

UPSC 2020

Topic – Locust Swarms – UPSC Current Affairs

Locusts are termed as the oldest migratory pests in the world. They are slightly different from grasshoppers as they are short-horned and have the ability to change their behaviour with respect to changes in weather and region. These locusts form swarms of adults (bands of hoppers) and breed on standing crops and plants.

Recently, Locust Swarm has made the headlines with its early arrival in India, affecting five states at the moment - Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. In 2020, the locust swarm is termed the 'worst in 26 years,' and the [United Nations](#) (UN) has warned it to be posing 'severe risk' to India's agriculture this year.

The topic, 'Locust Swarm' is seen as important from the [IAS Exam](#) perspective as it forms an important topic for the Current Affairs section and also Geography subject. Read this article to learn important facts about Locusts, Desert Locusts and the challenges associated with these.

Facts about Locusts - Locust Swarms for UPSC

The table below mentions a few important facts about Locusts that can be important for [UPSC 2020](#):

Locust Swarms - Facts for UPSC
<p>There are ten prominent species of Locusts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Desert Locust2. Bombay Locust3. Migratory Locust4. Italian Locust5. Moroccan Locust6. Red Locust7. Brown Locust8. South American Locust9. Australian Locust10. Tree Locust
<p>In India, out of these ten locusts, only four are reported:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Desert locust2. Migratory locust3. Bombay Locust and4. Tree locust
<p>Scientific Names of the locusts reported in India are:</p>

1. Desert locust - *Schistocerca gregaria*
2. Migratory locust - *Locusta migratoria*
3. Bombay Locust - *Nomadacris succincta*,
4. Tree locust - *Anacridium sp*

Desert Locus is the most harmful for the plants and standing crops and pose a great threat to Indian Agriculture. They have their origin from Saudi Arabia

The Locusts who are in their nymphal stage and yet to reach adulthood are called Wingless Nymphs and in a group, they are called bands of locusts

Locust Swarms are highly mobile and they can be very dense. One swarm of locust can have around 80 lakhs of these

Locusts and Grasshoppers are not the same. Locusts form a part of Grasshoppers but differ in their movement and behavioural patterns

Locusts belong to the family called Acrididae

Desert Locusts are polyphagous feeders - They have the ability to feed on many kinds of food:

- Leaves
- Flowers
- Fruits
- Seeds
- Bark of trees and growing points

Desert Locusts can also break down trees when they settle on these in masses. The weight of such masses of locusts is such that a tree can fall down

In the world, around 64 countries are mostly affected by locust swarms

Desert Locusts fly at a speed of 16-19 km/hour; however, the speed also depends on the wind speed

Locust Swarms can cover 5-130 km of distance in a day and can stay in the air for a long period of time

When a solitary locust flies, it usually flies at night; however when it is part of locust swarms; they fly during the day

Widespread rainfall generates an increase in the numbers of Locusts and the [Food and Agricultural Organisation \(FAO\)](#) has warned that locust numbers could grow another 20 times during the upcoming rainy season unless control activities are stepped up

The lifespan of a locus is 90 days

The swarm of locusts always stay together and eat the food of their size each day

They can populate easily in three breeding seasons by 16000 times

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Locust Swarms & India

The following points mention the state of India amid current locust swarms attack:

1. Desert Locusts have followed the wind patterns to cover a vast stretch from the Rab' al-Khali desert of Saudi Arabia to the fields of Rajasthan and beyond.

2. These desert locust swarms have destroyed crops in agricultural fields of states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and also Uttar Pradesh.
3. With the onset of monsoon and change in wind direction, they fly towards India from Saudi Arabia, crossing the Red Sea over to Iran and Pakistan.
4. India faces an average of 10 locust attacks in a year.
5. 2020 has also seen extensive rain in India before the expected months following which moisture and greenery have attracted locusts. Egg-laying also occurs in the rainy season
6. According to FAO, a single square kilometre of the locust swarms can contain up to 80 million adults and can eat as much food as 35,000 people in terms of weight in a single day.
7. Longer-than-usual monsoon across the Indo-Pakistan border and frequent cyclones in the Indian Ocean are speculated to be the reasons for the early locust swarm attack.

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Indian Cities/districts that are affected by the outbreak of locusts swarms are:

Nagaur	Jaipur	Dausa	Bangra Magarpur
Western Rajasthan districts	Malhargarh	Jhansi	Amravati
Wardha	Nagpur	Delhi has been put on alert	

India's Response to Locust Swarms

Locust Watch Centres are warning farmers of the speculated movement of the locust swarms. Also, the use of organophosphate chemicals with ultra-Low volume sprayers is a method to control the locust swarms attack. 'Chlorpyrifos' is being reserved in certain cities as it is effective in controlling a variety of insects following ministries are keeping the charge of the locust attacks:

1. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare
2. Ministry of External Affairs
3. Ministry of Home Affairs
4. Ministry of Defence
5. Ministry of Earth Sciences
6. Ministry of Civil Aviation and
7. Ministry of Communications

The role of stakeholders like State Governments, State Health Department and farmers, is equally important. The government is making use of drones to track the locust swarms movements. The other things used to contain the attack are:

- Satellite-derived tools
- Special fire-tenders and
- Sprayers at pre-identified border locations

Locust Swarms & the World

According to the FAO data, the following regions are or can be affected by the attack of locust swarms.

Note: The outbreak of locust swarms started with the onset of heavy rainfall in East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

Region of Locust Swarms Attack	Countries/Cities
East Africa	Kenya
	South Sudan
	Uganda
	Somalia
	Kenya
	Ethiopia
West Africa	Chad
Arabian Peninsula	Yemen
	Saudi Arabia
	Oman
	UAE
South West Asia	Iran
	Pakistan
	India