

Review of Autumn 2008 from Richard Smithers (Conservation Advisor)

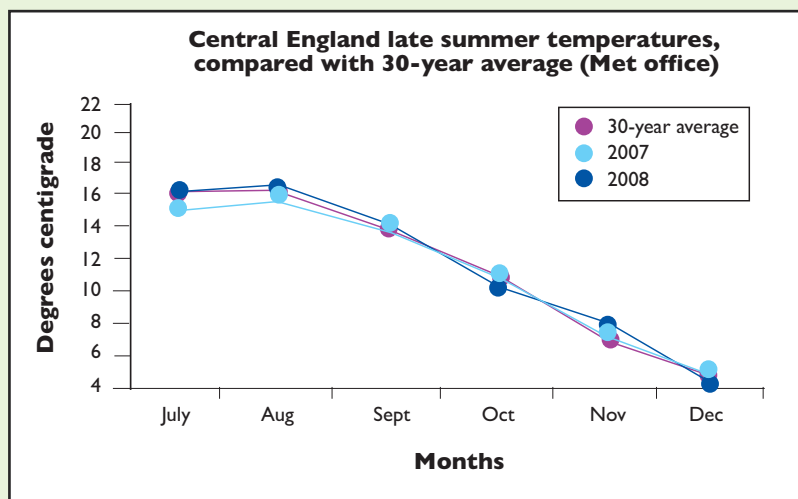
Autumn 2008 results

Advances in the date of spring phenology have been very marked, both in the UK and elsewhere. But changes in autumn phenology have been less clear. Autumn is a harder season to assess because recording has always been less popular than in spring and consequently there are fewer historic dates available.

A total of 34,000 records of individual autumn events were submitted to Nature's Calendar in 2008. This has declined from 48,000 in 2007 and 60,000 in 2006. We particularly need you to continue recording autumn events and to encourage your friends and family to do likewise, so that we can gain as good a grasp of what is happening as in relation to spring events.

Weather

Temperatures in July-December 2008 were very close to the 30-year (1961-90) average, only 0.19 degrees centigrade below it.



Events in 2008 compared to 2007:

Classic autumn events (October-December)

On average:

- Departing migrants left 2 days earlier
- Wintering migrants arrived 3 days later
- First tint, full tint and bare trees all occurred on the same day as in 2007 with leaf fall starting one day earlier

Summer-autumn fruiting (August-September)

On average:

- Fruit ripe was 4 days later

It is thought that later flowering in spring delays fruiting in autumn. Consistent with this idea, January-June 2008 was 0.82 degrees cooler than in 2007, which was the warmest spring on record. Fruiting in 2008 was 19 days earlier than our benchmark year of 2001.



Benchmark years

Last year, we established autumn 2007 as our autumn benchmark for Nature's Calendar, as the period July-December was only 0.04 degrees centigrade above the 30-year (1961-90) average. Spring 2001 acts as our spring benchmark, as the period January-June was only 0.16 degrees centigrade above the 30-year (1961-90) average.

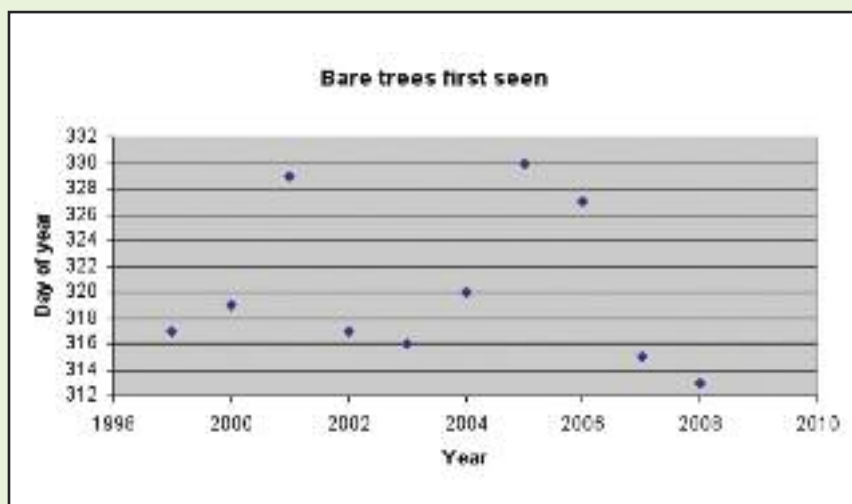
Climate variability

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change agrees that global temperatures are rising and that it is very likely that we are responsible. Not surprisingly many people, therefore, expect each successive year to be warmer than the last and are 'disappointed' when they have to put up with summers like those we experienced in 2007 and 2008. But in truth we have short memories. Every one of the last ten years in the UK has been warmer than the 30-year (1961-90) average, and the summers of 2007 and 2008 were no exception.

The point is that while the world is generally getting hotter, the situation becomes more complicated at a national scale and inevitably we will continue to experience variation in climate from year-to-year. This is well-evidenced by your records and is most noticeable in autumn, for example, in the date when bare trees first seen (see graph below).



WTPL/Anna Badley



It is important to appreciate that your observations do not contradict thinking on global climate change. Although we now have ten years of mass observation data, this is still a relatively short time-series. Unfortunately we have very few long-term records of autumn events but if we look to long-term records of spring events the trends associated with a warming world are all too obvious. This makes it all-the-more vital that you continue to record autumn events and encourage others to do so.



WTPL/Bob Carter



WTPL/Margaret Barton



WTPL/Paul Foster

Our table showing UK average dates for key events is available on request.

Any comments on our new format newsletter? Let us know please by calling 01476 584878 or writing to Kate Lewthwaite, Nature's Calendar, The Woodland Trust, Autumn Park, Grantham, Lincolnshire, NG31 6LL.