

Locust infestation in Mauritania

Country teams and FAO bring situation under control



FAO offers hand to curtail locusts before they threaten crops and livelihoods

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Ground control operations are in progress against an infestation of desert locusts in Mauritania. As long as there are no heavy rains the infestations should be eliminated by early December, FAO said today.

Seventeen teams from the National Locust Centre in Mauritania are currently undertaking survey and control

operations against breeding locusts in the west of the country where a serious infestation developed earlier this month.

The new hatchlings are gathering together to form small but dense hopper groups that are good targets for the control teams. More than 2,100 ha have been treated since the control operations started on 11 September.

“The current situation appears to be under control,” said Keith Cressman. “FAO is monitoring the situation extremely closely and will continue to keep countries, the donor community and other stakeholders informed of any significant developments as they arise.”

2004 outbreak worse

The infestation is smaller than the outbreak in 2003 that led to a regional plague in 2004-05. No significant rain has fallen this month and vegetation is starting to dry out.

All countries within the region are much better prepared than in 2003 and have sufficient resources in place to bring the current situation under control.

Although there is no immediate threat, other countries in the region are on standby and ready to help Mauritania if needed. Morocco has mobilized survey teams and two aircraft in the extreme south just in case locust adults arrive from Mauritania. So far, ecological conditions remain dry in southern Morocco and no significant locust infestations have been detected.

Rains only risk

If unusually heavy and widespread rains occur in the next six weeks, there is a risk that small swarms will form in early December in the infested area.

They could then move north into northern Mauritania and southern Morocco and breed during the winter. This could eventually lead to further migration and breeding during the spring as far north as the Atlas

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Mountains in Morocco and Algeria.

However, the probability of this to occur is slim and FAO and its partners will keep a close watch on the developments. FAO has taken several precautionary steps in case the locust situation deteriorates.

FAO is organising an experts meeting in Mauritania next week to assess the situation on the ground and to develop short and mid-term action plans. FAO is in regular contact with the donor community if additional funds are required for control operations.