

Locusts: an unchecked plague stalks the continent of Africa

by Marjorie Mazel Hecht

Millions of desert locusts from West Africa made an unprecedented flight to the Caribbean Oct. 20. According to Jeremy Rossey, a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) expert, desert locusts had never been sighted in the Caribbean before. Their flight across the South Atlantic was twice as long as any previously recorded locust flight.

"This is a large-scale invasion on a very wide front," Rossey told reporters. "We will never know exact numbers, but there are many, many millions of the locusts. Two weeks ago," he added, "none of us would have believed this is possible. We are obviously dealing with a new kind of beast. The main worry is that the swarm would breed and set up a permanent colony in the area." The locusts are feeding on bananas, vegetables, and palm trees, and are threatening crops from Martinique to Surinam. They are already on the South American mainland in Surinam, which borders Brazil, Guyana, and Venezuela. Miami is a possible target area in the near future.

The November invasion of North Africa by locust swarms will also pose a threat to southern European countries like France, Spain, and Italy in the next months, as new swarms form and move out in search of food. In Tunisia, for example, the favorable weather conditions have allowed the locust population to thrive, and in some instances, the pests have grown to the size of small birds. Since the locusts in a swarm stage breed four or five times a year, multiplying ten-fold each time, the potential threat to crops and vegetation is enormous if the locusts remain unchecked. In addition to breeding and mature swarms across the Sahel, in West Africa, and in North Africa, the locust situation is worsening in the Horn of Africa, putting Egypt, Israel, and Kenya in jeopardy.

Despite all the hand-wringing by international agencies like the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the locust plague now threatening to destroy much of Africa's food supply was both predictable and preventable. As mature locust swarms fill the skies from East to West Africa, and newly hatched locusts carpet the Sahel, there is still time to stop the most devastating locust plague of this century. What is necessary is the political will to mount an emergency mobilization that expends the resources—large and small planes, pesticides, ground spraying, communications and transportation equipment, satellite and airplane surveillance, and other infrastructure—to get the job done in a hurry.

Such an all-out mobilization must start by affirming that saving the lives of millions of Africans is more important than any supposed damage to "the environment." Concretely, this means that the most effective pesticide must be used to ensure that the next generation of locusts do not reach maturity and breed. For much of the vast Sahel region, the pesticide for the job is the long-lasting dieldrin, which could be sprayed in barrier strips where locusts are hatching and hoppers are beginning to search for food. Dieldrin kills the insects when they ingest it, and since it lasts for several weeks, it will ensure that the young locusts are killed whenever they hatch in the next period. Other pesticides are short-lived, and thus require more than one spraying to ensure a high kill ratio.

