Effects of climate change

Earth's climate is getting warmer, and scientists expect this warming to continue. Temperatures may rise by only a few degrees on average. Yet this small increase may cause large and damaging changes in the environment.

As temperatures rise, for example, many living things will struggle to survive in their current range. To maintain living in the temperature they like, some may shift their range closer to the north or south poles, to cooler temperatures. Some will not be able to shift fast enough. Others may find that their new ranges lack food, shelter, or other things that they need. Many species will die out, or become extinct.

Rising temperatures are already causing glaciers to melt. The extra water eventually reaches the oceans. There, it will cause sea levels to rise, threatening islands and coastal communities.

Rising temperatures will also put more energy, in the form of heat, into the oceans and atmosphere. There, it may lead to more extreme or surprising and unusual weather events. These are just a few of the possible results of climate change.