

# Beyond record hot, February was 'astronomical' and 'strange'

March 17 2016, by Seth Borenstein

---



In this Feb. 9, 2016 file photo, Lebanese men play cards and smoke water pipe, as they sunbath during unusually warm weather at the Mediterranean Sea off the Corniche, or waterfront promenade, in Beirut, Lebanon. Earth got so hot last month that federal scientists struggled to find words, describing temperatures as "astronomical," "staggering" and "strange." They warned that the climate may have moved into a new and hotter neighborhood. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)

Earth got so hot last month that federal scientists struggled to find words, describing temperatures as "astronomical," "staggering" and "strange." They warned that the climate may have moved into a new and hotter neighborhood.

This was not just another of the drumbeat of 10 straight broken monthly global heat records, triggered by a super El Nino and man-made global warming. February 2016 obliterated old marks by such a margin that it was the most above-normal month since meteorologists started keeping track in 1880, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

NOAA said Earth averaged 56.08 [degrees](#) Fahrenheit (13.38 degrees Celsius) in February, 2.18 degrees (1.21 degrees Celsius) above average, beating the old [record](#) for February set in 2015 by nearly six-tenths of a degree (one-third of a degree Celsius).

The old record was set just last December and the last three months have been the most above-normal months on record, said NOAA climate scientist Jessica Blunden. And it's not just NOAA. NASA, which uses different statistical techniques, as well as a University of Alabama Huntsville team and the private Remote Sensing System team, which measure using satellites, also said February 2016 had the biggest departure from normal on record.



In this Feb. 16, 2016 file photo, a girl takes pictures of her dog, back dropped by freshly sprung snowdrops and other spring flowers during an unseasonably warm winter day, in Bucharest, Romania. Earth got so hot last month that federal scientists struggled to find words, describing temperatures as "astronomical," "staggering" and "strange." They warned that the climate may have moved into a new and hotter neighborhood. (AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda)

These were figures that had federal scientists grasping for superlatives.

"The departures are what we would consider astronomical," Blunden said. "It's on land. It's in the oceans. It's in the upper atmosphere. It's in the lower atmosphere. The Arctic had record low sea ice."

"Everything everywhere is a record this month, except Antarctica," Blunden said. "It's insane."

In the Arctic, where [sea ice](#) reached a record low for February, land temperatures averaged 8 degrees above normal (4.5 degrees Celsius), Blunden said. That's after January, when Arctic land temperatures were 10.4 degrees above normal (5.8 degrees Celsius).

It was also the warmest winter—December through February—on record, beating the previous year's record by more than half a degree (0.29 degrees Celsius).

Georgia Tech climate scientist Kim Cobb said she normally doesn't concern herself much with the new high [temperature](#) records that are broken regularly.

"However," she added in a Thursday email, "when I look at the new February 2016 temperatures, I feel like I'm looking at something out of a sci-fi movie. In a way we are: it's like someone plucked a value off a graph from 2030 and stuck it on a graph of present temperatures. It is a portent of things to come, and it is sobering that such temperature extremes are already on our doorstep."

NASA's chief [climate scientist](#) Gavin Schmidt usually discounts the importance of individual record hot months, but said this month was different, calling it "obviously strange."

This was due to the long-term warming from heat-trapping gases and the powerful El Nino, so these types of records will continue for a few more months, but probably will not be a permanent situation, Schmidt said in an email.

But others were not so sure. Jason Furtado, a meteorology professor at the University of Oklahoma who wasn't part of any of the government teams, simply wrote in an email: "Welcome to the new normal."

**More information:** NOAA: [www.ncdc.noaa.gov](http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov)

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Beyond record hot, February was 'astronomical' and 'strange' (2016, March 17)  
retrieved 9 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-03-hot-february-astronomical-strange.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--