

Warning: extreme weather ahead

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Warmer

- What's the weather like today? Is it typical for this time of year?
- Describe a typical British summer. Quickly read paragraphs one and two and compare your answer with the information there.

2 Key words

Write the key words from the article next to the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

crops
reservoirs
drought zone

roller coaster
sceptics
unprecedented

freak
floods
heatwave

trends
wildfires
mild

- fires that start in an area of countryside and spread very quickly _____ (subtitle)
- large amounts of water that cover areas that were dry before _____ (subtitle)
- very unusual _____ (subtitle)
- an area that has experienced a long period of time with little or no rain _____ (para 1)
- a situation in which there are many big and sudden changes; compared to a fairground ride _____ (para 2)
- weather that is warm and pleasant, especially warmer than usual for the time of year _____ (para 2)
- never having happened or existed before _____ (para 3)
- plants grown for food, usually on a farm _____ (para 4)
- a period of very hot weather, especially when this is unusual _____ (para 5)
- artificial or natural lakes where water is stored so that it can be supplied to the houses in an area _____ (para 7)
- people who have doubts about things that other people think are true or right _____ (para 12)
- gradual changes _____ (para 12)

Warning: extreme weather ahead

Level 2 • Intermediate

global weirding – a combination of *global warming* + *weird* (*strange and unusual*); the phrase implies that, because of global warming, our weather has become weird.

Warning: extreme weather ahead

Tornados, wildfires, droughts and floods were once seen as freak conditions. But the environmental disasters we now see around the world are shocking signs of 'global weirding'.

John Vidal

13 June, 2011

- 1 There are drought zones across much of England and Wales, but Scotland has just had its wettest May ever. The warmest British spring in 100 years followed one of the coldest UK winters in 300 years. June in London has been colder than March. February was warm on Mount Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales, but in June it snowed there.
- 2 Welcome to the climate roller coaster, or what is being called the "new normal" of weather. British weather was, until quite recently, predictable and mild. It was guaranteed to be warm and wet. Now the seasons are reversed and temperature and rainfall records are broken almost every year. When Kent, in southern England, receives as much rain (four millimetres) in May as Timbuktu, Manchester has more sunshine than Marbella, and soils in southern England are drier than those in Egypt, something is happening.
- 3 Government scientists say the recent weather in Britain is "remarkable", "unprecedented" and "shocking", but this is nothing compared to the weather in other countries recently.
- 4 In 2010, more than two million square kilometres of eastern Europe and Russia experienced extreme heat. An extra 50,000 people died when temperatures stayed more than 6°C above normal for many weeks, crops were destroyed and hundreds of giant wildfires started. The price of wheat and other foods increased, as two thirds of the continent had its hottest summer in around 500 years.
- 5 In 2011, western Europe is having a heatwave, with 16 countries, including France, Switzerland and Germany, experiencing extreme dryness. Large areas of Europe have received less than half the normal rainfall in March, April and May, and temperatures have been much higher than usual for the time of year.
- 6 But for real extremes in 2011, look to Australia, China and the southern US. In Queensland, Australia, an area the size of Germany and France was flooded in December and January. It was called the country's "worst natural disaster".
- 7 In China, a very rare drought in southern and central regions has dried up hundreds of reservoirs, rivers and water courses. The government responded by trying to 'make rain'. It fired thousands of rockets to provide the clouds with chemicals. It may have worked: a record 30 centimetres of rain fell in some places in 24 hours, floods and mudslides killed 94 people, and tens of thousands of people lost their homes.
- 8 Meanwhile, north America had its most deadly and destructive tornado season ever: there were 600 "twisters" just in April. One hundred and thirty-eight people were killed in Joplin, Missouri, by a whirlwind that was one mile wide. Arizonans are fighting some of the largest wildfires they have known, and the greatest flood in recorded US history is occurring along the Missouri river.
- 9 The effects of extreme weather are greater in poorer countries. In Mexico, nearly half the country is now affected by drought. There have already been 9,000 wildfires, and more than 3.5 million farmers cannot feed their cattle or grow crops.
- 10 Wherever you look, there are extreme weather conditions. In 2010, 17 countries experienced record temperatures. Colombia, Peru, Cuba, Kenya, Somalia and many other countries have all registered far more or less rainfall or major heatwaves in the last few years. Temperatures in Bangladesh have been near record highs; Kuwait has seen temperatures above 50°C and Rajasthan in India 49.6°C, while parts of

