

EIR Feature

Defeat the IMF's genocide: Stop the locust plague!

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees . . . and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

—Exodus 10:15

If a massive aerial spraying effort is not begun by Sept. 1, the worst locust plague of the century threatens to strip all vegetation from huge areas of Africa. The near-normal African rains in 1985-86, following years of drought, have created ideal breeding conditions for this voracious pest, and now, outbreaks of four species of locust and the West African grasshopper are simultaneously under way. Although reports of locust breeding have been documented since December 1985, aerial spraying has been left to the last possible minute.

The international agency charged with overseeing the situation, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is carrying out the genocidal policy of the International Monetary Fund, which deprives the countries of the so-called Fourth World of the credit needed to save millions of lives. The FAO, along with the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), is minimizing the danger, withholding information, and promoting inadequate methods of control, thereby creating the conditions for an out-of-control plague of locusts and grasshoppers that will guarantee the death of Africa.

The only effective way to eradicate a locust infestation is to use a military-style mobilization to find and spray the infested areas before the young grasshoppers and locusts can reach the swarm stage. It is clear that the agencies involved, especially the FAO, are not doing this because they do not *intend* to win this war. They may look busy, collecting data and planning for "crisis management"; but in truth, everything that needs to be known about the situation is already in hand. They are playing the game of crisis management while preparing to carry out genocide.

Africa: where weather is favorable for locusts

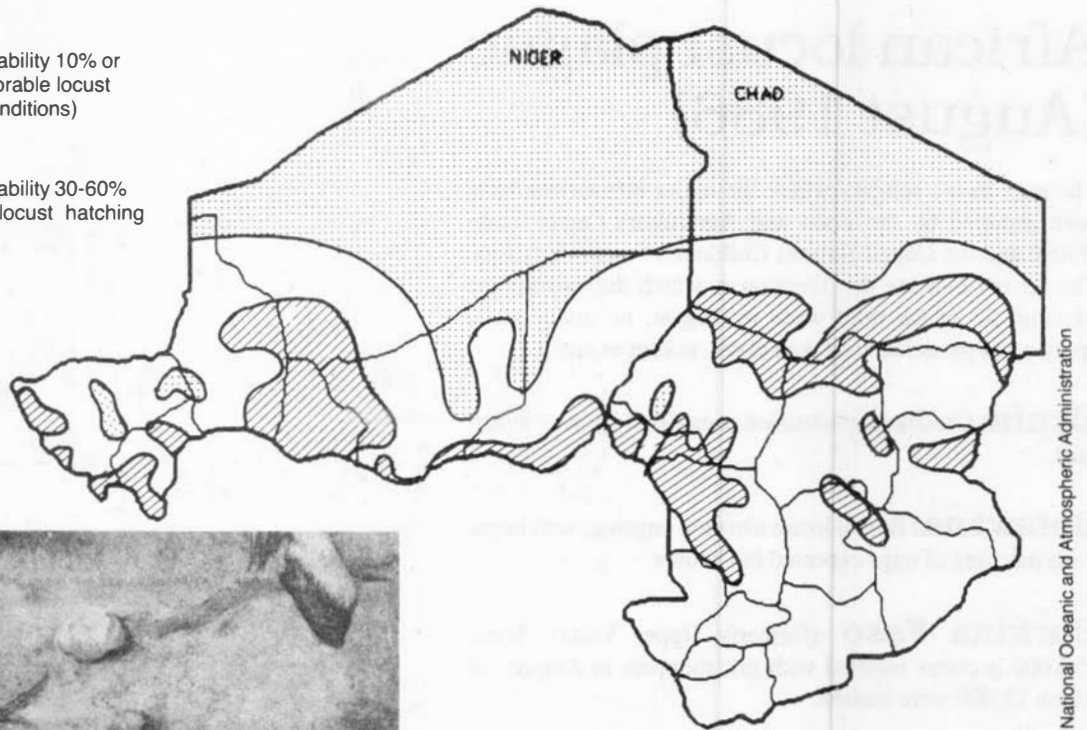
Topsoil moisture (July 30, 1986)



Water availability 10% or less (unfavorable locust hatching conditions)



Water availability 30-60% (favorable locust hatching conditions)



Pieter Brueghel the Elder's "Triumph of Death," ca. 1575, captures the essence of monetarist policies.

