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Locusts munch their way across state's crops

Ellie Harvey
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They are arriving in their millions.

The worst outbreak of locusts in a generation has begun across the eastern states, threatening a \$2.8 billion crop in NSW alone.

With the first hatching of spring reported by a Nyngan district farmer almost two weeks ago, 40 confirmed hatching sites across NSW have since sprung up - and there is the possibility of far more within days given the right weather conditions.

"This is a result of widespread laying in autumn," said a Industry and Investment NSW spokesman, Brett Fifield. "One of the difficulties is a good season that gives rise to good crops also gives rise to the potential for locust plague. It's a bittersweet situation."

He said the staggered hatchings, which arose because of recent fluctuations in temperature, would make things more difficult as the population would be in different stages of development.

The state government has declared war on locusts, but it is one that will have to be flexible.

"It's very hard to prepare a battle plan when you're up against nature itself," said Mr Fifield.

The Minister for Primary Industries, Steve Whan, said the government has an "arsenal on standby and staff at control centres are preparing for the offensive".

Aircraft will identify possible targets for treatment this week.

Farmer Dominic Ward stands to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of wheat crops.

He started noticing hatchings on his 7300-hectare property, about 30 kilometres west of Nyngan, about 10 days ago. "They're everywhere ... we're staring down the barrel of one of the best-ever years for cropping and you don't want to lose it from the bloody locusts if you can help it," he said.

Mr Ward, 29, said he has never seen it this bad but his father, David, who has been on the property since 1964, said he had seen worse.

They are confident that they can control locusts that have hatched on the family property, but the big concern is those flying in from western NSW.

"All our cropping country is under threat," he said.

Spraying will begin next week, Mr Ward said.

"It ruins your enthusiasm for the game," he said, although adding they will survive. "Just."

The Victorian Premier, John Brumby, also made a declaration of war on locusts last week, warning they could close events such as the Melbourne Cup and country race carnivals.

Locust hatchings forecast for spring.

Ivanhoe-Hillston: September 25

Nyngan-Tottenham: September 15

Tullamore-Condobolin: October 5

Dubbo-Peak Hill: October 6

Parkes-Cowra: October 14

Forbes-West Wyalong: October 12

Hay-Balranald: October 5

Wagga-Cootamundra: October 25

Narrandera-Griffith: October 15

Jerilderie-Deniliquin: October 18

Source: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Dates are a guide only.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/locusts-munch-their-way-across-states-crops-20100919-15hya.html>