Overturn the ban on dieldrin

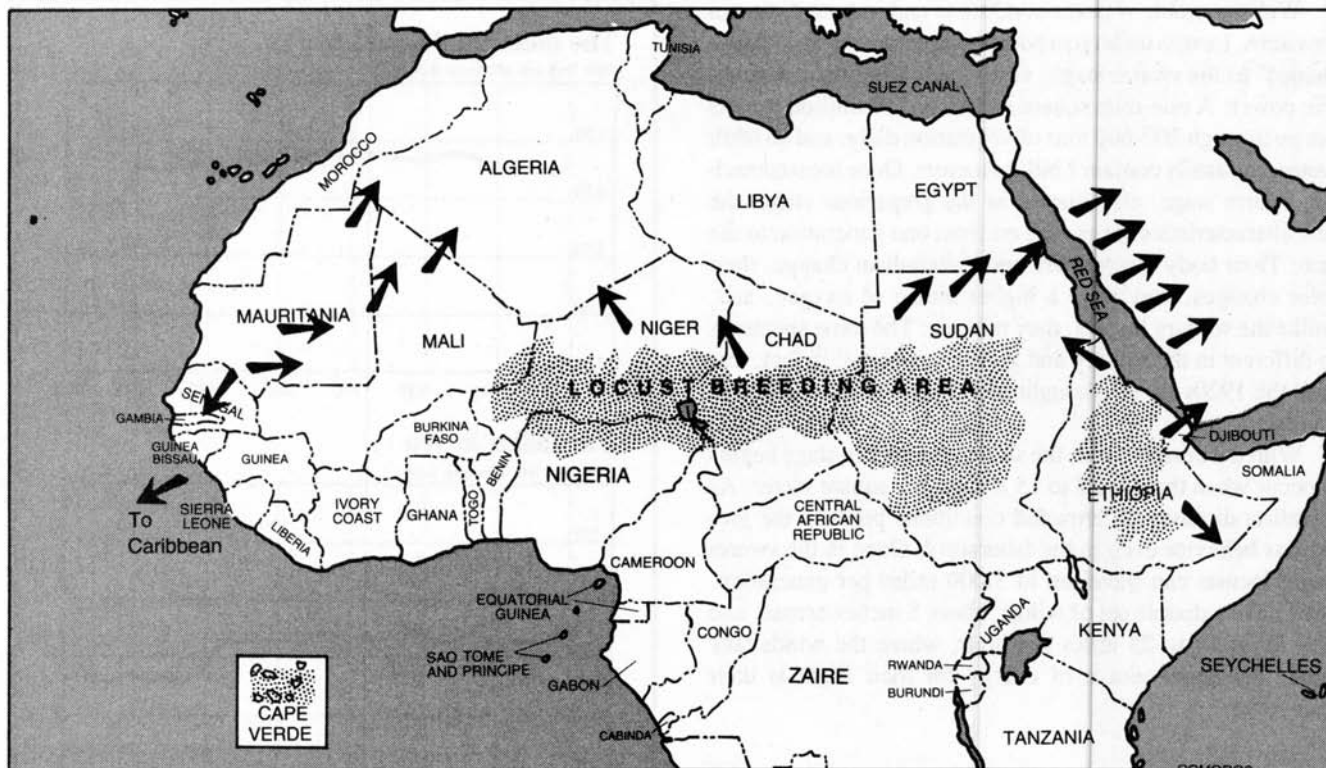
The first step is for the nations of Africa that are already suffering the first stage of genocide—famine and disease—to insist that people come first and that the U.S. State Department ban on dieldrin must be overruled. Dieldrin was banned in 1974, not for scientific reasons (the scientific evidence supported the continuation of its use); it was banned for political reasons, as part of the environmentalist assault on industrial society. The man responsible was Russell Train, then the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and now the head of the World Wildlife Fund. Train has been identified by pro-growth scientists as "the single most dangerous man in the international environmentalist movement," because of his behind-the-scenes efforts to promote malthusian policies.

The State Department, in its eagerness to pare down the African population, has explicitly threatened both the FAO and member states in Africa that use of dieldrin will automatically mean a cut-off of all aid.

Locust plagues are predictable

Although both temperature and rainfall conditions for millennia have determined when locusts or grasshoppers will multiply to the plague stage, today man has the ability to control and even eradicate these pests. For centuries, the intercontinental journey of locust swarms has followed the same path, breeding in endemic areas in Africa, moving from the Sahel region both west to West Africa and north to North Africa, and moving from East Africa across to Saudi Arabia.

Locust swarm movements through Africa, November 1988



The Oct. 18 African Locust Bulletin of the Food and Agriculture Organization notes the deteriorating situation in Africa: "Very large numbers of desert locusts have been blown out into the Atlantic Ocean," the report states, and "in West Africa there has been further westward and southward migration of swarms and new invasions of Cape Verde, Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau. . . . Substantial migration has occurred in a northeasterly direction toward the Red Sea . . . with mature swarms being reported from the Egyptian-Sudan border. In Ethiopia, the situation appears to be deteriorating with increasing numbers of swarms being reported. Further south, Djibouti has been invaded by swarms and it is virtually certain that swarms will invade Somalia shortly. . . . A large number of swarms have invaded Saudi Arabia along the Red Sea coast and have moved inland to Medina and the Asir."

As for the outlook to mid-November, the FAO bulletin reports, "Further swarm invasions of Senegal, Gambia, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau are likely over the next two weeks. There is also a high risk of invasion of northwest Mali from the north and west." The hatching of a second generation in Senegal and Mauritania is expected to be large, and "the risk of major invasion will be high during November as second-generation swarms form in the Sahel."

The map shows the expected migration of the swarms on the winds of the Intertropical Convergence Zone, carrying locusts to northwest Africa, east from Senegal and southern Mauritania toward Mali, and north from Mauritania.

If favorable conditions for the locusts continue, North Africa provides a staging ground for spread throughout the Mediterranean area, while Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the entry point to the Mideast.

How far the locusts travel depends on the climatic conditions and the winds. This year, for the first time, storm winds carried millions of African desert locusts to the Caribbean, where, if not halted, the pests have the potential to devastate the crops and greenery of Ibero-America and North America.

