

The Washington Post

Capital Weather Gang

The planet had its biggest temperature spike in modern history in February

By **Jason Samenow** March 14

The global temperature in February took its greatest leap in 136 years of record-keeping, rising 1.35 degrees Celsius (2.43 degrees Fahrenheit) above the 1951-1980 average. As a result of the gigantic temperature jump, it became the warmest February on record by a landslide.

NASA released the data over the weekend, and scientists reacted with astonishment.

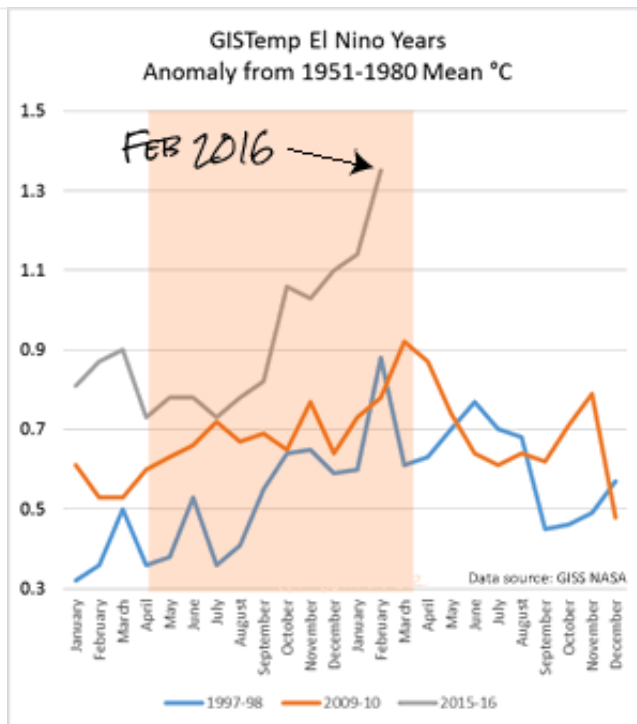
“Wow,” [tweeted climate scientist Gavin Schmidt](#), who directs NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies. “Normally I don’t comment on individual months, but last month was special.”

“This result is a true shocker, and yet another reminder of the incessant long-term rise in global temperature resulting from human-produced greenhouse gases,” [blogged meteorologists Jeff Masters and Bob Henson at Weather Underground](#).

The 1.35-degree difference from the 1951 base line marked the greatest monthly departure on record, 0.21 degrees Celsius above the next biggest departure established just the month before that.

The extraordinary global warmth was set in motion by the long-term climate-warming trend, but it surged to another level because of the record-challenging El Niño event that released into the atmosphere large quantities of heat stored in the tropical Pacific Ocean.

The heat injection helped this February pass February 1998, the previous record holder, by a whopping 0.47 degrees Celsius (0.85 Fahrenheit).



Sou Sou from Bundanga
@SouBundanga

Follow

Comparing 2015/16 with 1997/98 and 2009/10 El Niño years.
blog.hotwhopper.com/2016/03/hottes...

4:35 AM - 13 Mar 2016

36

15

Although February 1998's global temperature also spiked because of El Niño, this year's rise was steeper and started at a higher base line because of the years of climate warming in between.

February's warmth was especially pronounced over land areas in the Northern Hemisphere outside the tropics. In the Arctic, temperatures were remarkably warm, about 6 degrees Celsius (almost 11 degrees Fahrenheit) above normal, and sea ice was at a record low for the month.

Two other research centers confirmed that February achieved record highs, including [an analysis of surface temperature data from the Japan Meteorological Agency](#) and a satellite-based estimate of lower atmospheric temperatures from the University of Alabama at Huntsville.

The planetary warmth that began 2016 is without a rival, at a whole different level from the past two years, which ultimately set records.

The year will probably end as the warmest on record, passing 2015 and 2014. Deke Arndt, a climate scientist

at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, put it this way in [a conversation with Discover's Tom Yulsman](#): “If my wife asked me if I thought 2016 was going to be the warmest year, I’d say ‘yes’ pretty confidently. However, as a public servant and as a scientist, we’re a pretty conservative lot, and I don’t think we’d say that until we were 100 percent sure.”

