

How El Niño affects the weather

By Brian Clark Howard, National Geographic

This year's hurricane season is winding down. And as meteorologists predicted, there was above average activity in the eastern and central Pacific and less than usual in the Atlantic. The reason, also as predicted: a strong El Niño.

El Niño may have also contributed to October 2015 being the warmest on record, at 1.76 degree above the 20th century average for the month.

Now we'll begin to see the weather phenomenon's influence on winter storms and rainfall. But that doesn't mean drought-stricken California can celebrate just yet.

El Niño is the periodic warming of water in the Pacific Ocean every few years. When it occurs, it means more energy is available for storms to form there. El Niño also affects wind shear, which is when air currents at a lower altitude blow in a different direction from winds higher in the atmosphere. Strong wind shear makes it harder for hurricanes to form.

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