The key to stopping an infestation of locusts from reaching a plague stage is to spray widely enough so that there will be no next generation. (Female locusts lay about 300 eggs each over their lifetime, and each locust generation is 10

times larger than the previous one.) Those areas where the locusts have stopped to lay eggs must be treated, so that when those eggs hatch, the new hoppers will be killed before they reach maturity and breed a third generation.

As documented in *EIR*, the international agencies responsible, including the FAO and the State Department's Agency for International Development, deliberately refused to carry out wide-scale spraying of known areas of infestation throughout the Sahel and surrounding regions in 1986, 1987, and 1988. The reason was not that the spraying of the vast infested areas was too costly. As the head of the FAO Emergency Center for Locust Operations, Lukas Brader, told this writer more than once, the Food and Agriculture Organization would not spray because of the "environmental conse-

quences"—even if the funds were available.

The swarm stage

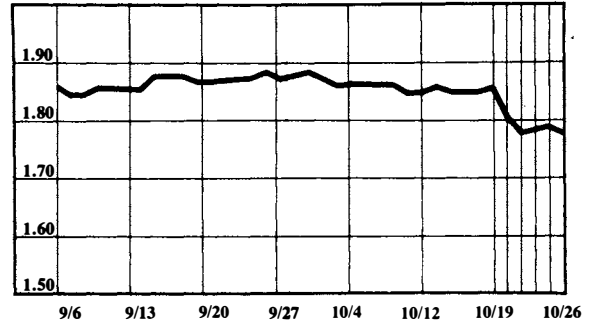
With favorable weather conditions and impotent control measures, locusts undergo a population explosion and "phase change" to the swarm stage, vastly increasing their destructive power. A one-mile square swarm of 150 million locusts can go through 200-600 tons of vegetation daily, and an adult swarm can easily contain 1 billion locusts. Once locusts reach this swarm stage, also known as the gregarious stage, the new characteristics are passed on from one generation to the next: Their body temperature and metabolism change, their color changes, they have a higher intake of oxygen, and, unlike the solitary locusts, they migrate. The same species is so different in the solitary and gregarious phase, in fact, that until the 1920s, it was thought that these were two different species.

With the desert locust, the shift to the swarm stage begins to occur when there are 5 to 15 locusts per square meter. As scientists discovered, crowded conditions produce the gregarious behavior even in the laboratory. Once in the swarm stage, locusts can travel up to 3,000 miles per generation. They have a double set of wings, about 5 inches across, and they fly at 10 to 25 miles per hour, where the winds take them. The main source of energy for their flight is their reserve fat.

Currency Rates

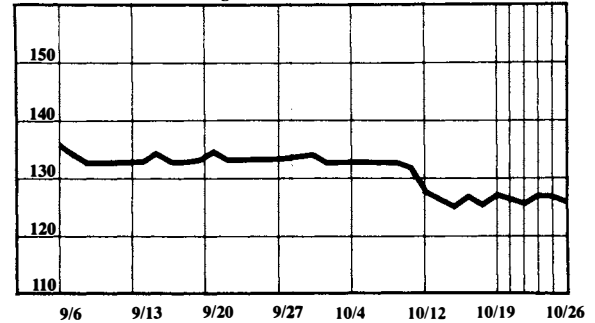
The dollar in deutschmarks

New York late afternoon fixing



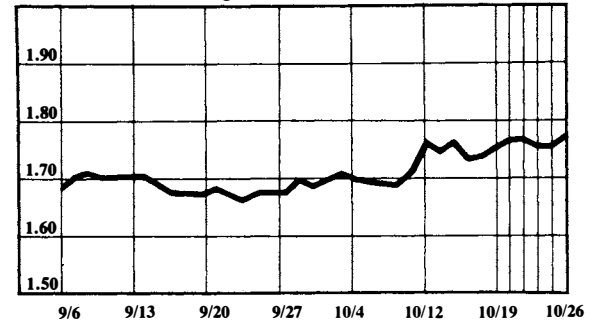
The dollar in yen

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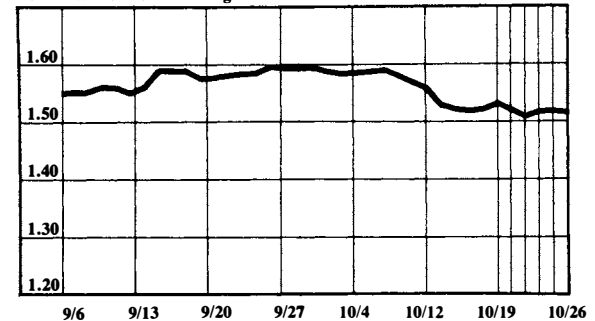
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