

EARTHWEEK: A DIARY OF THE PLANET

By Steve Newman

April Floods



At least six people are known to have died in some of the worst flooding ever to strike eastern Australia. Residents of several outback towns in Queensland and New South Wales were evacuated by helicopter as flood waters rose to cover the rooftops of homes in some locations. Thousands of head of livestock and wildlife drowned, and vast areas of cropland were ruined.

Some of the heaviest downpours to strike Tanzania in 47 years produced flooding that killed nine people, destroyed homes in 22 villages, and severely damaged a portion of the country's vital coffee crop. Extensive flooding also was reported in Uzbekistan's Tashkent Oasis, Taiwan and East Texas.

Tornadoes



A tornado tore through a string of Bangladesh villages, killing at least 24 people and injuring 2,000. The storm devastated 35 villages in Sirajganj

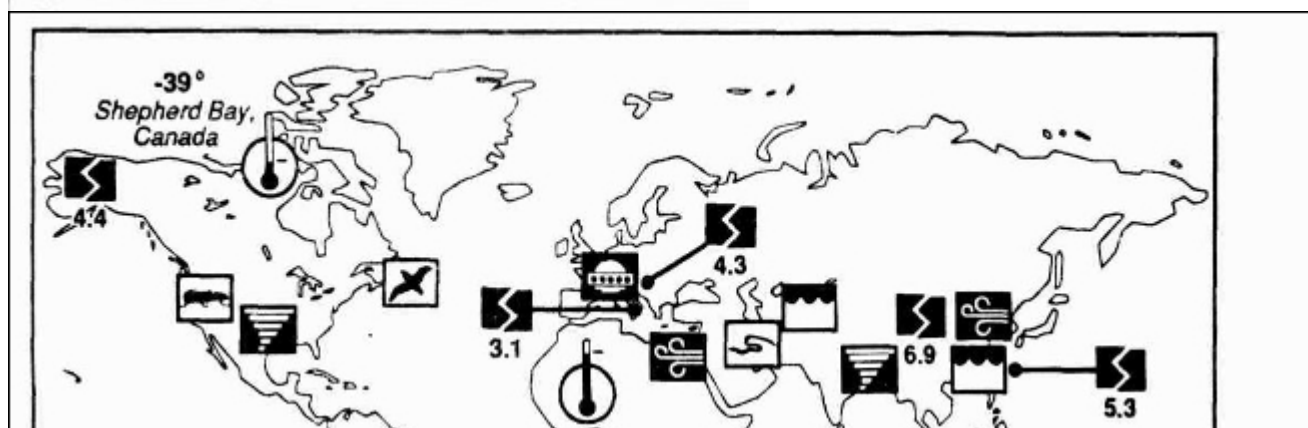
devastated 35 villages in Sirajganj district, tossing houses and trees as if they were scraps of paper, according to witnesses.

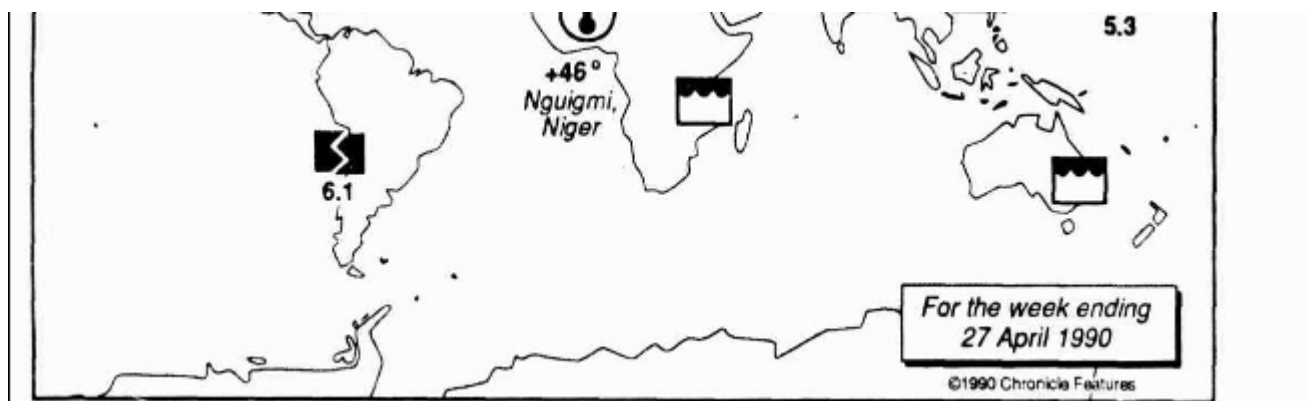
A swarm of severe thunderstorms produced flash floods and at least six tornadoes that hop-scotched across parts of Texas and Oklahoma. Three people were killed near Abilene when a twister tore through the high plains town of Brownwood. More than 254 mm of rain fell during two days of torrents, in the already rain-soaked Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area.

UFOs



Hundreds of people, including some pilots, reported spotting an unidentified flying object over Rome. Police in the Italian capital received numerous calls, describing a "kind of luminous ball that left smoke in its trail." There have been several reports of UFO sightings over Belgium in recent weeks.





Desert Plague



Officials began aerial spraying over 280,000 hectares of northern Nevada threatened by the worst Mormon cricket infestation in half a century. "We are seeing numbers of 500-plus per square metre, maybe up to 1,000," said Dick Rowe, a deputy director of the Nevada Department of Agriculture. If the insects, members of the long-horned grasshopper family, are allowed to grow to maturity, they will be 50 mm-long in 30 days and could devastate the region's alfalfa crop worth \$50 million. They are called Mormon crickets because they were first discovered by Mormon settlers in 1848.

Earthquakes



Moderate earth movements were felt in Northwest China, southern Italy, Japan's southern islands, Chile's central coast, eastern Turkey, Yugoslavia and central Alaska.

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Gull Reprieve



A plan to kill gulls on eastern Canada's Sable island with poison sandwiches was cancelled after Nova Scotia residents became enraged over the proposed slaughter. Wildlife officials had proposed the cull to save the endangered terns which are slowly being outnumbered by the gulls. Environmentalists said the plan would be a massacre, and could pollute one of the world's most delicate ecosystems.

Earth and Wind



A severe sand storm in Upper Egypt caused a power failure that affected almost all of the country. The Middle East News Agency reported that the storm damaged the strategic Nag Hammadi power station, and that power slowly was being restored across the country.

Residents of Beijing brought out their mops and brooms to clean up

after the worst dust storm to whip through the Chinese capital in at least 70 years. Flights were delayed and traffic slowed to a crawl when high winds and fine yellow dust —

nigh winds and fine yellow dust — originally top soil from the Mongolian plateau — blew into town.

Snake Shooter



An Iranian man who tried to trap a snake with the butt of his rifle was shot dead when the viper coiled around the weapon and pressed the trigger. Ali-Asghar Ahani, 27, was picnicking at a man-made fishing pond on the outskirts of Teheran with his wife, children and three other families, the Iranian news agency Irna reported. "We were chasing a rabbit when two snakes attracted our attention," said a friend of the dead man. "Pressing the butt of his rifle, Ali-Asghar tried to take the snake alive. The trigger went off in the ensuing struggle."

Additional Sources: *U. S. Climate Analysis Center, U. S. Earthquake Information Center and the World Meteorological Organization.*