THE WINTER THAT WASN'T

After the third-warmest winter in recorded Canadian history, millions of Canadians spent February and March basking in a record-shattering heat wave that baffled meteorologists, toyed with the economy and upset the country's very natural order. "I've been in this business for over 40 years and it takes a lot for me to be surprised and shocked by weather," said David Phillips, senior climatologist with Environment Canada. "It's like snowing in July or a hurricane in Winnipeg — it's just not possible." Warm air always surges up from the U.S. this time of year, Mr. Phillips said, but it is usually swiftly cooled down by blowing across several thousand kilometres of frozen, snow-blown Canadian countryside. This year, with snow cover at historic lows — and Arctic winds kept at bay by the jet stream — warm air was free to surge into Canadian cities at "almost the same temperature at which it left," said Mr. Phillips.

several thousand kilometres of frozen, snow-blown Canadian countryside. This year, with snow cover at historic lows — and Arctic winds kept at bay by the jet stream — warm air was free to surge into Canadian cities at "almost the same temperature at which it left," said Mr. Phillips. Nature out of sync Bitter harvest for maple syrup producers The gasman goeth **Preview of coming attractions** Tricked into thinking that spring had sprung, With maple trees budding early this year, maple Traffic along Canada's natural gas Shorter winters, less snow cover, birds hatched and mammals came out of syrup producers saw their operations cut short by pipelines slowed below projections in longer transitional seasons: hibernation — only to be hit hard once temperatwo to three weeks. In Western Quebec alone, March as Canadian and U.S. homeown-**Everything Canadians experienced** tures petered off near the end of February. harvests were expected to be only 50% to 75% of ers shut off their furnaces early. "There's this year is slated by climatologists Raccoon populations are expected to be hit normal levels. Thanks to a strategic stockpile of little demand to be seen," Eric Bickel, a to become the norm over the next particularly hard by distemper this year, as the natural gas analyst at Summit Energy century. "Our buildings are built maple syrup kept in reserve by the Services in Louisville, Ky., told disease is normally killed off by winter. Mild industry, however, consumer prices for normal weather, our vacations weather could also see an unwelcome crop of for the sweet liquid are Bloomberg News this week. In the U.S., are planned for normal weather ... beetles and other damaging pests heading for expected to remain the heat wave may be having the but there is no normal weather Canada's forests and farms. stable. reverse effect on energy usage as anymore," Mr. Phillips said. Floridians and Texans give their air **FEBRUARY 2012 MONTHLY MEAN TEMPERATURE** conditioners an early start. **DIFFERENCE FROM NORMAL** BANKS ISLAND TEMPERATURE Baffin ■ Kashechewan and Fort Albany DIFFERENCE IN °C TEMPERATURE Ont. (First Nations reserves): A swift thaw on the Albany River DIFFERENCE prompted an ice jam and subsequent FROM NORMAL flood that required the evacuation of MONTH IN °C some 300 people from the two First Nations communities. UNITED BAFFIN ISLAND STATES VICTORIA ISLANI YUKON 3 to 4 ■ Gulf of St. Lawrence: An early loss of 2 to 3 Whitehorse ice cover was a mixed blessing for harp NORTHWES' Foxe seals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. On the 1 to 2 one hand, it hampered the seal hunt, as -1 to 1 hunters found it hard to target large ice-bound congregations of seals. On the -2 to -1 other, it provided a significant barrier to seal mothers, who rely on ice to give -3 to -2 birth and nurse their pups. -4 to -3 ■ Northern Manitoba Ice roads in Northern Manitoba were Ungava closed by mid-March - capping off Bay an ice road season that had already At lanticbeen plagued by a late start. Ocean ALBERTA Spooked by the early loss of their BRITISH only transportation lifeline, isolated COLUMBIA northern communities continue to CANADA **NEWFOUNDLAND** push for an all-weather road. AND LABRADOR SASKATCHEWAN MANITOBA Hudson Bay Edmonton Vancouver Fort Albany O Calgary Victoria ONTARIO Gulf of UNITED O Walsh O Regina St. Lawrence STATES Charlottetown Lower Mainland & ■ Walsh: High winds Vancouver Island: Usually and unseasonably the first part of Canada to ■ Winnipeg: When the Jets dry, warm air welcome spring, this year southeastern B.C. was one of O Halifax played the Carolina Hurricanes on prompted devastating January March 18, Winnipeg was warmer the few places to be hit with ■ Lake of the Woods: Ignoring reports than Raleigh, N.C. Across the city, brush fires in Walsh unseasonably bad weather. golf courses and other outdoor of thinner-than-usual ice on Lake of the Well into mid-March, and two other attractions took advantage of 23C Vancouver was pounded with southern Alberta Woods, a group of Wisconsin men went communities. At least highs to open more than a week snow while heavy winds ice fishing anyway — and soon became trapped on a drifting ice floe. The group was rescued in an overnight operation. five homes were lost before the official start of spring. toppled trees and power lines in Greater Victoria. ■ Hamilton: Hamiltonians saw March **■ Ottawa**: A O Toronto temperatures unlike anything seen surprise late-February melt since 1910 - and welcomed the first CANADA'S FEBRUARY TEMPERATURE DIFFERENCE HISTORY was all it took to day of spring with a smog warning. Windsor O bring an early end MONTHLY MEAN TEMPERATURE DIFFERENCE IN °C **■ London** Summer-like weather was to skating season or partially to blame for a St. Patrick's Day the Rideau Canal. ■ Windsor: During a spring FEBRUARY riot that broke out in a London student Ottawans only got FEBRUARY inspection of Windsor's Jackson 28 days of skating district. St. Patrick's Day festivities were 2011 2010 Park, park officials discovered certainly rowdy in previous years, but chilly weather had been good at keeping on the canal this that squirrels had capitalized on a lack of winter snow cover by digging up half of the park's year; the shortest them from becoming violent. season since 2002. 10,000 tulip bulbs. ■ Brantford: In early March, researchers in Montreal announced that increasingly mild winters were ushering in the end of backyard hockey rinks — and foiling the hockey careers of any future Wayne Gretzkys. In Mr. Gretzky's hometown of Brantford this year, outdoor hockey had given way to golf and ultimate frisbee as early as March 1. FEBRUARY FEBRUARY FEBRUARY 2009 2008 2007

15 15 15 15 2000 2010 2000 2010 2000 2010 2000 2010 2000 2010 2000 2010 SOURCES: ENVIRONMENT CANADA, AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD CANADA * In graphs above the data for March 2012 is the mean temperature for March 1-27 only TRISTIN HOPPER, JONATHON RIVAIT AND RICHARD JOHNSON / NATIONAL POST

OTTAWA IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C

MONTREAL IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C

HALIFAX IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C

WINDSOR IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C

VANCOUVER IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C

EDMONTON IN MARCH

AVERAGE TEMP IN °C