

Newsbytes EXTRA

The Third Watch

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"Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him." Tozer

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July 12, 2020

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Locusts invasion

A second crisis is ravaging an area of Africa that's already grappling with the impact of COVID-19: locusts.

The most serious desert locust outbreak in 70 years could leave nearly 5 million people in East Africa facing starvation, according to the International Rescue Committee (IRC). It

comes as many of the countries in the region are already struggling to manage food insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

locusts swarms east africa food pest insects food crops development agriculture

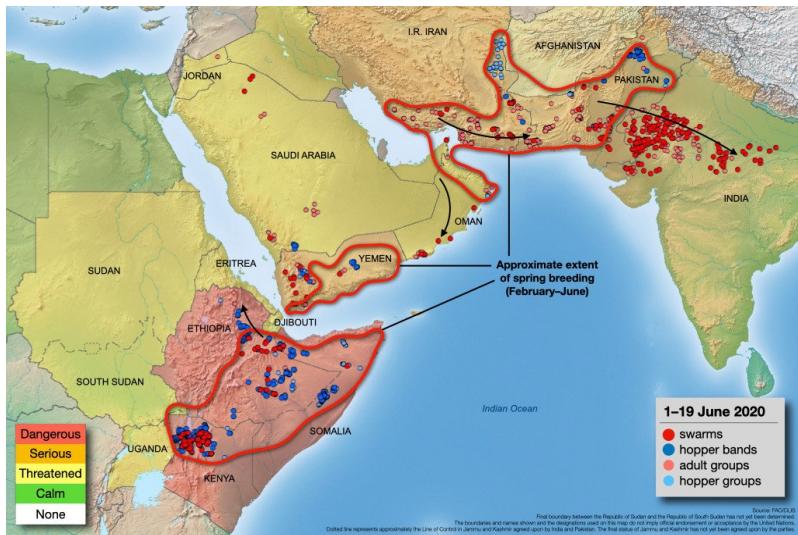
Image: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Desert Locusts are swarming across East Africa.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has already warned that the pandemic has left some of the world's most vulnerable communities facing "a crisis within a crisis," as it disrupts supply chains and hammers the economy, exacerbating the global hunger problem.

Now locusts are destroying crops that could have been a lifeline. A square-kilometre swarm can consume the same amount of food in one day as 35,000 people. Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Sudan are among the worst-hit countries and the outbreak threatens to spread wider, the IRC says.

Around one in five of the world's acutely food-insecure people are in the IGAD region, an area of 5.2 million square kilometres that comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, according to a report from the Global Network Against Food Crises.



While weather extremes were the primary cause in 2019, most of the countries are vulnerable to conflict, insecurity and economic shocks. Without taking into account the effects of COVID-19, more than 25 million people will face acute food insecurity requiring urgent action in 2020, the IRC says – it's calling for larger scale funding to help mitigate the onset.

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Image: Food Security Information Network

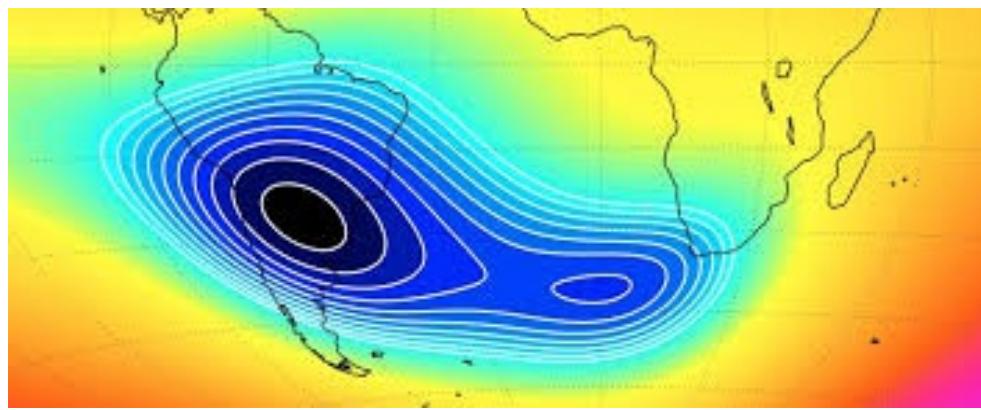
Left uncontrolled, the locust plagues that develop can take years and hundreds of millions of dollars to bring under control, according to the FAO. Without intervention the organization predicts a 50-70% cereal harvest loss in the worst case, or at least 20-30% loss in the best case.

The FAO operates a Desert Locust Information Service to monitor the situation, provide information and help give warnings and forecasts to those countries in danger. The IRC estimates that tackling the emergency in Somalia – the hardest-hit country so far – alone needs an additional \$1.98 million this year.

"This is the worst locust invasion we have seen in a generation," says IRC's local partner Sahal Farah, Community Resilience Committee Vice Chairman for Docol in Somalia. "Huge hectares of pasture land were completely destroyed."

The Mysterious Anomaly Weakening Earth's Magnetic Field Seems to Be Splitting

New satellite data from the European Space Agency (ESA) reveal that the mysterious anomaly weakening Earth's magnetic field continues to evolve, with the most recent observations showing we could soon be dealing with more than one of these strange phenomena.

