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Short Updates About Environmental Problems

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Insecticides and Rat Poisons Hurting Children and Other Life

On Friday, October 22nd, milk contaminated with insecticide killed at least 28 children ages 5 to 15 and sickened 20 others in a Peruvian village. Powdered milk received at their school was prepared in a pot used earlier to mix insecticide.

In Apopka, Florida near Orlando, hordes of mice turned up for reasons unknown and residents laid out poisons and traps. Now eagles and hawks and other birds of prey are turning up sick from eating the mice.

After 27,000 birds mostly male red-winged blackbirds were deliberately poisoned on the Harvey and Marilyn Culli farm in Mascoutah, Illinois the weekend of October 16th, some residents have reported seeing other sick animals since. And people want to know when there will be an arrest for the federal crime of using poisoned grain to bait and kill the birds?

Gulls continue to die with internal hemorrhaging at the Presque Isle State Park in Erie, Pennsylvania. West Nile Fever Virus and Avian Botulism results should be known by the end of October. Poisonous rodenticides used to kill rats are more likely, according to biologist Dr. Kathryn Converse, but so far investigators have not found the source of the suspected poison.

West Nile Fever Virus

More about West Nile Fever. Recently a crow and cuckoo bird found dead north of Albany, New York tested positive for the virus, according to a New York State Health Department press release on October 15th. And so did a dead crow found recently in Moorestown, New Jersey, the furthest point south that the new virus has spread so far. Across the Delaware River in Pennsylvania, more dead crows were found last week in Chester and Montgomery Counties around Philadelphia and have been sent for West Nile Virus testing. Results will take three weeks.

One-Eighth World's Bird Species Face Extinction

This week at a meeting in Malaysia, BirdLife International reported that one in eight of the world's bird species faces extinction in the coming decades because of human assault on the global environment. Countries with the most birds at risk are Brazil, Indonesia, China, Colombia, Peru, India and the Philippines. BirdLife said most birds are threatened by deforestation, burning of vegetation, commercial logging, subsistence farming, plantations, arable farming and mining. Most threatened species live in forests. But populations of country birds such as swallows and skylarks in Europe have declined by 50% in the last thirty years.

Unexplained Marine Animal Deaths

In the oceans, marine life are having a bad time, too. In the past year alone from the seas around New Zealand, twenty-three **giant squid** have been trawled up dead and no one knows why. All twenty-three were caught in commercial fishing nets at about 1200 feet depths. To put those 23 deaths into perspective, the National Institute of Water and Atmosphere says only fifty giant squid were found dead in the previous twenty years! Giant squid grow up to nearly fifty feet long, have a beak like a parrot and can have huge, 12-inch diameter eyes. Scientists think they live about a mile below the surface of oceans, but no one has ever studied a living giant squid - making them one of the most illusive creatures on earth.

In the Long Island Sound waters off Connecticut and New York, at least a million **lobsters** in recent weeks have died. The die-off is too widespread to be explained by lack of oxygen in late summer polluted waters. Bodies are now being studied for disease and cause of death. One lobsterman, Jay Palmer, pulled up the several hundred traps he had in the western Sound and is now working in construction. He told reporters at the Connecticut Post, "I'm not a scientist, I'm a fisherman, (but) my gut feeling is that it's a chemical problem. I know people who've been fishing out here for fifty years and this has never happened before." Palmer also said the eggs on female lobsters are gray instead of green and that blue crabs and spider crabs also are coming up either dead or sick.

Until this mysterious tragedy, East Coast lobsters were already in trouble from severe overfishing. In fact, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is expected to impose the first coast wide limits on the number of traps lobstermen can drop in an effort to protect the rapidly diminishing population of marine animals.

There is a **dead zone** down in the Gulf of Mexico, an area as big as New Jersey is dead. And it's causing a war between Midwestern farmers and fishermen in the Gulf. A study released by the Clinton administration says the chief source of the dead zone is upriver on the Mississippi at the hog farms in Iowa and fields in Illinois saturated with fertilizers and pesticides. The government has proposed a 20% cutback in the use of nitrogen fertilizers that end up in the Gulf from the Mississippi River. Farmers want to be paid for any land they take out of production.

Nitrogen fertilizers make plants grow, including huge algae blooms. As algae thrives, spreads, dies and sinks to the bottom, it removes oxygen from water. Some marine animals that are agile such as shrimp and fish can get out of oxygen-deprived water quickly. But slower animals such as snails and crabs die. This year the dead zone covered 7,728 square miles and is expected to be larger next year. Even the Gulf fishermen are asking the government to help. "The key is to not wait until this takes over the whole Gulf!"

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