

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, May 17, 2024

By Steve Newman

Arctic Rain

Scientists are scrambling to understand just how much rain has replaced snowfall in the Arctic in recent years, and how the wetter climate is affecting wildlife, indigenous peoples and the landscape.

Rain was once rare in most parts of the Arctic, where it was too cold and dry for clouds to form and absorb moisture.

The increased rainfall is accelerating Greenland's melting and is triggering flooding, landslides and starvation for Arctic animals.

After rain fell on snow and froze in recent winters, tens of thousands of moose, caribou, sheep and muskoxen starved to death across the Arctic because they could not dig through the ice to reach the plants they needed to eat.

Earthquakes

A strong tremor occurred along the Guatemala-Mexico border was felt widely from Guatemala City to Mexico's Chiapas state.

• Earth movements were felt along the Baja California-California border, eastern Taiwan and from western Puerto Rico to eastern Dominican Republic.

La Niña Alerts

Australia and Colombia issued alerts for the possible development of the La Niña ocean cooling in the Pacific in the latter half of this year.

The cyclical phenomenon has typically brought heavy rains and flooding to parts of both countries.

But meteorologists say that because global sea and air temperatures have been at record levels for months, the current climate models' abilities to provide accurate projections of future weather are being skewed.

Sea surface temperatures across the tropical Pacific are currently at "neutral" levels, between those of El Niño and La Niña.

The U.S. agency NOAA says there is a 69% chance of La Niña developing between July and September.

Chilean Chill

As areas north of the equator have suffered from the hottest weather ever recorded, residents of Santiago, Chile, are suffering from the longest Southern Hemisphere cold snap on record during autumn.

"Since 1950 onwards, i.e., in the last 74 years, we have not had such an intense cold spell in May, said University of Santiago climatologist Raul Cordero. "We have had days with even lower temperatures, but now we have a succession of eight days with temperatures well below typical values."

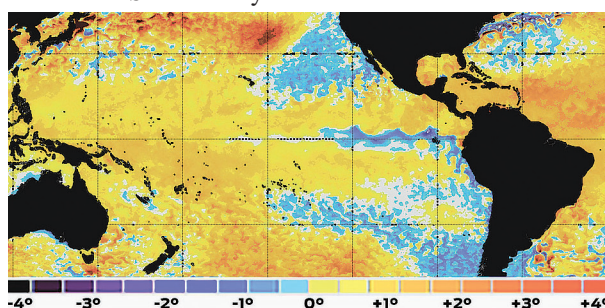
Measures have been taken to help the homeless in many areas to shelter from the cold.

Mosquito Invasion

Climate change has allowed one of the world's most common types of mosquito to reach Scotland for the first time on record, joining the swarms of biting midges that have long thrived in the country's mild and wet summers.

Heather Ferguson from the University of Glasgow say she has been surprised to now find at least some of 16 common varieties of mosquitoes in all corners of the country.

But experts stress that the types of mosquitoes that can carry malaria, West Nile and other diseases are unlikely to arrive in Scotland anytime soon.



NOAA's analysis of sea-surface temperatures on May 14 shows that El Niño's warmth had been replaced by cooler waters off South America.

Solar Storm

The most intense geomagnetic storm to strike Earth's atmosphere in more than 20 years produced vivid aurora displays around the world as it also disrupted radio communications and brought farm equipment to a standstill at the height of the planting season.

There were also reports that the seven blasts of solar energy caused irregularities in power grids.

Farmers in the Canadian Prairies and the American Midwest suffered hours of shutdowns when the high-precision GPS units on their tractors were knocked out.

Volcanoes

At least 67 people perished in a flood caused by "cold lava" rushing down the slopes of West Sumatra's Mount Marapi volcano.

Triggered by torrential rainfall, flows of mud and volcanic debris swept people to their deaths and damaged more than 100 structures.

• The stronger of two blasts from Indonesia's Mount Ibu volcano sent ash soaring 3 miles above the remote island of Halmahera.

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