

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, August 21, 2020

By Steve Newman

Beyond Recovery

Scientists say that Greenland has now shrunk past the point that it can recover from global heating even if the goal to limit temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius this century is achieved.

Writing in the journal *Nature Communications Earth & Environment*, they say there is no longer enough snow in winter to replenish the glaciers of snow and ice that are being lost to the melt of summer.

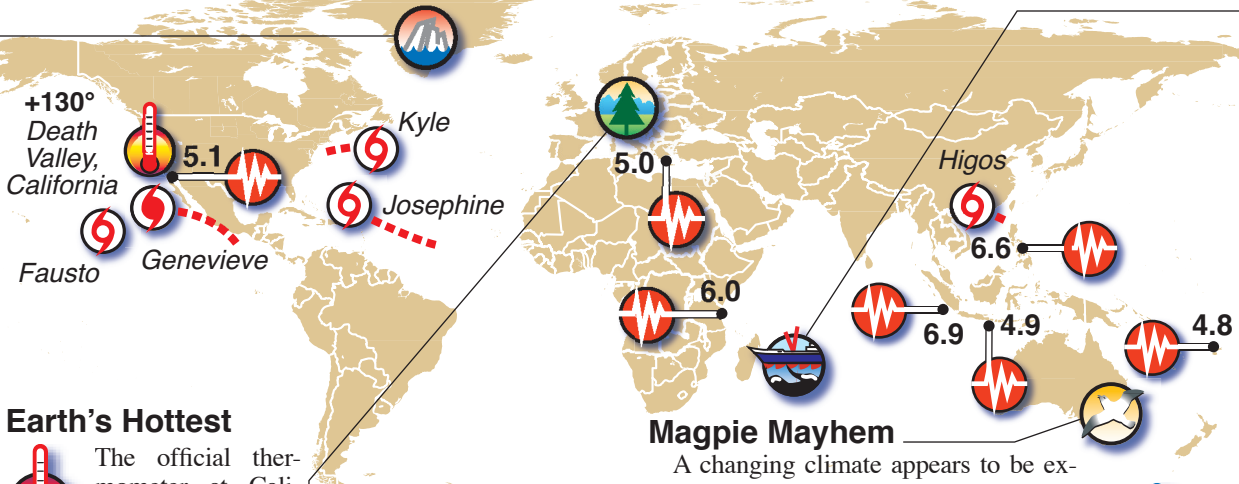
“Greenland is going to be the canary in the coal mine, and the canary is already pretty much dead at this point,” said Ian Howat of Ohio State University.

Earthquakes

At least one person died and dozens of others were injured when a magnitude 6.6 temblor struck the central Philippines’ Bicol region. Significant damage was reported.

- Earth movements were also felt in Bali and East Java, southern Sumatra, northern Fiji, coastal Tanzania, southern Greece and northern Baja California.

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



Earth’s Hottest

The official thermometer at California’s Death Valley measured an air temperature of 130 degrees Fahrenheit on August 16, which meteorologists say could be the hottest ever recorded on the planet.

While a reading of 134 degrees was taken in Death Valley in 1913, recent studies suggest it was incorrect because of observer error.

A 131-degree reading at Kebili, Tunisia, during July 1931 is now also suspected to be bogus.

This summer’s mid-August heat also baked much of the western United States, triggering lightning storms that sparked a spate of destructive wildfires and blackouts across California.

Euro Heat

Recent stress from the record heat and arid conditions resulting from the deepening climate crisis has caused long-term damage to some European forests, according to a new study. The unprecedented scorching summer of 2018 ravaged many trees across Germany, Austria and Switzerland, where leaves wilted, aged and were shed prematurely.

Writing in the journal *Basic and Applied Ecology*, scientists say many trees didn’t form new shoots the following year, meaning they were partially or entirely dead.

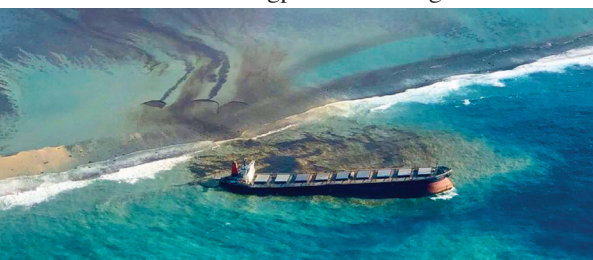
Spruce, beech, silver fir and pine were said to have sustained extensive damage.

Magpie Mayhem

A changing climate appears to be extending the season when Australia’s magpies swoop down and terrorize cyclists and pedestrians, according to bird experts.

While the aggressive birds, which swoop to protect their hatchlings, typically don’t begin calling for a mate until the last full moon of August, they have already been menacing the human population for weeks.

Behavioral ecologist Darryl Jones of Griffith University says that the early swooping is probably because the magpies were tricked into nesting early by recent warmer winters and erratic weather. Authorities warn not to make eye contact with the birds, to carry umbrellas and to walk not run in areas where magpies are nesting.



An oil spill has polluted Mauritius’ pristine coast. Photo: Government handout

Poisonous Shock

Wildlife experts say it could take decades for the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius to recover from the 1,000 metric tons of oil that spilled into its pristine waters from a grounded and off-course Japanese tanker.

The vessel rammed into a reef and began spilling oil faster than local volunteers and crews, some wading without protective gear, could halt its spread.

But it was a losing battle for a country where tourism and fishing drive the economy. Its reefs, endangered animals and plants, mangrove forests and lagoons have already suffered a massive poisonous shock, according to Mauritian environmental scientist Adam Moolna.

Tropical Cyclones

Tropical storms Josephine and Kyle swirled over the Atlantic as the earliest 10th and 11th named storms on record.

- China’s Guangdong province was drenched by Tropical Storm Higos.

- Hurricane Genevieve brushed the tip of Baja California while Tropical Storm Fausto churned the Pacific.