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Cataclysmic Weather and Unheard of Numbers

by Graham Brazier

“More than one billion marine intertidal animals may have perished along the shores of the Salish Sea during the record temperatures at the end of June”, according to University of British Columbia researcher Chris Harley, who was quoted in the July 10 issue of *Mother Jones*. He went on to say, “The heat and the stench were staggering after masses of mussels, barnacles, clams, hermit crabs, and starfish cooked to death at a number of Lower Mainland beaches.” Many Denman Island waterfront residents can confirm that Lower Mainland beaches were not the only scenes of such suffering.

Consequences of extreme heat were not, of course, limited to the seashore. Acre upon acre of forested land throughout the province as well as all of, what must be, billions of its inhabitants in addition to countless human communities throughout the province suffered traumatizing losses due to wild fires — none more devastating than Lytton. And evacuation notices continue to be issued throughout the province as wild fires spread.

Locally, the Comox weather station reported five consecutive days when the maximum temperature exceeded 32°. It peaked on June 27 at 38° — the highest temperature recorded in the 77 year history of the station. The fact that June’s weather is notoriously variable and challenging for forecasters is also evident in the overnight low temperatures recorded during this five day period. 23.1°, which was the overnight low temperature recorded on the 29th of June is warmer than the maximum temperature recorded in 8 of the 77 Junes on the record.

Though ‘unprecedented’ is most certainly the appropriate word for the sweltering heat of the recent five day period it was somewhat surprising to discover that temperatures exceeding 30° have been recorded in 25% [19/77] of previous Junes. In 1969, for example, 5 days of 30° or more with a maximum of 34.4° recorded on June 9 are part of the historical record and eleven years earlier in June of 1958, for 7 days the temperature exceeded 30°. Nevertheless, while they exceeded 30°, they stopped well short of the 38° experienced on June 27 of this year.

The fire threat that extreme heat brings about is, of course, exacerbated when accompanied by drought. And, as I write on July 16, Denman Island’s weather station at the community school has recorded 33 consecutive days without measurable precipitation and despite the few drops that I awoke to this morning I imagine the trend will continue as I doubt those drops were measurable. [note: July 17 Those drops were not measurable at the Community School, however, they added up to .8 mm at the Comox Airport and their stretch of rainless days ended at 30.] Our neighbours in Comox have experienced 30 days without rain while Vancouver and Victoria have both gone 31 days without. No rainfall has been recorded at any of these stations to this date in July this year. Consequently, it is still possible that Comox could tie the record set in July of 1958 and 1985 when no measurable precipitation was recorded in the whole month — thirty-one rainfree days!

Drought, though not common in the Comox Valley, is not rare either. In the past 77 years we have experienced 13 stretches of 30 or more consecutive days without rain. None of these

stretches however included days in June — not surprisingly, all were later in the summer. The longest drought was 44 days, recorded between July 17 and August 29 in 1961. All but one other dry spell occurred between July and August. In 1993, however, strange as it may seem, the first 23 days in September preceded by the last 8 days of August were rain free.

These statistics are more than somewhat discomfoting; for what is normally considered the “fire season” in this part of the world has only just begun.

Source:

<https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2021/07/the-canadian-heat-wave-has-been-devastating-for-billions-of-marine-creatures/>