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FAO DESERT LOCUST CONTROL COMMITTEE

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Will the situation worsen in the coming year?
(Agenda Item 6)

General outlook

The Desert Locust situation is expected to remain calm during the spring and continue so until at least to the end of the summer. Seasonal rainfall predictions suggest that higher than normal rains may occur during April along both sides of the southern Red Sea and during April and May on the northern coast of Oman and southeastern coast of Iran. This could allow one generation of breeding to occur and cause locust numbers to increase slightly in both countries. The forecast for the summer depends on the nature of the seasonal rains in the Sahel of West Africa, Sudan and western Eritrea, in the southern Arabian Peninsula and along the Indo-Pakistan border. Seasonal predictions suggest that rains are expected to be normal in most areas during June and July except for the possibility of above average rains during June in northern Chad and during July in Niger and Algeria[1]. Only low numbers of locusts are likely to be present at the start of the summer rainy season this year. If unusually good rains fall throughout the summer, then there is a possibility for two to three generations of breeding to occur and locust numbers would increase. If this happens and once vegetation dries out, then locusts could concentrate and gregarize in the autumn but, at this point, this is an unlikely scenario.

Due to the uncertainty of the rains, the seasonal weather predictions[2] and the relatively large areas of the recession area that cannot be monitored due to continued insecurity, national surveys should be carried out regularly in the spring and summer breeding areas that are accessible.

[1] This paper includes all information and seasonal weather predictions available as of 23 February. It will be updated during the DLCC with additional data and weather predictions.

[2] DLIS incorporates seasonal rainfall and temperature predictions provided by the World Climate Service (StormExchange) into operational locust forecasts on an experimental basis because these estimates can vary dramatically from month to month.

Western Region

Seasonal predictions suggest that very little rain is likely to fall in the Region from March to May. This may be combined with slightly cooler than normal temperatures during the spring in Northwest Africa. In the summer breeding areas in the Sahel, higher than normal rains could occur in northeast Chad in June, and in the Air Mountains in Niger and south of the Hoggar Mountains in southern Algeria in July.

Currently, only low numbers of locusts are present in northwest and northern Mauritania, and perhaps in parts of northern Mali and Niger, Western Sahara and southern Algeria. If sufficient rains do not occur to allow breeding during March and April, then locust numbers will remain low and probably decline further. Any adults that survive in the currently infested areas would shift to the summer breeding areas in the northern Sahel of West Africa during May and June. The scale of this movement is expected to be extremely limited.

The forecast for the upcoming summer depends on the timing, amount, distribution and duration of the seasonal rains in the Sahel. According to the seasonal predictions, good rains may occur in Chad during June and in parts of Niger in July. This suggests that at least one generation of breeding could occur in these areas in the early part of the summer. If rains start on time and continue in other summer breeding areas, then there is a possibility that at least one generation of breeding could occur there as well. However, it is not certain that this will take place before the end of July. Therefore, it is unlikely that more than two generations of breeding will occur this summer in the Sahel, and only low numbers of locusts would emigrate to winter areas. The uncertainty of the rains and the seasonal predictions means that surveys should be carried out regularly during the summer in Mauritania, southern Algeria and, security permitting, in northern Mali, Niger and eastern Chad.

Central Region

Currently, only scattered locusts are present in some areas because of poor rainfall and limited breeding during this past winter. According to seasonal predictions, late rains could occur during April in coastal areas along the southern Red Sea from the Tokar Delta in Sudan to Massawa, Eritrea and from Lith, Saudi Arabia to the northern Tihama in Yemen. If so, then small-scale breeding could continue to May and cause locust numbers to increase slightly.

Seasonal predictions call for higher than normal rains along the Batinah coast in northern Oman during April and May. This could allow one generation of spring breeding to occur and cause locust numbers to increase slightly but gregarization is not very likely to take place.

Similar to the Western Region, the summer forecast depends on rainfall in the interior of Sudan and Yemen from June to October. Scattered solitarious adults are likely to move from the winter to the summer breeding areas during June. Small-scale breeding usually commences with the onset of the summer rains in the interior of Sudan, western Eritrea and the interior of Yemen, which might not be until August this year. If good rains fall during the summer, then at least one generation of breeding could occur that would cause locust numbers to increase slightly by autumn.

Eastern Region

Good rains have fallen on the southeastern coast of Iran recently that may allow one generation of breeding to occur in March. Seasonal predications suggest that drier than normal conditions can be expected on the coast in March while above average rains could fall during April and May. If so, this could allow an extended first generation of breeding or perhaps a second generation until the beginning of the summer in southeast Iran, causing locust numbers to increase. The situation is somewhat different in the adjacent spring breeding areas in western Pakistan where breeding may not commence until May when seasonal predictions suggest that good rains may occur. In this case,

only one generation of limited breeding is expected and locust numbers will not increase significantly.

From late May onwards, scattered solitarious adults are expected to move towards the summer breeding areas along both sides of the Indo-Pakistan border. Ecological conditions could become favourable in some places from any pre-monsoon rains that fall during May as suggested by the seasonal predictions. Otherwise, small-scale breeding will occur once the monsoon rains commence in about late June or early July, which normally allow for one generation of breeding. There is no indication so far that the monsoon rains will be higher than normal this year.

Conclusion

Although the outlook is for a continuation of the currently calm situation, seasonal weather predictions could change. Therefore, regular surveys should be maintained in all breeding areas, especially after rainfall and in response to ecological developments. During the spring, surveys should concentrate on northern Mauritania, Western Sahara, Algeria, the southern Red Sea coastal plains, the northern coast of Oman and the southeastern coast of Iran. During the summer, surveys should focus on the traditional breeding areas in the northern Sahel between Mauritania and western Eritrea, in the interior of Yemen and along the Indo-Pakistan border.