The most shocking fact to understand in looking at this disaster is that the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and similar institutions believe that Africa has too many people. These Malthusians have already written off the entire continent—553 million people.

Delays and deception

The FAO set up the Center for Locust Control in Rome in mid-August to coordinate the international effort against the locust plague—fully eight months after the crisis in the Sahel was documented by the French agency PRIFAS and one month after the U.N. Fund for Children, UNICEF, called the situation an emergency. The reason the delay is particularly critical is that locusts are most easily eradicated when they are young—before they have wings and can reproduce. That means locating those uncultivated areas where the females lay eggs, so that poison bait can be spread or so that the areas can be sprayed soon after the eggs hatch. If this approximately three-week period is missed and the locusts or grasshoppers are allowed to mature, they will produce a second generation that is 10 times the size of the first. Each delay sends the situation further out of control.

This is how the present policy will directly cause more Africans to die:

- The money requested by FAO and pledged by various donor nations now totals about \$12 million, with \$3.3 million in hand to begin spraying the Sahel area starting Sept. 1. This sum is far too little. For example, Senegal, which is inundated with grasshoppers, has requested \$4 million for that nation alone. Botswana, also hard-hit, has requested \$4 million, after exhausting its own budget. The Sahelian area the FAO

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African locust plague (August 1986)

The map shows roughly where the major infestations have been reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Children's Fund. The arrows indicate the direction in which the swarms are moving. As of the third week in August, no major aerial spraying of pesticide had taken place, except as noted.

Benin: Grasshopper situation considered "grave" in August.

Botswana: Brown locust situation ongoing, with large-scale hatching of eggs expected in October.

Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta): Some 250,000 hectares infested with grasshoppers in August, of which 13,000 were treated.

Burundi: Small swarms reported in East in late May.

