



# The World Around Us



"Foreign Correspondent"  
Michael Ludwig reports on some strange goings on in the natural world.

## Temperatures Cooling Down in Europe...

Ireland came to a virtual standstill at the beginning of March. Rain from Storm Emma coming from the south hit cold air moving in from the east, and turned it to snow.



Image courtesy of Susan Murphy Wickens

Strong winds from the storm blowing the snow into deep drifts added to the problem, particularly in the east and south of Ireland. The whole country was under a Status Red Snow-Ice weather warning at one point and everyone was asked to stay indoors during the worst of the weather. The cold front responsible for the freezing temperatures became known as the "Beast from the East" and much of Europe experienced arctic conditions because of it. Funny as it sounds, this is what is expected with global warming! The weather gets crazy. So, expect more of this.

## A Murmuration of Starlings in Timoleague, West Cork

A murmuration is the name given to a huge flock of starlings flying in formation, whirling and changing pattern in an instant as they move through the air. Over the last few months, a spectacular murmuration was seen in Timoleague, West Cork. Peter Wolstenholme of Birdwatch Ireland, who lives nearby, said the starlings had been gathering there since early November from such places as Scandinavia and Russia and also from further up the country where the weather was colder (climate change, again?). The size of the murmuration grew steadily to about 10,000 starlings, the largest to be seen in West Cork. Flying in this formation, not only teaches young birds how to protect themselves from predators, such as sparrowhawks, but there is safety in numbers as the predators find it hard to focus on just one bird.



## ...and warming up in Australia

According to the Bureau of Meteorology in Australia, seven of Australia's ten warmest years have occurred since 2005. The Bureau's Head of Climate Monitoring, Dr Karl Braganza, said that the national mean temperature for 2017 was 0.95°C warmer than the 1961-1990 average, making it Australia's third-warmest year on record. Both day and night-time temperatures were warmer than average; particularly maximum temperatures, which were the second-warmest on record.

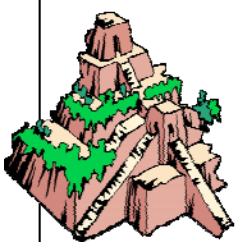


This year, on the afternoon of 7th January 2018, the temperature reached 47.3°C in Penrith in Sydney, the second highest temperature recorded by a weather station in the Sydney metropolitan area in 79 years. The highest was 47.8°C in Richmond, Sydney, in 1939.

The highest temperature ever recorded in Australia was 50.7 °C, recorded on 2nd January 1960 at Oodnadatta Airport, South Australia.

## Mapping Ancient Mayan Cities

In Guatemala, Central America, scientists have been using laser technology to map a 2,100 km<sup>2</sup> area of jungle where ancient Mayan cities once thrived. Using LiDAR imaging, which stands for Light Detection and Ranging, they have been able to produce aerial images of these cities by 'peeling back' the canopy of trees that has hidden them for centuries.



Scientists were stunned when these revealed 60,000 houses, palaces and elevated highways. They estimate that the cities were home to many more people than previous thought; instead of 5 million, it could have been nearer to 10 or 15 million. These images will be

invaluable to those researching Mayan archaeology and with plans to scan a much wider area, who knows what more it will reveal.

## Wildfires and Mudslides in California

Wildfires and mudslides in California typically occur late in the year when drought-dried vegetation catches fire and are then fanned by the Santa Ana winds that blow in from the desert. They are often started as a result of human activity. Last December, the fire



named "Thomas" became the largest wildfire in California's history. Nearly 1141 km<sup>2</sup> were burned and more than 1,300 structures were destroyed. Overall, 2017 was the most destructive wildfire season in the state. Nearly 9,000 wildfires scorched a total of 4856 km<sup>2</sup> and killed 46 people. The previous winter and spring were wet, which encouraged more vegetation to grow. But summer heat dried the vegetation to tinder and then when the fires started they were driven by high winds.

In January 2018, the wildfires were followed by mudslides. Vegetation 'anchors' the earth in place but when heavy rain hit and there is no vegetation left after the wildfires to hold the soil in place mudslides occur. Some of them are catastrophic! More impacts of climate change.

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