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**Unusual Hot Winter in Moscow as Temperatures Hit 133-year High**

29/12/2019



Zoo bears have been unable to hibernate, ice rinks are melting and the hills in Gorky Park from which the young, and not so young, glide down on their sledges are covered with grass. Even the flowers have begun to sprout.

The Russian capital has witnessed the hottest December in history and 2019 will likely go down as the warmest in 140 years of meteorological observations.

Not only is the temperature not dropping below zero, but there is no sign of the blanket of snow that usually covers sidewalks and parks at this time of year.

"This year is truly unique because of its abnormal weather conditions," Anton Dubiniuk, in charge of the Moscow State University Botanical Garden, told EFE.?????

Temperatures have been around seven degrees higher than the norm, which has confused experts and left children restless at the prospect of a holiday without sledging.

Marina Makarova, a specialist from the Hydrometeorological Center of Russia, told EFE that in the last 10 years winters have been warmer and less snowy than usual, but 2019 has surpassed any other year.

The Decembers of 1960 and 2008 were some of the warmest with just 10 days of snow, but this year there have only been five.

The issue is not only the lack of snow but the fact that when it has snowed it has melted.

Instead of a white Christmas with clear skies, the capital has been overcast for several weeks.

"This long period of high temperatures has given us a few curiosities," Dubiniuk said. "In our garden, flowers and

green shoots have appeared. And the earth has not had time to freeze.”

Among the “curiosities” are snowdrops, crocuses, and primroses that are flowering and shrubs such as rhododendron, forsythia and daphne sprouting.

“They are real miracles. Usually these plants sprout at the beginning of spring, but since the conditions are so pleasant they have appeared at the end of the year,” he said, adding he has never witnessed anything like it.

The lawn, which only grows when temperatures are above five degrees, occupies a large expanse at the botanical garden.

“The trees still sleep, but the plants do not. There has been neither snowfall nor frost. The danger is that they lose resistance to the cold. If the temperatures drop sharply, then they might not be able to adapt and could die,” the gardener said.

The unusual weather has also affected the people of Moscow.

“These days there are indeed more colds,” Makarova added.

“Humans react both to temperature and the lack of sun. The saying goes: ‘The cold kills viruses.’”

Makarova quoted poet Alexander Pushkin who in Eugene Onegin recounts how one year the snow waited until January to make an appearance.

The meteorological expert predicted that, although forecasts beyond five days are very risky, winter will arrive in the city next week.

The unusually high temperatures seem to be part of a wider trend across European Russia, from the Baltic to the Ural Mountains, she said.

In his last annual press conference, President Vladimir Putin warned Russia heats up “twice as fast on average than the rest of the world.”

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