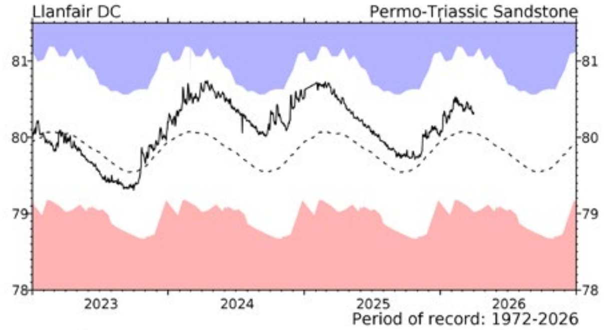
Groundwater

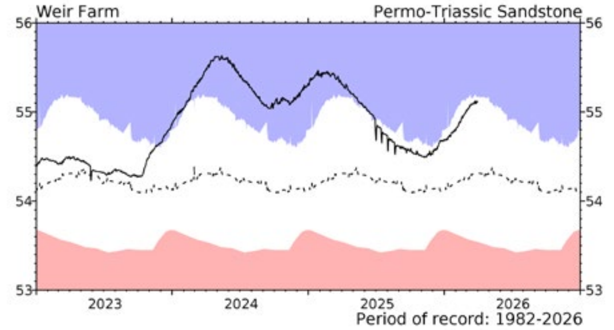


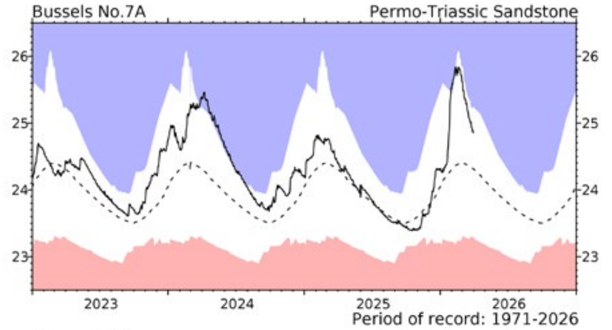


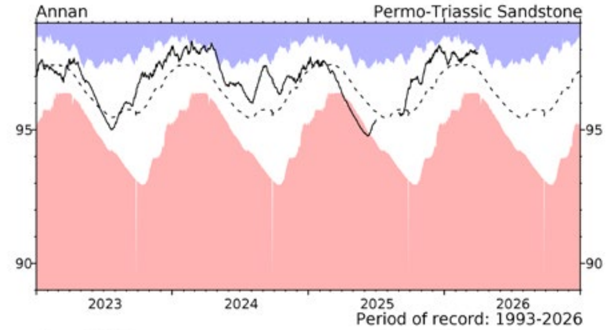


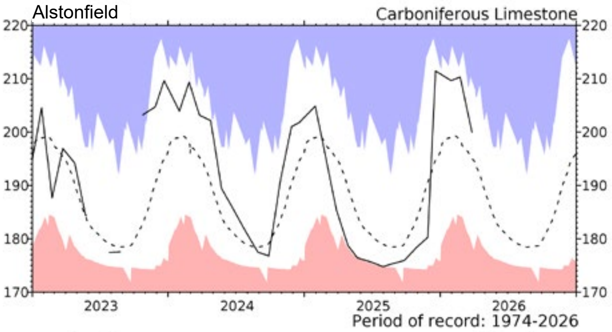


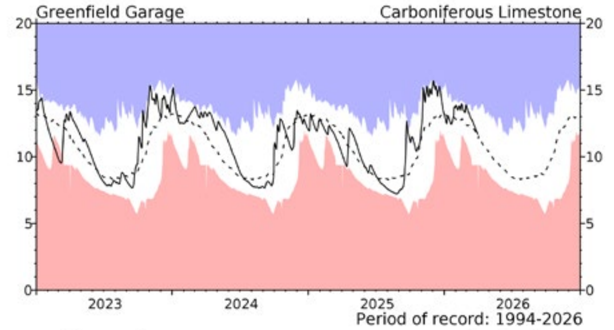


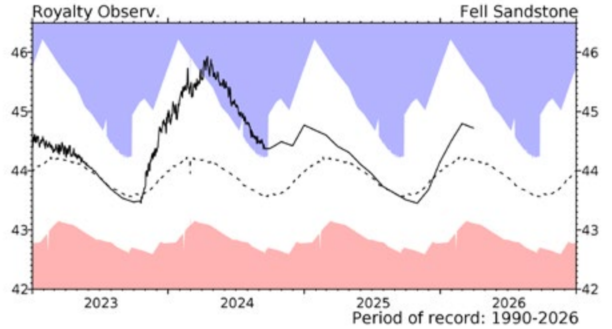


