
CURRENT SCIENCE — 50 YEARS AGO

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL LOCUST CONFERENCE, CAIRO, 1936*

The "Proceedings of the Fourth International Locust Conference, Cairo, 23rd April 1936", which has been recently published, is a handsome volume on which the Egyptian Government might well be congratulated, though one might wish that it had been issued more expeditiously. The "Proceedings" serve to remind us that the beginning of a new locust visitation, which, from past experience, might be expected in Northern India at intervals of 4 to 8 years, may not be far off, and that, as in the case of States expecting war, the best course is a policy of armed preparedness, with trained staff and control material ready to come into action at a moment's notice.

In the past, Governments took interest in the Locust Problem only while locusts were present in their millions devastating the crops, and spent vast sums of money on their control, but when they disappeared in course of time, no further interest was taken, till such time as another visitation made its appearance. The reason for this apparent neglect is not far to seek. In the case of such pests or diseases, as are confined to a particular country or tract and are of annual recurrence, it should not be difficult for that country to arrange for their study and control, but where one is concerned with a plague of the nature of locusts, capable of migrating long distances across a number of countries, and appearing, moreover, after long intervals of absence, it is research work on a basis of Inter-State or International co-operation that is called for.

Various conferences had been held in the past, with the object of achieving a common orientation of policy and mutual co-operation in combating locust visitations. The earliest, possibly, was the one held at Pretoria in 1906, composed of representatives of Basutoland, the Cape Colony, Natal, the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal, and another met at Montevideo in 1913, when delegates from the Argentine, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay conferred about the investigation of the breeding grounds of the South American locust. In October 1920, an International Conference in connection with the organisation of locust control was held at Rome under the auspices of the International Institute of Agriculture, in which 20 States of the Old and the New Worlds participated. It resulted in

the Rome Convention of 31st October 1920, whereby adjoining States bound themselves to make co-operative efforts and to give mutual help in regard to locust control.

A cursory glance at the resolutions passed at the Conference and the recommendations made in regard to the international plans of future work on various locusts would give one an idea of the vast ground covered. The following formed the subjects of some of the resolutions: statistics of damage by locusts and grasshoppers, study of the phases, study of migrations in correlation with meteorological conditions, studies of the breeding grounds, factors controlling locust activity, the ecological control of outbreak centres, methods of forecasting locust outbreaks, locust control methods including employment of aeroplanes, and study of natural enemies. The resolutions recorded are highly valuable, as they embody the latest information available on the particular subject. Most of the papers submitted to the Conference have been appended to the "Proceedings" and are of exceeding value as records of experiences in different countries under varying climatic conditions.

One of the important results of the various schemes of locust research has been the tracing of many of the infestations of recent times to their actual outbreak centres. In the case of the Desert Locust, it was found that infestation had originated in three different centres: (1) in the Mekran area of British and Iranian Baluchistan, (2) in the Red Sea Coasts of Sudan and Arabia, and (3) in some centre in the western areas of Sahara. As regards the African Migratory Locust, the infestation was proved to have begun first in the region of the Niger Bend in French Sudan, and to have gradually increased in extent and intensity till an enormous extent of area of over 10 million square miles of territory on the African Continent was covered. The determination that this extensive infestation of the Migratory Locust had originated in a single outbreak centre, viz., the San-Macina District of French Sudan has been appropriately described as "an outstanding achievement of the international anti-locust investigations".

Adverting to the practical aspect of the results of locust research, it may be stated that it is an

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exceedingly difficult task attempting to control locusts, when they have taken the shape of swarms. The swarms appear in such large numbers and have such immense powers of migration, that it would be well nigh impossible to control them. On the other hand, it should be an easier task to tackle an infestation in its initial stages, in the outbreak areas. If all potential outbreak centres could be delimited, and the area watched by a fully competent organisation, the incipient swarms could be dealt with as they arise. If this could be arranged, it should be possible

to nip the evil in the bud, and save the enormous expenses entailed in the attempt to deal with infestations after they have developed.

In the words of Uvarov, "the alternative to thorough studies of locusts leading to rational schemes of control, is to continue paying annual tribute to the oldest enemy of agriculture — the Locust. This may have been unavoidable in the past, but there is now no excuse for carrying on the old policy of letting locusts develop unchecked and then spending millions in attempting to control them."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NATIONAL CONGRESS OF SIRMCE

The theme of the above congress is "Environmental health and ecosystem — Role of mass media". The venue of the congress is Rustomji Cama Hall, M. P. Shah Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, Civil Hospital Campus, Ahmedabad. The congress will be held during October 29–31, 1988. The scientific programme will include

plenary sessions which will consist of invited papers on selected topics presented by experts in the field and a number of platform presentations.

For further information please write to Dr (Mrs.) R. D. Bhattacharya, B-02 Sidhachakra Apartments, Ellis Pridge, Ahmedabad 380 006.

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON APPLICATIONS OF GEOCHEMISTRY

The above symposium organised by the Shivaji University, Kolhapur will be held during December 19–21, 1988.

The programme would include invited talks and presentation of papers followed by discussion. Lectures and oral presentations of research papers will generally be confined to selected areas. However, research papers on all related areas of earth science will be considered.

The following aspects of applications of geochemistry have been chosen as central themes for

the symposium: 1. Instrumentation and analytical Techniques; 2. Geochemistry and petrogenesis of igneous rocks; 3. Geochemistry of sedimentary rocks, 4. Chemical changes during metamorphism, 5. Ore chemistry and ore genesis, and 6. Isotope geochemistry and REE geochemistry.

Further particulars may be had from: Dr C. K. Bhaskare, Convener, National Symposium on Applications of Geochemistry, Shivaji University, Kolhapur 416 004.
