




Peru Marine Deaths

 The mysterious deaths of thousands of dolphins and now seabirds over the past few weeks has prompted Peruvian officials to declare a health alert and urge people to avoid a long stretch of affected coastline. At least 5,000 pelicans and other ocean birds washed up on the country's northern coast just weeks after more than 900 dolphins died in the same area. In total, nearly 3,000 of the marine mammals have perished so far this year, which some scientists say was mainly due to seismic testing for oil offshore. The government and one of the exploration companies operating offshore say the dolphins succumbed to a virus. Initial tests suggest the dead birds were malnourished, leading officials to say the two die-offs are entirely unrelated. They point to a mass pelican death along the same stretch of coast in 1997 that was due to a shortage of anchovies, which were driven off by the El Niño ocean-warming phenomenon.


Arctic Rebound

 Some Arctic marine mammals, fish and birds are increasing in numbers as the region undergoes dramatic changes in climate, according to a new report. The Arctic Council released the "surprising" results of the Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program in Montreal. The report says that Arctic marine species have increased overall, driven by rising mammal populations and "dramatic increases" in fish populations. But those numbers appear to have leveled off, and marine birds have undergone a steady decline since 1998. Some mammals were found to be recovering from centuries of exploitation, but rising populations of gray whales, bowhead whales and Greenland walrus have not returned to historical levels.


Nordic Whaling Resumes

 Norway's dwindling whaling fleet harpooned the first three whales of the season, which began on April 1 and allows 1,286 Minke whales to be slaughtered through Aug. 31. Per Rolandsen, of the country's Fishermen's Sales Organization, said poor weather has hampered the hunt while shrinking demand for whale meat meant less than half of last year's comparable quota was taken. Rolandsen added that the Minke whale population is now large enough to justify the country's limited catch. Norway, along with Iceland and Japan, are the only countries to defy the 1986 international moratorium on commercial whaling. Truls Gulowsen, the head of Greenpeace's Norwegian branch, has denounced his country's hunt of the marine mammals. "Instead of trying to keep the industry alive ... it would be better advised to set about dismantling it," he told Agence France Presse.

Indonesia Cyclone


 Tropical storm 19S formed briefly over Indonesia's Banda Sea. Maximum sustained winds near the storm's small circulation center reached only about 50 mph before wind shear caused 19S to dissipate near Babar Island. Due to its brief life span, the storm was never given a proper name designation by Australian weather authorities.

Earthquakes

 Late reports say at least 15 people were injured and more than 1,000 structures were damaged when an earthquake struck northwestern Azerbaijan on the morning of May 2.

• Earth movements were also felt in western Iran, central New Zealand and northern parts of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Eruption Precautions

 Residents in eastern parts of Mexico City have been provided with masks to protect them from airborne ash should the nearby Popocatepetl volcano violently erupt. The Federal District's Public Safety Secretariat took the unusual measure after the mountain, about 40 miles southeast of the city center, produced a series of blasts in recent week. The masks and a public awareness campaign were focused on children and the elderly because they are the groups most likely to suffer from "lung diseases or chronic degenerative" illnesses if exposed to ash, the secretariat said.

Homecoming Calls

 A U.S. ornithologist has begun to use recordings to lure back the iconic swallows that once swarmed each spring to the 236-year-old Mission San Juan Capistrano in Southern California. Charles Brown, an expert consulting with the mission, blames urban sprawl for the vanishing birds, which once arrived in large numbers about this time of year from wintering grounds in southern Argentina. Now, hidden speakers play swallow courtship calls for up to six hours each day in a last-ditch effort to woo the cliff swallows back. Curious swallows have been observed flitting around the speakers and dipping and weaving over the gardens. But none have taken up residence. The mission, made famous by the love ballad "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano," was founded by Franciscan missionaries in 1776. The padres soon noticed that large numbers of the birds would arrive each spring, and even nested on the ruins after the mission was wrecked by an earthquake in 1812.