




Smaller in Warming

 Climate change is threatening the survival of some bird species while others are getting smaller with shorter wings due to warming. Responding to one report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Interior Secretary Ken Salazar warned that migratory birds “are facing a new threat — climate change — that could dramatically alter their habitat and food supply and push many species towards extinction.” The FWS report said that climate change will have an increasingly disruptive effect on bird species in all habitats, with oceanic and Hawaiian birds in greatest peril. A separate study led by Josh van Buskirk of the University of Zurich points to a verification of Bergmann’s Rule, which says animals tend to become smaller in warmer climates. Buskirk and his colleagues found that of the half a million birds measured while passing through Carnegie Museum’s Powdermill ringing station in Pennsylvania between 1961 to 2007, 60 of the 83 species caught in the spring migration now weigh less and have shorter wings.

Volcanic Cooling

 Undersea volcanic activity appears to provide a dampening influence on global warming as the seabed eruptions create nutrient-rich water that feeds carbon dioxide-eating plants. Writing in the journal *Nature Geoscience*, Australian and French scientists show that hydrothermal vents around underwater volcanoes in the Southern Ocean spew iron. After billowing to near the surface, the mineral allows single-cell organisms called phytoplankton to bloom, soaking up the greenhouse gas in the process. The world’s oceans are believed to remove about 20 to 25 percent of the atmospheric carbon dioxide currently produced by human activities.

Whooping Winter Bounty


 This has been a far better winter for a flock of endangered whooping cranes along the South Texas coast than during the parching drought of last winter. Ample rainfall since autumn kept all but one of the 264 birds alive and fully fed in preparation for their seasonal 2,400-mile trek northward to Canada this spring. After being brought back from near total extinction over the past 40 years, a record 23 of the birds, nearly 10 percent of the South Texas flock, died of starvation last year due to dwindling river flows that wiped out much of the crane’s main diet of blue crab. There are only about 400 whooping cranes left in North America and the 263-bird flock that nests at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge is the only one that migrates without human assistance.

Tropical Cyclones

 Fiji’s prime minister said his South Pacific island nation suffered “overwhelming” damage as Category 4 cyclone Tomas battered northern and eastern areas for three days. Initial reports said only one fatality occurred during the storm, which also destroyed dozens of homes and heavily damaged many more. Earlier, Tomas destroyed approximately 80 percent of the crops on the French overseas territory of Wallis and Futuna.


- Australia’s Queensland coast was on alert late in the week for approaching Category 1 Cyclone Ului. The storm earlier inflicted damage to buildings on Rennell, in the Solomon Islands, as a Category 5 cyclone.

Earthquakes


 A wide area of northern Japan was rocked by a 6.6 magnitude quake centered off the northeast coast of Honshu. No damage was reported.

- Earth movements were also felt in western Sumatra, Indonesia’s Maluku Islands, northern New Zealand, the Chile aftershock zone and Southern California.

Sino Sandstorms

 Towering clouds of sand darkened skies across a broad swath of China, stretching from westernmost Xinjiang province to Taiwan. The massive sandstorm initially turned the midday sky in Xinjiang an eerie red while motorists were forced to inch along with visibilities of only about 200 feet. Additional clouds of sand were lifted off the Gobi Desert when the front spread across central and eastern China. The red pall eventually reached Taiwan, reducing visibility to about three miles and partially obscuring the sun.

Wrath of the Jackal

 Jackals are devouring the crops of several northern Zimbabwe farmers in the wake of devastating hailstorms just two weeks earlier. *The Herald* reports the canines have turned to cotton crops instead of their usual diet of dead carcasses and small animals. “My cotton is at boll formation stage and these dogs eat up the green bolls,” Julius Bunda of Bunda village told the Zimbabwe daily. Some farmers say they have tried leaving poisoned meat and hides out to kill the jackals, but the bait instead killed their own dogs. Other farmers have resorted to sleeping in their fields and lighting fires to deter the animal raids. Chief Nematombo, who presides over the region, said the spirits are very angry that his people are not honoring traditional values, leading to a wrath of hailstorms and jackals.