

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, May 7, 2021

By Steve Newman

Manatee Deaths

An average of seven manatee deaths have been reported each day in Florida so far this year as the U.S. government and local marine mammal experts try to find what's behind the spike in fatalities.

About 675 manatee carcasses were found from January 1 to mid-April, compared to 637 in all of last year.

Nearly half of the sea cow fatalities occurred around the Indian River Lagoon. Recent algae blooms and pollution have killed off the area's seagrass beds, which the manatees feed on.

Development and habitat loss are also adding stress to the animals, as is chronic exposure to pesticides such as glyphosate, a key ingredient in Roundup. Red tide outbreaks from the widespread use of fertilizers are also polluting manatee habitats.

Earthquakes

At least three people were injured during a strong quake that struck off northeastern Japan.

• Earth movements were also felt in Panama and southwestern Australia.

Vanishing Glaciers

A new study of the world's glaciers reveals that they are melting at a faster pace than previously estimated, posing an increasing threat of inundation to coastal communities and low-lying islands around the world.

The research found that other than the ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica, glaciers lost 676 gigatons of ice per year on average between 2000 and 2019. The losses were said to have accelerated sharply during the period as global heating became more acute.

Some glaciers have already vanished, with others expected to do so by the end of the century.

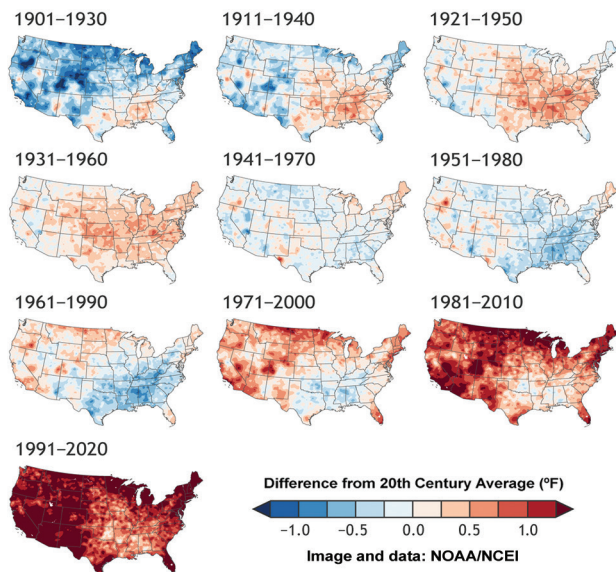
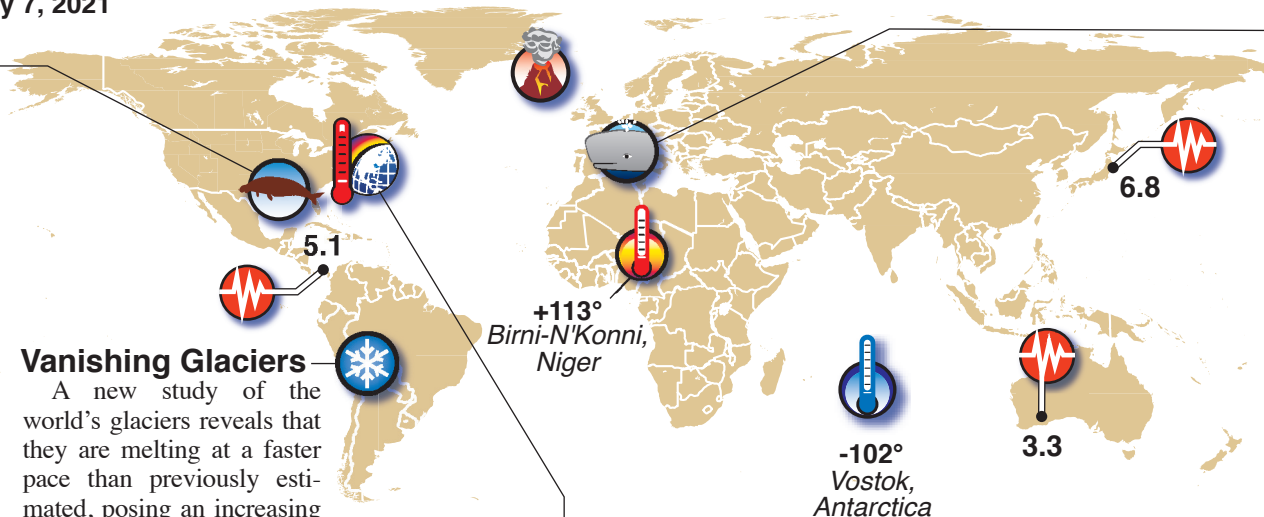
This is a particular threat in South Asia, where mountain glaciers are an important source of fresh water to rivers such as the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Indus.

New Normal

The U.S. environment agency NOAA issued its latest calculations of what is now the climatic "normal," which is based on temperature averages from the past three decades.

The previous normals were based on weather data from 1981 to 2010. But because of the unprecedented warmth of the past two decades, evidence of the current climate emergency is clearly evident in the new 1991-2020 calculations.

The average temperature in the 48 contiguous United States for the past 30 years is now almost a half-degree Fahrenheit hotter than between 1981 and 2010.



NOAA says the normal annual temperatures across the U.S. are warmer than the 20th-century average virtually everywhere. From 1901-1930, the annual average temperature was mostly colder than the 20th-century average.

Wayward Cetacean

A young gray whale, born in California's coastal waters, has been wandering around the western Mediterranean in recent weeks as the first of its species to ever appear there.

Marine biologists believe it got lost while feeding in the Arctic's Beaufort Sea and eventually wound up in the Atlantic rather than its Pacific home waters.

While apparently healthy, the whale looks unusually thin because the Mediterranean doesn't have the kind of food it is used to.

Experts hope the lost whale can make it down the Spanish coast, through the Strait of Gibraltar and into the Atlantic, where it has a better chance of survival.

Lava Geyser

Iceland's spectacular Geldingadalir-Meradalir volcanic eruption intensified, with fountains of lava shooting 1,000 feet into the air — clearly visible from the capital, Reykjavik.

Scientists say the eruption is now behaving more as originally predicted.

Dist. by: Andrews McMeel Syndication
©MMXXI Earth Environment Service