

The Catch

COCORAHS -- MARCH IN LIKE A ??

FORT COLLINS, CO — Tuesday, March 2, 2011

Dear precipitation measurers and ponderers: (sometimes affectionately known as "CoCoRaisins")

First, a warm welcome to everyone -- our rain gauge regulars and all of you who are new to CoCoRaHS. There has been a steady stream of new recruits, especially the last couple days. It must be the result of the annual "March Madness" CoCoRaHS volunteer recruiting competition. In the early going, Illinois and Kentucky are neck 'n neck in the competition vying for the lead.

Lion or lamb

Many of you recall the old March adage "in like a lamb, out like a lion" (or vice versa). That folklore evolved to help remind us that spring weather gets really, really topsy-turvy. So how did March present itself this year. There were a few local exceptions, but for much of the country it arrived quite lamb like. But look out. Things will change.

Dust off your gauge -- it's that time

It got up to a balmy +6 F in Williston, ND today. Our son works up there and seems to love it. Their long winter continues with at least another week of near zero weather ahead. When he drove up yesterday, it was +60 F when he left Colorado and -10 when he got to North Dakota. Nice. He doesn't mind the cold but he's looking forward to his first Dakota "mud season".

As it continues to warm most places, you can think about putting your funnel and inner tube back in the gauge. This provides a quicker, easier

and more accurate rainfall measurement. Of course, if snow is forecast, bring the small tube and funnel back inside.

As winter has dragged on, the number of CoCoRaHS volunteers has been fading a bit. This is a good time to dust off and clean up your gauge and get started again. CoCoRaHS needs your help.

Oklahoma Extremes

Last time I wrote, a low temperature of -31F had been reported in northeast Oklahoma (Nowata) in early February. That number has since been verified and is the new all-time record low for Oklahoma. Interestingly, just seven days later that same weather station reached +79F -- a lovely 110 degree Oklahoma warm up. As February drew to a close, the temperature soared even higher reaching +90F in parts of OK. How's that for some big changes. Take that, San Diego.

Some reminders

Since many of us are new or are just getting started again, let's review a few CoCoRaHS things.

Severe weather training

At this time of year, many National Weather Service offices are offering training programs for people of all ages on how to detect and report severe weather. We highly recommend this training if you've never done it before. Go to <http://www.weather.gov> and click on your area and you should be able to find a list of scheduled training classes. Hopefully one will be in or near your community.

CoCoRaHS reports

Time of observation

Most of us chose 7 AM as the scheduled time for our daily observation. That works great for the project. The closer to 7 AM that you measure and report, the better. Our computer automatically fills in the "Default" time of observation for you -- the time you selected when you signed up. But if you don't do your measurement until 8:15 or 9:30 AM or whatever, remember to type in the actual time you read and emptied the gauge. Don't just leave the default value on the form. On dry days it doesn't matter, but when it's raining near then time of your daily observation

then it really matters just when you check and empty that gauge. So be sure to type in your actual observation time if different from the default.

Total Snow Depth

This is a data field on our regular daily precipitation report form. A lot of you leave this field blank. That's OK, but if you know there is no snow on the ground, it's great if you type in zero for the total snow depth. The presence or absence of snow on the ground has big effects on temperatures and other aspects. So if you have some snow on the ground

-- with at least half the ground covered, then please take a reasonable estimate of the average depth and report that amount. A surprising number of forecasters and other scientists really want to know how much snow is left on the ground even if there hasn't been any new snow in days -- especially this time of year.

Significant Weather Reports

These "supplemental" reports are really useful. Regardless of the time of day or night, if it's been pouring rain or snow, or doing anything else that you think the National Weather Service should know about, then please take a minute and send in a special "Significant Weather Report". By submitting a "Significant Weather Report" you immediately and automatically notify the NWS weather forecasters on duty at your local NWS office.

To submit a "Significant Weather Report" log into the CoCoRaHS data entry website and then click "My Data". Your normal "Daily Precipitation" report form will appear. Instead click on "Significant Weather" under the menu that appears to the upper left under "Enter my new reports." The "Significant Weather Report" form will appear. Fill it out as best you can. You don't have to fill out every blank. Then hit "Submit" Immediately your local National Weather Service forecast office will receive that special report on their computers.

Hail reports

Likewise, there is a special report form for reporting hail. It's in the same general area.

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Admin/MyDataEntry/HailReport.aspx>

If it is hailing or has just stopped hailing, please use this form to report this information. The data will appear on our "Hail" maps but the reports will also be immediately forwarded to the appropriate NWS office.

Drought Impact report

Same idea. Use this form to report persisting dry conditions that are beginning or continuing to have negative impacts in your area.

Zeros

Yes, this question comes up so often. Do I need to report "zero" every day that it doesn't rain? The answer goes like this. You are a volunteer. Only you know how much time you have to spare, so spare what you want to. But if you can, please report your zeros. Without that zero report, we'll never know for sure. So if you can, please take the extra few seconds to log on and click the "submit" button to send in your zero report. Also, remember the "Monthly Zeros" report to fill in zeros a month at a time. This tool also lets you view your daily reports on a calendar page format.

Finally, report the "Snow Water Equivalent" (SWE) measurements if you can (remember SWE Mondays!!) especially in the mountains and across the northern tier of states. Put it all together and alas -- valuable and much appreciated data. Keep it up -- and if you've never started taking precipitation measurements, this would be a great time with spring just ahead.

The tiniest egg

Our hens have taken it easy this winter with hardly any egg laying for a few weeks. Then, just recently, the egg laying has begun again. Friday -- when it was cold and snowy -- we had our first 3-egg day in many weeks. Now we're up to 4 or five. We'll have a few eggs to sell soon. The odd thing about it was that first three-egg day, one egg was huge, one was normal sized and one was only about the size of my fingernail -- smaller than a robin's egg. I've never seen our hens do that before.

Two chicks and a Siamese

Somehow animals beget more animals. We don't even have a rooster, and yet we suddenly have baby chicks. When you have an old farm with animals near the city like we do, people somehow know about it. A friend

of a friend couldn't resist the little peeps down at the feed store a couple weeks ago and ended up taking two home. Two weeks later, reality set in and they realized they wanted to take a trip and had no place for chickens. They pondered the situation -- probably for only 5 seconds, and the next thing we know they are over for a friendly visit -- and to drop off some chicks. Then, the next day arrived and another friend shows up to give us an old Siamese cat. Again, someone with a good idea just couldn't make it work and they ended up with an animal they couldn't take care of. So ... within hours, it was ours. All very interesting.

Enjoy March. Measure well.

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University