

Heat wave breaks records in France, kills baby birds in Spain

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LONDON — This city was not built for extreme heat. The London Underground, though a marvel of the Victorian era, is only partially air-conditioned. And the soupy, sweaty “Tube” put even the stiffest upper lips to the test on Friday, Britain’s hottest day of the year.

“You just grin and bear it,” said Michael Finch, a 33-year-old lawyer who was pulling luggage, carrying a 5-liter water bottle and playing to type.

“Make sure you have some water,” he advised, “and then look forward to getting out the other side.”

Dangerous discomfort is being felt across much of western Europe this week, as a punishing heat wave — propelled by hot air blowing in from Africa — sends temperatures soaring.

The thermometer at London’s Heathrow airport topped 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 Celsius). “Worcester will be hotter than Hawaii,” one local headline read.

At what Meteorological Office meteorologists predicted might be the “hottest Royal Ascot on record,” racecourse officials relaxed their famously strict dress code, allowing men to remove their jackets and ties in all enclosures after the conclusion of the royal carriage procession. Many spectators elected to keep their ties on, anyway.

In Spain, the State Meteorological Agency called it the earliest major heat wave in more than 40 years, while authorities in France noted that they had never in recorded history surpassed 104 degrees (40 Celsius) this early in June.

On Friday, dozens of weather stations in France recorded their hottest June temperatures on record, and two locations observed their hottest-ever day on record: the town of Pissos in southwestern France hit 107 degrees (41.7 Celsius), while Revel hit 104 degrees (40.2 Celsius).

In Spain’s Valencia province, temperatures on Wednesday and Friday were some of the hottest for June since 1950. The Valencia airport set a record June high on Friday at 102 degrees (39 Celsius), beating the mark set in 2017.

One of the highest temperatures recorded in this heat wave so far occurred in Andújar in southern Spain, which hit 111.5 degrees (44.2 Celsius) on Friday.

The heat wave was expected to subside in Britain and to a degree in Spain after Friday, but peak in France on Saturday. Germany, Poland and Austria are all expected to be unusually hot through the weekend. The heat is then expected to shift to southern Europe early next week.

The Met Office said the temperatures were surprising for mid-June — though they have started recording higher temperatures in recent years.

“This is the type of thing that climate scientists were warning about, and unfortunately, it does look like this is going to become more common,” said Alex Burkill, a senior meteorologist.

In Spain, authorities issued dozens of heat warnings and put nearly the entire country under “extreme risk” of wildfire. While firefighters try to contain the blazes already underway, thousands of people have been evacuated.

In southern Spain, hundreds of baby birds died after leaving their scorching nests too early. Scientists said Spain’s earliest heat wave had coincided with the hatching season for swifts, a protected species. Biologist Elena Moreno Portillo told the Guardian newspaper that the birds tend to build enclosed nests in the cavities of buildings, which are often made of concrete or metal. “So it becomes an oven and the chicks, who can’t fly yet, rush out because they can’t stand the temperature inside,” Moreno Portillo said. “They’re literally being cooked.”

The extreme heat, coupled with lack of rain, has reduced some of Europe’s major rivers to low levels. Italy’s Po, the country’s largest river, is so low that shipwrecks are resurfacing. Authorities in northern Italy are increasingly concerned about the possibility of water shortages.

France issued its highest heat-warning category Friday for areas in the west and southwest.

“Be vigilant!,” French Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne wrote on Twitter.

Scott Duncan, a meteorologist based in Scotland, tweeted that the event could be “one of the most profound heatwaves in French history. An immense number of records are about to fall.”

France and Spain also just recorded their highest average May temperatures on record.

And people really do feel the heat, because air conditioning — while becoming more common — is still far more the exception than the norm in much of Europe.

After a heat wave killed 15,000 in France in 2003, French nursing homes developed emergency plans for weeks like this. Many of them are now equipped with air-conditioned rooms, additional ventilation or sprinklers that cool down building facades.

But both France and Germany are reported to have roughly 5 percent or fewer residential homes with air conditioning. In contrast, more than 90 percent of people in the United States have access to air conditioning at home.

Some European countries have additionally discouraged people from setting their air conditioning too high this summer, in an effort to reduce electricity demand and reliance on Russian natural gas. Italy’s “operation thermostat” instructs schools and public buildings to consider 77 degrees (25 Celsius) as low as they should go.

In Paris, city authorities encouraged residents and tourists to use a dedicated website to find over 900 “islands of coolness” which include city parks, cemeteries, swimming pools and museums. [The site](#) also points to dedicated “cooling routes” — for example, streets with lush trees — that connect those spaces. Other French cities rely on misting devices.

But climate scientists say that more needs to be done as climate change makes periods of intense heat more frequent.

Hannah Cloke, a climate scientist at the University of Reading, said Britain was “really not prepared” for extreme heat, with offices, houses and nursing homes “not built to help keep people cool.”

“People aren’t taking it very seriously. They think about ice creams and having fun, but they aren’t seeing the risk for vulnerable people,” she said. Hundreds of people in Britain die every year from heat waves.

To help keep cool, many Brits on Friday flocked to outdoor swimming pools and ponds and fountains.

Sandra Greenidge, a 47-year-old babysitter, brought the toddler she looks after to London’s Southbank Center cultural complex, where fountain jets blasted water in the air, creating “rooms” that appear and then quickly disappear.

“We don’t have the infrastructure for ... this heat,” she said. “Considering that, we do reasonably well. A lot of places have become dual purposes — like the galleries providing things like this for children.”

The toddler wiggled out of her arms, grabbed his bucket and waded back into the fountain. “We may be here for hours,” Greenidge said.

Noack reported from Paris and Livingston from Washington. Kasha Patel in Washington contributed to this report.