Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 10 September 2021 04:41

Week ending Friday, August 27, 2021

Greenland Rain

The second freakish heat wave to blow across Greenland so far this summer caused rain to fall at the highest point of the country's ice sheet for the first time in recorded history. The instruments at Greenland's Summit Station, established in 1950, recorded temperatures above freezing for more than nine hours on Aug. 15, with rain falling off and on for 13 hours. But since there are no rain gauges at the typically frigid location, the research staff was unable to say how much rain actually fell. Parts of the ice cap were 18 degrees Celsius above average on that day, triggering a massive melting event that was seven times above the average for mid-August.

Earthquakes

A stretch of India's southeast coast was jolted by a magnitude 5.1 temblor, centered beneath the Bay of Bengal.• Earth movements were also felt in India's Assam state, northern Mongolia, Trinidad, southeastern Oklahoma and near the California-Baja California border.

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Snowless Andes

South America's majestic Andes Mountain range is in the grip of a decade-long drought that has left many slopes between Ecuador and Argentina with only patches of snow, or no snow at all. Currently in the depth of the Southern Hemisphere winter, the Andes should be at the peak of the snow season. But satellite images from this July and a year ago show a significant decrease in snow cover, threatening ski resorts and the communities that depend upon the mountains for water. "The glaciers are in a very dramatic process of retreat that is much more accelerated than we have seen before," Ricardo Villalba of the Argentine Institute of Snow, Glacier and Environment Science Studies told Reuters.

Giant Return

Blue whales are being spotted again off Spain's Atlantic coast after a more than a 40-year absence. The world's largest mammal was hunted to near extinction, including from whaling ships out of Spain's Galician ports until the country banned whaling in 1986. The first returning blue whale was spotted in 2017 by Bruno Diaz, head of the Bottle Dolphin Research Institute in Galicia. Another was seen a year later, then they both were joined this summer by yet another. Diaz believes they have returned to the region out of a form of homesickness, or ancestral memory.

Tropical Cyclones

Hurricane Henri weakened to a tropical storm just before drenching parts of New York, New Jersey and New England with some of the area's heaviest rainfall on record. • Quickly moving Hurricane Grace left at least eight people dead and three missing after making landfall as the

strongest tropical cyclone on record in the Mexican state of Veracruz. Remnants of the storm later regenerated into Tropical Storm Marty off Mexico's Pacific coast. • Tropical Storm Omais drenched Japan's southernmost islands before its remnants doused South Korea.

Warmer & Wetter

With unprecedented rainfall occurring this summer from Asia and Europe to the eastern United States, scientists say global heating has made such rain events and their subsequent catastrophic flooding in Europe between three percent and 19 percent more powerful and up to nine times more likely. An international group of climate scientists at World Weather Attribution says that human-caused climate change has made downpours in the region up to 20 percent heavier. They add that as the atmosphere warms further and can hold even more moisture, Western and Central Europe will suffer even more extreme rainfall.

Vog Warning

Toxic sulfur dioxide gas being emitted by Taal volcano, about 60 km south of Manila, prompted Philippine officials to warn surrounding residents to protect themselves from the volcanic smog, or vog. It can cause irritation to the eyes, throat and respiratory tract.

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