

Best of Last Week: Global warming hot spots already here, fastest robot yet, and vitamin D deficiency worsens COVID-19

May 11 2020, by Bob Yirka



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It was a good week for Earth sciences as a team of researchers at the University of California, Davis, found that [in some cases, cold air rises](#)

—and showed what that could mean for Earth's climate. They found that in the tropics, sometimes cold air rises due to the lightness of water vapor. Also, a team led by Columbia University's Colin Raymond found that [potentially fatal combinations of humidity and heat are emerging across the globe](#)—far earlier than has been predicted. And a team at Rice University developed [an 'artificial leaf' concept that inspired research into solar-powered fuel production](#)— which led them to create a low-cost device that splits water to produce hydrogen fuel.

In technology news, a team at North Carolina State University, [inspired by cheetahs, built the fastest soft robots yet](#)—quadrupeds that feature a spring-powered, 'bistable' spine and are part of a new class of robots called "Leveraging Elastic instabilities for Amplified Performance" (LEAP). Also, a combined team from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and the Helmholtz Institute Mainz developed [a simple method for measuring the state of lithium-ion batteries](#) using atomic magnetometry. And a team at the University of Southampton [mapped wind and solar energy sites around the globe for the first time](#). Also, a team from Pennsylvania State University, Minjiang University and Guizhou Education University suggested that [emerging supercapacitors promise storage, high power and fast charging](#).

In other news, Anirban Basu, with the University of Washington in Seattle, calculated that [the U.S. COVID-19 death rate is 1.3%](#)—excluding undetected cases. And in somewhat related news, a team at Michigan State University conducted [a study into mysterious giant viruses](#)—and in so doing, identified and characterized several key proteins responsible for orchestrating infections.

And finally, if you are like millions of others wondering if there is a way to increase your chances of surviving novel coronavirus infection, you might want to check out the results of a study conducted by a team at Northwestern University—they found that [vitamin D deficiency appears](#)

[to play a role in COVID-19 mortality rates.](#)

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