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Hurricane Season May Be "Extremely Active"

Atlantic-born hurricanes would have unknown consequences for Gulf oil spill.

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Video: Geographic Bee Finale



Orphan "Moon Bear" Cubs Get Help



Hurricane Ike swirls over Cuba two Atlantic hurricane seasons ago.

Image courtesy NOAA

Willie Drye
for [National Geographic News](#)
Published May 27, 2010

The U.S. East Coast and Gulf Coast should brace for a potentially "extremely active" hurricane season, according to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's](#) 2010 Atlantic

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Photos: Fish With "Hands" Identified

Nine fish that use handlike fins to walk, rather than swim, off Australia have been identified as new species.



New Oldest Human Species Identified?

Potential new species walked upright, looked somewhat apelike, swung from trees, and played with fire, study suggests.



Top Ten New Species

From a psychedelic fish to a "phallic" fungus, see some of the most unusual species described in 2009, as chosen by taxonomists.

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forecast, released Thursday.

NOAA warned of added risk from the [Gulf of Mexico oil spill](#), saying a hurricane storm surge could bring "discernable deposits" of oil even farther ashore along the Gulf Coast.

(See "[Hurricane Could Push Spilled Gulf Oil Into New Orleans.](#)")

At a press conference in Washington, D.C., agency officials predicted that the 2010 hurricane season could be one of the busiest on record, with as many as 23 named tropical storms forming in the Atlantic Ocean between June 1 and November 30. (Watch [hurricane videos.](#))

As many as 14 of those storms could become hurricanes, which have winds of at least 74 miles (119 kilometers) an hour, according to a NOAA statement. Up to seven of those hurricanes could become major storms, with winds exceeding 110 miles (177 kilometers) an hour, the forecast says.

In an average summer about 11 tropical storms form—among them 6 hurricanes, including 2 major hurricanes.

The "extremely active" hurricane season prediction is based in part on record water temperatures currently in the Atlantic regions where tropical storms form and along the paths where they can intensify into hurricanes, NOAA says. Warm water and warm, humid air fuel hurricanes.

Another factor driving the forecast is the lack of an El Niño in the eastern Pacific, NOAA says. The unusually warm waters of an El Niño cause the jet stream—a high-altitude wind current to shift southward—where high-level winds can disrupt hurricane formation.

(Related: "[Strong Hurricanes Getting Stronger; Warming Is Blamed.](#)")

NOAA's 2010 Atlantic hurricane season forecast is slightly more ominous than [Colorado State University's](#) eagerly awaited annual prediction, released in early April. Though it forecast an "above average" hurricane season, the Colorado team predicted fewer tempests than NOAA: 15 named storms, 8 hurricanes, and 4 major hurricanes.

(See "[2009 Hurricane Season Quietest in Decades.](#)")

Hurricanes' Effects on Oil Spill Unknown

The explosion last month of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil rig off the coast of Louisiana has injected a worrisome uncertainty into 2010 hurricane forecasts for the Gulf Coast.

Craig Fugate, administrator of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, said NOAA scientists are trying to determine how a hurricane might interact with the massive oil spill.

Gradually and pervasively oozing ashore, coating everything in its path, leaked oil has started fouling Louisiana wetlands. But it's not clear hurricane-driven oil would behave in the same way.

"We don't have models to tell us how the oil will come ashore" in a hurricane, Fugate said at the news conference. "I don't think the oil will come ashore in a hurricane like it's coming ashore now."

Rather than a comprehensive coating, for example, hurricane-tossed oil may be patchier. But it wouldn't be invisible, said Fugate, who said oily traces would be easily "discernable."

Depending on the topography, a powerful hurricane can drive a storm surge more than a mile (1.6 kilometers) inland. And as Texas Tech University's Ron Kendall told National Geographic News earlier this month, "You put a major hurricane in [the oil spill zone], you're liable to have oil in downtown New Orleans."

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France's Brown Bears

Practically extinct for decades, bears may be making tenuous steps back into French country living.



Robo-Record Set on Mars

The rover Opportunity has surpassed the record for longest time spent working on Mars: 6 years, 116 days, and counting.



GG Blog: Dammed River Saved

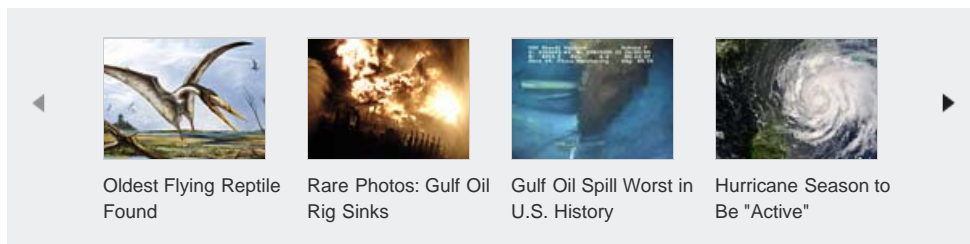
The return of large numbers of fish to the Kennebec shows rivers can heal.

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Gulf Oil Spill News and Pictures



Gulf Oil Spill Worst in U.S. History
Amid cautious optimism that a "top kill" effort to cap the leaking well causing the Gulf oil spill is working, President Obama banned new offshore drilling Thursday until further notice.



Gulf Coast Pipelines Face Damage?
As oil from the Gulf spill kills off wetlands, it could dangerously expose buried pipelines and other infrastructure, experts say.

[More Gulf Oil Spill Coverage »](#)

From the New June Issue



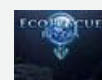
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