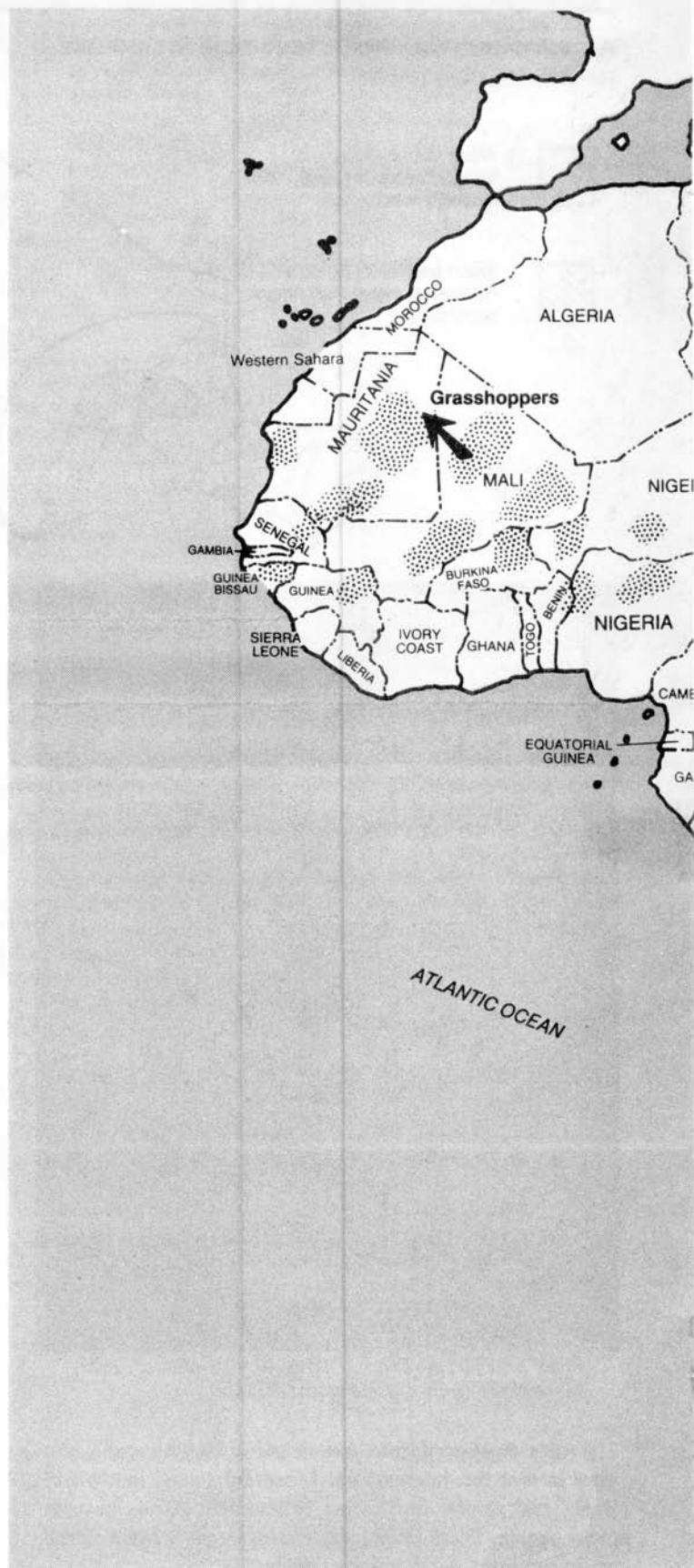
Chad: First reports of grasshopper breeding in May. All Sahel areas infested with grasshoppers and locusts, which destroyed 2,000 hectares. By August-September, 300,000 hectares will be affected, with 500,000 eggs per hectare reported. In September-October, these pests are expected to swarm south and attack crops.

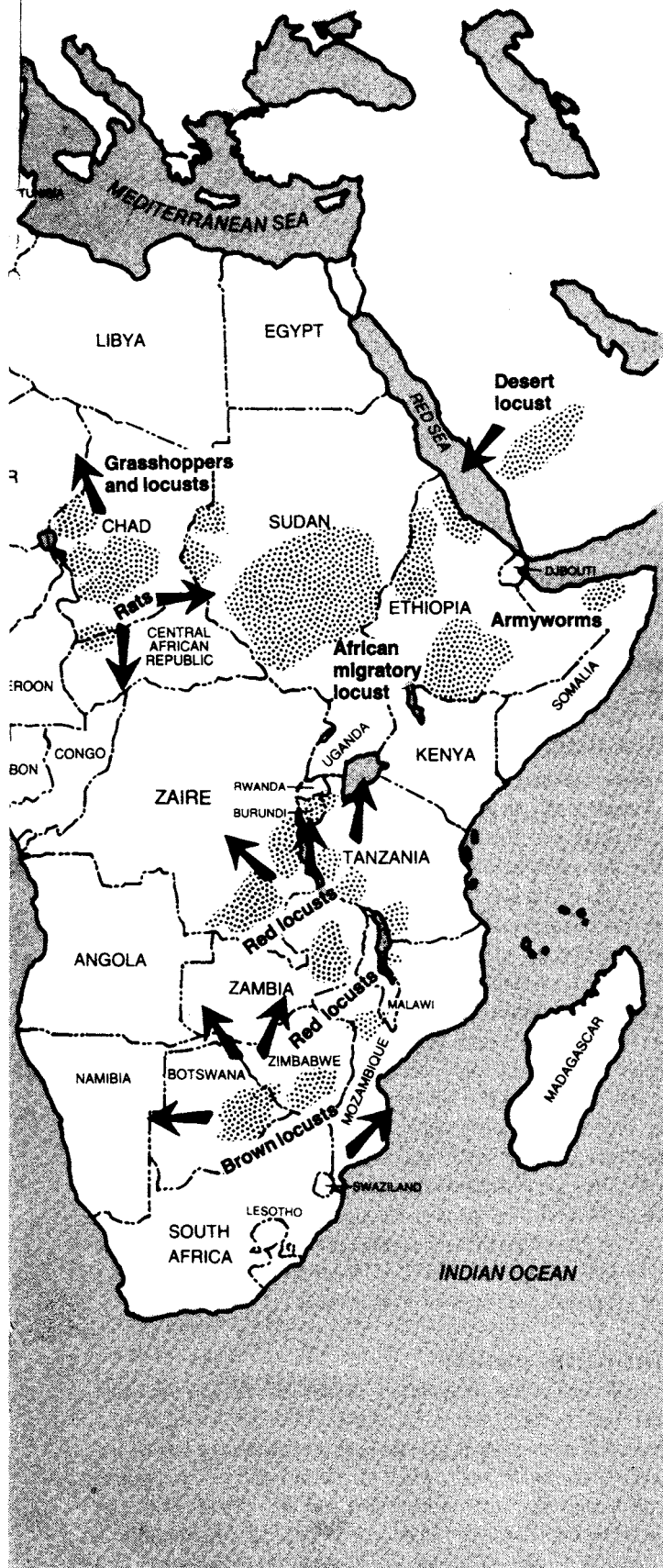
Ethiopia: Desert locusts, African migratory locusts, and grasshoppers reported. Armyworms threaten 11 of 14 regions, "the worst year ever recorded," according to UNICEF. FAO reports that conditions are worse in some areas than during the 1984-85 drought.

