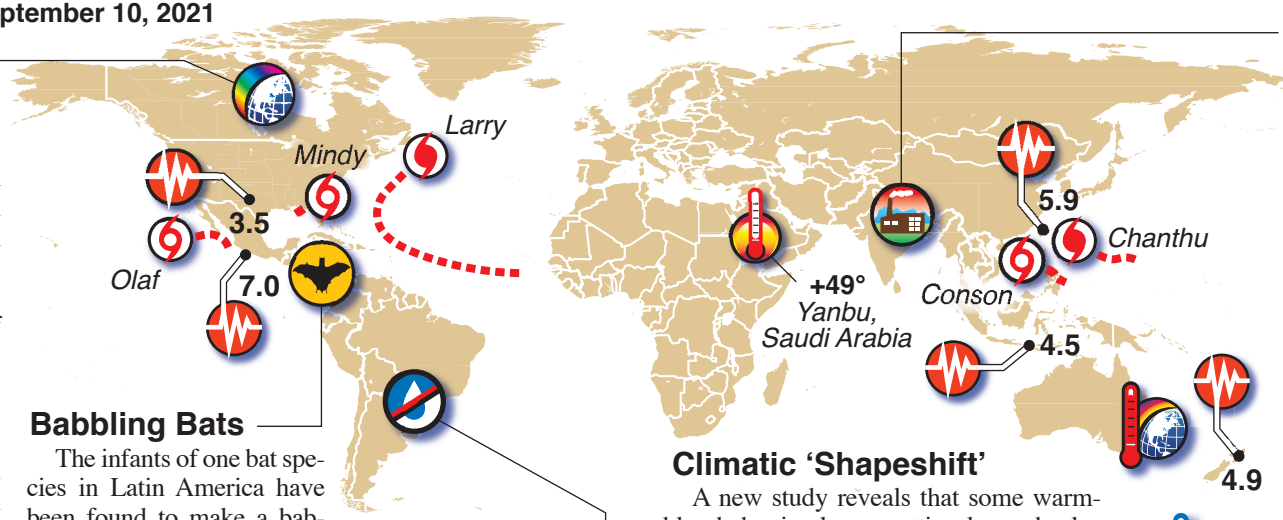
Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

By Steve Newman

Week ending Friday, September 10, 2021



Solar Meltdown

Earth's reliance on electronics could make the planet vulnerable to a global internet "meltdown" should a solar storm as powerful as the one that occurred in the pre-hi-tech year of 1859 knock out that technology.

The Carrington Event of Sept. 1-2, 1859, caused serious damage to telegraph systems of the day.

Speaking to *WIRED*, researcher Sangeetha Abdu Jyothi said that while local and regional fiber networks probably wouldn't be badly affected by such a large-scale solar storm, she is concerned about the repeaters used to connect the world's vast undersea cable system.

Earlier studies have warned that other technology, especially orbiting satellites, could be fried by an intense solar storm.

Earthquakes

At least one person was killed as a powerful temblor caused scattered damage and power failures around Acapulco.

• Earth movements were also felt in West Texas, New Zealand's North Island, eastern Taiwan and Bali.

Babbling Bats

The infants of one bat species in Latin America have been found to make a babbling sound not unlike those of human babies.

While it is known that the early vocalizations of human babies are integral to their language development, there has been little evidence of the behavior in other species.

But researchers from the Museum of Natural History in Berlin found that baby greater sac-winged bats are especially loquacious, mouthing 25 different types of syllables.

Study co-author Martina Nagy says that as in speech, the bat babbles are a precursor to the sounds adults of the species use to communicate. Bouts of the bat babbles can last up to 43 minutes, according to Nagy.

Dwindled Giant

South America's once-mighty Paraná River is now at its lowest level since 1941, causing thousands of acres of wetlands to dry up as well as threatening public water supplies and the livelihoods of fishermen and farmers.

Experts say they don't know if this is part of a natural cycle or climate change. But there has been a three-year period of below-normal rainfall at the river's source in southern Brazil.

Low water levels have also created a 50% drop in hydroelectric power at generating plants along the Argentina-Paraguay border.

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Climatic 'Shapeshift'

A new study reveals that some warm-blooded animals are getting larger beaks, legs and ears to better regulate their body temperatures as the planet gets hotter.

Researcher Sara Ryding of Australia's Deakin University says that the physical evolution of some species is occurring across many regions and among a variety of species. She says this means climate change is probably the only common factor behind the evolution.

"Shapeshifting does not mean that animals are coping with climate change," said Ryding. "It just means they are evolving to survive it." But she adds that not all species may evolve rapidly enough to survive global heating.

Baby greater sac-winged bats of Central and South America have been found to babble very similarly to human babies. Photo: Michael Stifter

Pollution Kills

A new report highlights how air pollution, mainly from coal, is impacting life expectancy far greater than diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, and even behavior such as smoking cigarettes and waging war.

The Air Quality Life Index reveals that unless particulate pollution is reduced to meet World Health Organization guidelines, the average person will lose about 2.2 years of his or her life.

Even though China has slashed its air pollution, dirty air is still cutting about 2.6 years off its life spans.

India has made no such efforts, and its citizens lose 5.9 years off their lives, especially in the highly polluted north of the country.

Tropical Cyclones

Tropical Storm Conson knocked out power in parts of the Philippines.

• Typhoon Chanthu briefly reached Category-5 force east of the Philippines.

• Newfoundland was on alert for Hurricane Larry as Tropical Storm Olaf clipped Baja California.

• Tropical Storm Mindy doused northern Florida and southern Georgia.