

MAY 2003

The new month began untypical of the last few in that heavy rain was seen, continuing the wet spell that had begun on the 24th of April. Indeed, the 1st was the wettest day to have occurred since December 21st 2002 with its 23.8mm/0.94in. *By a strange quirk in the atmosphere, which was unusually clean due to the daily "washing" that it had to contend with for over a week, the global radiation level peaked on the 1st at 1.042 kilowatts per square metre. This was the first time that it had breached the 1-kilowatt per square metre mark since August 13th last year.*

Maximum air temperatures continued in the mid to upper teens, well down on the levels seen mid-April, though normal for the time of year. Nights were also frost-free due to the increased cloud levels over-night thus preventing the wide temperature ranges seen last month. As the end of April and beginning of May saw the height of the Bank Holiday season, much depended on the weather conditions which were, typically, similar to most years, changeable for much of the time!

Winds were westerly and generally light, gusts being in the region of 24 knots/28mph with excellent visibilities on most days. Apart from the 2nd when the visibility was no better than 3km/2miles, on most days early May it was in the region of 40+km/25+miles. Days were, on the whole, warm with ample sunshine, the occasional shower serving to remind us that spring was well on the way. The ten-day period that made early-May was accompanied by quite reasonable daytime maxima in the region of 13C/55.4F to 20C/68F, copious sunshine totalling

71.1 hours and little in the way of rain with a fall of 20.9mm/0.83in, the heaviest daily fall of 14.0mm/0.55in occurring on the 1st.

Overall, winds were westerly on 80% of the days and were light averaging 6kn/7mph with a gust no higher than 25kn/29mph on the 4th and 5th. There was no ground or air frost and an absence of thunder, radiation levels breaching the 1kilowatt per square metre mark on 6 days and peaking at 1.048 kilowatts per square metre on both the 8th and 9th, high levels for early May. With total evaporation at 21.2mm and total rainfall at 23.7mm there was a water surplus of 2.5mm for the 10-day period.

Mid May began in unsettled mood with sunny periods and showers on the 11th, and blustery WSW winds. This was a feature that was to continue right through mid-May, blustery showers and spells of sunshine. During the period temperatures ranged from 16.5C/61.7F on the 18th to -1.2C/29.8F on the 15th, the latter date also providing a grass minimum of -4.0C/24.8F catching many gardeners unawares and burning off much of the bedding out that had already, contrary to advice, been made. Black bulb radiation peaked at 53.7C/128.7F on the 12th though many days mid-month saw maxima in the low to mid forties C.

Rainfall totalled 25.6mm/1.01in of which 6mm/0.27in fell on the 18th, rain actually falling on 90% of the available days amounting to a total of 24 hours. Opposed to this sunshine totalled some 68.2 hours, the 12th seeing 12.5 hours of this. Mid May saw a surplus of water in that evaporation amounted to 21.5mm and rainfall 25.6mm, a surplus of 4.1mm over the ten days.

Winds were from a westerly quarter on 90% of the days and averaged 5.2kn/6.0mph, gusts peaking at 33kn/38mph on May 19th. A damaging thunderstorm occurred on Sunday May 18th at 1750 GMT with hailstones the size of marbles and a nearby lightning strike that took out my automated data recording logger and high-resolution satellite receiving system. The same storm put an elderly lady from Colley Gate in Hospital and removed much of the roof of a nearby house. Weather not at all typical for this time of the year. The final few days of mid-May continued changeable with periods of rain and sunshine, though it remained relatively mild with day maxima in the mid teens Celsius.

Late May was to see further unsettled weather, though we had no further thunder and maximum temperatures climbed gradually reaching 27.0C/80.6F by the 31st. Apart from the 21st, when so sunshine was recorded, days were sunny though not exceptionally so for late spring, though 14.3 hours were recorded on the last day of the month. Black bulb maxima peaked at 57.8C/136.0F on the 31st, the highest figure for the month. The showery activity continued right through the period, just the 25th and 27th being rain-free. The month ended in a much brighter and warmer mood than it began, with daytime temperatures reaching the mid-twenties C by the 29th as a high-pressure ridge extended from the Azores into Scandinavia. Rain that had fallen almost continuously since the beginning of the month petered out on the 27th with a light fall of 0.2mm/0.01in. The month ended in a blaze of summer, with high temperatures, light winds, plentiful sunshine and clear skies.