Guinea Bissau: Grasshopper infestation in four areas.

Mali: Grasshopper infestation in May moved north. By the second generation, 200,000 hectares were infested. The second generation adults moved north into Mauritania in mid-August. Crops had to be sowed four times. "Spraying has been delayed."

Mauritania: Some infestation in July; massive hatching in August.





Mozambique: Extensive locust infestation reported in late July.

Niger: Grasshoppers reported in several areas and FAO reports 35,800 hectares aerially sprayed. At the Chad border, infestation is 500,000 grasshoppers per hectare.

Nigeria: Grasshopper damage to sorghum and millet reported.

Republic of South Africa: Locust infestation from 1985-86 season was treated on 543,000 hectares, but because of large numbers of eggs laid, the situation is expected to "reach plague proportions and affect much of the country, as well as Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Lesotho."

Rwanda: Small numbers of locusts reported in May.

Senegal: Grasshopper infestation of 200 per square meter reported. "By early August, situation grave," reports the FAO. Some ground control in effect.

Somalia: Desert locusts reported in northern coastal areas in May, but "good rains have promoted good breeding conditions."

Sudan: Desert locust swarm reported in June and July, and African migratory locusts are also reported. UNICEF notes that "progressively less of the south is accessible even to the most resourceful of agencies. Most of East bank is no-man's land."

Tanzania: "Uncontrolled red locust breeding" leading to swarms were reported in three areas. These moved northwest to Burundi, Rwanda, and Zaire. More swarms are expected.

Zaire: Red locusts reported in July.

Zambia: Red locusts on increase, threatening sugar and tea areas.

Zimbabwe: Brown locust swarm reported in late May.

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intends to spray is 1 million hectares—not very large, considering the size of the continent, or the fact that the United States, this year, routinely sprayed 13 million acres for grasshopper control.

- For its part, the United States has pledged a paltry \$1.25 million toward the emergency effort in the Sahel. As one experienced military man put it, this is not enough to cover gas for the airplanes to do the spraying!

- The FAO and other nations have continued to mount “fact-finding” missions in lieu of action. Facts are necessary, to be sure, but why, given all the time the FAO has spent fact finding, is there such a dearth of public information?

