

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

LIBRARY
RECEIVED

☆ APR 12 1937 ☆
U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, April 17, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Mormon crickets and U.S.D.A. entomologists are the main characters in the news reported by this week's letter from Washington.

Our correspondent writes: "The entomologists are among those fore-handed scientists who believe in learning the numbers of the enemies long before the fight begins and in striking before the opposing force starts on the march.

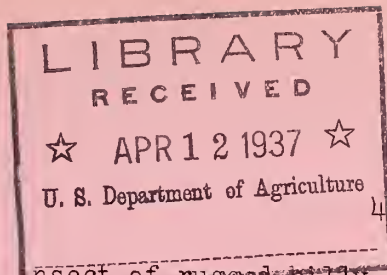
"Right now field men of the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine are preparing for strenuous warfare against the Mormon cricket, that pest of grain, alfalfa, and other crops, whose very name has been striking terror in the hearts of western farmers ever since the first great plague of these insects back in 1848.

"During the winter, the entomologists made their regular survey and found that last year's brood of Mormon crickets had left a tremendous number of eggs for hatching this spring. Calculating carefully from this survey, the entomologists could predict how much country the hungry 1937 brood would cover. Listen to these figures on the feeding grounds for these insects: 'Four thousand acres in California; 22 thousand acres in Colorado; over 90 thousand acres in Idaho; over 102 thousand acres in Montana; 98 thousand acres in Nevada; over 10 thousand acres in Oregon; over 51 thousand acres in Utah; over 87 thousand acres in Wyoming; and 17 hundred acres in Washington.'

"But, as I said, the entomologists are not planning to sit idly by while this horde of insects destroys crops in 9 States. Their preparations are already made to treat the young crickets to a barrage of poison dust before they can reach the cultivated valleys below their hatching grounds in the wastelands of the Northwest. An allotment of 300 thousand dollars from W.P.A. funds is making the fight possible. The States and localities will supply material, equipment, and transportation for the campaign. The Government will furnish the men.

"For years now entomologists have been studying this destructive insect and finding various ways to fight it, or, 'control it', as they would say. So far they have found that the most practical, inexpensive and effective method of warfare is to dust the young crickets with poisonous calcium arsenate powder. This acts as a 2-way poison. The Crickets lick some of it from their legs and antennae and they take in more through their breathing apparatus. But success with this method always depends on dusting early enough to reach all the youngcricket bands.

I 73 Hh



R-HC

- 2 -

4/17/37

"The Mormon cricket is normally an insect of rugged hilly country such as that found in many Rocky Mountain States. Year after year it feeds on such common wild plants as bitterroot, mustard, dandelion, and Russian thistle. Only when its population becomes too thick to be supported in the hills does it come down to feed on cultivated crops in the valleys. But when it comes, it comes in great bands varying in size from a city block to a square mile or more. Each square foot of such a band contains from 40 to 50 crickets. Sometimes the migrating crickets are so thick that they merge into an enormous horde that spreads over thousands of acres -- a horde which gives the appalling impression that the whole ground is moving. Crickets are constantly on the move, traveling usually straight ahead, never going around an obstacle but hurdling it -- or trying to. You can imagine what happens to crops and gardens in their line of march.

"These cricket outbreaks may last from 2 to 6 years -- or until they are stopped by the weather, natural enemies, or man. The present outbreak began in 1932 and increased gradually in most of the infested States, notably in Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Wyoming, and Montana. In 1935 it decreased slightly in Idaho, Montana, and Washington. But last year crickets caused great crop losses, especially where no scientific fight was waged against them. For example, grain losses in the Crow Indian Reservation amounted to 200 thousand dollars and in Utah that damage was estimated at 64 thousand dollars. But Nevada, which carried on a thorough control campaign last year, reported a loss of only a thousand dollars. In Idaho also the damage was slight.

"This year, the entomologists say, the outbreak would be the largest on record if uncontrolled.

"Of course, these insects have several natural enemies that help cut down their population. Last year sea gulls helped keep them down in Utah, just as they did in 1848 when this cricket came near starving out the early settlers in that State. Every one who has visited Salt Lake City remembers the imposing monument just inside the temple grounds put up to the gulls by the grateful people they saved.

"The historian H. H. Bancroft tells the story this way. He says: 'In the latter part of May when the fields had put on their brightest green, there appeared a visitation in the form of vast swarms of crickets, black and baleful as the locusts of the Dead Sea. In their tracks they left behind them not a blade or leaf.' The early Mormon settlers tried in vain to beat them back. They kept on until suddenly 'myriads of snow-white gulls' appeared from over Salt Lake and soon made a feast of the devouring host.

"This incident is probably responsible for part of the Mormon cricket's name. It is called a cricket probably because it looks something like the common black field cricket and makes chirping noise rather like it. But the entomologists say that the Mormon cricket is not a true cricket at all. It is a wingless, long-horned grasshopper."

That concludes our Department of Agriculture letter for this week.

#####

