

23Overview of El Niño Phenomenon
Visual Aid

VA #23 Overview of El Niño Phenomenon

El Niño is a cyclic phenomenon that has a great influence on life in the Pacific Ocean and worldwide effects on climate. It occurs about every 2 to 7 years. The last major El Niño was in 1997–1998; however, several “minor” El Niños have occurred since then. The main indicator of El Niño is warming of ocean surface waters in June and July in the equatorial Pacific. This warm water moves eastward along the Equator toward the Galápagos Islands.

El Niño events have major effects on the usually arid Galápagos Islands. During El Niño years, the islands receive substantially higher amounts of rainfall, leading to a significant increase in plant growth.

Summary of Effects of El Niño:

- increased rain
- increase in fresh water in tidepools
- increased water temperature
- decrease in ocean upwellings that bring nutrients to the surface
- decrease in phytoplankton
- decrease in zooplankton
- decrease in green and red algae
- increase in brown algae
- increase in vegetation growth on land
- increased erosion of rocky surfaces
- increased wave action