



Week ending Friday, January 21, 2022

Air Hazards

Smog and smoke clouds that now frequently plague California and other parts of the West are making breathing more dangerous for residents of the region, according to a new study. Researcher Deepti Singh of Washington State University, Vancouver and colleagues found that exposure to ground-level ozone and the fine-particle pollution from more frequent wildfires has increased by 25 million “person days” from 2001 to 2020. Short-term effects from the pollution include breathing difficulties and worsening heart and lung diseases, such as asthma. Exposure to both types of pollution at the same time compounds the health risks, and long-term exposure can have even far more serious consequences. The study found that in August 2020, 86 percent of the western U.S. was blanketed by extreme amounts of both.

Tropical Cyclone

Remnants of Tropical Storm Tiffany battered parts of far northern and northwestern Australia with flash flooding and strong winds.

Mass Extinction

Earth's sixth mass extinction is currently accelerating, and a new study points out that it is the only one in the planet's history to be caused by human activity. "Drastically increased rates of species extinctions and declining abundances of many animal and plant populations are well documented, yet some deny that these phenomena amount to mass extinction," lead researcher Robert Cowie said. Writing in the journal "Biological Reviews," he and his colleagues estimate that between 7.5 percent and 13 percent of Earth's two million known species may already be lost. Some critics of the alarm over the man-made "biological annihilation" of wildlife say this is merely a new and natural trend, with humans just playing the dominant role in Earth's evolutionary history.

Earthquakes

Dozens of people were killed in western Afghanistan as two quakes wrecked hundreds of homes. • More than a thousand homes were damaged when a magnitude 6.6 temblor rocked western Java. • Earth movements were also felt in South Asia's Hindu Kush region, the Armenia-Azeri border area, the northern Persian Gulf, northern Greece, northeastern South Africa, islands of the eastern Caribbean and southeastern Alaska.

Breeding Seabed

Scientists say they have discovered the world's largest fish-breeding area, located in the south of Antarctica's Weddell Sea. Trolling with underwater cameras, they captured images of thousands of Jonah's icefish nests on the seabed, with a density of about one nest per 3 square metres, which suggests about 60 million breeding sites blanket the seabed. "I went on an expedition to this region about 25 years ago, and one of the big questions then was where do these icefish breed," British Antarctic Survey scientist Katrin Linse said. "Finding an assemblage on this scale is just mind-blowing to me."

Manatee Deaths

A record number of Florida's protected manatees died during 2021, with the 1,101 deaths more than double the five-year average. Most were along the state's eastern coast, where pollution-fed algae blooms were the main cause. The blooms are responsible for wiping out thousands of acres of seagrass in the Indian River Lagoon, a major feeding area for manatees.

Volcanic Blast

The most powerful volcanic blast anywhere on the planet for more than 30 years was heard thousands of miles away and created a humanitarian disaster in nearby Tonga. Tsunamis from the Hunga Tonga volcano blast rushed across the Pacific as barometers worldwide recorded the force of the explosion. The ocean surges also caused "significant damage" in Tonga as falling ash poisoned the landscape, including the rainwater supplies that most Tongans collect on their roofs. It is feared that ash-filled waters offshore will deprive fish of food and spawning beds, threatening the livelihoods of fishermen.

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Written by Gallupsun Staff

Friday, 04 February 2022 05:31

Dist. by: Andrews McMeel Syndication©MMXXII Earth Environment Service