

2008



SWAC/CRC INTER-REGIONAL WORKSHOP FOR DESERT LOCUST INFORMATION OFFICERS

22-24 April 2008

Cairo, Egypt

Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South-West Asia (SWAC)
Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC)
Desert Locust Information Service (DLIS)



SWAC/CRC Inter-regional Workshop for Desert Locust Information Officers

22-24 April 2008 (FAO/RNE, Cairo)

Introduction

The FAO Senior Locust Forecasting Officer, Keith Cressman, conducted a three-day inter-regional workshop for the Locust Unit Heads and Information Officers from eight countries in the Central Region, three countries in Southwest Asia and DLCO-EA¹. Three resource persons also attended: H. Dridi (EMPRES/WR), N. Al-Harthy (Oman) and F. Bahakim (EMPRES/NPO Yemen). All of the appropriate individuals attended the workshop except for the Locust Unit Head (Deputy Director, Jodhpur) from India who was replaced by the Director of the Dept. of Agriculture and Cooperation who is not involved in the national locust programme.

The workshop follows a similar one that was conducted by the reporter in December 2007 in the Western Region. However, it was the first time an inter-regional workshop had been organized on this topic.

Workshop programme (see Annex 1)

- overview of RAMSES v 3.62 and eLocust2
- experience in using eLocust2 and RAMSES: problems and solutions
- feedback from DLIS on eLocust2 and RAMSES
- eLocust2 and RAMSES practical examples (Information Officers)
- use of GoogleEarth to visualize data and remote sensing imagery
- use of Novacom platform and eLocust2 data to manage field teams
- understanding and using FAO/DLIS forecasts

Summary of first day discussions

The first day was spent discussing the experiences, problems, solutions and improvements of eLocust2 and RAMSES in an open, frank and informal manner. All of the countries have eLocust2 units and are using them during survey and control operations although Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia should use them more. Participants were very pleased with the performance, simplicity and usefulness of eLocust2. The main difficulties were: (1) interruption of power during transmission which can cause some data to be lost – solved by keeping the unit powered properly for about 30 seconds after a message had been sent, or by connecting it to an external battery or directly to the vehicle battery, (2) a weak cable – solved Novacom who is now providing stronger cable, and (3) the MailReader program often did not decode the data properly – solved by a new version. Consequently, there were no significant problems with eLocust2. Several participants asked for an external rechargeable power source. Egypt showed three different external batteries that they had developed. Egypt also demonstrated a case and a bag for transporting an eLocust2 unit and its components.

On the other hand, Information Officers were having more difficulties with RAMSES, which is not surprising because it is more technical and complicated. This has been compounded by the numerous patches and updates that have been issued in order to meet the requirements of all countries. RAMSES was installed at least four years ago in all of the countries that participated in the workshop, except for Somalia where it will be installed later this year. Yet, many of the Information Officers did not know how to use specific functions of RAMSES (linking control data with survey, add new maps, removal of duplicate records, backing up),

¹ See Annex 2 for details.

which were shown, during the workshop. Many users wished that (1) data could be entered simultaneously by more than one user which is useful when entering historical data and during upsurges and plagues when there are large amounts of data to enter – this is not possible with the RAMSES MS Access database, (2) all data are exported not just a subset for FAO – to be requested from the programmers, and (3) data could be viewed on Google Earth – a KML export function is under development. Some strange behaviour was also noted, some that can be solved by reinstalling the program while other problems would have to be resolved by the programmers.

The Locust Unit Head in Iran, M. Ghaemian, has developed a very interesting and promising open-source multi-lingual version of RAMSES as well as several small supplementary programs. These programmes should be tested further with the view of replacing the ArcView version of RAMSES by 2010, especially given the high cost of the ESRI GIS software, the inherent limitations of the MS Access database software, and the relatively high cost of contracting the programmers for updating and maintaining the current version of RAMSES.

Summary of second day discussions

During the second day, Information Officers demonstrated how to use eLocust2 and the main important functions of RAMSES: eLocust2 data decoding and importing, data display, query and analysis, use of MODIS and rainfall estimate imagery, data export to DLIS, and making maps for bulletins. Nearly all the countries currently include a RAMSES map in their monthly bulletins except Pakistan and India. These countries were encouraged to do so as soon as possible. The demonstrations allowed the Information Officers' supervisors (the Locust Unit Heads) to understand better the new technologies and the degree of skill that is required of their officers. The reporter continually emphasized the importance of a strong link between the Locust Unit Heads and their Information Officer(s) in order to make data-based decisions.

