



Week ending Friday, March 19, 2021

Seismic Sinkholes

Small villages in central Croatia have become riddled with nearly 100 sinkholes since the area was rocked by a deadly magnitude 6.4 temblor in December. Seven people perished and massive structural damage occurred during the quake. Villagers are now watching as the holes cave in next to their homes. While sinkholes are not uncommon in the area, scientists say the sheer number of them would have taken years if not decades to appear without the powerful earthquake.

Earthquakes

Dozens of schoolgirls were injured in a stampede after a magnitude 4.7 temblor struck along the Kenya-Tanzania border on March 11.

- More than 40,000 tremors have shaken southwestern Iceland since late February due to rising magma.

- Earth movements were also felt in central Greece, northeastern Algeria, northeastern New Zealand, Tokyo, Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, eastern Ontario and around Wichita, Kansas.

Pulverized Plastic

Scientists say they have found a way to cleanly, efficiently and cheaply break down polystyrene, a type of plastic used in packaging material, food containers, cutlery and other items. A team from the U.S. Department of Energy's Ames Laboratory and Clemson University says it has found a way to grind up the polystyrene with metal ball bearings until a desired chemical reaction occurs. This type of "mechanochemistry" deconstructs the plastic through chemical events in which the metal bearings and oxygen in the air act as co-catalysts. The resulting debris can be used to create other products. "We think this proof of concept is an exciting possibility for developing new recycling technologies for all kinds of plastics," senior scientist Viktor Balema said.

Congo Lava

Increased activity within the incandescent lava lake of East Africa's Mount Nyiragongo has officials worried that another deadly eruption might be approaching. The volcano, located within Virunga National Park of the Democratic Republic of Congo, killed 250 people and left 120,000 others homeless in 2002 when it spewed a rapid stream of alkaline lava that raced downslope at up to 60 mph. Experts say recent activity is almost identical to what occurred before that eruption and another in 1977.

Quietly Disappearing

An Australian songbird is slowly fading into extinction as it loses its mating song crucial for its survival. Scientists at the Australian National University say the young regent honeyeaters are struggling to learn mating calls because the adult birds are disappearing and not passing on the tunes. "This lack of ability to communicate with their own species is unprecedented in a wild animal," researcher Dejan Stojanovic said. He adds that the honeyeaters are now so rare that some younger birds never find an adult male to teach them their love song.

Early Blossoms

Japan's renowned cherry blossoms are in full bloom again, bursting forth in vivid pink at the earliest date on record around Tokyo. The first blooms were observed in the capital on March 14, the same date as during last year's record early appearance. The early blossoms are said to be the result of the ongoing global heating that brought Japan unusual February warmth.

Blinding Sand

China and Mongolia have suffered the worst sandstorm in a decade, whipped up by high winds that killed at least 10 people and left nearly 400 others missing amid very low visibilities. Health experts said levels of the tiny particles of airborne sand, which have been linked to respiratory disease, soared to 9,350 micrograms per cubic meter in Beijing, 180 times the daily maximum exposure recommended by the World Health Organization. China has been trying to reforest and restore the ecology upwind from Beijing to create a "great green wall" that can hold back the sand.

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