



Week ending Friday, October 25, 2019

El Niño Shift

Extreme El Niño episodes are becoming more frequent under climate change, and climate researchers say continued global warming is likely to make them even more frequent. A report in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science says a study of Pacific Ocean warming from 1901 to 2017 found that four out of the five El Niños identified as extreme have formed since 1970. The warmer waters are now originating in the west-central Pacific rather than the eastern Pacific as they did prior to the late 1970s. That has triggered more extreme weather shifts, including severe droughts in Australia and floods in California.

Earthquakes

Tall buildings as far away as Dubai swayed during a moderate quake centered in southern Iran.

- Earth movements were also felt in New Zealand's North Island, Guam and along the Kansas-Oklahoma border.

Wild Earth

Despite humankind wielding an overwhelming influence on the planet, scientists say that half of Earth's land surface not covered in ice still remains relatively wild, albeit broken into small, isolated tracts. The summary of a National Geographic Society global survey conducted in 2017 and 2018 concludes that even with the damage to the environment caused by human activities, there is still an opportunity to protect what wild places are left. The wildest remaining regions are the remote boreal forests of northern Canada and Russia, the Central Asia highlands, the Central and South American rainforests and the deserts of North Africa and Australia.

Rat Drivers

Researchers in Virginia say they have trained rats to master the art of driving by teaching them to steer tiny cars to collect tasty bits of sugar-coated cereal. Kelly Lambert of the University of Richmond says six female and 11 male rats learned to steer the rodent rover by touching the center, left or right of a metal bar that controlled the wheels. She added that hormone monitors indicated that the rats seemed to relax as they mastered the driving. "They may get the same kind of satisfaction as we get when we perfect a new skill," Lambert told New Scientist.

Plastic or Cans?

Producers of bottled water are scrambling to find practical ways to switch from the single-use plastics that are polluting the planet to recyclable aluminum cans. The biggest challenge is that creating each can means twice as much carbon is released into the atmosphere than from the manufacture of one plastic bottle. Cans are also more expensive to make. Marketing experts say this is somewhat offset because less power is needed to chill water in cans.

Emerging Island

An underwater volcano in the South Pacific nation of Tonga with a history of creating short-lived islands is growing again toward the ocean surface. Metis Shoal has throughout recorded history created lava domes, pumice rafts and small islands that are eventually eroded by waves. It spawned a huge pumice raft in August that made headlines when sailors encountered it. The volcano has since been observed causing plumes of steam to rise above the Pacific.

Tropical Cyclones

Tropical Storm Nestor brought down trees, spawned tornadoes in the southeastern U.S. and flooded some coastal areas near where it made landfall in the Florida Panhandle.

- Tropical Storm Octave formed briefly far from land in the northeastern Pacific.
- Tokyo and other areas of eastern Japan were soaked when Typhoon Neoguri skirted Honshu just a week after record-setting Typhoon Hagibis ravaged the island.

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Written by Gallupsun Staff

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- Typhoon Bualoi passed well to the east of Japan.

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