

Week ending Friday, January 10, 2020

Emerging Disease

Motorists and truck drivers on a remote part of Washington State Highway 240 spent the closing hours of 2019 and the first few hours of 2020 trapped by a massive number of tumbleweeds that blew onto the roadway, halting traffic for a 20-mile stretch.

The iconic western weeds piled up 20 to 30 feet high in places until road crews managed to remove them by hand and with snowplows.

Experts blame the wind-blown Armageddon on last winter's heavy snowfall, which nourished the thistle's growth during summer.

 Alaska's towering Shishaldin volcano spewed two columns of ash up to 5 miles into the sky about 680 miles southwest of Anchorage during two separate blasts, prompting aviation officials to issue alerts for air traffic in the region.


The mountain has produced a string of low-level eruptions that began last July at the tip of the Alaska Peninsula, accompanied by streams of lava.

Kenyan officials began aerial spraying for hordes of arriving desert locusts that have ravaged vegetation across parts of Ethiopia and Somalia in recent weeks.

The worst infestation in 70 years has already destroyed 175,000 acres of crops across the Horn of Africa and parts of northeastern Kenya, threatening famine in a region that had already suffered devastating flooding last year.

“We have seen drought and torrential rains kill our people and animals, and now we have locusts,” Kenyan legislator Adan Keynan told reporters at the country’s parliament in Nairobi.



 The strongest in a swarm of rare quakes that rocked southwestern Puerto Rico killed at least one person, toppled buildings and knocked out power to the entire U.S. commonwealth.

A magnitude 6.4 temblor that caused extensive damage during the swarm was the strongest on the island in 102 years.

- Earth movements were also felt in southern Mexico, metropolitan Tokyo, southwestern Taiwan, northern Sumatra and southwestern Iran.

The ongoing Australian firestorms that have caused such misery and death to the human population may have also killed billions of animals in recent weeks.

Beyond the scorched koalas and kangaroos, scientists also fear the long-footed potoroo marsupial may now be extinct in the wild due to the southeastern bushfires.

Experts fear the ecosystems there will never recover, with several other animal and plant species left critically endangered or extinct.

Snipers were dispatched in helicopters to cull up to 10,000 feral camels that were nearing remote aboriginal towns in search of water.



The long-footed potoroo marsupial may have been burnt into extinction by the catastrophic Australian blazes. Photo: Flickr/Kristian Golding

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A new SARS-like outbreak that has sickened scores of people in China seems to have originated around a market that sells seafood, meat and the flesh of wild animals in the central city of Wuhan.

Some who passed through the city have become ill after returning home to cities as far away as Hong Kong.

Many victims have been hospitalized in critical condition. But Chinese officials say the symptoms of fever and breathing difficulties are less severe than from SARS, which killed hundreds of people 17 years ago.

The entire genome sequence of the new coronavirus has been identified.



Parts of the South Pacific island nation of Fiji suffered wind damage and floods from passing Cyclone Sarai, which briefly attained Category-1 force.

- Floods from Tropical Storm Blake cut off communities along northwest Australia's remote Pilbara and Kimberley regions.

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