

The Great British Weather of 2018 – how did forest nursery crops respond?

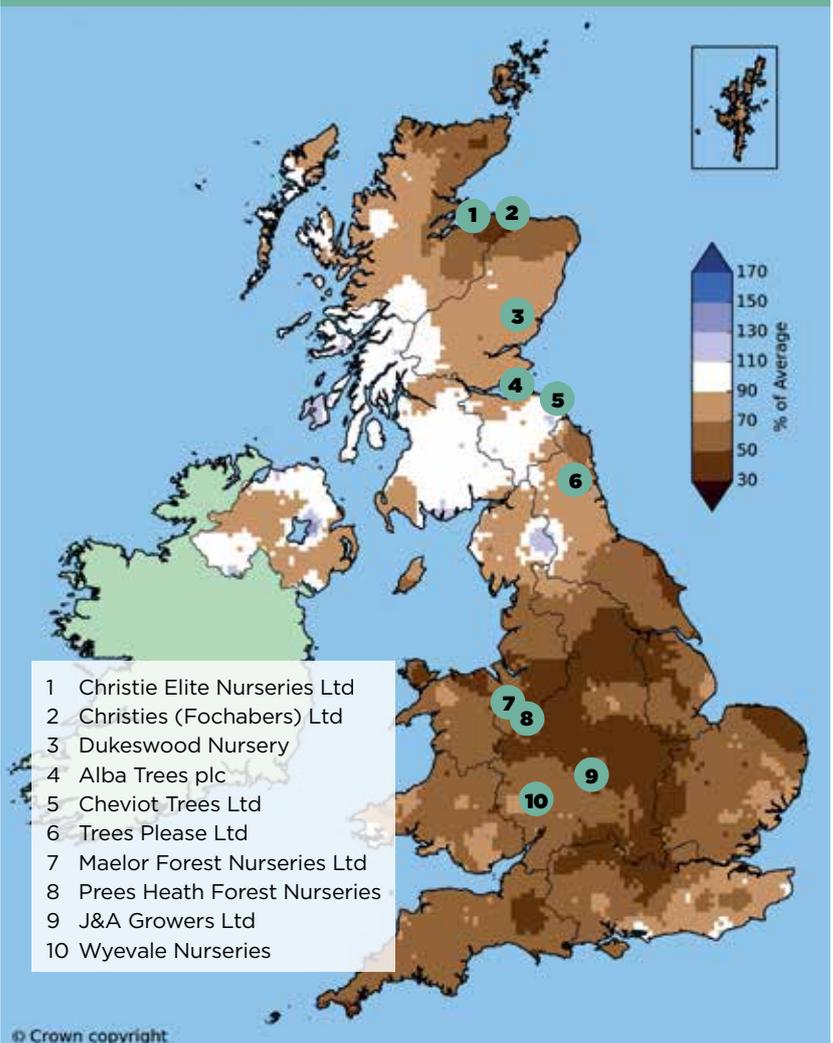
by **Alice Snowden**, Cheviot Trees

It seems to be more and more frequently we experience record breaking extreme weather; the hottest season since here, the driest season since there, and so on. Is this a worrying trend, does it have a real impact on nursery production and planting stock availability? We cannot control it but we see each year how the weather impacts our crops on the forest nurseries, and as growers we respond as we can. 2018 has undoubtedly provided us with a range of challenges thus far! The industry-wide increase in nursery tree production means more trees will be planted this season than for many recent years; what can we expect from this year's planting stock?

The 'Beast from the East' in March was followed by such an unusually late spring, possibly the latest we've seen for decades. The cold temperatures meant that bud burst was delayed. Was this a good thing? Well, it is always a trade-off between gaining the longest possible growing season versus growing too early and have the new growth caught and damaged by late spring frosts. Late bud burst and avoidance of spring frosts is good for tree quality and form, although slightly at the expense of height.

Summer was dry. So, so dry. When it arrived, it was hot and dry. Nurseries up and down the UK were depending on their irrigation systems almost like never before. What does this mean for the tree crops? Our bareroot seedbeds and container grown crops generally have permanent/semi-permanent sprinkler or gantry systems in place. Lots of hard work for the watering staff but it was possible to germinate and start the crops off reasonably. With lots of early warmth and water the new sown crops began the season well enough. Heat stress soon kicked in however and many crops stopped growing partway through summer this year. Irrigation is

Met Office Summer 2018 rainfall amount % of 1981-2010 average showing position of nurseries



- 1 Christie Elite Nurseries Ltd
- 2 Christies (Fochabers) Ltd
- 3 Dukeswood Nursery
- 4 Alba Trees plc
- 5 Cheviot Trees Ltd
- 6 Trees Please Ltd
- 7 Maelor Forest Nurseries Ltd
- 8 Prees Heath Forest Nurseries
- 9 J&A Growers Ltd
- 10 Wyevale Nurseries



The 'Beast from the East' was followed by an unusually late spring and then a dry summer which called for heavy irrigation.