

MAY STATISTICS RECORDED AT LERWICK OBSERVATORY

	May 2008	Averages 1971-2000
Mean maximum temperature	11.7°C	10.2°C
Mean minimum temperature	6.5°C	5.2°C
Daily mean temperature	9.1°C	7.6°C
Mean sea-level pressure	1021.3 hPa (mb)	1013.8 hPa (mb)
Total rainfall	7.4 mm	53.6 mm
Wet days => 1 mm	3 days	10.1 days
Sunshine	242.9 hours	168.3 hours
Air frosts	0 days	0.5 days
Ground frosts	2 days	4.8 days
Snow/sleet	0 days	2.2 days
Days with gale	0 days	0.6 days
Maximum daily mean temp.	11.4°C on 29 th	
Minimum daily mean temp.	6.3°C on 18 th	
Highest maximum	15.1°C on 5 th	
Lowest day maximum	9.1°C on 18 th , 20 th	
Highest night minimum	10.5°C on 29 th	
Lowest minimum	2.8°C on 21 st	
Lowest grass minimum	-1.8°C on 21 st , 22 nd	
Wettest day	1.6 mm on 19 th	
Sunniest day	15.8 hours on 26 th	
Highest mean hourly wind	23 knots on 1 st , 28 th	
Highest gust	34 knots on 28 th	

DRY, WARM AND SUNNY

For most of the month pressure was well above normal over Scotland, the Norwegian Sea, Iceland and Greenland. It was below normal over southern Britain, much of France and Iberia. The Azores anticyclone was also weaker than usual. This situation produced a markedly SE to E'ly airflow across the British Isles, the strongest such in a record extending back some 136 years. As a result, it was the warmest and driest May on record in many parts of Scotland, Northern Ireland and northwest England, and it was also the sunniest locally in northern Scotland.

For Lerwick this was the driest May on record, marginally drier than the same month in 1951, when 7.5 mm were measured. Fair Isle had its sunniest month ever with 304.7 hours, an average of almost 10 hours a day! This easily beat the previous record of 278.1 hours in May 1994. Fair Isle was also hoping for its driest May, but very welcome rain towards the end of the month saw the amount rise from 1.9 mm by the 28th to a total of 7.7mm. The driest month ever on Fair Isle was April 1974 when a mere 1.0 mm of rain fell. However, with a record extending back many more years, Lerwick can beat this with August 1947, when just 0.7 mm of rain fell. Their sunniest month was May 1948 with 271.5 hours.

At the other end of the country, the exceptional rains of the last week across southern areas of England and Wales resulted in it being the third consecutive very wet May there, with 180mm at Princetown (Devon) and 162mm at Manston (Kent).

Overnight rain cleared Shetland on the 1st to leave a mostly dry, bright day with a cool E'ly breeze, as a filling low over the UK drifted west into the Atlantic. A showery trough swinging round the decaying low brought some evening rain. The 2nd, with pressure building to the east, was dry and mainly sunny with a light SE'ly wind. This steadily strengthened during the next couple of days, with Atlantic fronts - making slow progress against a blocking anticyclone developing to the east - eventually bringing some rain by the evening of the 4th,

During the next few days the anticyclone remained slow-moving over the North Sea. A light ESE'ly wind brought rather cloudy conditions with hill and some coastal fog patches on the 5th, and also some rain early on the 6th. However, the 7th, 8th and 9th were dry and mainly sunny, though with a freshening SE'ly wind.

The anticyclone then relaxed eastwards, allowing a weak cold front to move east over northeast Scotland, bringing some rain and misty conditions on the 10th. Though the rain soon cleared it remained cloudy, with the moderate to light SE'ly winds working round into the NW and eventually NE by the 11th, as a new high developed east of Iceland. This remained slow-moving over the Norwegian Sea on the 12th, a fresh NE'ly airflow bringing brighter conditions south across Shetland later in the day.

The 12th, 13th and 14th were fine, dry days, with moderate SE'ly winds becoming NW'ly as the high drifted south just to the west of Shetland. The NW'ly airflow around the high brought moist, generally cloudy conditions with a little patchy light drizzle on the 15th. With pressure falling over Scandinavia, a cold front moved south from the Norwegian Sea in a freshening N'ly airflow on the 16th, bringing cool and cloudy conditions, some showery rain and a little hail. With a shallow low over southern Sweden and a ridge of high pressure building southeast from Iceland, a cool, showery N'ly airflow persisted until the 19th.

The 20th became drier and brighter as a ridge of high pressure extended southeast across Scotland, bringing a cool N to NE'ly airflow to Shetland. This veered to a light E'ly by the 21st, as an anticyclone developed over the northern Norwegian Sea. Under clear skies and light winds, both the 21st and 22nd saw an early grass frost in places. With the anticyclone slow-moving to the north, Shetland continued to see dry and clear conditions with mainly light E'ly to NE'ly winds - slightly fresher at times through the Fair Isle Channel - from the 22nd - 28th.

On the 29th E'ly winds freshened, with outbreaks of rain spreading from the south and east as a shallow low over Scotland drifted northwest. This cleared later as associated fronts moved north and easing winds veered S'ly.

Though pressure began to build across the Northern Isles, the low - moving away towards Iceland - carried a weak front through the Shetland area and brought some patchy rain on the 30th and 31st.

Dave Wheeler

Initial Statistical details for Scotland as a whole (1961-1990 average) for May:

Mean Temperature – 10.5°C (2.2°C above average). Warmest May in series. Previous warmest were May 1992 & May 1919, when 10.4 °C was recorded.

Rainfall – 29.6 mm (34% of average). Fourth driest May in series and driest since 1994, when 28.7 mm was recorded.

Sunshine – 212.4 hours (128% of average). Sunniest since 2000, when 234.9 hours was recorded.
(These figures may be revised as late data becomes available)

Data from the UK Met Office