

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, November 15, 2019

By Steve Newman

Trans-Arctic Virus

The massive loss of Arctic sea ice is opening up pathways for a killer virus from the south to infect marine mammals once shielded from exposure as it seemingly moves freely from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Researchers from the University of California, Davis, have found an emergence of the deadly phocine distemper virus in the Arctic region, which killed thousands of harbor seals in the North Atlantic in 2002. It was later identified in northern sea otters in Alaska.

Researcher Elizabeth VanWormer says that as the ice melts further, this virus and other pathogens may more easily cross between North Atlantic and North Pacific marine mammals.

Earthquakes

A magnitude 5.9 temblor killed at least five people and injured 300 others near the northern Iranian city of Tabriz.

- Earth movements were also felt in the Nepal-India border region, Hawaii's Big Island, western Guatemala and southeastern France.

Climatic Ailments

A study published in the world's leading medical journal says that children born today will face untold and lifelong health problems due to the effects of climate change and its root causes.

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change study was a partnership of 120 experts from 35 institutions, including the World Health Organization, the World Bank, University College London and China's Tsinghua University.

It warns that the most pressing health issue is the long-lasting effects of air pollution, which is worsening around the world.

The study goes on to caution that climate change is creating a world with more extreme weather events, the risk of food shortages and increasing cases of infectious diseases.

Tropical Cyclones

Cyclone Bulbul killed dozens of people as it lashed the coast of Bangladesh and eastern India, where homes and crops were destroyed by winds of up to 75 mph.

The cyclone was formerly Tropical Storm Matmo, which drenched central Vietnam the previous week. It regenerated over the Bay of Bengal and was renamed by Indian meteorologists.

- Former Typhoon Nakri doused the same part of Vietnam as Matmo before dissipating over Cambodia.

- The open waters of the central Pacific were churned by Typhoon Fengshen.

African Wildlife Rescue

A severe drought parching Zimbabwe's wildlife sanctuaries has prompted officials to relocate hundreds of animals to save them from starvation.

The problem is made more acute by an overpopulation of elephants in the drought-plagued Hwange National Park, where 53,000 of the pachyderms roam in a region that only has resources for fewer than 15,000.

Lions, wild dogs, buffalo, giraffes and impalas are also being moved in the coming months as part of the largest relocation effort in the southern African nation's history.



Vanishing sea ice threatens to allow diseases to spread across the Arctic to infect marine mammals once shielded from them. Photo: NOAA Fisheries

Eruption

Southern Japan's Mount Sakurajima volcano spewed ash and vapor high over Kyushu Island in its most powerful eruption in three years.

As the country's most active volcano, Sakurajima is just east of the major city of Kagoshima, which was not threatened by the eruption.

Bush Blazes

Australian experts say this season's "catastrophic" bushfires in the east of the country are due to a combination of warmer weather brought on by climate change and the amount of forest and scrub available to burn, linked to rising greenhouse gas emissions.

The blazes have burned hundreds of homes and 2.5 million acres, as well as burning about 350 koalas alive. At least four people have also perished in the fires that stretch from New South Wales into Queensland.

The new hotter climatic reality means there are more days with high or extreme bushfire risk over a longer period of time, according to the country's Department of Industry and Science.

Dist. by: Andrews McMeel Syndication
©MMXIX Earth Environment Service