



Week ending Friday, June 4, 2021

Urban Microbiomes

Every city has been found to have its own unique “fingerprint” of viruses and bacteria that researchers say can probably be used by authorities to determine where someone is from with about a 90 percent accuracy. A team led by Cornell genomics expert Christopher Mason asked colleagues around the world to collect swabs from urban transport systems and conducted a genetic analysis on each. Besides finding that the larger the city, the more complex its diverse microbial life, they also discovered 10,928 viruses and 748 bacteria that were previously unknown to science. “I think it’s a wonderful affirmation of how much left we have to discover about the world,” Mason said.

Earthquakes

A wide area of Alaska from Fairbanks to Anchorage and Homer was jolted by an unusually sharp tremor. • Earth movements were also felt in Lake Tahoe, Los Angeles, Cyprus, the India-Bangladesh border and New Zealand’s Canterbury region.

Unabated Warming

The U.N. warns there is now a 40 percent chance that global temperatures will rise within the next five years, at least temporarily, to surpass the key global temperature limit of 1.5 degree Celsius above preindustrial levels. But the World Meteorological Organization says that natural climate variability could mean there would be a brief cooling for another decade or two after that, before even more greenhouse gas emissions cause that limit to be crossed permanently. WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said that the new study is “yet another wake-up call” to slash greenhouse gas emissions. A separate study concludes that nearly 40 percent of all heat-related deaths around the world from 1991 to 2018 can be attributed to human-caused climate change.

Lake Suffocation

Earth’s deepening climate crisis is causing oxygen levels in freshwater lakes around the world to decline rapidly in a trend that threatens freshwater biodiversity and drinking water quality. As global heating warms the waters, they cannot hold as much oxygen. And the recent intense summer heat has reduced how much surface water mixes with and delivers oxygen to the deep. A research team found that the oxygen decline has been between three and nine times faster during the past 40 years, falling 19 percent in deep waters and five percent at the surface.

Rodent Crisis

Australia’s worst mice plague in decades has become so acute in recent weeks that the rodents have begun eating each other after devouring crops and exhausting other food sources. With hordes of the ravenous pests causing “unprecedented” losses for farmers, the government has placed an order with India for the banned poison bromadiolone to help cull the surging house mouse population. “We’re at a critical point now where if we don’t significantly reduce the number of mice that are in plague proportions by spring, we are facing an absolute economic and social crisis in rural and regional New South Wales,” Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall told reporters.

Wayward Jumbos

A herd of 15 wild Asian elephants that left a Chinese nature reserve in April has destroyed crops, wrecked barns and wandered through communities as it trekked relentlessly for nearly 300 miles toward Yunnan's provincial capital of Kunming. No one knows why the pack of pachyderms has made the journey, but elephant expert Chen Mingyong told China's official Xinhua news agency that the leader possibly "lacks experience and has led the whole group astray." Officials have been tracking the animals with drones and a task force in 76 cars, and have used roadblocks and tons of food in an attempt to shift the elephants' course.

Tropical Cyclones

Weak and disorganized Tropical Storm Choi-wan left at least eight people dead in central and northern areas of the Philippines as it triggered floods and mudslides. • Tropical Storm Blanca, the second of the eastern Pacific hurricane season, churned the open waters well off the Mexican coast.

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