

Earth breaks heat record again, but not by as much as before

June 16 2016, by Seth Borenstein



In this May 23, 2016 file photo, a man bathes his son on a hot afternoon in Mumbai, India. Federal scientists say Earth sizzled to its 13th straight month of record heat in May, but it wasn't quite as much an over-the-top scorcher as previous months. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool, File)

Earth sizzled to its 13th straight month of record heat in May, but it wasn't quite as much of an over-the-top scorcher as previous months, federal scientists say.

Record May heat, from Alaska to India and especially in the oceans, put the global average temperature at 60.17 degrees Fahrenheit (15.65 degrees Celsius), according to NOAA. That's 1.57 degrees (.87 degrees Celsius) above the 20th-century average, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

There's still a good chance that June will break records even as El Nino, one of two main reasons for record heat, dissipates, scientists say. And in the U.S. Southwest temperatures are forecast to dance near 120 degrees later this week into next week. NOAA's July through September forecast is for hotter-than-average temperatures in the entire United States except a tiny circle of southeastern Texas.

"We're in a new neighborhood now as far as global temperature," said Deke Arndt, NOAA's climate monitoring chief. "We've kind of left the previous decade behind."

But it's not quite as broiling as it has been. May only broke the record—set in 2015—by .04 degrees. It's the first time since November that a month wasn't a full degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) hotter than the 20th-century average. March and February this year were 2.2 degrees Fahrenheit above normal.

"It is slightly off from the kind of unprecedented large global temperatures we've seen in the last five to seven months," Arndt says.

Arndt, like nearly every major climate scientist, says the record warm temperatures are due to a strong El Nino placed on top of man-made global warming from heat-trapping gases that come from the burning of fossil fuels.

The El Nino has just dissipated and forecasters expect its cooler flip side, La Nina, to kick in soon, which should keep global temperatures a

bit lower than they've been, but still warmer than 20th-century average, Arndt said

But that may not be quite enough to keep 2016 from being the third straight record hot year, Arndt says. That's because so far, 2016 is averaging 55.5 degrees (13.06 degrees Celsius), which beats the previous January to May record set last year by 0.43 degrees.

Jonathan Overpeck, a climate scientist at the University of Arizona, just came back from India and its record-breaking heat wave in time for potential record breaking heat in parts of Arizona.

"Thirteen months of consecutive record breaking heat is really unprecedented, and it's yet another visceral glimpse of what is yet to come as the planet warms up even a lot more," Overpeck said in an email. "No doubt about it, the planet is warming fast and we're feeling the impacts."

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Earth breaks heat record again, but not by as much as before (2016, June 16) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-06-month-hottest-modern-history.html>

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.