

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, June 11, 2021

By Steve Newman

Climate Vintage

Earth's hotter climate is forcing some European winemakers to change strategies to maintain the quality of their wines.

"With warmer temperatures, the vine cycle has been shorter and we've been harvesting earlier, on average," Dom Perignon Champagne maker Daniel Carvajal Perez told the CNA news network.

He added that the warmer climate had actually brought higher quality to his grapes.

Germany's riesling growers also like the new climate reality. Twelfth-generation family winery Weingut Peter Jakob Kuhn says he no longer has to suffer seasons when the grapes don't achieve enough sweetness.

Earthquakes

Southern California, near the Mexico border, was rocked by more than 600 tremors, punctuated by a magnitude 5.3 quake.

• Earth movements were also felt in northern Oregon, the South Dakota-Nebraska border area and New Zealand's central North Island.



New CO2 Record

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has reached a level 50% higher than at the dawn of the industrial age.

The U.S. agency NOAA says the average CO2 level during May was 419.13 parts per million (ppm). That's 1.82 ppm higher than last May.

The level is also 120 ppm higher than back when the greenhouse gas was relatively stable without the impact of the polluting fuels that have driven the global economy since the 1700s.

"We are adding roughly 40 billion tonnes of CO2 pollution to the atmosphere per year," said Pieter Tans of NOAA's Global Monitoring Laboratory. "That is a mountain of carbon that we dig up out of the Earth, burn and release into the atmosphere as CO2 — year after year."

Tropical Med

Global heating is said to be turning the Mediterranean into a tropical sea, with native species driven out by some of the 1,000 more exotic ones that have adapted to the warmer waters.

The Italian branch of the World Wildlife Fund says the trend will have damaging consequences for fisheries, tourism and what seafood is on the menu.

Maritime director of the branch Giulia Prato said in a report: "Climate change is not a problem of the future; it is a reality that scientists, fishermen, divers, coastal communities and tourists are already experiencing today."

A Hero Retires

A giant African pouched rat named Magawa is retiring after five years of detecting 71 landmines and 38 other unexploded ordnance.

The Belgian charity APOPO says Magawa is "beginning to slow down" after a very successful assignment in Cambodia.

The organization trains the rodents in their native Tanzania to detect the chemicals in explosives. The rats are light enough to scurry across minefields without detonating the explosives, doing in just 30 minutes what a metal detector would accomplish in four days.

APOPO gave Magawa a hero's medal and says he will retire eating his favourite treats of bananas and peanuts.



Magawa's human colleagues say he will stay at his post for a few more weeks to "mentor" new rat recruits. Photo: APOPO

Viral Hot Spots

New research has found parts of the world where conditions are ripe for new coronaviruses to make the jump from bats to humans.

An international team of scientists identified regions where forest fragmentation, agricultural expansion and intense livestock production have concentrated horseshoe bat habitats to the point that the so-called zoonotic viruses could easily infect humans from the wild.

Most hot spots are now clustered in China. But parts of Japan, the northern Philippines, Indochina and Thailand may see hot spots develop in the future if livestock production increases, according to the research.

Human encroachment into bat habitats is also said to greatly increase the chances of people becoming infected with new, or novel, coronaviruses.

Java Eruption

Indonesia's Mount Merapi volcano erupted four times, with flows of lava and plumes of ash, in the heart of Java.

