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NATURE NEWS

Amazon drought causes massive deaths of fishes

By DPA

Oct 19, 2005, 19:00 GMT

Manaus - The Amazon Basin's worst drought in 50 years has caused massive fish deaths in the Rey lake region, officials said Wednesday.

At least 100 tonnes of dead fish are estimated to be floating in the nearby section of the world's largest rain forest.

The fish died because of dropping water levels, which have reduced the Solimoes River to a trickle as it empties into the Rey lake, officials said. The regional capital Manaus is located on the lake.

Two weeks ago, 40 tonnes of dead fish were found about 60 kilometres upstream from the lake.

Residents of the region have been suffering drought for some time. On Tuesday, the government in Brasilia freed up its first moneys - 14 million dollars - for food for the region, to be distributed among 32,000 families.

The aid must be transported by air because the rivers - which normally connect villages - have dried up.

Reports of heavy rainfall in Peru's western rim of the Amazon basin have raised hope that water levels will climb again.

According to Brazilian weather expert Carlos Nobre, the warming of Atlantic waters is a possible factor in the drought.

'There are few historical records of extreme drought in the Amazon,' he told the newspaper 'O Globo'. 'Certainly not for the western range of the Amazon.'

Global warming and high water temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico have been blamed for the current destructive hurricane season in the Caribbean.

A current study published in the U.S.-based Proceedings of the National Academies of Science warns that extreme weather events such as heat waves, floods and drought will increase in 'frequency and severity' over the next century. The study gives specific conditions expected for varying regions of the United States.

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