

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, April 19, 2024

By Steve Newman

Safe Passage

Bird experts are asking residents across the United States and Canada to help prevent the up to 30 bird deaths per second that can occur during the spring migration from Feb. 15 to June 15 due to collisions with human-made objects.

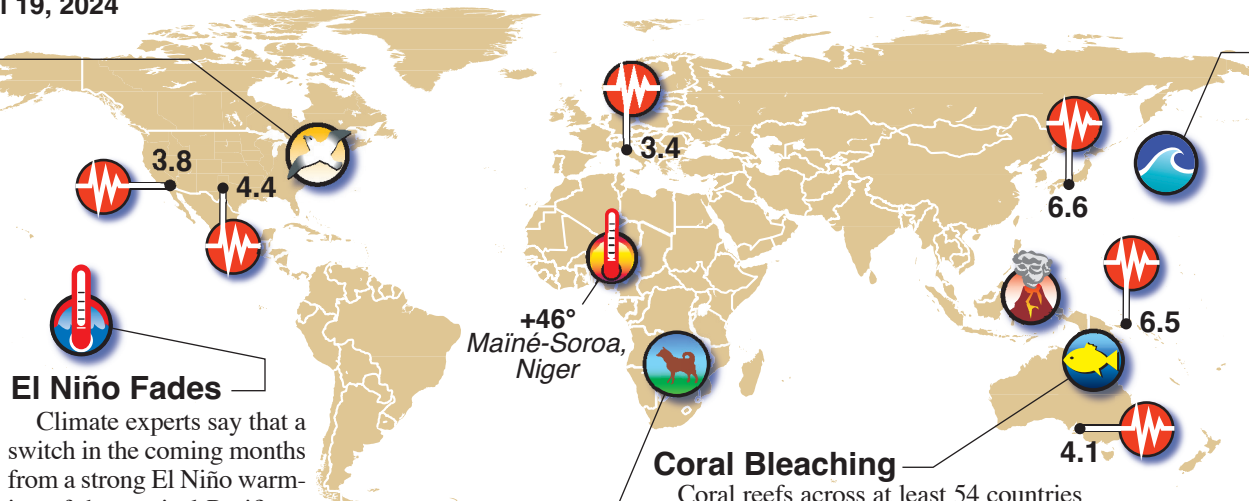
“Up to a billion birds die each year in the United States when they crash into windows and other structures made with reflective or transparent material,” said Andrew Farnsworth at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

He recommends homeowners turn off nonessential lighting from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m., or to draw curtains. He also suggests adding shields to external lighting to direct light downward instead of up into the sky.

Earthquakes

Nine people were injured in a sharp quake that rocked a wide area of southern Japan.

- Earth movements were also felt in eastern Papua New Guinea, southeastern South Australia, Italy’s Tuscany region, the desert resorts of Southern California and West Texas.



El Niño Fades

Climate experts say that a switch in the coming months from a strong El Niño warming of the tropical Pacific to a possible La Niña cooling later this year will help them determine if the recent unprecedented high temperatures worldwide have been due to accelerated climate change or not.

NOAA predicts there is an 85% chance the El Niño warmth will be gone sometime before June, while Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology says the tropical Pacific sea surface already “cooled substantially” during mid-April.

The absence of that heat will reduce the vertical wind shear that typically squashes hurricane and tropical storm development in the Atlantic Basin, possibly leading to a very active hurricane season.

Dog Sperm Bank

Scientists in Africa are freezing sperm from genetically diverse male African wild dogs to be used in an artificial insemination program designed to help the endangered species survive.

Only around 6,600 are believed to still exist in habitats that have become highly fragmented due to human encroachment. This is causing the canines to interbreed, reducing their genetic diversity.

It is hoped that collecting sperm from many isolated communities and using it for breeding across Africa will also bring resistance to canine distemper and other illnesses that have decimated wild dog populations.

Coral Bleaching

Coral reefs across at least 54 countries and territories are suffering from a global bleaching phenomenon brought on by an unprecedented warming of the world’s oceans for more than a year.

Bleaching occurs when coral becomes stressed and turns white because the water it lives in is too hot, causing it to expel the symbiotic algae that normally cover it.

The global bleaching started last year in the Florida Keys when water there became as warm as a hot tub. It then spread to the Southern Hemisphere and now affects more than half of the world’s coral.



Global heating is pushing coral reefs toward the worst worldwide coral bleaching on record. Photo: XL Catlin Seaview Survey

Plastic Seabeds

A new international study estimates that there are now vast amounts of plastic pollution blanketing the planet’s seabeds.

“We discovered that the ocean floor has become a resting place, or reservoir, for most plastic pollution, with between 3 to 11 million tonnes of plastic estimated to be sinking to the ocean floor,” said senior research scientist Denise Hardesty of Australia’s Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

It’s believed the majority of the plastic is clustered around continents and resides less than 200 metres beneath the surface.

Eruption

A massive evacuation of thousands of people was launched after Indonesia’s Mount Ruang stratovolcano in North Sulawesi province spewed lava and other volcanic debris.

The volcanic island of the same name was evacuated, and houses on a nearby island were riddled with holes from falling volcanic stones.

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