

# Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, June 19, 2020

By Steve Newman

## Mini Forests

A patchwork of small but dense forests is emerging across Europe thanks to a Japanese botanist who has also planted tiny forests in Japan and Malaysia.

Akira Miyawaki's projects use saplings of native varieties, adapted to local conditions, to cover sites as small as a tennis court and in patches of roadside.

The method typically uses 30 or more species at a time and is said to grow forests 10 times faster, 30 times denser and 100 times more biodiverse than those planted in conventional ways.

Besides the ability to capture carbon from the atmosphere to combat global warming, the mini forests provide better food and shelter for a diversity of creatures, such as insects, snails and amphibians.

## Seabed Rumbles



The seabed near the southeastern Caribbean island of Grenada was jolted by more than 1,000 small tremors from what officials say is increased unrest at the underwater volcano Kick 'em Jenny.

## Giant Success

A group of aging giant tortoises that helped save their species from the brink of extinction in the Galápagos Islands was released into the wild after four decades of tireless breeding.

The number of giant tortoises plummeted to just 15 individuals in the 1970s as the captive breeding program was launched.

There are now more than 2,000 living on Española Island, meaning the species' survival is assured and the breeding program can end.

One tortoise named Diego, famous for his virility, sired some 800 offspring. He and 14 other breeding veterans have been relocated to an area of the island where their favorite snack of cactus is abundant. Wildlife experts say this setting should make their transition to life in the wild easier.

## Hydrogen Future?

A group of six European countries is calling on the European Union (EU) to increase funding to support hydrogen fuel, which has the potential to power vehicles with little or no carbon footprint in the future.

The energy ministers of Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg said in a joint statement that the funding must be backed by new legislation linked to the EU's coronavirus recovery fund.

The move comes as the California Energy Commission predicted that hydrogen fuel could become as cheap as gasoline within five years, thanks to new technology.

## Island Building

An international team of scientists says rising sea levels don't necessarily mean all the world's coral reef islands will become submerged over the next century.

New modeling suggests that as rising tides bring waves crashing on the islands' shores, the wave action will send the coral material surrounding the beaches into the interior, building the reef higher.

"It is important to realize that these coral reef islands have developed over hundreds to thousands of years as a result of energetic wave conditions removing material from the reef structure and depositing the material towards the back of reef platforms, thereby creating islands," said researcher Gerd Masselink.



Coral reef islands may be able to grow taller and keep pace with rising sea levels. Photo: Gerd Masselink/University of Plymouth

## Locust Feed

Farmers in Pakistan's Okara district are earning money by trapping some of this year's hordes of invading locusts so the insects can be turned into high-protein chicken feed in local mills.

The scheme works because locusts cluster on vegetation and on the ground from dusk until dawn. This is when the farmers have been able to haul in about 7 tons of them nightly, earning each farmer up to \$125 per night.

But the practice is only allowed in areas that have not been sprayed with pesticides to control the swarms.

## Earthquakes



One person was killed and nine others were injured when a magnitude 5.4 temblor struck eastern Turkey's Bingöl province. Dozens of homes and other buildings were damaged.

• Earth movements were also felt in the northern Red Sea region, southern Iran, western India's Gujarat state and northern Jamaica.

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