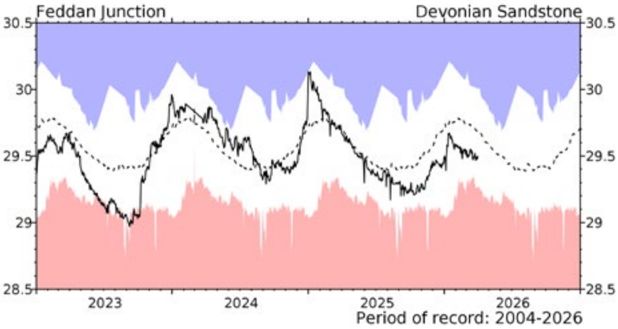




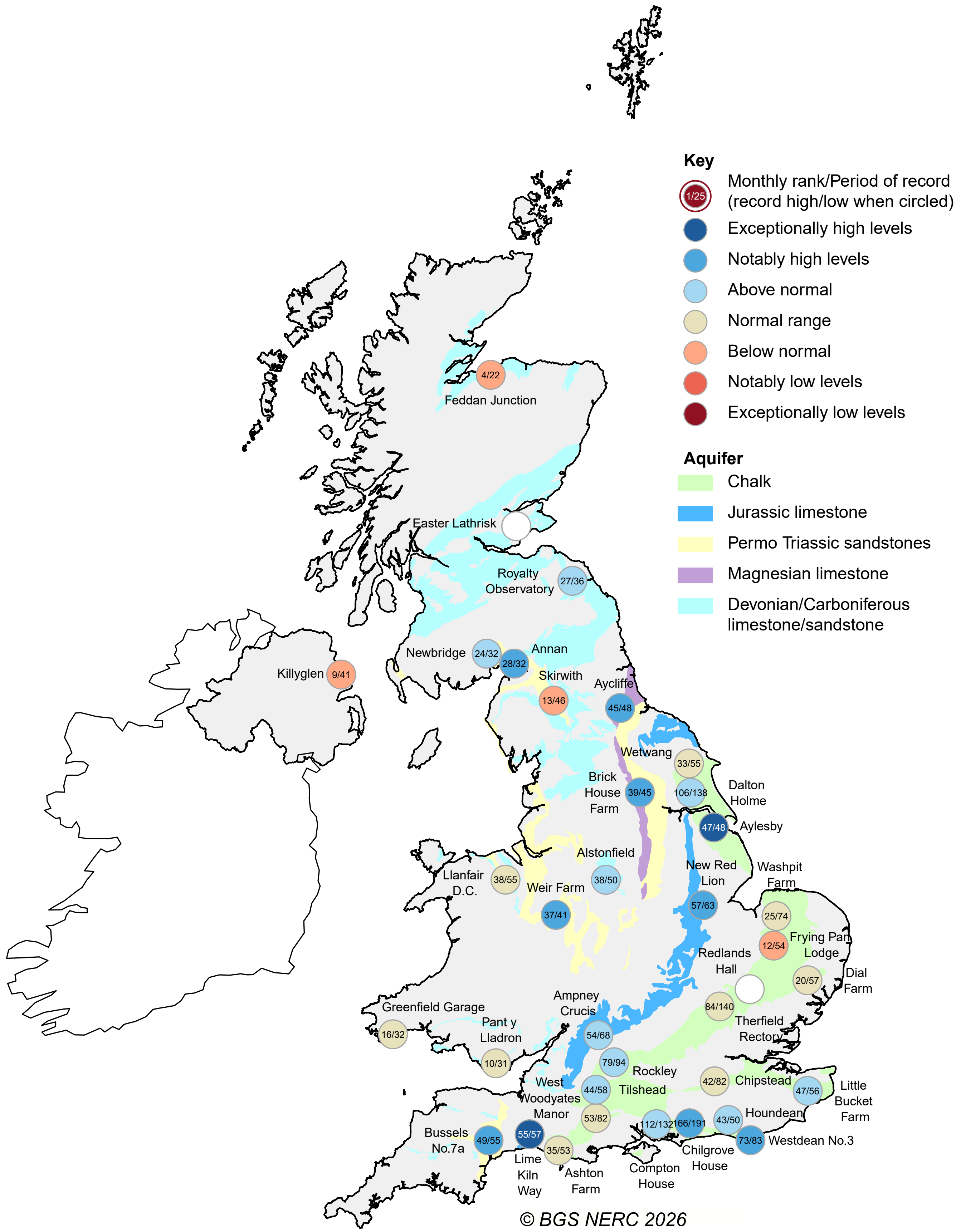








Groundwater

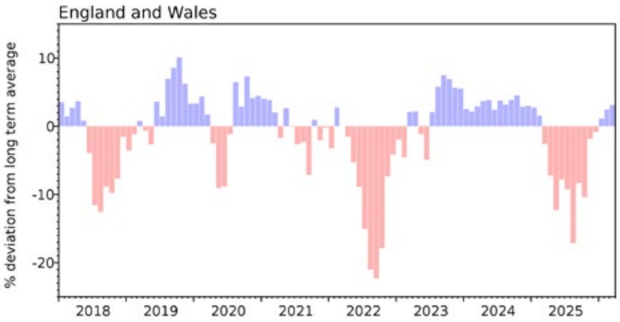


Groundwater levels - March 2026

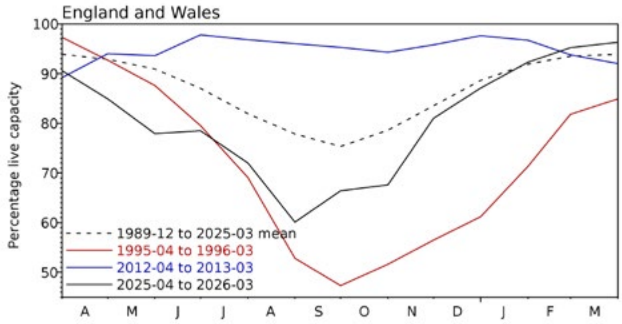
The calculation of ranking has been modified from that used in summaries published prior to October 2012. It is now based on a comparison between the most recent level and levels for the same date during previous years of record. Where appropriate, levels for earlier years may have been interpolated. 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

