

## Weather eye: Loss of glaciers poses a threat

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The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is the highest coastal mountain in the world. The pyramid-shaped peak rises up from the Caribbean coast of Colombia, reaching 5,775m (18,946ft) above sea level. The mountain has a huge range of microclimates that nurture some of the world's most diverse wildlife and plantlife. At the top of the mountain the temperatures are freezing and sustain a glacier — the northernmost glacier in tropical South America. But satellite pictures reveal that the ice is rapidly shrinking, with 41 per cent gone in 20 years. And a recent study warned that this and the other five glaciers in Colombia were forecast to disappear completely by 2022 at the latest.

Although the fortunes of the glaciers have always waxed and waned with fluctuations in climate, they are now in retreat. In the past 30 years the shrinkage accelerated as mountain temperatures rose by about 1C (1.8F), an exceptional lurch in the climate. One notable impact of that warming has been a growing shift from snowfall to rainfall on the mountaintops, speeding up the loss of ice even further.

The loss of the glaciers poses an enormous threat to plants and wildlife, and also to the water supplies for hundreds of towns and villages. Not only that, but the weather has changed dramatically: storms have grown stronger and floods have set off landslides — like that in Colombia on Monday in which 30 people died — often followed by droughts. This crisis spurred the Kogi Indians of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to speak out. They remained untouched by the Spanish invasion 500 years ago, one of the few indigenous American peoples to escape the conquistadors, and they avoided contact with the outside world. But in 1988 they allowed a BBC producer, Alan Ereira, to make a documentary warning of the damage caused by the changing climate.

Since then the Kogi have grown increasingly concerned that their way of life faces extinction, and they are now making a new film, a trailer for which can be seen at [alunathemovie.com/en/](http://alunathemovie.com/en/)