



Cool Knowledge of Meteorology

Headline Photo / Wilson Wong

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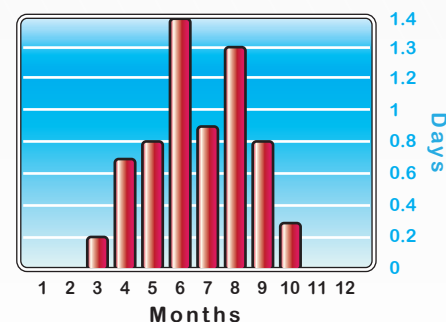
Raining Cats and Dogs

"Raining cats and dogs" is an English idiom to describe heavy downpour situations. The definitive origin of this phrase is difficult to trace. Among the many versions that exist, one can be traced back to the 17th century Irish writer, Jonathan Swift. In one of his poems, England was narrated as having poor drainage system and heavy rain would cause flooding. Floating around in the flood waters were drowned cats and dogs, among other debris. Later on, he also wrote in an article " ... he was sure it would rain cats and dogs. ...".

Heavy downpours are rather common in Hong Kong during the summer season. If one defines "heavy rain" as hourly rainfall of 30 mm or above, then there are around 6.5 days with "heavy rain" at the Observatory Headquarters each year on average. To date (as of Sep 2013), the highest hourly rainfall at the Observatory Headquarters is 145.5 mm recorded on 7 June 2008. When the rain is extremely heavy, forecasters sometimes use "torrential rain" to describe the situation but never say "raining cats and dogs". As a matter of fact, there are no reports of "raining animals of any kind" in Hong Kong thus far, according to the official record of the Observatory!

Average number of "heavy rain" days in each month

*Records at the Observatory Headquarters during the period 1981-2010.



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Summer-like Warm Winters

The global climate is obviously changing and Hong Kong climate is no exception. In particular, local temperatures experienced a noticeable rising trend in the last century. During the last 10 years, there were some abnormally warm winters and autumns, including the warmest February in 2009 (with monthly mean temperature of 20.5 degrees and maximum temperature as high as 28.3 degrees), the warmest October in 2008 (with monthly mean temperature of 26.5 degrees and average daily minimum temperature of 24.9 degrees), as well as the warmest November in 2006 (with monthly mean temperature of 23.3 degrees). In fact, five out of the ten warmest years since 1885 occurred between 2001 and 2010. Similar situations were happening in many parts of the world. Given such undeniable evidence of climate change, we need to take positive steps to face this major challenge.



Rank	Yearly Mean Temperature of Hong Kong (degree)	Year
1	24.0	1998
2	23.9	2002
3	23.8	1966
3	23.8	1999
5	23.7	2007
6	23.6	1994
6	23.6	2001
6	23.6	2003
9	23.5	1991
9	23.5	2006

LEE Tsz-cheung

Report on "The Global Climate 2001-2010, a Decade of Extremes"

According to a report released on 3 July by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the 2001-2010 decade was the warmest on a global scale since 1850. Accompanying the warm anomaly was a net loss of ice — rapid decline in Arctic sea ice, melting of ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctic, as well as loss of glaciers in other parts of the world. Such widespread melting of glaciers and ice sheets, exacerbated by the thermal expansion of sea water, led also to a continuous rise in sea level. The decade was also rather eventful in terms of climate extremes and record-breaking phenomena, including heat waves in Europe and Russia, Hurricane Katrina in the United States, Tropical Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, floods in Pakistan, as well as droughts in the Amazon basin, Australia and east Africa.

WMO's report on "The Global Climate 2001-2010, A Decade of Extremes" is available at: http://library.wmo.int/pmb_ged/wmo_1103_en.pdf

