

FEBRUARY 2003 (2)

The new week saw a reversal in conditions as winds turned westerly bringing in milder air from the Atlantic, quickly raising temperatures to more normal levels. Saturday the 22nd brought clear skies at dawn that quickly gave rise to radiation fog becoming quite dense by 09.00 hr. Once dispersed, the remainder of the day was sunny with 5 hours recorded, temperatures rising to 8.0°C/46.4°F during the afternoon. The evening saw slight ground

frost, followed by a further slight ground frost on both the 23rd and 25th. Days became quite spring-like with afternoon maxima on the 23rd rising to 13.5°C/56.3°F with 3.3 hours of bright sunshine. The dry spell

that had lasted from the 13th ended on the 22nd with just 0.2mm/0.01in of rain followed by a more substantial fall of 3.2mm/0.13in on the 23rd. The remainder of the month was warm but unsettled as the country was bathed in a mainly westerly airflow, sunshine reaching 6.7 hours on the 25th that was another very pleasant day. The 28th saw a fall of 9.1mm/0.36in of rain, the heaviest of the month. Temperatures did remain well up on the whole with just 3 ground frosts in the final week of the month, which also saw 20.2 hours of sunshine.

FEBRUARY SUMMARY.

February was cooler than the last few years, the highest maximum of 13.5°C/56.3°F being 0.9°C below last year but still 1.3°C above the 30-year mean giving the same overall

value as in 1999. The mean minimum temperature recorded, of -0.3°C/31.5°F, was the lowest since 1996 due to the large amount of frost we had. This led to a mean daily temperature of 3.5°C/38.3°F, also the lowest since 1996. In all there were 14 air frosts, well above the last few years and these lasted for a total of 428.3 hours. Ground frosts numbered 21, also the worst since 1996 and 4 above average. The worst consecutive spell of air frost was from February 14th to February 20th inclusive, whilst that on the ground lasted from February 10th to February 23rd inclusive. Despite all of this the only temperature to produce a negative anomaly was the mean minimum, and that by just -0.7°C.

It was a very dry month with 29.9mm/1.18in rain giving the driest February since 1998 [14.1mm]. This rain fell at the beginning and end of the month, the mid part being relatively dry with no measurable rain from the 13th to the 21st inclusive. The wettest day was the 28th with 9.1mm/0.36in of rain. Rain fell on 15 days, the lowest number since the 5 in 1998 and 1 above average, though most of this was light. Indeed, just 6 days were "wet" [$>1\text{mm}/0.04\text{in}$] and 2 "wetter" [$>5\text{mm}/0.20\text{in}$]. In all, the month's fall was roughly half of expectation. Rain was falling over a period of 36.5 hours with the most intense rain being at 34mm/1.34in per hour on the 2nd.

Snowflakes were observed on 5 days though snow lay at 9 hr on just 2 days [5th and 6th] and then less than 1cm deep. This was the worst period of

snow since the 7 occasions with lying snow in 1996.

The month was much sunnier than average by over 57% making it the best since 2001. It now seems that the winter months are tending towards more sunshine. The next day was the 18th with 9.1 hours making it a "sunny" day and in line with 2001 and 2002. Only 4 days were sunless, the best figures since 1998 [2] and 12 better than average showing again, the trend towards a sunnier season.

Winds were predominantly easterly in February with 10 days from the east and 2 from the southeast averaging 5.4kn/6.2mph with a maximum gust of 36kn/41mph, just 2 days producing gale force gusts. In all, a variable month, drier and sunnier than a normal February, but with several cold spells and markedly cold easterly winds.