Lake that disappeared in Chile reappears

Chile's Lake Tempanos, whose disappearance in May left scientists and residents of the southern region of Magallanes stumped, is again filling with water, the Spanish news agency EFE said.

It was the National Forestry Service (Conaf) officials who first observed the disappearance of Lake Tempanos in Bernardo O'Higgins National Park, May 27.

The officials saw that the lake of some 10 sq km was no longer there - all that remained was a dry lakebed some 30 metres deep in which there still remained the ice floes, or 'tempanos', after which the lake was named.

They also noted that a river some 40 metres wide and eight kilometres long that emptied into the lake from a nearby glacier had shrunk to a narrow stream.

On Monday a team from the Scientific Studies Centre of Valdivia and the Chilean Navy conducted an aerial inspection of the region to try to determine the cause of the lake's disappearance and saw that it was once again filling with water.

During the flight above the region, scientists obtained cartographic data and took photos of the basin affected by the phenomenon.

After the inspection, the experts concluded that the lake had been drained through a crevice that opened up on a side of the glacier and the water ended up in the sea.

'This confirms that the glaciers in the area are experiencing strong shrinking and thinning, and this process is what explains the formation of these glacial lagoons,' glacier expert Andres Rivera said.

'We have confirmed that this has to do with a glacial lake that forms part of a larger lacustrine system made up of the lake that Conaf found empty and another much larger one that formed between the Tempano and San Bernardo glaciers,' the scientist said.

On June 21, Rivera had said that the lake's disappearance was not so unusual, given the nature of glaciers, and that the area in question was 'very dynamic' and had been characterized 'by interesting changes' over the past few decades.

'In fact, the lake that disappeared did not exist 30 years ago,' he said, without ruling out the possible influence of climate change or the response of the ice floes to the change in temperatures or the amount of rainfall.

During the flight the scientists detected the presence of ice floes on the bottom of both the lakes.

'We can say with certainty that there is water that is still reaching the area and that is accumulating in the same basins that were emptied,' Rivera said, adding that the process could be slow and depended on the speed at which the ice melts, a rate that is usually slow in the Southern Hemisphere summer.

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