Warning: extreme weather ahead

Level 2 • Intermediate

Canada, including Toronto, have been extremely hot: a record 33°C.

frequently, they are more extreme and the trends all suggest long-term change.

11 Rich countries may suffer less in the short term because the global trading system guarantees food, and access to electricity allows air conditioning. However, in parts of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, millions of people have little or no food left after a series of poor rainy seasons.

13 Droughts and heatwaves, deeper snowfalls, more widespread flooding, heavier rains, and temperature extremes are now the "new normal". Analysis of natural disasters in 140 countries shows that climate is becoming more extreme.

12 Sceptics argue that there have always been droughts and floods, freak weather, heatwaves and temperature extremes. But most climate scientists and observers are worried because the extreme weather events are occurring more

14 "I think that 'global weirding' is the best way to describe what we're seeing" says climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe of Texas Tech University.

© Guardian News and Media 2011

First published in *The Guardian*, 13/06/11

3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article?

1. The whole of Britain is currently suffering from drought conditions.
2. In the past, British weather was quite predictable.
3. In May 2011, parts of southern England received the same amount of rain as parts of Africa.
4. In the summer of 2010, people in Russia set fire to their ruined crops.
5. The biggest temperature extremes can be seen in Scotland.
6. The Chinese shot rockets into clouds to try to make rain.
7. Thousands of people lost their homes in the mudslide caused by the rain.
8. In the US, 600 people were killed by tornadoes in 2011.
9. Sceptics say that the weather has always been like this.
10. Although there are a lot of extreme weather events, there is no evidence that our climate has become more extreme.

Warning: extreme weather ahead

Level 2 • Intermediate

4 Weather-related vocabulary

Put a tick if the type of weather or weather-related event in the left-hand column *always* contains the conditions on the right. Put a question mark if it *sometimes* contains them. Put a cross if it *never* contains them.

	hot	cold	dry	wet	windy
e.g. drought	✓	X	✓	X	?
flood					
tornado					
heatwave					
snowfall					
mudslide					
wildfire					

Now add some more weather or weather-related events that you know but that are not in the article.

5 Discussion

- Have you noticed or experienced 'global weirding' in the past few years? Do you believe it exists?
- Have the weather patterns changed since you were a child?

6 Webquest

- Go to the BBC website and look at the forecast for your area: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/>
Read the weather news and the section about climate change. Find out if any weather warnings have been issued.
- Read about your country's weather in the country guides:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/hi/country_guides. Does this describe the weather you have had recently?

Warning: extreme weather ahead

Level 2 • Intermediate

KEY

2 Key words

1. wildfires
2. floods
3. freak
4. drought zone
5. roller coaster
6. mild
7. unprecedented
8. crops
9. heatwave
10. reservoirs
11. sceptics
12. trends

3 Comprehension check

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. F
6. T
7. T
8. F
9. T
10. F

4 Weather-related vocabulary

Teacher's note: Allow a certain amount of flexibility with the answers to this task and turn any uncertainty into a point of discussion. Encourage students to look up the definitions of these weather situations in their dictionaries.

	hot	cold	dry	wet	windy
<i>e.g. drought</i>	✓	X	✓	X	?
flood	?	?	X	✓	?
tornado	?	?	?	?	✓
heatwave	✓	X	?	?	?
snowfall	X	✓	X	?	?
mudslide	?	?	X	✓	?
wildfire	✓	X	✓	X	?