Daily Life

OPENING CEREMONY INCITES EXHILARATING BEGINNING FOR 2026 WINTER OLYMPICS

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On Friday, Feb. 6, the 2026 Winter Olympics made its riveting debut via a galvanizing opening ceremony that took place at the San Siro Stadium in Milan. Over 80,000 people attended the ceremony, while three other opening ceremonies took place concurrently at Livigno, Predazzo and Cortina.

What's fascinating about the opening ceremony was its enthralling collage of events that ranged from speeches to dance performances and concerts, all of which contributed to the phenomenal debut of the 2026 Winter Olympics.

One major event of the ceremony was the lighting of the cauldrons. This was remarkable because not only was it a symbol of the beginning of the Olympics, but for the first time in history, not one, but two cauldrons were lit. One was lit in Milan, while the other was lit in Cortina. Watching the two cauldrons change colors from blue to bright red as the flames contacted them was a nifty experience.

Another notable event was the raising of the Italian flag and the singing of the Italian national anthem. Not only was this event important to the opening ceremony, but it was significant to Italy and its culture. As the Italian flag was brought into the stadium, three lines of people preceded it, with each line wearing a different color that represented the nation's flag. When the Italian flag was raised, Italian singer Laura Pausini performed a captivating and uplifting rendition of the Italian national anthem.

Besides all of this, the dancing and musical performances were also astonishing highlights of the opening ceremony. The dance performances, including the time travel dance performed by Sabrina Impacciatore, were outstanding events that represented Olympic and Italian culture. Additionally, Andrea Boccelli's performance was remarkably powerful, engaging the audience to sing along with him.

Another artist that performed was Mariah Carey. As the center stage glowed in gleaming colors of orange, pink and purple, Carey sang "Nel Blu, dipinto de blu" by Domenico Modungo followed by "Nothing is Impossible," a notable song from her most recent album. The performance was beautiful. However, Carey's way of performing the two songs wasn't as enthusiastic or powerful as that of Bocelli.

A final memorable event was the parade of athletes, where all countries competing in the Olympics gracefully entered the stadium. Some of the countries gained different reactions among the audience. For instance, the Israelis were booed. Concurrently, audience members became very emotional for the Ukrainians.

Aside from reactions, some of the countries had features that made them stand out. Great Britain's flag bearers had scarves designed and knitted by Tom Daley, an Olympic diver. Additionally, some countries are making their Olympic debut this year, with two being Benin and the United Arab Emirates.

The 2026 Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony was a fun and lively event to watch. Although not the first opening ceremony I have watched, seeing all the different performances that resembled Italian culture was highly intriguing. While I was a little disappointed with Mariah Carey's performance, the other performances were fascinating to watch. As the Olympics begin, I am looking forward to watching and rooting for my favorite athletes!



The 2026 Winter Olympics opening ceremony at the San Siro Stadium in Milan, Italy. The ceremony took place Friday, Feb. 6, with over 80,000 spectators in attendance.
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How habitat fragmentation and climate change impact tropical plants

by Elijah Polance | STAFF WRITER | HE/HIM/THEY/THEM | elijah.polance@uconn.edu

A University of Florida professor visited the University of Connecticut on Thursday, Feb. 5, to discuss the impact of habitat fragmentation and drought on tropical plants.

Emilio Bruna spoke to the UConn community at the Biology/Physics building about his long-term research in the Amazon rainforest as part of the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB) department's weekly "Seminar Series," where experts in the field talk about their research.

Before diving into his findings, Bruna had the audience laughing with a series of self-aware jokes comparing Florida to Connecticut, a sign of the lighthearted and engaging lecture style that followed.

Bruna said that fragmented rainforest habitats — which are portions of rainforest that have been downsized to small patches due to human development — typically have lower species diversity and a higher rate of local extinction than continuous forests. However, there is not much information on what specific factors cause this decline in plant species.

Some experts speculate that plant decline in habitat fragments come from having fewer required pollinator and seed dispersal species, reducing reproduction and growth, Bruna said. But others attribute plant struggles to changes in environmental factors because of the habitat's fragmentation itself.

Portions of Bruna's research assess how these factors impact Heliconia acuminata, a tropical plant native to South America. But he also wanted to explore how climate change-induced drought affects plants in fragmented rainforest habitats.

"Life seems terrible, especially if you're a fragmented forest," Bruna said. "But it gets worse, and that is that species in tropical landscapes — all landscapes — fragmented tropical landscapes are also dealing with the consequences of changing climates."

The impact of drought on plant species can be unpredictable, sometimes even leading to short-term flourishing, Bruna said. Drought effects can also be delayed, taking time to influence plant growth and even overlap with future drought impacts.

"The plant is going to have grown a certain amount, but you don't necessarily know whether it's because it's a lingering effect or a new delayed effect," Bruna said. "And not only do you have the effects of the first drought, you've got the subsequent effects layered on top of the effects of the first drought."

Bruna's synergy hypothesis presumed that drought would reduce the growth rate of tropical plants in fragmented habitats more severely than it would for tropical plants in continuous forests.

To test this, Bruna studied over 10 locations near Manaus, Brazil. Six were continuous forests, three were 10-hectare plots of fragmented forest and four were one-hectare plots of fragmented forest. Over time, only the continuous forests exhibited a positive growth rate for the studied plant species in all locations, while most of the fragmented locations had a negative growth rate.

The process of evaluating drought's impact on plant growth, survivability and fertility was less simple. Bruna compiled over 10 years of data, and through complex computational equations, determined a way to discern the consequences of each drought, including their lingering effects. He found that droughts can take up to 36 months before having an effect on plant growth.

These models also allowed Bruna to predict how — at the current rate of climate change and drought prevalence — these tropical plants might fare over the next few decades, taking into account habitat fragmentation. In both the models with the most and least extreme drought predictions, plants in continuous forest fared much better than those in fragmented forest in the long term.

While his research demonstrated how different environmental changes interact with one another, it also showed that these changes can be unpredictable and difficult to study, Bruna said. He hopes other scientists apply similar studies to different plant species in different climates for a broader understanding of how climate change and habitat fragmentation make it harder for species to survive.

"We are living in a fragmented world whether we like it or not," Bruna said. "So, we need to understand what's happening in fragmented ecosystems."

Margot Gagnon, a graduate student in the EEB program, attends each of the department's "Seminar Series" events because she is enrolled in the program. Her current focus is on dissections and she liked hearing how these habitat-wide studies differed from her own work, she said.

"I'm always really interested in the logistics, the practical aspects of doing tropical studies," Gagnon said. "Because it's very technology-limiting to do research in the dead center of the Amazon, and I'm really interested in how they navigate that."

There needs to be more research on drought and habitat fragmentation like Bruna's, Dr. David Wagner, an entomology professor at UConn, said. Plants are necessary for everything in nature, so Bruna's research is relevant for all ecologists regardless of their species specialization, he said.

"We don't know why we lose species, so that's a very important problem," Wagner said. "Why do we lose species from cutting up a rainforest? We have small fragments, so we need to understand that problem so we can practice preventing it."

Upcoming events in the "Seminar Series" program can be found on the EEB website. The research and data from Bruna's lab can be found on his website.