



Week Ending November 13, 2009


A Sinking Threat

 A giant manmade cavern beneath Carlsbad, N.M., threatens to cave in, swallowing parts of the city that include businesses, a trailer park and a stretch of a main U.S. highway. Three decades of pumping freshwater into a salt layer about 400 feet below the surface, followed by its extraction to help with oil well drilling, already caused two nearby sinkholes to open up last year. State officials now say the ground around the city is heaving in some areas, while other parts are sinking. The city of about 26,000 residents has declared an emergency and says government-installed sensors should give several hours of warning before any cave-in occurs. That should be enough time to evacuate the population, but such a collapse would also swallow up nearby farmland, causing \$100 million in damage.

Messing With Nature


 Unusually early and heavy snowfall over Beijing attributed to China's ongoing weather modification projects has caused capital residents to question whether it's right to mess with Mother Nature. The earliest snowfall to blanket Beijing in 22 years fell on Nov. 1, followed 10 days later by another period of frozen precipitation. Beyond the typical wintry inconveniences such snowfall can cause, the *China Daily* reports that nearly half of the city's annual allotment of snow-removal chemicals has already been used. The paper cited an unnamed official who said the Beijing Weather Modification Office had artificially induced both storms by seeding clouds with chemicals. Such methods have been used for several years to alleviate a protracted drought across North China.

Tropical Cyclones


 Storm-force Cyclone Phyan brought locally heavy rain and gales to the coast of western India as it made landfall very near the country's financial capital of Mumbai. At least four people were reported to have lost their lives in storm-related accidents. Hundreds of makeshift homes were damaged by the storm's passage, which brought only about 1.5 inches of rainfall to the flood-prone region.

- Hurricane Ida weakened rapidly before drenching the southeastern United States. It had earlier brought torrential rainfall to parts of Central America, including El Salvador, where floods and mudslides killed at least 175 people.

Black Fever Outbreak


 A deadly tropical disease is spreading across southern Sudan, where lack of adequate medical care and inter-ethnic conflict are preventing many of those infected from getting the treatment that could save their lives. The bite of the sand fly has been spreading the parasite that causes the disease known as kala azar, or black fever. It is the second-largest parasitic killer in the world after malaria. Almost all of those who go untreated die after suffering enlarged organs and other symptoms. But prompt treatment produces a 95 percent survival rate.

Earthquakes


 Two people were killed and hundreds of others were injured when a strong temblor struck near central Indonesia's Sumbawa Island in the middle of the night.

- Earth movements were also felt in northwest Sumatra, the central Philippines, Taiwan, Tibet and southern Nevada.

Bali Rumbblings

 A volcano on the Indonesian resort island of Bali has produced an increase in volcanic tremors significant enough for officials to issue a special alert for tourists and nearby residents. Mount Batur has also spewed columns of black smoke in conjunction with the rumbling tremors over the past few weeks. People are now banned from climbing the mountain, a popular tourist spot. The summit is considered holy by the Balinese, with some climbing the mountain on a regular basis to make offerings.

Python Posses

 Florida officials are grappling with a slithering invasion that threatens to kill wildlife and even humans — giant non-native snakes like pythons and boa constrictors. The reptiles are escaped pets or their descendants, and biologists estimate there are now tens of thousands of them crawling across the Everglades and other parts of South Florida thanks to the region's temperate climate. A 2-year-old girl from just northeast of the Tampa Bay Area was found asphyxiated by a Burmese python that measured 8 feet in length. That prompted the state's first-ever python hunt in which 39 Burmese were captured by early November. One measured more than 10 feet in length. But the majority were less than 4 feet long, prompting wildlife experts to point out that the relatively small size means the snakes are now breeding in the wild. Most were found to have empty bellies, meaning they're also hungry.