Summary of third day discussions

On the third day, participants were shown how to: (1) check RAMSES data before sending it to DLIS, (2) use eLocust2 Novacom platform as a management tool, (3) use the FAODLIS Google Groups and (4) display MODIS and rainfall estimates in Google Earth. The FAO Senior Locust Forecasting Officer explained how to understand the forecasts that he writes in the monthly *FAO Desert Locust Bulletin*, how to interpret and translate them into action. Participants were very interested in this part of the workshop and found it to be extremely useful.

Specific details

RAMSES

- Moving from QuickEntry to QuickEntry (to view only, no input) does not work in all country systems
- On the QuickEntry form - Hoppers: must complete Behaviour last otherwise becomes unchecked when other data is entered
- V4 should be open source to move away from ArcView, include languages, communications, and minimize support and maintenance

Conclusion

Although many of the participants are becoming more experienced in eLocust2 and RAMSES, substantial training and support are required and should be provided by FAO DLIS and the commissions in the coming years such as on-the-job training, regional workshops, remote and interactive training, and specialized courses. Expertise and resource persons should be further developed within the Region.

The participants were extremely enthusiastic about the workshop and actively participated in each session. The workshop should be followed up by well-targeted visits by DLIS to the Information Officers in affected countries in the coming year. It may be useful to meet together again as a group towards the end of 2009 to exchange experiences and reassess progress that has been made.

Annex 1. Workshop programme

Tuesday 22 April: Discussions		Responsibility
09:00-09:30	Welcome and workshop objectives	Butrous, Cressman
09:30-10:30	Overview of RAMSES v362 and eLocust2	Cressman
10:30-11:00	Coffee break	
11:00-13:00	Experience in using eLocust2: problems and solutions (<i>informal roundtable discussion</i>)	Participants
13:00-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-15:00	Experience in using RAMSES: problems and solutions (<i>informal roundtable discussion</i>)	Participants
15:00-16:00	Experience and feedback in eLocust2, RAMSES and Google Group by DLIS	Cressman
Wednesday 23 April: Practical examples		Responsibility
09:00-10:30	eLocust2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data entry and transmission • Data by email and RAMSES import 	1 Locust Info Officer for each item
10:30-11:00	Coffee break	
11:00-12:30	RAMSES version 3.6.2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data display on a map • Data query and SQL 	1 Locust Info Officer for each item
12:30-13:30	Lunch break	
13:30-15:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using IRI rainfall estimates and MODIS imagery in RAMSES • Making RAMSES maps for bulletins 	1 Locust Info Officer for each item
15:00-16:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis 	1 Locust Info Officer
19:00	FAO dinner – Nile cruise	
Thursday 24 April: Forecasts and conclusion		Responsibility
09:00-09:30	Use of GoogleEarth to visualize data	1 Locust Info Officer
09:30-10:30	Use of Novacom platform and eLocust2 data to manage field teams	1 LCU Head
10:30-11:00	Coffee break	
11:00-13:30	Understanding and using FAO/DLIS forecasts	Cressman
13:30-14:30	Lunch break	
14:30-15:30	Summary and follow-up	Butrous, Cressman

Please note that the time schedule is approximate and will depend on the length of the discussions

Annex 2. Workshop Participants

FAO (4)

- Fuad Bahakim (EMPRES/CRC, Sana'a)
- Munir Butrous (EMPRES/CRC, Cairo)
- Keith Cressman (FAO/DLIS, Rome)
- Dridi Hichem (EMPRES/CLCPRO, Algiers)

Locust-affected countries (22)

Country	Head Locust Centre	Info Officer
Egypt	Mohamed Abdul Rahman	Osama Taha
Eritrea	Ghebrehiwet Teame	Zerisenay Okube
Ethiopia /1	Fikre Markos	Kassahun Yitaferu
Oman	Abdullah Al-Darmaki	Nasser Al-Harthy
Saudi Arabia	Mohamad H. Halawani	Abdullatif Abdul Salam
Sudan	Rabie Khalil	Hussein Othman
Somalia	n/a	Mohamed Jama Dahir / Abdillahi Eige
Yemen	Abdou Farea Al-Romaih	Said Al Mamry
DLCO-EA	n/a	Mehari Tesfayohannes
India /2	K.S. Sethi	Pramod Gour
I.R. Iran /3	Herbod	Mehdi Ghaemian
Pakistan	Zafar Ali Khan	Ghulam Qadir Lund

/1 Mr. Fikri Marcos will attend as Director, Plant Protection Division and Mr. Kassahun as Locust Head

/2 Mr. Sethi will attend from the Plant Protection Dept.

/3 Mr. Herbod will attend as Deputy-Director, Plant Protection Organization and Mr. Mehdi Ghaemian as Locust Head