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

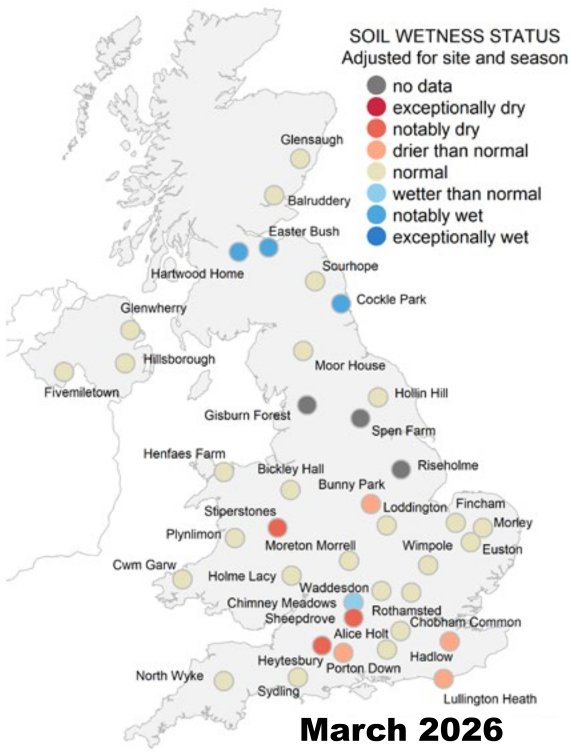
Area	Reservoir		Capacity (Ml)	2026 Jan	2026 Feb	2026 Mar	Mar Anom.	Min Mar	Year* of min	2025 Mar	Diff 26-25
North West	N Command Zone	•	124929	87	93	100	8	77	1993	80	19
	Vyrnwy		55146	100	100	100	4	64	1996	96	4
Northumbrian	Teesdale	•	87936	100	100	99	6	77	2003	87	13
	Kielder		(199175)	91	93	93	1	81	1993	87	6
Severn-Trent	Clywedog		49936	87	94	97	2	86	1996	93	4
	Derwent Valley	•	46692	100	100	99	4	54	1996	86	14
Yorkshire	Washburn	•	23373	96	99	98	4	70	1996	87	10
	Bradford Supply	•	40942	100	100	99	5	59	1996	86	14
Anglian	Grafham		(55490)	74	79	85	-7	77	1997	95	-10
	Rutland		(116580)	92	97	95	3	73	2012	95	0
Thames	London	•	202828	88	90	94	-1	88	1990	94	-1
	Farmoor	•	13822	80	99	99	4	80	2013	99	-1
Southern	Bewl		31000	82	94	99	8	49	2012	94	5
	Ardingly		4685	100	100	100	2	51	2012	100	0
Wessex	Clatworthy		5662	100	100	99	1	82	1992	93	6
	Bristol	•	(38666)	100	100	97	3	71	1992	97	1
South West	Colliford		28540	80	90	92	4	58	1997	87	5
	Roadford		34500	97	100	100	13	37	1996	97	3
	Wimbleball		21320	100	100	99	2	78	1996	97	2
	Stithians		4967	100	100	100	5	52	1992	98	2
Welsh	Celyn & Brenig	•	131155	90	94	95	-2	72	1996	86	9
	Brianne		62140	100	100	100	2	90	1993	95	5
	Big Five	•	69762	97	100	99	3	78	1993	94	5
	Elan Valley	•	99106	100	100	100	2	89	1993	92	8
Scotland(E)	Edinburgh/Mid-Lothian	•	97223	94	97	98	2	71	1998	91	7
	East Lothian	•	9317	100	99	99	0	95	2025	95	4
Scotland(W)	Loch Katrine	•	110326	98	97	96	3	74	2010	91	5
	Daer		22494	100	100	100	4	77	2013	86	14
	Loch Thom		10721	100	100	100	4	83	2020	93	7
Northern Ireland	Total+	•	56800	100	98	96	4	83	2002	87	9
	Silent Valley	•	20634	100	100	99	10	57	2000	91	9

( ) 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.