At some point, 2016’s chart-topping warmth is bound to reverse. The present El Niño is forecast to wane as the spring wears on and a La Niña event, which exerts a cooling effect on the planetary temperature, could kick in later this year or in 2017.

“‘Global warming’ is not a relentless march towards warmer temperature with every month and season and year and decade being warmer than the preceding month and season and decade,” climate scientist Jerry Meehl of the National Center for Atmospheric Research [told Yulsman](#). “Human-caused warming due to increasing greenhouse gases can best be seen over the long term so that the internal variations average out, leaving the more steady increase of global temperatures over those longer time scales.”

Jason is the Washington Post’s weather editor and Capital Weather Gang's chief meteorologist. He earned a master's degree in atmospheric science, and spent 10 years as a climate change science analyst for the U.S. government. He holds the Digital Seal of Approval from the National Weather Association.

The Post Recommends

Why smart people are better off with fewer friends

Are you ready for "paleo-happiness"?

How ‘ghost corporations’ are funding the 2016 election

Opaque and hard-to-trace outfits are funneling millions to outside groups.

‘The Simpsons’ predicted a Trump presidency 16 years ago tomorrow. The writer explains why.

'Simpsons' writer Dan Greaney says that comedy even deserves "the blame" for a serious Trump candidacy.

At a Glance

Sat.	Sun.	Mon.
45° /47° 80%	35° /42° 70%	32° /47°

Tue.	Wed.	Thu.
31° /53°	43° /68°	50° /72°

Forecast by National Weather Service ↻

National Airport **Dulles** **BWI**

Right Now

47.0

(8.3° C)

Weather Overcast

Wind Northeast at 11.5 mph

Wind Chill 42 F

Dew Point 30.9 F

Pressure 1018.2 mb

Last updated: Mar 19, 2016, 5:52 a.m.

Washington, D.C., Snow Tracker

Current Snow Total
22.2"

Record Most Snow
(2009-10)
56.1"

Record Least Snow 0.1"
(1997-98, 1972-73)

Last Winter's Snow
Total
18.3"

[Winter Outlook](#) ➔

Tweets by @capitalweather

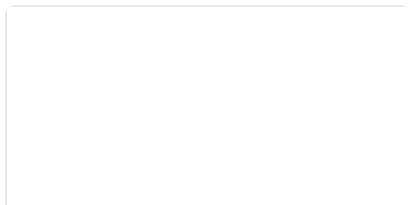


Capital Weather Gang

@capitalweather

D.C. area forecast: Rain mixing with or turning to snow today, minor accumulation possible

wapo.st/1R6EC6x



D.C. area forecast: Rain mixing ...

Whether or not you see snow stick ...

washingtonpost.com

1h



Capital Weather Gang

@capitalweather

Saturday's digit: 3/10 - Another weekend that's much less nice than during the work week. Precip in during the morning or midday. Ian, CWG

7h

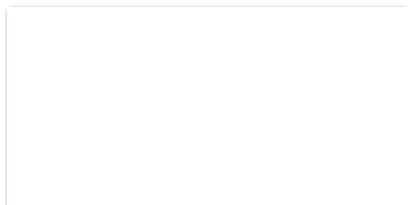


Capital Weather Gang

@capitalweather

PM Update: Much colder this weekend with rain and snow

wapo.st/1ZawIMy



PM Update: Much colder this we...

Temperatures nose dive and there!...

washingtonpost.com

14h

[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

D.C. Area Almanac

March ▾

19

National **Dulles** **BWI**

High 57 56 55

Avg 38 33 34

High (1945) 87 (1986) 74 (1918) 78

Low (1876) 13 (1967) 10 (1876) 12

Sunrise 7:11 am 7:13 am 7:10 am

Sunset 7:19 pm 7:21 pm 7:18 pm

°F | **°C**