

Meteorologists meet to mull weird British weather (Update)

June 18 2013, by Jill Lawless



In this Thursday, June 28, 2012 file photo, children play on a stranded car in the flood water as torrential downpours cause flash floods in Jarrow, England. Come rain, wind or sunshine, weather has long been Britain's main topic of conversation. Now it has also become a mystery. Meteorologists and climate scientists are meeting Tuesday to discuss why this country has recently experienced icy winters, washed-out summers and the coldest spring in half a century. Scientist Stephen Belcher, who's chairing the workshop, says its goal is to look at whether the weird weather is the result of "a run of natural variability," or the product of human-driven climate change. (AP Photo/Scott Heppell, File)

Come rain, wind or sunshine, weather has long been one of Britain's main topics of conversation. Now it has also become a mystery.

Meteorologists and climate scientists are meeting Tuesday to discuss why this traditionally temperate country has recently experienced icy winters, washed-out summers and the coldest spring in a half-century.

Scientist Stephen Belcher, who is chairing the workshop organized by Britain's weather-forecasting agency, the Met Office, said its goal is to look at whether the weird weather is the result of "a run of natural variability," or the product of human-driven climate change.

He said one theory is that there is a link between declining Arctic sea ice and the European climate, "but exactly how this process might work, and how important it may be among a host of other factors, remains unclear."

Most scientists agree that the Earth's temperature is increasing because of emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.

The Arctic is getting hotter more quickly than any other part of the globe, and experts predict the region will be free of sea ice during the summer within about 20 years. Sea ice is important because it keeps the rest of the world cooler, and some scientific studies suggest that its melting may be indirectly connected to extreme weather in the U.S. and Europe in the past few years.

Scientists also believe a southern dip in the jet stream, the narrow band of fast-moving wind which flows west to east across the Atlantic, may be partly to blame for some of Britain's cool, wet weather.

Whatever the cause, few would deny Britain's recent weather has been unsettling. In Britain as elsewhere, there is evidence that extreme

weather events such as flood-causing storms are becoming more common.

The winter of 2010 brought snow and ice to areas such as southern England that had long escaped freezing temperatures.

The Met Office says the summer of 2012—a seemingly endless parade of cool, rainy days—was the second-wettest in a century, with June 2012 the wettest June since the 18th century.

This March, April and May were the fifth-coldest spring in national records dating back to 1910 and the coldest since 1962.

The Met Office said Tuesday's meeting is unlikely to provide definitive answers, but could identify fields for further study.

And forecasters had some short-term good news for weather-weary Britons—Wednesday and Thursday are due to be the hottest days of the year so far.

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Citation: Meteorologists meet to mull weird British weather (Update) (2013, June 18) retrieved 28 June 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2013-06-meteorologists-mull-weird-british-weather.html>

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