



Week ending Friday, September 11, 2020

Plastic Soils

New research finds that microplastic pollution is causing harm to the tiny creatures living in the ground.

Writing in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, scientists say the assault is occurring in soil-dwelling mites, larvae and other creatures that are crucial to the fertility of the land. They play an important role in recycling carbon and nitrogen, and they break down organic material. Plots contaminated with microplastics saw a reduction of those creatures of between 15% and 62%, the scientists said.

Earthquakes

At least 34 people were injured when a magnitude 5.2 quake damaged homes in northeastern Iran's Golestan province.

- Southern England was soundly shaken by a tremor that many said felt like a large explosion.
- Earth movements were also felt in northeastern Japan, central New Zealand, Vanuatu, northern Chile and eastern New Jersey.

Arctic CO2 Surge

Carbon emissions from wildfires raging across part of the Arctic this summer have been a third higher than those of last summer's record conflagrations in the region. The European Copernicus atmospheric monitoring service points to so-called zombie fires that smoldered beneath the ground through the winter months for triggering even higher emissions. About 205 megatons of the greenhouse gas were emitted in June and July alone as Siberia was roasted by a heatwave. Many of the blazes in early summer were unreachable to firefighters and burned out of control.

Baby Boom

Five baby gorillas have been born within six weeks deep in their tropical forest habitats of Uganda, offering hope that conservation efforts are paying off. In total, seven babies have been born so far this year, compared to only three in 2019. There are about 400 mountain gorillas living in the country's Bwindi National Park, and they are under constant threat of poaching. "This is highly unusual; it's an incredible blessing," said Uganda Wildlife Authority spokesman Bashir Hangi.

Singing Dogs

A rare species of dog that can sing, or more accurately yodel, has been rediscovered in the wild in the remote highlands of the Indonesian part of New Guinea. The howls of the canines have been compared to the calls of humpback whales. There are about 200 captive descendants of the eight dogs that were gathered in the 1970s, but they are now seriously inbred. While none have been seen in the wild for half a century, a new expedition returned to the capture site and found 15 of the wild dogs there are genetically similar enough to their captive cousins to provide

them fresh genes.

Arctic Polluters

An increasing number of polluting ships are now sailing across the Siberian coastal stretch of the Arctic Ocean because of the more open waters that have resulted from record melting sea ice. An analysis by Reuters found that traffic through the icy waters' busiest routes along the coast of Siberia increased 58% between 2016 and 2019. Those ships are carrying iron ore, oil, liquified natural gas and other fuels. Reuters says that the COVID pandemic has not slowed the trend, with 935 voyages being documented in the first half of 2020, compared with 855 in the same period last year.

Tropical Cyclones

Typhoon Haishen took a destructive path across far southern Japan and the Korean Peninsula similar to Typhoon Maysak during the previous week.

- Tropical storms Paulette and Rene churned the central Atlantic, while Julio passed to the west of Mexico.

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