

A Desert in Bloom

Why did the world's driest place suddenly burst with colorful new life?

A carpet of pink blossoms stretched as far as the eye could see. The flowers were not only beautiful but also extremely rare. They bloomed last fall in the driest place on Earth, the Atacama Desert in Chile, a country in South America.

The desert covers more than 40,000 square miles between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes Mountains. Much of the arid region gets only a few drops of rain a year.

But about once a decade, the desert gets more rainfall than normal. Last year was one of those years. Two big storms brought the heaviest rains that some areas in the region had seen in nearly a century.

The rainfall set off an explosion of plant growth. Millions of seeds that had been lying in the dry ground for years



grew. More than 200 species of plants, including many flowers, broke through the soil.

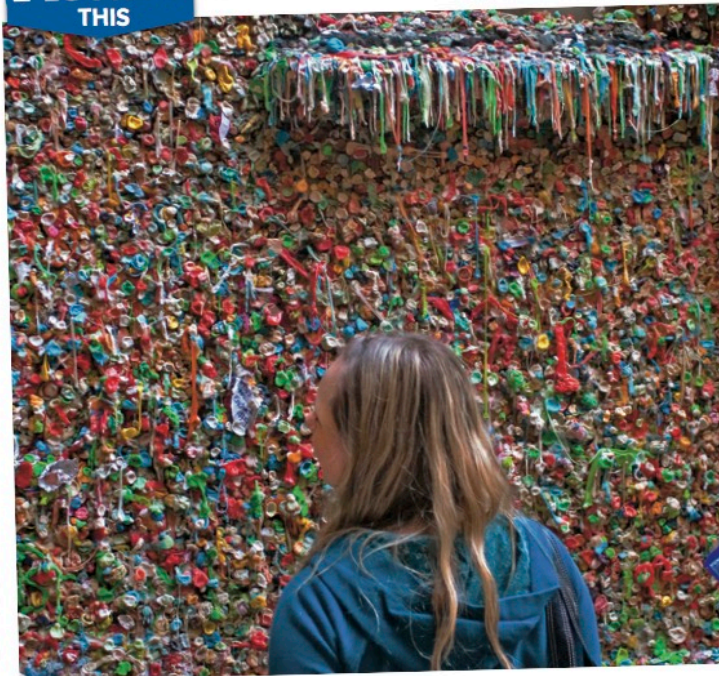
"These are special times," says Michael Dillon. He's a scientist who has studied the Atacama region. "The desert comes alive."

Word to Know

arid (AA-rihd) *adjective*. extremely dry; receiving little or no rain



Picture THIS



Goodbye, Gum!

Have you ever tried to get gum off your shoe? Try removing a million pieces of gum from a wall! About 20 years ago, people started sticking chewed gum to a wall in Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington. Over time, the "gum wall" became a tourist attraction.

Recently, officials from the market realized that all that goo was damaging the wall. Workers spent nearly a week using hot-water sprayers and rakes to remove 2,350 pounds of hardened gum.

Officials from Pike Place Market don't expect the wall to stay clean for long. But they do hope to limit any new gobs of gum to a much smaller area.

JIM MCMAHON/MANMAN™ (GLOBE); CARLOS AGUIAR/AP/GETTY IMAGES (ATACAMA DESERT); ROD CROWLA/AMY (GUM WALL)