

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, March 31, 2023

By Steve Newman

Mosquito Invasion

Florida researchers say an invasive species of mosquito has been spreading over southern parts of the state, raising concern of its potential to spread disease.

Known by its scientific name, *Culex lactator*, it was first seen around Miami in 2018 and has since spread to Collier and Lee counties.

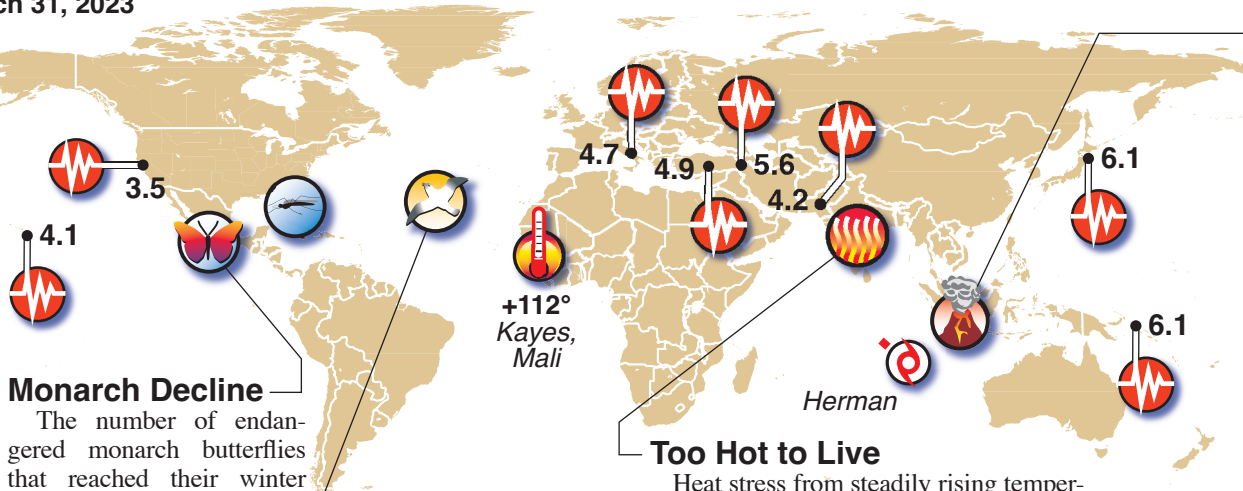
"There are about 90 mosquito species living in Florida, and that list is growing as new species are introduced to the state from elsewhere in the world," said entomologist Lawrence Reeves.

Culex lactator is native to Central America and northern South America and belongs to a group of mosquitoes known to transmit the West Nile and St. Louis encephalitis viruses.

Earthquakes

South-central Italy was jolted by a sharp tremor, centered in the Molise region.

• Tremors were also felt in southern Turkey, northwestern Iran and Armenia, south-central Pakistan, northeastern Japan, the Solomon Islands, Hawaii and the San Francisco Bay Area.



Monarch Decline

The number of endangered monarch butterflies that reached their winter habitat in the mountains of western Mexico dropped by 22% this season, the victims of illegal logging, habitat loss and climate change.

The World Wildlife Fund Mexico reports that extreme 2022 temperatures in the United States contributed most to the decline.

Droughts, frosts and the loss of the migrating monarchs' food source, milkweeds, across North America are also major factors.

The monarchs once clustered in trees covering more than 45 acres of forest in Michoacan state before logging, fires, drought and removal of sick or weak trees brought that number down to only around 5.5 acres this year.

Wayward Voyager

Wildlife experts say they have documented a "remarkable" transatlantic voyage by a female osprey that was born in Scotland and then "flew" 4,124 miles to Barbados. It is said to be the first time a British osprey has been observed in the Americas.

"It is highly unlikely that even an osprey could have completed this in a single flight, even with strong tailwinds," said Tim Mackrill of the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation.

"So it is probable that she took the opportunity to rest on boats, which may themselves have been traveling to the Caribbean from the U.K.," he added.

Too Hot to Live

Heat stress from steadily rising temperatures in India is pushing some of its human population to the limits of survival.

After India's hottest February on record, there are growing fears there will be a repeat of last summer's record heat waves, which killed hundreds, caused massive crop losses and triggered power blackouts.

With temperatures last summer comparable to those in the Sahara and Saudi Arabia, South Asia's much higher humidity made sweating much less efficient for the population, or not effective at all.

A recent World Bank report warned that India could become one of the first populated places where mounting heat and humidity could rise above survivable limits.



The first osprey from Scotland ever seen in the Americas was identified in Barbados thanks to its band. Photo: Michael St. John

Krakatau Blasts

Indonesia's Anak Krakatau (Child of Krakatau) volcano erupted with several blasts that sent columns of ash soaring over the Sunda Strait separating Java and Sumatra. Officials cautioned residents and tourists to remain outside a 3-mile radius of the crater.

The volcano emerged from the sea about 50 years after a series of catastrophic eruptions of the legendary Krakatau in 1883 killed more than 36,000 people and affected the climate around the world for at least a year.

A partial collapse of Anak Krakatau in 2018 sent a huge chunk of the volcano sliding into the sea, creating a tsunami just before Christmas that killed 439 and injured 14,000 others who were caught by surprise along the coasts of Java and Sumatra.

Tropical Cyclone

Cyclone Herman spun up over the waters of the eastern Indian Ocean, threatening only shipping lanes in the region. The storm's highest winds reached about 55 mph.



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