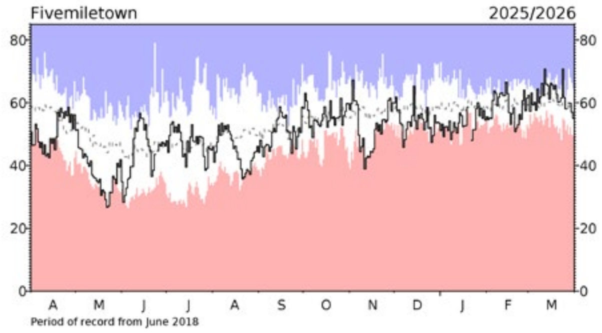
Soil Moisture

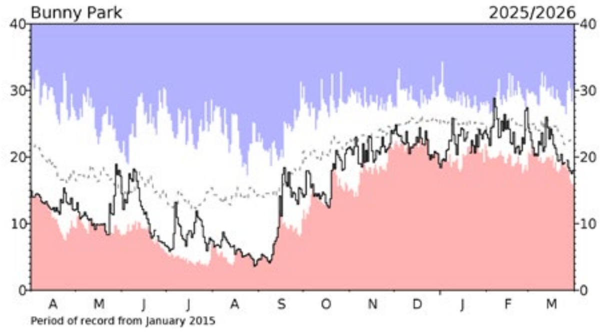


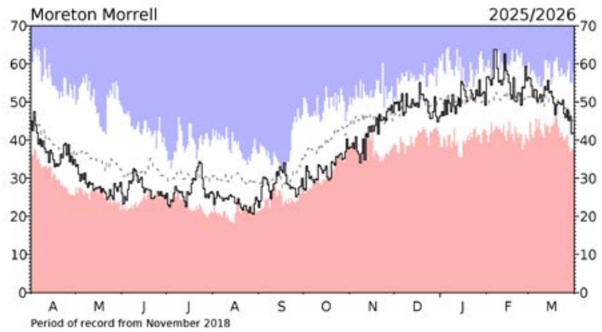
Daily mean soil moisture status at COSMOS-UK sites on the last day of the month 31 March 2026. Soil wetness categories are adjusted for site specific characteristics, i.e. taking account of the possible range of soil wetness at each site, determined through period-of-record data and hindcast modelling. Where no data are available on the last day of the month, these are shown by grey dots.

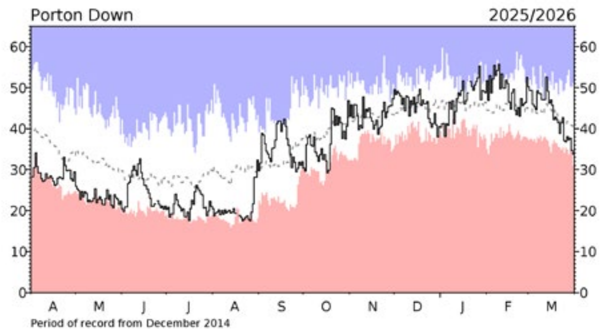
Soil moisture dropped across the Midlands, the South of England, and Wales, with the majority of sites in these areas now sitting below field capacity. Some of the sharpest declines in soil moisture could be seen at sites such as Bunny Park, Euston, Hadlow College, Porton Down and Rothamsted. Sites situated in the North of England, Scotland and Ireland maintained soil moisture levels similar to those seen last month, with only two exceptions (Balruddery and Fivemiletown).

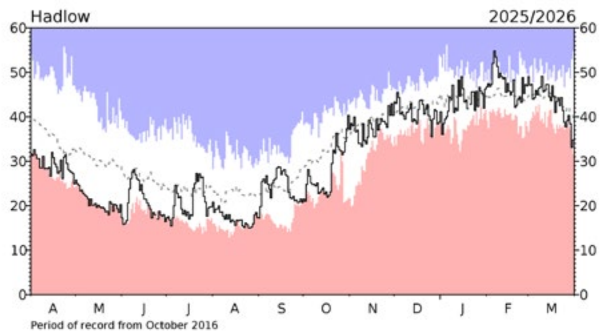
Above average temperatures throughout the UK and below average rainfall across the South has led to much of the network drying noticeably in comparison to the previous two wet months.











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/Y006208/1 as part of the NC-UK 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. These are provisional totals calculated from a sub set of Met Office registered gauges and will be subject to change once data from the complete network of Met Office registered gauges has been quality assured and gridded within the annual process of updating the HadUK-Grid dataset.

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