Museum visitors learn how climate change affects their own backyards

Yale UniversityYale University

Visitors to the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History’s latest exhibition will have the opportunity to explore how climate change in New England might affect them personally.

“Seasons of Change: Global Warming in Your Backyard” — which opened at the Peabody Museum on Dec. 15 and runs through Feb. 24 — is an interactive traveling exhibition that illustrates how climate change is impacting the landscape of New England over the change of the seasons. Although New England climate change is the focus, global climate change is addressed as well.

This family-friendly exhibition uses computer games, videos, and hands-on specimens to illustrate the science of global warming and climate change. As visitors control a global climate change simulation and compare coastal flooding today with projections for the year 2100, they will have guidance formulating answers to the question: What will you miss most about your current climate?

New England is already experiencing changes that are consistent with global warming: rising temperatures and sea levels, decreasing snow cover, and earlier springs, scientists say. With these changes, those who live in the region can also expect an increase in extreme weather, including additional summer days above 100°F, more damaging nor'easters, and more seasonal droughts. Scientists also predict a 10% increase in precipitation in the next 50 years, including fewer — but more intense — rain events and more winter rainstorms. Coastal regions will be at greater risk of flooding and erosion.

Changes in climate are also affecting local flora and fauna in the form of altered habitat, breeding and migration patterns, and the availability of food, scientists say. Invasive insects are eating through forest habitats, for example, and migratory bird ranges are shifting in response to warmer weather and changing forest composition. Rising temperatures in the North Atlantic are also putting marine species, such as shellfish, at increasing risk, and these foods and others are expected to become scarcer. While some species may adapt to changes in climate, others may have nowhere to go, scientists maintain.

“Seasons of Change” was made possible by a grant from the National Science Foundation and support from the Environmental Defense Fund. The presenting sponsor is Energize CT.

The exhibition is a project of Brown University's Center for Environmental Studies and Clean Air-Cool Planet's New England Science Center Collaborative.

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