

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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NORMALS

Meteorological institutions often receive requests for data of the temperature, rainfall, etc., recorded at such and such a place "during the last five years," or some other specified period of time. Usually, in such cases, what the inquirer really wants is average values of the elements mentioned, but he does not realize that averages have already been worked up from the existing records of most weather stations throughout the world. In other words, he is not aware of the existence of what meteorologists call "climatic normals."

A normal is the average value that, in the course of years, any meteorological element is found to have on a specified date, or during a specified month or other portion of the year, or during the year as a whole. The word "normal" is also used as an adjective in such expressions as "normal temperature," "normal rainfall," etc. Thus we may speak of the normal temperature of January 1 (at a specified place), or the normal rainfall for March, or the normal wind velocity for the year, etc. Normals are computed from long series of observations, if available, but not necessarily from the entire record of a station up to date, as this would entail constant revision. The normal serves as a standard with which values occurring in a particular year may be compared to determine what is called the "departure from the normal."

Climatic normals have been worked up on a vast scale for all parts of the world in which weather records have been kept for many years. Some are available only in manuscript, but the published normals would fill a small library.

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