2009

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

27-28 May 2009

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)

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Introduction

In collaboration with CRC, the FAO Senior Locust Forecasting Officer, Keith Cressman, conducted an inter-regional workshop that brought together English-speaking national locust information officers from 13 countries in the Central, Eastern and Western Regions for informal discussions on using and improving RAMSES and eLocust2 for locust surveillance and early warning. The workshop followed a similar event that took place in April 2008 attended by nearly the same officers as well as their supervisors, the National Locust Unit heads. As this year's discussions concentrated on technical issues and new releases of eLocust2 and RAMSES software, it was decided that it was sufficient to invite only the locust information officers, funded by their perspective regional commissions[1]. Two participants from N. Somalia could not attend due to unexpected and last minute visa difficulties.

The workshop was an informal event without an agenda or timetable. This allowed all issues to be discussed as raised by the participants in a very open manner. The participants were asked to indicate what they wanted to achieve during this year's workshop. Most said they wished to know more about eLocust2Mapper, the custom application developed by the Locust Unit Head in Iran to manage eLocust2 data from the field prior to importing it into the RAMSES databases.

To set the stage of the workshop, a 15-minute film, *A Locust Diary*, by Robert Nugent on the 2008 control campaign in southern Ethiopia was shown. This was the same film that elicited negative reaction by some delegates at the recent DLCC. The participants at this workshop embraced the film and thought that it was an accurate depiction of the difficulties often encountered in the field.

Summary of technical discussions

Reporting. Two exercises demonstrated the need to report as much detail as possible about unconfirmed locust sightings, and the difficulty when the same data is reported in different formats (eLocust2, forms, summaries, reports) more than once, which creates confusion when they do not match. This has been a recent problem in northern Somalia. It was suggested that locust information officers develop a list of standard questions to ask travelers, nomads, villagers, etc. when met during surveys.

RAMSES. This year there were much fewer questions and problems regarding RAMSES than last year, suggesting that the locust information officers are probably becoming more comfortable in its use. Participants had questions on (1) adding photos to the database, (2) updating survey records with control, (3) searches based on record ID numbers and (4) inputting rainfall station data.

FAODLIS Google Groups. The different sections of the FAODLIS Google Group, established to facilitate the exchange of problems, solutions and tips amongst locust

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[1] CRC: Egypt (Rania Huessein Mostafa, Samira Mohamed Nabel, Essam Mahmoud Ibrahim), Eritrea (Eyob Mengis), Ethiopia (Hiwot Lemma), Oman (Nassor Al-Harthy), Saudi Arabia (Abdullatif Abdulsalam, Marwan Hassan Balkhour), Sudan (Kamal Suliman), Yemen (Saeed Al-Mamaary) and DLCO-EA (Mehari Tesfayohannes); SWAC: India (Pramod Gour), Iran (Mehdi Ghaemian, Mahmoud Chalakizebardast), Pakistan (Ghulam Qadir Lund); CLCPRO: Libya (Zamzam ElBusefi) and H. Dridi (resource person).

information officers, were reviewed. So far, there are nearly 40 members of which most actively contribute.

Remote sensing. The new greenness maps under development by the Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium) as a means to improve the use of MODIS imagery were explained

eLocust2. There were no significant difficulties raised by the participants about eLocust2 use. Most of the concerns centered on (1) how to install upgraded software, and (2) making better use of the Novacom platform to query and display the data, and manage the eLocust2 units. Hichem Dridi (CLCPRO) explained the file structure of eLocust2 software files and the importance of following closely the installation instructions. As the Novacom platform has been upgraded several times recently, the reporter presented a quick overview of its functionality and encouraged information officers to use it to monitor the daily performance and efficiency of survey teams in the field. It was noted that most survey officers complete the *FAO Desert Locust Survey & Control Form* in addition to entering data into eLocust2. The form acts as a backup in case something happens to the eLocust2 data. It can also be a means of verifying data but greater care is required in completing both the form and eLocust2.

eLocust2Mapper. The programmer, Mehdi Ghaemian (Iran), demonstrated the use of the application that checks eLocust2 data received by email or, better yet, downloaded directly from the Novacom platform. A new advanced version allows the data to be corrected by the locust information officer prior to importing it into RAMSES. eLocust2Mapper has matured and is now a fully functional application after nearly ten beta versions. It helps to ensure high quality field data. It is multilingual so it can be used easily by locust information officers in English, French, Arabic and Persian speaking countries.

Technical support. Hichem Dridi (CLCPRO) suggested using Skype in combination with a web cam as one way to improve the support that FAO (DLIS and Commissions) provides to national locust units in the use of new technologies. The proposed system would allow FAO and the user to see the desktop of each other's computer in order to help solve problems. It was suggested that national locust information officers download Skype and the Locust Commissions look into the possibility of procuring a single web cam model (based on H. Dridi's specifications) and distribute one to each country.

Standard operating procedures. A one-page SOP to help locust information officers better organize their working day was presented and discussed. The SOP was modified from one that was developed during a technical backstopping mission to Mali earlier this year.

Conclusion

The participants and FAO felt that the workshop was very useful because it brings the locust information officers together to exchange experiences, problems and solutions face-to-face rather than through the Internet or by other means. This helps to maintain a strong information network that is the foundation of preventive control and FAO's locust early warning programme. The workshop should be repeated on an annual basis with the same participants. The next one is tentatively scheduled for May 2010 in Cairo.

Each participant received a USB key with the latest versions of eLocust2, eLocust2Mapper and RAMSES as well as the SOP and Cobian back-up software.