

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, November 29, 2019

By Steve Newman

Climate Appeal

A new U.N. report says the world is doomed to a climate disaster without immediate and sustained efforts to cut carbon emissions by 7.6% each year until 2030.

Emissions have instead surged 1.5% annually over the past decade.

The recommended cuts would limit warming to the 1.5-degree Celsius rise experts agree would avoid global warming's worst effects.

Inger Andersen, executive director of the U.N. Environment Program, warns that without immediate action, CO2 will reach levels that make the worst dangers of warming inevitable.

"We need to catch up on the years in which we procrastinated," said Andersen.

Earthquakes

Albania was rocked by a destructive tremor that killed more than 20 people.

- At least one person was killed by a sharp quake near the China-Vietnam border.

- Earth movements were also felt in far northern New Zealand, northern Morocco and Costa Rica.

Lethal Light

A new scientific review points to light pollution as a major contributor to the "insect apocalypse" decimating many species.

An earlier study this year blamed pesticide use, habitat destruction and climate change for the loss of nearly half of the planet's insects since 1970.

But writing in the journal *Biological Conservation*, an international team of experts says artificial light is disrupting insect reproduction and navigation, as well as drawing insects to untimely deaths.

"Artificial light at night is human-caused lighting – ranging from streetlights to gas flares from oil extraction. It can affect insects in pretty much every imaginable part of their lives," said senior author Brett Seymoure.

Smart Forecasts

Swiss researchers say they have enlisted artificial intelligence to accurately predict where lightning will strike within a 10-to-30-minute period.

After "hindcasting" previous lightning strikes, a team from the École Polytechnique Fédérale in Lausanne created an algorithm to recognize weather conditions that lead to a lightning discharge.

The team says data from 12 Swiss weather stations in both urban and mountainous environments between 2006 and 2017 were used to allow a pinpoint forecast of when lightning will strike inside a 19-mile radius.

Chimp Attacks

Chimpanzees have begun attacking children in western Uganda during recent years in a shocking trend that has resulted in serious injuries and deaths.

A highly publicized and gruesome attack in 2014 saw a chimp savage a 2-year-old child after snatching it from its mother. At least three more fatal attacks on infants have occurred since then, accompanied by a half-dozen other attacks that resulted in injuries or narrow escapes.

The Uganda Wildlife Authority points to the destruction of the chimps' forest habit outside of protected areas to grow crops. It says this is sending the primates into villages in search of food, leading to the attacks.



Malaysia's last Sumatran rhino, "Iman," lost her battle with cancer, leaving the species regionally extinct. Photo: © WWF-Malaysia / David James

Rhino Extinction

Malaysia's last Sumatran rhinoceros has died in a wildlife reserve that had been its sanctuary since 2014.

The 25-year-old female known as Iman died of cancer, leaving only a small number of the species still alive, mainly in Indonesia.

Malaysia's last remaining male Sumatran rhino died in May of this year.

"Iman's death came rather sooner than we had expected, but we knew that she was starting to suffer significant pain," said Augustine Tuuga, director of the Sabah Wildlife Department.

Experts fear the entire species will go extinct within decades if conservation efforts are not expanded.

Tropical Cyclones

Tropical Storm Rita, the season's first in the South Pacific, brought locally heavy rain to parts of the island nation of Vanuatu.

- Tropical Storm Fung-Wong churned the western Pacific south of Japan.

- Typhoon Kammuri passed to the south and west of Guam.

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