

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, August 5, 2022

By Steve Newman

Bird Flu Victims

The avian influenza outbreak that has ravaged poultry and wild birds around the world this year now seems to be killing seals along Canada's St. Lawrence River.

At least 15 of the 100 marine mammals found dead along the waterway since January have tested positive for the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of the virus.

Stéphane Lair of the University of Montreal says the seals most likely contracted the virus from infected eider ducks, with which they share the same islands to give birth at the beginning of summer.

A spokesman for Fisheries and Oceans Canada says these are the first cases of the virus being passed from wild birds to marine mammals ever reported in Quebec.

Earthquakes

 Around 450 buildings were damaged when a magnitude 5.1 quake shook eastern Nepal.

• Earth movements were also felt in southwestern Pakistan, East Timor and Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara province, the far southern Philippines and northwestern Honduras.

+48°
Death Valley,
California



Frank



Georgette

5.4

The Shortest Day

Earth spun on its axis just an itty bitsy teenie weenie bit faster on June 29, causing us to experience the shortest day since measurements began in the 1960s.

By using high-precision atomic clocks, scientists determined that Earth completed its spin that day just 1.59 millisecond shy of 24 hours.

Influences such as earthquakes, El Niño, the moon's gravity, storms and even vanishing glaciers can affect earth's rotation.

There have been several unusually shorter days in recent years, including 2020, when 28 were among the shortest in the past 50 years.

But in the long term, Earth's rotation is actually slowing down about one-74,000th of a second each year, mainly due to the gravitational tug of the moon.

Marine Heat Wave

The blistering heat waves that have scorched much of Europe this summer have also brought excessive heat to the Mediterranean, which experts warn could wipe out several marine species.

The sea between Spain and Italy has been up to 5 degrees Celsius above normal this summer, and it is feared the warmth has already ravaged ecosystems.

Less severe marine heat waves also hit the Mediterranean during the past several years, leading to mass die-offs of marine life.

Relentless heat and drought have also ravaged crops, including the prized olive trees of Spain and Italy.

Icelandic Eruption



More than 10,000 tremors shook Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula during a three-day period, leading to a fresh eruption of Fagradalsfjall volcano, which became a spectacular tourist attraction for months last year.

The strongest quake registered magnitude 5.4 and was felt strongly in the capital, Reykjavik, knocking items off shelves nearby.

The renewed eruption is in an uninhabited valley near Iceland's main international airport.



Iceland's Fagradalsfjall volcano produced a fresh eruption after days of intense seismic activity just southwest of the capital. Photo: Edward Marshall



-64°

South Pole,
Antarctica

Whaling 'Collapse'

Japan's whaling industry appears to be struggling to stay in business due to cutbacks in government subsidies and younger Japanese turning their backs on what was once a staple food.

The industry has faced condemnation for using a loophole in International Whaling Commission rules that allowed it to hunt the marine mammals under the guise of scientific research.

But without subsidies, Kyodo Senpaku Co., the only offshore whaling company in Japan, has recently been selling whale meat below the break-even cost.

"Even the Japan Fisheries Agency has now abandoned any pretense that commercial whaling can be profitable," said Patrick Ramage, head of the International Fund for Animal Welfare.

Tropical Cyclones



Tropical Storm Songda spun up briefly over the Yellow Sea, while Trases brought moderate rain to the Korean Peninsula.

• Hurricane Frank and Tropical Storm Georgette lost force over the Pacific.

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