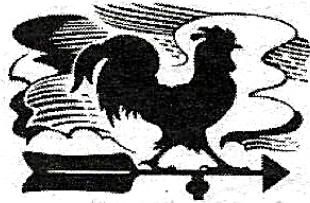


Weather Eye

Paul Simons



May wasn't just the sunniest May in UK records, it was the sunniest of any month of any year. There were an average of 266 hours of sunshine across the UK in May, beating the record of 265 hours in June 1957.

The sunniest place of all in May was Bournemouth, although this comes from a limited survey of 48 weather stations across the UK that have reported sunshine statistics. The weather station at Bournemouth Airport recorded 339.5 hours of sunshine in May, which smashed their previous sunniest month, June 1975, which had 320.1 hours. May's sunshine was 70 per cent of the maximum possible for the month, making an average of 11 hours each day and, hardly surprisingly, without any completely dull days. Bournemouth's average for May is 218.5 hours sunshine.

Bournemouth is rightly proud of its climate, with some of the sunniest weather of the UK. That is thanks partly to its own special micro-climate, as the Purbeck Hills to the west help to protect the resort from wet westerly winds.

There have been clashes with the Met Office in the past over erroneous weather forecasts. In 2010, the late May bank holiday was forecast to have heavy thundery downpours of rain, and as a result an estimated 25,000 people avoided visiting the resort. It turned out to be a magnificently hot sunny day without a drop of rain. The beaches were left deserted and the town lost an estimated £1 million or more in revenue. It was the last straw, and Bournemouth council invested in its own weather forecasting service from a local company.

The experience highlighted fierce competition in sunshine statistics for resorts along the south coast and beyond. In 2012 Eastbourne claimed the title of sunniest place in the UK, but that raised the hackles of Jersey, which claimed to be sunnier, although the Channel Islands are part of the British Isles, not the UK. Bognor Regis could also lay claim to sunniest place in the UK, with 1,902 hours of sunshine each year.