



Volcanic Sunsets

 Skywatchers across the United States and Northern Europe have been treated to unusually vivid and colorful sunsets thanks to the eruption of Sarychev Peak volcano on June 12 in Russia's Kuril Islands. The blast sent massive plumes of sulfur dioxide and other debris soaring high into the stratosphere. According to Spaceweather.com, the combination has created white ripples in the evening skies, along with hints of lavender. Some meteorologists believe the airborne volcanic debris is also having a marginal cooling influence on the atmosphere of the Northern Hemisphere this summer.


Monsoon Relief

 Recent fears that a delayed southwest monsoon across much of India would bring drought and rising food prices were alleviated by drenching rains that finally reached New Delhi and other northern cities. The rainfall and cloud cover also ended the annual pre-monsoon season of "heat and dust," with daytime temperatures dropping from near 105 degrees Fahrenheit to the more comfortable 70s. The rainy season across India usually lasts from June to September. But with nearly a month of that period being rain-free this year, government meteorologists predict precipitation will be only 93 percent of the long-term average nationwide.

Tropical Cyclone

 Tropical Storm Nangka weakened to a tropical depression prior to making landfall in China's Guangdong province, just east of Hong Kong. The disturbance landed near Huizhou City with diminished winds of only 35 mph.

Winged Aesthetics

 A Japanese professor has demonstrated that pigeons can be trained to tell the difference between paintings that humans consider to be beautiful and paintings that, how shall we say it, don't measure up. Shigeru Watanabe of Keio University borrowed four birds from the Japanese Society for Racing Pigeons and had them view a series of paintings created by students at a Tokyo elementary school. The birds were rewarded with food if they pecked at paintings that received a good grade and had also been unanimously considered beautiful by a panel of 10 adults. They received no reward for pecking at paintings that didn't quite make the grade. Through the month-long experiment, the pigeons were eventually exposed to paintings they had not seen before. Writing in the journal *Animal Cognition*, Watanabe says the winged critics learned to peck at the previously unseen good art twice as often as at the comparable crude paintings. But the birds were unable to tell the difference when color was removed or the art was modified to become highly pixelated.

North Atlantic Melt


 Danish researchers say that the extent of sea ice between Greenland and Norway's Svalbard Arctic islands is the lowest in at least 800 years. By examining tree ring and ice core samples, as well as ship logs and harbor records, a team from the Niels Bohr Institute pieced together a picture of how much of the ice has existed since the year 1200. Writing in the journal *Climate Dynamics*, lead author Aslak Grinsted says that the ice extent is lower now than even during the 13th century, which was an unusually warm period.

Earthquakes

 Southwest China's quake-weary Sichuan province was jolted by a string of moderate earthquakes, with the strongest damaging thousands of buildings. Eight people were also injured when the 5.6 magnitude quake struck near the city of Mianzhu.

- About 50 Maori tribe members evacuated their homes on New Zealand's North Island due to the danger of mudslides being unleashed by an ongoing swarm of tremors near their village of Waihi.
- Earth movements were also felt in Taiwan, Hawaii, central Chile, Iceland, southern Greece, Crete, north-west Oklahoma and Cleburne, Texas.

Stoned Wallabies

 A group of kangaroo-like marsupials has been getting high in Australian poppy fields grown for medicine, and then hopped around in an opium-induced daze, according to a government official. "We have a problem with wallabies entering poppy fields, getting as high as a kite and going around in circles. Then they crash," said Tasmanian Attorney General Lara Giddings. The Australian Broadcasting Corp. reports she made the announcement at a hearing on security for poppy crops. She added that the animals actually have been creating crop circles while under the influence. Earlier reports say that sheep have also eaten some of the poppies, then walked around in circles. Australia exports about 50 percent of the world's legally grown opium used to make morphine and other painkillers.