

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, August 28, 2020

By Steve Newman

No COVID Respite

The sharp decline in greenhouse gases spewed into the atmosphere during the global pandemic this year will have virtually no impact on the future of global heating, scientists predict.

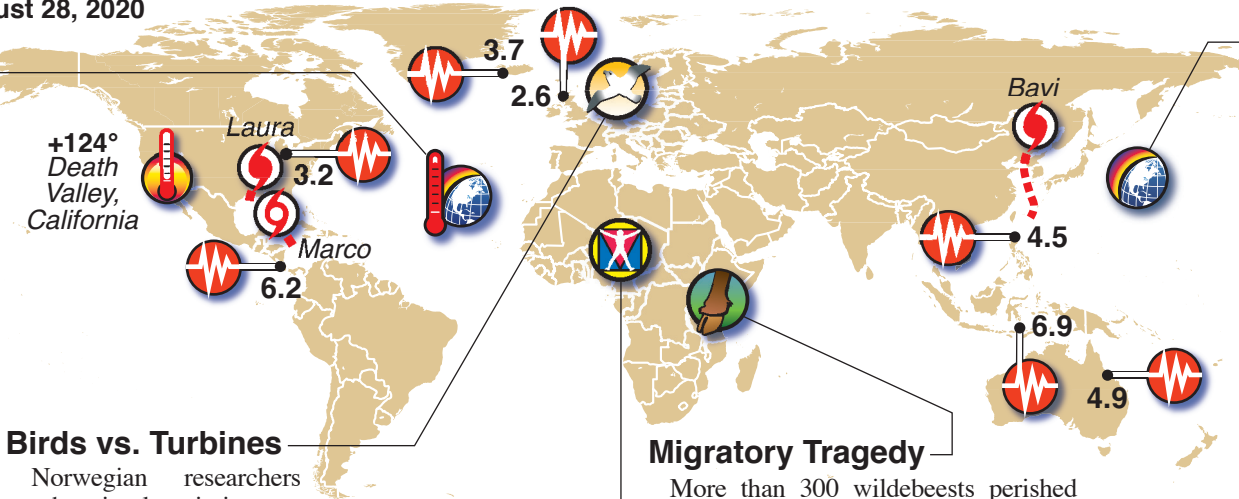
Even with far fewer vehicles on the world's roadways and industrial production sharply curbed, a new analysis says global temperatures will be only 0.01 degree Celsius lower by 2030 than earlier predictions.

Writing in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, Piers Forster, from the University of Leeds, and colleagues say that only strong green energy stimulus efforts can keep the world from exceeding the 1.5-degree Celsius warming target by 2050.

Earthquakes

A wide area of Costa Rica, including the capital of San José, was shaken by a strong temblor.

- Earth movements were also felt in the Banda Sea, the far northern Philippines, northern Queensland, western Scotland, southwestern Iceland and southeastern Michigan.



Birds vs. Turbines

Norwegian researchers say that simply painting one blade of wind turbines black can cut the number of bird deaths the spinning devices cause by up to 70%.

“Collision of birds, especially raptors, is one of the main environmental concerns related to wind energy development,” said researcher Roel May of the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research in Trondheim.

The contrast of the black blade against the sky and other blades appears to help make the turbines more visible to passing birds.

Other tests are planned around the world to make sure the Norwegian success isn't unique to the region.

Polio Eradication

The World Health Organization declared that the entire African continent is now free of the virus that causes polio after no new cases were reported during the past four years.

A \$13 billion global effort over the past 30 years has virtually wiped out the crippling disease, with only Afghanistan and Pakistan still reporting cases — 87 so far this year.

While the poliomyelitis virus was eradicated in the industrialized world after a vaccine was discovered in the 1950s, poorer nations in Asia and Africa went decades unable to provide that vaccine to their citizens.

Migratory Tragedy

More than 300 wildebeests perished during a suspected stampede while crossing the Mara River on Aug. 23 in Kenya's Maasai Mara Game Reserve.

The Nation daily reported that the bloated carcasses littered the river, filling the air of the country's most famous game park with the stench of death.

The park's deputy chief game warden, Eddy Nkoitoi, said there were so many dead wildebeests in the water that the crocodiles and vultures couldn't eat them all. Those that drowned unfortunately picked a part of the river to cross that was swollen by heavy rains upstream.



Vultures feed on the carcasses of hundreds of wildebeests that drowned in the Kenyan portion of Mara River. Photo: Maasai Mara Game Reserve

Overshoot Day

Scientists designated Aug. 22 this year as Earth Overshoot Day, the date when humans have used all of the ecological resources the planet can produce in an entire year.

While the date had been getting earlier and earlier as consumption grew, the drop in what has been taking from nature this year during the worldwide pandemic has pushed it back by more than three weeks.

Using data compiled by the United Nations, the Global Footprint Network, which determines Earth Overshoot Day, found that humans began consuming more than the Earth can provide without being replenished about the year 1970.

Tropical Cyclones

The central U.S. Gulf Coast was battered by two cyclones in rapid succession, including Category-4 Hurricane Laura, which produced extensive damage as it slammed into southwestern Louisiana.

- Typhoon Bavi lashed Okinawa and the Korean Peninsula before dissipating over far northeastern China.