Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

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Bovine Emissions

Feeding beef cattle a small supplement of red seaweed each day could sharply cut the amount of the greenhouse gas methane that the animals expel into the atmosphere through burps and flatulence, scientists say. Methane is 30 times more effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere than CO2, making cows important contributors to global heating. Researchers from the University of California, Davis say that after feeding cows about three ounces of the marine plant per day for 21 weeks, they saw an 80 percent reduction in methane produced by the ruminant animals. The team is working on ways to make it easier to feed the cows seaweed and to cut its cost to farmers.

Earthquakes

A sharp temblor centered off Japan's northeastern coast was felt widely across Honshu Island, including Tokyo.

• Earth movements were also felt in northeastern New Zealand, northeastern Turkey and interior parts of metropolitan Los Angeles.

Plastic Pathogens

Researchers say they have found that the vast amounts of microplastics released into the environment from wastewater treatment plants each day may be "hubs" for antibiotic-resistant bacteria and other pathogens. A team from the New Jersey Institute of Technology says the plastic pollution forms a slimy layer of film on the surface of wastewater, which collects dangerous microorganisms and allows them to commingle and mix with antibiotic waste. The scientists say this poses a threat to marine life and human health if the plastic-borne pathogens bypass the treatment process, which is typically not designed to remove the plastics.

Eruptions

Iceland's Mount Fagradalsfjall erupted with spectacular fountains and flows of lava for the first time in 6,000 years, only 25 miles southeast of the capital, Reykjavik. Scientists and sightseers roasted marshmallows and hot dogs from the heat of the lava, but the foul smells of the volcanic gasses were said to curb most everyone's appetite. • Flights in and out of Guatemala's main international airport were briefly halted as crews removed runway ash from the latest in a series of eruptions from nearby Pacaya volcano.

Horns Down

Wildlife experts in Africa say they have found it is safer to relocate the critically endangered black rhinoceros upside down, sedated and blindfolded by helicopter rather than by land. It is sometimes necessary to move rhinos from local overcrowding and to make them less vulnerable to poaching. Their blood oxygen levels are higher when they are upside down, compared to lying on their side on a flatbed truck. Nearly 98 percent of black rhinos disappeared in the wild after the 1960s, when more than 100,000 roamed the deserts, shrublands and savannas from Kenya to Namibia.

Heat Imbalance

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One half of Earth is emitting heat from the planet's interior faster than the other, which scientists say has probably been going on for 400 million years. Krister Karlsen of the University of Oslo says the lopsided heat loss is probably a leftover effect of when all the world's landmasses were joined in a supercontinent, dubbed Pangaea. Scientists believe it was centered around today's Africa. Since ocean areas trap less heat from Earth's interior than land, the vast Pacific is losing more heat.

Flood of Pests

Southeastern Australia's worst floods in 50 years have forced thousands from their homes and driven a frightening number of snakes and spiders into populated areas. Other wildlife species are also scrambling for higher ground, including skinks, ants and crickets. The hordes of spiders invading people's homes have proven to be the most traumatic for many residents. But they are advised not to reach for insecticides because the arachnids will eventually leave when the waters recede.

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