

= Tropical Storm Laura (1971) =

Tropical Storm Laura was the final storm in the active 1971 Atlantic hurricane season . It formed on November 12 in the western Caribbean Sea , and reached winds of 70 mph (120 km / h) as it approached western Cuba . Across the island , Laura produced heavy rainfall , peaking at 32 @. @ 5 inches (83 cm) . The resulting flooding killed one person and caused crop damage . 26 @, @ 000 people were forced to evacuate their homes . Initially , Laura was forecast to move across the island and impact the southern United States , but it executed a small loop and turned to the southwest . The storm moved ashore on Belize , one of only four November storms to affect the country . Little impact occurred during Laura 's final landfall , and it dissipated on November 22 over central Guatemala .

= = Meteorological history = =

Tropical Storm Laura began in a large area of convection across the southwest Caribbean Sea in mid @- @ November . On November 12 , a tropical depression formed about 175 miles (280 km) north of Panama . It moved northwestward , slowly organizing and becoming a tropical storm on November 14 . Receiving the name Laura , the storm continued to intensify as it turned northward toward western Cuba ; late on November 15 , it attained peak winds of 70 mph (110 km / h) . Originally , the National Hurricane Center anticipated Laura would attain hurricane status , as well as for it to continue northward into the Gulf of Mexico . Although a cold front was expected to bring the storm to the north , a ridge instead increased over the southeastern United States , which prevented Laura from moving ashore .

Tropical Storm Laura maintained peak winds for about 48 hours , during which a minimum pressure of 994 hectopascals (29 @. @ 4 inHg) was recorded . Steering currents were initially weak , which caused the storm to drift toward the northeast , before the ridge to its north forced the storm to the southwest ; by late on November 17 , Laura finished executing a clockwise loop . Its path to the southwest away from Cuba was unusual ; only two other storms on record ? a hurricane in 1888 and Hurricane Ike in 2008 ? had a southward element in their path when they affected Cuba , and each struck the northern coast of the country . Laura weakened as it turned westward and later to the south and southwest . After the winds decreased to 50 mph (85 km / h) , however , the storm began re @- @ intensifying as it approached Central America . Late on November 20 , Laura again reached peak winds of 70 mph (120 km / h) , which was maintained for 30 hours until the storm made landfall in Punta Gorda , Belize . Early on November 22 , the system dissipated over central Guatemala .

= = Preparations and impact = =

When Tropical Storm Laura first passed the Cayman Islands , it produced up to 3 inches (7 @. @ 5 cm) of rainfall . As it was slowly moving off of the coast of Cuba , Laura dropped heavy rainfall , including nearly 20 inches (50 cm) across most of the Isle of Youth ; one station on the island reported 14 inches (36 cm) in 24 hours . The highest total in the country was 32 @. @ 5 inches (83 cm) , and overall the storm impacted four provinces , including Isle of Youth , Pinar del Río , La Habana , and the city of Havana . On the Isle of Youth , Laura produced winds of 70 mph (120 km / h) , with gusts to 80 mph (130 km / h) . On the mainland , the storm destroyed 20 homes and several tobacco sheds , with damage also reported to the coffee , sugar , fruit , and vegetable crops . Due to the flooding , officials forced 26 @, @ 000 people from their homes in Pinar del Río , and one person in that province drowned while crossing a river . The storm 's passage was believed to have diverted a flock of great black @- @ backed gulls toward Central America and north @- @ coastal South America ; the species is usually found in the Mid @- @ Atlantic states , and were migrating to the Gulf Coast or Cuba when they were affected by the storm .

When Laura 's path was uncertain , forecasters advised fishermen to remain at port along the Yucatan Peninsula and southern Florida . Gale warnings were also issued for the Florida Keys , due

to the uncertainty . No significant damage or casualties were reported in Central America , although heavy rainfall was reported across the region . On Glover 's Reef off the coast of British Honduras (now Belize) , the storm stranded a group of about 20 scientists affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution ; the group was affected by the strong winds and rains , and required rescue . The storm damaged several buildings along the mainland .

Laura was one of only four storms to form in November and affect Belize , the others being a tropical storm in 1898 , a hurricane in 1942 , and Hurricane Ida in 2009 .