Furthermore, the FAO denied knowing, in the third week in August, the facts that UNICEF found in July and made public Aug. 1 in an emergency report. Certainly, if FAO was aware of the information, it was not acting on it. UNICEF’s emergency report described the rains of May 1986 and the resulting densities of 500,000 locusts per hectare: “Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Cape Verde are all under siege. Major attacks are reported from Chad where farmers are forced to reseed their fields to produce minimum crops. If this first attack is not checked in the coming weeks, a second generation will be allowed to develop and cause disaster by September/October. . . . For people living on the edge of survival, a disaster like this can be the final blow.”

- Where to spray could have been decided early on, based on the “locust weather watch” information put together by the Assessment and Information Services Center of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Using satellite data, NOAA has precisely mapped the Sahelian areas where the water availability was 30-60%, indicating favorable locust hatching conditions. Those are the areas that could have been sprayed (see map, page 35). NOAA also has color-coded satellite composites of areas of Africa that show over a period of a week where there is new vegetation. Thus, NOAA’s data can show both where the locusts are likely to hatch and where they will go next to find food—the location of the next generation.

This information, along with low-level wind data, can be available every five days from NOAA, which routinely carries out a drought-watch worldwide. Why wasn’t it put to use sooner, and why isn’t the assessment center put on an emergency Africa assignment?

- Once the likely breeding areas are mapped, these data could be supplemented by color infrared photography from aircraft, which can produce a resolution of 6 inches, compared to the 200-foot resolution of satellites. In the southwestern United States, such aerial surveillance can routinely cover 250,000 acres in an hour. The FAO supposedly has this capability.

- As can be seen in the accompanying interview, the U.S. State Department is playing the same game as the FAO, claiming that the situation is under control and that a military logistical intervention is not necessary. Thus there has as yet

been no extraordinary presidential or Department of Defense decision to intervene. Meanwhile, the emergency U.S. military units capable of dealing with the locust emergency are confined by budget cuts. They claim that without top-down intervention and assurances of new funds, they cannot act without endangering ongoing operations.

- The role of the IMF in this may not be up front, but it is decisive. For example, locust control centers set up in three regions of Africa were equipped 10 years ago to monitor and move on a situation before it became a disaster. These centers were triaged by the IMF austerity, so that they are not now operational; equipment is in disrepair, parts are missing, trained people are no longer there.

- While the September deadline for the Sahel area is as yet not met, the FAO is silent on the next front—southern Africa—which must be sprayed in October.

The plague can still be stopped

The current FAO effort involves adding up the requests from the various countries affected for pesticides, small planes, training, ground-spraying equipment, etc., and then matching these needs with a similar donor list. The patchwork result resembles some kind of giant game board, where the FAO collects and distributes the chips that designate future action.

To turn this situation around, the United States must deploy its Air Force spraying capability, which operates with a more advanced technology than the smaller planes and helicopters. Right now, the U.S. Air Force maintains two C-130s equipped for spraying that are experimenting with a new, more efficient spraying method. These two planes alone could cover the Sahel area in the required time. Because they are much larger than the usual spray planes, they can fly five-hour sorties, covering up to 67 square miles per sortie. They are capable of landing on sand or on a paved highway. They can also carry enough pesticide that they do not have to return to their base after each sortie; as long as there is a source of water, they can mix up more pesticide and continue flying.

Because these C-130s can outperform even the largest of the previous planes (C-123s) used in commercial spraying, they can not only save time, but operate at one-third of the cost. They are also powerful enough to successfully navigate the mountainous areas with strong updrafts.

The State Department considered using these planes, but as of this writing, the decision was that this capability was not necessary (see interview, page 42).

An ancient scourge

The locust has periodically devastated Africa, the Middle East, and southern Asia for centuries. Man has fought at least five great wars against locusts in this century, the last major battle being in 1967-68, when locusts migrated from Sudan, west across the Sahel to Morocco and from Saudi Arabia to the Middle East, Iran, and India. In a 1958 plague in Somalia, a swarm of 40 billion locusts ate 80,000 tons a day—enough

A military-style effort can win the locust war

The United States must take the current effort to combat Africa's locust plague away from the bureaucracies of the "One World" bureaucracies like the U.N. and the State Department, and put it into the hands of the military, whose methods were successful in fighting locusts in the 1950s and 1960s. A military-style mobilization should include the following:

Mapping the infestation: The Assessment and Information Services Center of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) must be put on an emergency mobilization to continue satellite data mapping for the Sahel and East Africa and to begin the work for southern Africa, where massive breeding is expected in October-November. By starting now, the areas requiring spraying can be identified.

