

## Winter 2023-2024 Staggers Past its Midpoint

By Don Sutherland

In her poem, “In the bleak midwinter,” 19<sup>th</sup> Century English poet Christina Rossetti wrote:

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,  
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

Winter 2023-2024 has seen anything but water- and earth-hardening cold, much less “snow on snow, snow on snow.” In the New York City area, it has been yet another abnormally mild winter with a noted lack of snowfall. On a cautionary note, just over half of seasonal snowfall during El Niño winters typically falls from February 1<sup>st</sup> onward.

In the meantime, Winter 2023-2024 will become the second consecutive winter that has seen less than 3” or snow through January 31<sup>st</sup> in New York City and the 20<sup>th</sup> such winter on record. It will become the fifth case of two consecutive such winters. Three of the cases with two consecutive such slow starts to the snow season have occurred since the 1990s. Weather records go back to 1869.

Beyond the New York City area, the past week witnessed extraordinary heat in parts of the Northern Hemisphere. On Thursday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, the mercury soared to 87° in Gavarda, Spain. That was the highest temperature ever recorded anywhere in Europe during January.

A day later, Washington, D.C. saw the temperature climb to 80°. That was the highest temperature on record for January. It was also the earliest 80° or above temperature on record there by nearly four weeks. The old record was set on February 21, 2018.

Climate change has driven a warming of winters. New York City’s average winter temperature has increased from 34.0° to 36.0° from 1961-1962 through 1990-1991 and 1991-1992 through 2020-2021. Winters 2022-2023, the least snowy winter on record with just 2.3” of snow, and the current winter may well mark the early stages of a transition toward a permanently less snowy state in the New York City area. As a result, borrowing from another 19<sup>th</sup> Century poem, “Hymn to Charity,” winter’s power to bind “the captive world in icy chains” is fast eroding.