



Yemen is facing worst locust outbreak in nearly 15 years

Widespread breeding ongoing – aerial control campaign required

6 June 2007, Rome – Yemen is facing its worst Desert Locust outbreak since 1993, FAO warned today. An intensive survey and aerial control campaign using helicopters needs to be mounted to avoid massive locust infestations and serious damage to food crops.

“Widespread breeding is in progress within a large and remote area of an estimated 31 000 square kilometres in the interior of Yemen, where locust swarms are likely to form,” said FAO locust expert Keith Cressman, who has just returned from a week-long assessment mission to the country.

“Smaller-scale breeding has occurred also in other areas. Overall, an estimated 50 000 to 75 000 hectares may have to be treated this summer,” he added.

If locust infestations are not controlled in time, agricultural crops in Wadi Hadhramaut and other areas including the Sana’a highlands will be at risk.

Heavy rains

Unprecedented heavy rains in March and again last week have favoured locust breeding and fledging in the most affected areas, and one or two more Desert Locust generations can be expected.

The situation could be exacerbated in the coming days by heavy rains and high winds associated with a very strong tropical cyclone over Oman.

The current generation of new locust adults will mature during June and should lay eggs by the end of the month. At that time, there is also a risk of swarms forming in the interior of Saudi Arabia which, if not controlled, could move to currently infested areas in Yemen.

As the locust infestations are spread over a large and remote area of rough terrain, it is not possible to conduct sufficient surveys or control the infestations on the ground only.

The National Locust Control Center is not sufficiently equipped to deal with the problem, facing a shortage of vehicles, pesticides, sprayers, communication equipment, and trained field teams.

Helicopter control

FAO recommends that a control campaign using two helicopters

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Locust swarms are likely to form in Yemen.

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The Desert Locust consumes its own weight in vegetation every day.

should start by mid-July in order to minimize the locust threat to the region.

The Government of Yemen is mobilizing national funds and is activating the National Locust Steering Committee. Nevertheless, international assistance will be necessary to support national control efforts for a first control phase until September.

Locusts are migratory grasshoppers that often travel in vast swarms. A Desert Locust lives about three to five months. The life cycle comprises three stages: egg, hopper and adult.

Eggs hatch in about two weeks, hoppers develop in five to six stages over a period of about 30-40 days, and adults can mature within three weeks. Swarms can travel from 5 to 130 kilometres or more in a day with the wind.

A Desert Locust adult can consume roughly its own weight in fresh food per day -- about two grams. A very small part of an average swarm eats the same amount of food in one day as about 2 500 people.

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