

## **EARTHWEEK: A DIARY OF THE PLANET**

*By Steve Newman*

### **Oil Pollution**



Shifting winds kept the massive Persian Gulf oil spill from spreading further southward as environmentalists warned that only one in 10 of the oily birds rescued from the area will survive. "The birds are weakened when they preen themselves and ingest large quantities of oil. That's the killer," said Jose Carreilo, chief of wildlife conservation for the Ontario region of Environment Canada, who is helping in the Gulf rescue effort.

Several people in western Iran became ill after eating fish caught in the oil-tainted waters of the northern Persian Gulf. The victims said the fish gave off an oily smell when being cooked. Meanwhile, the Iranian press reported that more black, greasy rains had fallen in western parts of the country, caused by fires at oil installations in Iraq and Kuwait. The rains polluted water supplies and farmlands, and a huge pall of smoke darkened the sky over Bandar-e Lengeh, on the northern rim of the Gulf.

In Britain, as many as 40,000 sea birds may have died in the Severn Estuary because of an oil spill. The 20-km slick of heavy fuel oil was caused by a fractured pipe at British Steel's Lanwern plant in Wales.

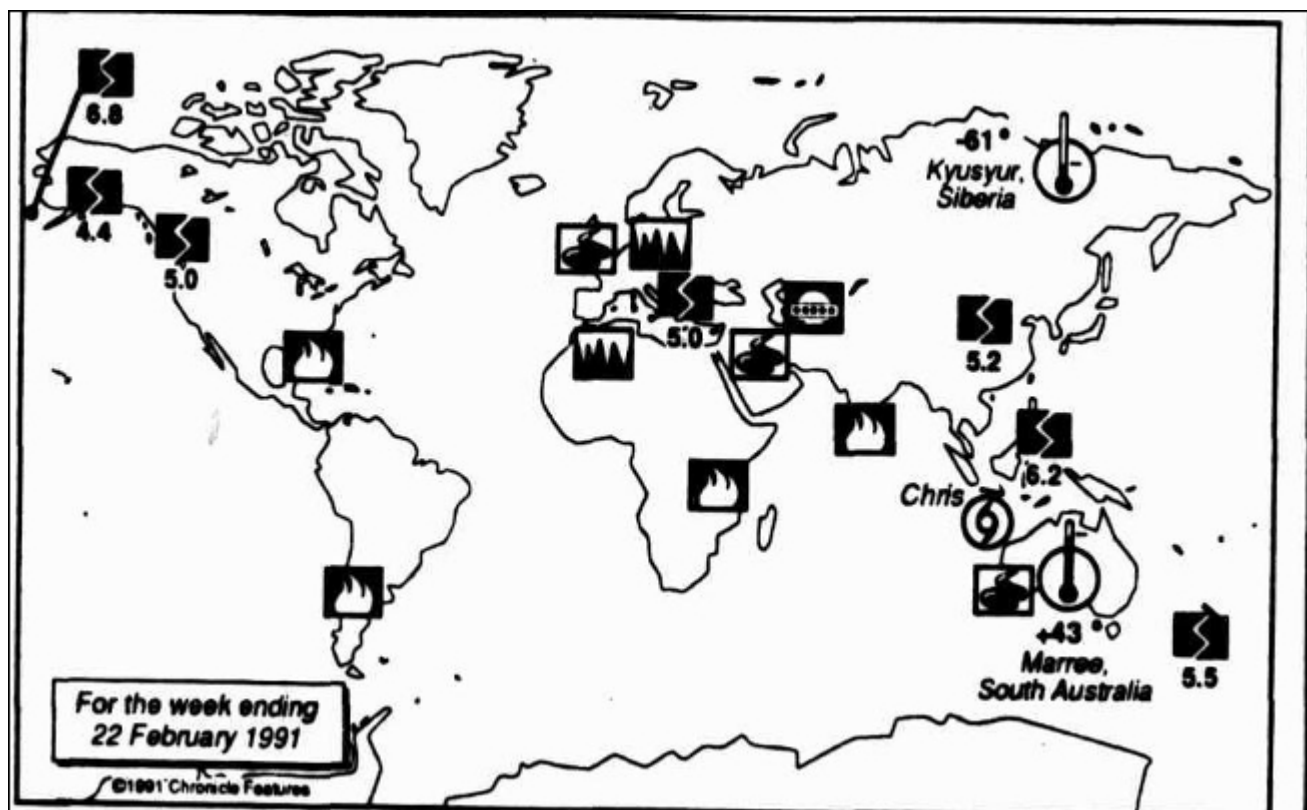
The worst oil spill ever to affect Western Australia blackened 12 miles of pristine white beaches after

miles of pristine white beaches after the Japanese tanker Sanko Harvest hit a reef and sank off Esperance, 725 km southeast of Perth. Rescue workers saved at least 20 rare New Zealand seal pups that were covered with oil. Other victims were kangaroos in the Lucky Bay area, where four were found dead with oil on their tails and paws.

### **Tropical Storms**



Tropical cyclone Chris churned the northeast Indian Ocean between Australia and the Indonesian island of Jawa with sustained winds of 100 kilometres per hour.



## Wildfires



A raging brush-fire swept through the Nairobi National Park, sending hundreds of wild animals running in panic, but causing no deaths.

High winds and low humidity in southwest Florida fanned 149 wildfires that blackened more than 4,000 hectares, gutted a dozen buildings, and injured four people.

A 60,000-hectare grassland fire, set by a group of children, raged out of control in western Argentina near the Chilean border.

Fire that destroyed more than 200 hectares of teak and sandalwood forest in southern India also killed hundreds of deer and other animals. Residents near the Muelhole Forest blame poachers for setting the blaze.

## Earthquakes

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A moderate quake and several strong aftershocks knocked down houses, cracked roads, and caused land-

slides in China's Sichuan province.

In Greece, major damage was reported on the island of Zante from a tremor centered beneath the Ionian Sea. Earth movements were also felt in southern British Columbia, southern Alaska, around the Bering Sea, New Zealand's South Island, and the southern Philippines.

## Winter



More than a month of sub-freezing temperatures in Berlin has driven rats from

**■■■■■** Berlin has driven rats from their frozen underground homes into the streets in search of food. Residents of Kreuzberg, a neighborhood in the western part of the city that once faced the Berlin Wall, were advised not to feed birds to avoid attracting rats. More than 100 rats massed in a Kreuzberg park.

The same Siberian air mass that plunged much of Europe into a deep freeze brought snow to the Sahara for the first time in more than 30 years. The rare snow was seen in Al-

geria from near the Moroccan border to the central high plains.

## **UFOs**



Tass reported that the skies over Uzbekistan were teeming with flying saucers. Locals, who are said to have grown accustomed to the space invasion, suspect the aliens are after the region's vast gold deposits. In the latest twist to the space mystery, newspapers *Vecherny Tashkent* and *Molodezh Uzbekistana* reported the visit by alien robots in the town of Daugyztau, in central Kyzyl-Khem. Three local teenagers spotted what they described as "truncated pyramids, covered with metal scales." They had what looked like wings on their sides, and made huge leaps, covering 4-5 metres. Tass said the report could have been the result of the boys' rich imagination, but So-

**the boys' non imagination, but Soviet UFO experts said they found powerful magnetic fields in places pointed out by the children.**