

Globe breaks heat record for 8th straight month. Golfers get to play in Minnesota's 'lost winter'

February 8 2024, by SETH BORENSTEIN and STEVE KARNOWSKI



A street vendor displays sheets for sale while people sunbathe on the beach in Barcelona, Spain, Jan. 26, 2024. For the eighth straight month, Earth was record hot, according to the European climate agency's analysis of January 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti, File

For the eighth straight month in January, Earth was record hot, according to the European climate agency. That was obvious in the northern United States, where about 1,000 people were golfing last month in a snow-starved Minneapolis during what the state is calling "[the Lost Winter of 2023-24](#)."

For the first time, the global temperature pushed past the internationally agreed upon warming threshold for an entire 12-month period, with February 2023 to January 2024 running 2.74 degrees Fahrenheit (1.52 degrees Celsius) hotter than pre-industrial levels, according to the [Copernicus Climate Change Service](#) of the European Space Agency. That's the highest 12-month [global temperature](#) average on record, Copernicus reported.

The globe has [broken heat records each month](#) since last June.

January 2024 broke the old record from 2020 for warmest first month of the year by 0.22 degrees Fahrenheit (0.12 degrees Celsius) and was 3 degrees Fahrenheit (1.66 degrees Celsius) warmer than the late 1800s, the base for temperatures before the burning of fossil fuels. Even though it was record hot in January, the level above normal was lower than the previous six months, according to Copernicus data.

Climate scientists blame a combination of [human-caused warming](#) from the burning of fossil fuels and a natural but temporary El Niño warming of parts of the Pacific, saying greenhouse gases have a much bigger role than nature. This is the time of year that El Niño warming often peaks, said Texas A&M University climate scientist Andrew Dessler.

"This is both disturbing and not disturbing. After all, if you stick your finger in a light socket and get shocked, it's bad news, sure, but what did you expect?" Dessler said.

Just because the globe exceeded the 1.5-degree warming threshold for 12 months, that's not what scientists mean by reaching the warming limit of 1.5 degrees, said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, co-author of a United Nations science report about the harms of exceeding more than 1.5 degrees. The 1.5-degree limit, adopted by the 2015 Paris climate agreement, is more about 30-year averages.

"These are much more than numbers, ranks and records—they translate to real impacts on our farms, families and communities from unprecedented heat, changing growing seasons and rising sea levels," said North Carolina State Climatologist Kathie Dello.

International Falls, a Minnesota city on the Canadian border that [proudly bills itself](#) as the "icebox of the nation," recorded its first-ever [50-degree high for January](#) on Jan. 31, when the temperature hit 53 Fahrenheit (11.7 Celsius). Minneapolis has already set a record for the number of 50-degree days for a winter.

About 70% of the Minnesota [currently has bare ground](#), with most of the state so far getting less than 25% of normal snowfall.

Authorities have rescued dozens of ice anglers from normally solid northern Minnesota lakes after ice floes broke off and carried them along. The annual [Art Shanty Projects festival](#) on Lake Harriet in Minneapolis in January had to be cut short due to open water and unsafe ice.

The Montgomery National Golf Club, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) south of Minneapolis, should be blanketed under a thick layer of snow this time of year. Instead, it's doing a booming business.

"We did about a thousand golfers in January. If we had had just one golfer, that would have been a record," owner Greg McKush said. "After

today, we will have had about a thousand golfers for February, which is unheard of."

McKush said he reopened two Saturdays ago and figures he might be able to stay open all winter if temperatures continue to reach at least into the 40s.



People gather at "El Morro" to watch the sunset during the San Sebastián Street festivities in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Jan. 21, 2024. For the eighth straight month, Earth was record hot, according to the European climate agency's analysis of January 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Alejandro Granadillo, File

It seems like the fairways are trying to green up, he said, and a lot of the

frost has come out of the ground. Most golfers are telling him conditions are "better than expected."

In Wisconsin, fourth in the U.S. in maple syrup production, the mild winter weather prompted many farms in the state's northern and central regions to begin tapping their trees in mid-January—up to two months earlier than normal, depending on the area, said Theresa Baroun, executive director of the Wisconsin Maple Syrup Producers Association.

"There's a wide range of the state that are tapped and cooking syrup already. It's very unusual. This is one of the most abnormal weather patterns for starting out the maple season we've seen," she said Wednesday. "For maple trees to run, it needs to be freezing at night, above freezing during the day. And this weather has been perfect for the maple trees to run."

Baroun, whose family has about 1,200 maple trees at their Maple Sweet Dairy in De Pere, Wisconsin, just south of Green Bay, said the farm began cooking sap this week and that's the earliest her family can remember since production began in 1964.

The February sturgeon season on Michigan's Black Lake was canceled for the first time due to lack of ice for safe fishing.

At Isle Royal National Park, an island in Lake Superior between Michigan, Minnesota and Canada, scientists [couldn't conduct their annual wolf and moose count](#) because the ice was so weak they couldn't land ski-planes on it to get there.

One of the stranger consequences has been the early emergence of ticks. The Metropolitan Mosquito Control District in Minnesota reported its first deer tick of 2024 on Monday, posting a [creepy photo on social media](#) of a tick in a vial against the backdrop of Feb. 5 on a calendar.

District officials said they haven't found any mosquito larvae yet—but it's not from a lack of searching.

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Citation: Globe breaks heat record for 8th straight month. Golfers get to play in Minnesota's 'lost winter' (2024, February 8) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-globe-8th-straight-month-golfers.html>

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