



IT IS THE FORCE THAT IS RAPIDLY MELTING THE EARTH'S ICE CAPS, CLAIMING THE LIVES OF ENDANGERED SPECIES WORLDWIDE, FORCING ANIMALS FROM THEIR NATURAL HABITATS, FUELING STRONGER STORMS AND MORE SEVERE WEATHER SHIFTS, AND SPREADING DISEASES IN NEW TERRITORIES. MANY OF US KNOW IT AS GLOBAL WARMING. IN CABO PULMO, IT IS KNOWN AS "CALENTANDO"...

Global Warming and Reefs: The Facts Speak for Themselves

BY BRITTANY PARKIN

CABO PULMO REEF, THE ONLY LIVING HARD coral reef in North America, is one of the most biologically diverse ocean ecosystems in the world. The seven-mile long aquarium is a brilliant underwater kingdom that provides sanctuary for hundreds of species of marine animals including birds, sea turtles, numerous species of fish, whales, and sharks. In the 80's, commercial overfishing nearly destroyed the delicate balance of the coral reef's ecosystem, but this problem was largely resolved in 1995 with the creation of the Cabo Pulmo National Marine Reserve that, among other things, banned all fishing within the protected area.

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Today, in addition to rapid development, the greatest threat to this essential ecosystem is global warming. Over the past 30 years, the steady rise of sea temperatures associated with global warming have damaged the symbiotic relationship between coral and algae, causing portions of the reef to bleach and die out. The destruction of the coral ecosystem has dire effects on both the people living in Cabo Pulmo who depend on the vitality of the sea for sustenance and economy as well as the many animals that live in the canyons and crevasses of this beautiful coral reef.

Whales in particular are suffering. The magnificent gray whales that migrate over 5,400 miles from the Bering Sea to the tepid lagoons of Baja California Sur every year to give birth are having difficulty finding enough food in the warmer waters. As a result, their migratory patterns are changing as they extend their stay in the north searching for food and new feeding grounds. While this may seem rather benign, these migratory and feeding changes raise concerns that the new prey may not be as nutritious. During the

whales' northern migration in 1999 and 2000, marine scientists counted 200 beached gray whales and one that appeared emaciated.

The invasion of new diseases as a result of warmer temperatures has claimed human life in Cabo Pulmo as well. Maria Castro, the Castro family matriarch who opened a popular restaurant on the beach, La Palapa, died at the age of 54 of dengue fever in 2003. To date, her death is the only known fatality of this disease in Cabo Pulmo, but among the many effects of global warming is the increase of mosquitoes carrying dengue fever, malaria, and yellow fever to higher altitudes and other latitudes.



Global warming is a force we can no longer ignore. Whereas the science behind it was once positioned as dubious by “experts” who attributed significant spikes in global temperature to historically normal cyclical weather patterns, the facts now speak for themselves. As indisputable data pours in, we are finally beginning to leave behind a decades-long period of ignorance and move forward into an era characterized by acceptance and action.

Significant damage has been done to such pristine places as Cabo Pulmo, but through continued education and action, we can work together to slow and possibly even reverse some of the devastating effects that global warming will have on Baja's magical peninsula. For some practical ways on how you can help put this global climate crisis to rest, visit www.BajaLife.com/EcoWatch. And for more information on the Cabo Pulmo Marine Reserve, please visit www.CaboPulmoPark.com. ■

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