

# Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, December 6, 2019

By Steve Newman

## Unbridled Warming

Earth is likely to end its hottest decade on record on New Year's Eve, according to a new U.N. climate assessment released at the start of a two-week global climate summit in Madrid. It also said 2019 is on course to be the second- or third-warmest year on record, and possibly the hottest year not influenced by an El Niño.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warned that there have been "utterly inadequate" actions to deal with surging greenhouse gas emissions behind the looming climate crisis.

"We simply have to stop digging and drilling and take advantage of the vast possibilities offered by renewable energy and nature-based solutions," said Guterres.

## Earthquakes

Aftershocks jolted areas of Albania that had been ravaged by a more powerful temblor on Nov. 27, which killed 51 people.

• Earth movements were also felt along the Myanmar-India border, Guam, central Oklahoma and around Washington's Mount Rainier.

## Popo Eruption

A large plume of ash and other volcanic debris from Mexico's restive Popocatepetl volcano forced a KLM flight from Amsterdam to Mexico City to turn back across the Atlantic.

The volcano produced 148 discharges of ash, steam and other vapor on the day of that flight.

## Tropical Cyclones

Category-4 Typhoon Kammuri left at least 17 people dead and a path of destruction across the central Philippines. With maximum winds of 130 mph, the storm brought down trees that killed two of the victims and forced Manila's international airport to close.

• Tropical Storm Pawan was taking aim on Somalia late in the week. Ambali spun up over the western Indian Ocean.

## Dolphin Dextrality

Researchers have observed that almost all bottlenose dolphins appear to have a dominant right-hand side.

A team from the Florida-based Dolphin Communication Project say bottlenose dolphins appear to have an even more pronounced right-side bias than humans.

The right-flipper trait is most evident when the mammals are chasing prey.

They almost always use the right flipper to make sharp left-hand turns just before digging their beaks into the sand to grab a meal.

This appears to keep their right eye and their right side close to the ocean floor during the forage.

## Carbon Emissions Grow

The amount of heat-trapping carbon dioxide being spewed into the atmosphere surged even higher this year, but not as rapidly as during the previous two years.

The Global Carbon Project, an international group led by Stanford University scientist Rob Jackson, says that emissions of CO2 are expected to hit about 40.6 billion tons this year, mainly due to rising natural gas and oil consumption and big jumps in China and India. That translates to 2.57 million pounds of carbon dioxide being spewed into Earth's atmosphere every second.

While emissions in the U.S. and European Union dropped 1.7% since last year, China increased its emissions by 2.7% as India produced 1.8% more.



Almost all bottlenose dolphins are "right-flipper." Photo: NOAA Fisheries

## Super Swine

Chinese biotechnology centers are scrambling to use genetic engineering in an effort to create healthier hogs in the wake of an expanding African swine fever crisis that cost the country half of its pigs this year.

While individual farms have been trying to breed much larger and tastier swine with conventional methods, researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences have managed to breed hogs fortified with a gene that helps the animals cope with the bitterly cold winters in many parts of the country.

## La Nada

The U.N. weather agency said that neither El Niño nor La Niña conditions will emerge across the tropical Pacific Ocean during the next few months, but that doesn't mean the world won't experience freak and extreme weather.

World Meteorological Organization spokeswoman Clare Nullis told reporters that neutral ocean-temperature conditions will prevail through February.

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