Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World
Week ending Friday, October 5, 2018

Cats vs. Rats

The first study to look at how talented feral cats are at killing wild rats found that the felines just aren’t very good at that task.

Writing in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, lead researcher Michael H. Parsons of Fordham University said the findings add to the growing evidence that any benefit of using cats to control city rats is outweighed by the threat they pose to birds and other urban wildlife.

Earlier studies found that cats prefer smaller, defenseless prey such as birds and smaller native wildlife, which makes cats a threat to urban ecosystems.

Eruptions

Mexico City was dusted by volcanic ash after Popocatepetl volcano produced 183 emissions of ash and vapor during a 24-hour period.

- Mount Soputan spewed ash over Indonesia’s Sulawesi Island following the disastrous magnitude 7.5 quake that struck nearby.

Tropical Cyclones

Powerful Typhoon Trami killed four people and injured more than 120 others as it raked the heart of Japan.

- Typhoon Kong-Rey approached southern Japan and South Korea.
- Hurricanes Walaka and Sergio churned the eastern Pacific, while remnants of Hurricane Rosa unleashed flooding in Mexico and the U.S. Desert Southwest.
- Hurricane Leslie formed in the Atlantic.

Canine Smarts

Dog lovers around the world may be disappointed to hear that researchers have found that “man’s best friend” is probably not as smart as they think.

“Dogs are special, but they’re not exceptional,” says Britta Osthaus of Canterbury Christ Church University. “They’re smart, but they’re not stand-out smart.”

She and Stephen Lea compared the brain power of dogs with wolves, bears, lions and hyenas, and found that the abilities of canines were at least matched by several species in each group.

“We are doing dogs no favor by expecting too much of them,” said Osthaus.

Bovine Gas Control

The burps and flatulence of cows contribute about 4 percent of all greenhouse gas created worldwide, but a Swiss company is touting a way to reduce those bovine emissions.

Co-founder of Agolin, Kurt Schaller, told Reuters that his company’s special feed can cut those gases by about 10 percent per cow.

Schaller told the agency that trials have shown its product also helps increase milk yield and feed efficiency. The company says this is achieved by using additives based on botanical compounds.

Earthquakes

Well over 1,000 people perished on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi when a magnitude 7.5 temblor caused violent ground motion and a subsequent tsunami that devastated the city of Palu.

- Earth movements were also felt on the Indonesian island of Flores and in interior parts of Southern California.

Summer Melt

The Arctic’s sea ice melted to its sixth-lowest coverage on record in late September. The annual minimum of 1.77 million square miles measured on Sept. 19 and 23 followed the second-lowest-ever wintertime expanse seen earlier this year.

Scientists say they were surprised by the heavy melting in an area at the center of old, thick ice north of Greenland. Image: U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center

“This year’s minimum is relatively high compared to the record low extent we saw in 2012, but it is still low compared to what it used to be in the 1970s, 1980s and even the 1990s,” said Claire Parkinson, a climate change senior scientist at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland.

Sea ice around the North Pole has now started to expand again as the long Arctic winter is settling in.

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