

THE HEAT IS ON!



Pavo Real Spray Park (photo by Lisa Tate)

STORY BY LISA KAY TATE



Wet N' Wild
Waterworld

(photo
courtesy of
Wet N' Wild)

June in El Paso means “the heat is on,” with temperatures averaging higher than any other month.

That’s a little unusual compared to other regions of the country where July and August are typically the hottest months. It’s the dry air and sunny skies that push the Sun City’s average daily high about one degree hotter than July, when the summer monsoon season begins. The extra moisture isn’t much of a relief, since the high humidity can make July and August seem hotter (and make swamp coolers less effective).

Fortunately, there are plenty of city-run public pools and splash parks offering quick relief from the heat, as well as the area’s major water park, Wet ‘N Wild Waterworld. For those who want to cool off without getting wet, Southern New Mexico offers both high elevations and great caves to escape the El Paso heat.

HOT FACTS ABOUT JUNE

Unlike some areas where the temperatures rise later in the summer, June is El Paso’s hottest month in terms of temperature, National Weather Service Meteorologist Jason Laney said. But as the saying goes, at least it’s a dry heat.

“This is true because dry air gets hotter than moist air,” Laney said. “When we get into July that is typically when the monsoon season begins.”

El Paso’s hottest recorded temperature (from 1879 to present day) was June 30, 1994 when temperatures reached 114°F.

“The earliest record of temperatures reaching 100° or above was on May 8, 1989, but almost half of our three digit temperature days occur in June,” he said. “The average start date for 100° temperatures is June 14.” (This year, the thermometer first hit 100° on May 9, just a day after the record.)

The differences between summer months

are not that extreme. June’s average high temperature is 95.5°F, with July’s at 94.7°, and in August, the month with the highest temperatures recorded nationwide, around 92.

“It may feel just as hot in July and August,” Laney said. “The temperature may be lower, but it will feel just as high.”

Temperatures are recorded for the El Paso area from El Paso International Airport, he explained, and there has been an increase in the number of hot days in El Paso during the summer. One reason for this is the increase in urban areas.

“This is the urban heat island effect,” he said. “Green, grassy areas are not going to heat up as much as where there are large areas of concrete.”

For the last couple of years, there has been the start of an El Niño pattern (warm phases of a recurring climate pattern across the tropical Pacific) occurring, he added, which local meteorologists are watching. This should lead to this June being about average if not just a little hotter than usual.

“I would anticipate a handful of 100° days this year,” he said. “You should have plenty of days that are normal or above for June.”

KEEPING SAFE

The desert area’s extreme heat can be exhausting, but it also can be dangerous.

“Heat is the No.1 weather-related killer in the United States,” Laney said.

He said it is known as the “silent killer,” because heat-related deaths don’t get as much news attention as deaths related to more dramatic weather hazards such as tornados.

In the latest 18-year nationwide average, from 1995 to 2012, Laney said 103 deaths a year occurred from exposure to heat, in comparison to 75 people killed by torna-

does, 79 in floods, 69 in hurricanes and 42 from lightning strikes.

“That’s a big difference,” Laney said. “Thirty-eight children died of hyperthermia as result of being left in locked cars in the heat.”

He said this isn’t always due to negligent parents, but to a simple lack of education concerning the dangers of heat in cars, even for just a few minutes. He quoted one of the National Weather Service safety campaign slogan’s “Beat the Heat. Check the Back Seat,” for both people and pets.

“On an 80° day, the temperature in a parked car can go from 80° to 120°,” he said. “On a hot sunny summer day it can rise to 180° to 200° in car. A little child’s ability to cool themselves is not as high as adults.”

Some of the more common problems associated with high temperature include sunburn, heat cramps and heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion symptoms include feeling faint or dizzy, excessive sweating, cool, pale or clammy skin, nausea or vomiting, rapid, weak pulse and muscle cramps. Treatments include common sense measures such as getting to a cooler, air conditioned place, drinking water, and taking a cool shower or using cold compresses.

Heat exhaustion, however, is not the same as the much more serious heat stroke, whose symptoms include throbbing headache, no sweating (unlike heat exhaustion), body temperature rise above 103° with red, hot, dry skin, and possible loss of consciousness. Like heat exhaustion, rapid pulse and nausea or vomiting are also symptoms. In the case of heat stroke, persons should call 911 and take immediate actions to cool the person suffering until help arrives. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) keeps information handy on its weather.gov site.

During hotter months persons should follow a few basic rules: slow down (reduce

SUMMER COMES EARLY TO THE SUN CITY, WITH JUNE TYPICALLY RECORDING THE HIGHEST TEMPERATURES OF THE YEAR. SO THAT MEANS IT’S ALSO THE TIME TO BEAT THE HEAT ANY WAY YOU CAN!

strenuous exercise during the hotter times); dress for summer (lightweight, loose and light-colored clothes), eat light, drink plenty of water, use air conditioners or portable electric fans, minimize direct exposure to the sun, take cool baths or showers, do not take salt tablets (unless directed by one’s doctor), and be aware of those most at risk for heat-related problems. Those most at risk include infants, older, sick or frail people and pets.

El Paso Extreme Weather Task Force does its part to help at-risk individuals during the summer months with its Fan Drive for the Elderly. Each year, El Pasoans are urged to donate new fans for use by the elderly or disabled through the summer. Fans may be dropped off at any El Paso fire station. They also encourage people in need of a fan to contact the Extreme Weather Task Force emergency line at 211.

Laney said another health issue with heat is dehydration, particularly in June’s dryer temperatures. The dryer it is, the quicker sweat evaporates, just like pouring water on a hot surface on a sunny day.

“This is an issue all summer long,” he said, “but in June this is big issue because as we perspire it evaporates faster. A person might think since they aren’t feeling like they are sweating as much they aren’t needing as much water, but this isn’t the case.”

SPLASH OFF, COOL DOWN

Long time area residents have their favorite ways of cooling off during June and the rest of the summer, including finding the best places to get wet. This year there are more places than ever before, and more are coming.

The El Paso area’s most popular place to cool off is Wet N’ Wild Waterworld in Anthony, Texas (see separate story). It’s one of many water-filled oases offering

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