Spraying: The United States must commit itself to a military-style effort of the sort that could cover the affected areas of the continent in a week. The U.S. Air

Force now has available the largest and most advanced planes—C-130s—equipped for pesticide spraying. They should be used immediately to cover the 1 million hectares of emergency spraying in the Sahel. The other small aircraft lined up by the slow-moving international relief effort could then be used to extend the area of spraying.

Other large planes equipped for spraying should be brought into service. The larger planes are more efficient and less costly to operate.

Pesticide production: Although there appear to be adequate stocks of pesticides available for the Sahelian effort, given the scale of the problem and the October offensive necessary in southern Africa, U.S. pesticide production should be geared up now on an emergency basis to prepare for a continentwide effort, not only for this year, but for 1987-88. In addition to the commonly used fenitrothion, stronger pesticides that can be used to kill adult locusts should be stockpiled and ready.

Infrastructure: Adequate funds must be appropriated to update the necessary activities in addition to spraying in order to eradicate locusts, grasshoppers, and other crop-threatening pests.

corn to feed 400,000 people for one year.

This is the first time in this century, however, that all four species are striking at the same time.

A locust can eat two to three grams—two to three times its weight—each day. A one-mile-square swarm of 150 million locusts, 5,000 feet in elevation, can go through 200 to 600 tons of vegetation daily, leaving nothing for the human inhabitants except starvation.

The only hope of success in combating a locust plague is to eliminate the insects when they are in their earliest stages and unable to fly, either by laying down poison bait to be eaten as soon as the eggs hatch or by killing the pests in their hopper stage. The commonly used pesticide for this task is fenitrothion, used in a very low-volume spray—half a liter per hectare—that is mixed with a little oil to help it settle on the ground. (One of the constraints is that spraying has to occur in the early morning hours, before the ground heats up and sends the spray up instead of down.) The kill rate averages 95%, which, in areas of high infestation, means that there will still be the problem of tracking the survivors.

Fenitrothion is a contact spray that lasts only four or five hours, killing the insect on contact, but it is not harmful to humans or animals. For example, when malathion, a related pesticide, was used against the medfly in California in aerial spraying, it was not even necessary to warn people that the spraying was going to take place, because such low levels are not harmful.

If locusts are not killed in the early stages, the job becomes much more difficult, and a stronger pesticide is need-

ed. Cygon, for example, can be used, but this is four to five times as expensive, because it is that much more difficult to make.

Female locusts lay 70 to 100 rice-sized eggs in a cluster in the sand. In order to hatch, the eggs must be able to absorb their weight in water. Then there is a population explosion. The locust egg hatches into a three-legged "hopper" (also called a nymph or an instar), which can only hop or crawl slowly. It sheds its skin, turns black in the sun, and then begins to move out in packs.

The locust molts five times, going from hopper to adult capable of flying usually within 60 days. However, if the temperature and moisture level are good, this period from birth to maturity shortens to 25 to 26 days. There are reports from the FAO that conditions are so favorable to the locusts, that they are maturing in a record 15 to 20 days—which greatly limits the amount of time when they are vulnerable.

When food is abundant (such as now, when the rains have produced some of the first good crops in 10 years), the locusts live about four months. In times of drought, their metabolism changes and they can survive for a year without food.

Under favorable conditions, the locust's body temperature and metabolism change, and the locusts turn into a self-propagating gregarious swarm. Once in the swarm stage, locusts can travel up to 3,000 miles per generation. They have a double set of wings, about five inches across, and they fly where the winds take them, averaging about 10 miles per hour. The female locusts in the swarm breed along the way, laying three sets of eggs, usually about 200 in all.