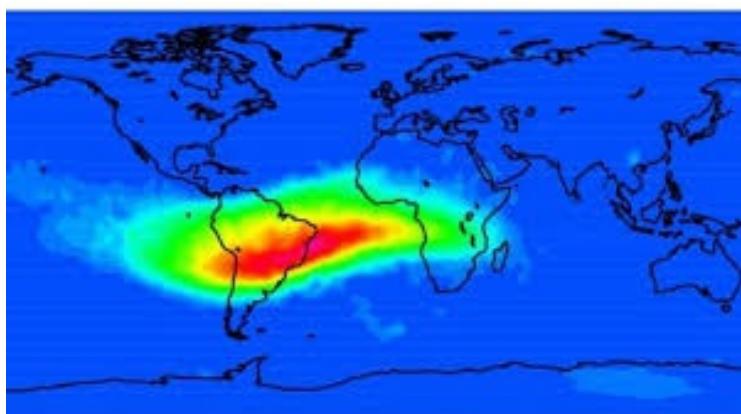


The South Atlantic Anomaly is a vast expanse of reduced magnetic intensity in Earth's magnetic field, extending all the way from South America to southwest Africa.

Since our planet's magnetic field acts as a kind of shield – protecting Earth from solar winds and cosmic radiation, in addition

to determining the location of the magnetic poles – any reduction in its strength is an important event we need to monitor closely, as these changes could ultimately have significant implications for our planet.

At present, there's nothing to be alarmed about. The ESA notes that the most significant effects right now are largely limited to technical malfunctions on board satellites and spacecraft, which can be exposed to a greater amount of charged particles in low-Earth orbit as they pass through the South Atlantic Anomaly in the skies above South America and the South Atlantic Ocean.



Note that the magnitude of the anomaly should be diminished, though. In the last two centuries, Earth's magnetic field has lost about 9 percent of its strength on average, the ESA says, assisted by a drop in minimum field strength in the South Atlantic Anomaly from approximately 24,000 nanoteslas to 22,000 nanoteslas over the past 50 years.

Exactly why this is happening remains a mystery. Earth's magnetic field is generated by electrical currents produced by a swirling mass of liquid iron

within the outer core of our planet, but while this phenomenon appears stable at any given moment, over vast timescales, it's never really still.

Above: Satellite data revealing the new, eastern centre of minimum intensity emerging beside Africa.

Research has shown that Earth's magnetic field is constantly in a state of flux, and every few hundred thousand years (give or take), Earth's magnetic field flips, with the north and south magnetic poles swapping places.

That process could actually occur more frequently than people think, but while scientists continually debate when we might next witness such an event, even the regular, wandering movements of Earth's magnetic poles keep geophysicists guessing.

In any case, it's not fully clear how those reversals might be tied to what's currently going on with the South Atlantic Anomaly – which some have suggested could be caused by a vast reservoir of dense rock underneath Africa called the African Large Low Shear Velocity Province.

What is certain, though, is that the South Atlantic Anomaly is not sitting still. Since 1970, the anomaly has been growing in size, as well as moving westward at a pace of approximately 20 kilometres (12 miles) per year. But that's not all.

New readings provided by the ESA's Swarm satellites show that within the past five years, a second centre of minimum intensity has begun to open up within the anomaly.

This suggests the whole thing could even be in the process of splitting up into two separate cells – with the original centred above the middle of South America, and the new, emerging cell appearing to the east, hovering off the coast of southwest Africa.

"The new, eastern minimum of the South Atlantic Anomaly has appeared over the last decade and in recent years is developing vigorously," says geophysicist Jürgen Matzka from the German Research Centre for Geosciences.

"The challenge now is to understand the processes in Earth's core driving these changes."

Just how the anomaly will develop from here is unknown, but previous research has suggested disruptions in the magnetic field like this one might be recurrent events that take place every few hundred years.

Whether that's what we're witnessing now isn't fully clear – or how a split anomaly might end up playing out – but scientists are watching closely, as are we.

Current Conflicts 2020

AFRICA:

(30 Countries and 274 between militias-guerrillas, terrorist-separatist-anarchic groups involved)

Hot Spots: Burkina Faso (ethnic clashes), Central African Republic (often there are armed clashes between muslims and christians), Democratic Republic of Congo (war against rebel groups), Egypt (war against islamic militants of Islamic State branch), Libya (civil war), Mali (clashes between army and rebel groups), Mozambique (clashes with RENAMO rebels), Nigeria (war against islamist militants), Somalia (war against al-Shabaab islamist militants), Sudan (war against rebel groups in Darfur), South Sudan (clashes with rebel groups)

ASIA:

(16 Countries and 185 between militias-guerrillas, terrorist-separatist-anarchic groups involved)

Hot Spots: Afghanistan (war against islamist militants), Burma-Myanmar (war against rebel groups), Pakistan (war against islamist militants), Philippines (war against islamist militants), Thailand (coup d'etat by army May 2014)

EUROPE:

(10 Countries and 83 between militias-guerrillas, separatist groups and anarchic groups involved)

Hot Spots: Chechnya (war against islamist militants), Dagestan (war against islamist militants), Ukraine (Secession of self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic), Artsakh ex Nagorno-Karabakh) (clashes between Azerbaijan army against Armenian army and Nagorno-Karabakh army)

MIDDLE EAST:

(7 Countries and 261 between militias-guerrillas, terrorist-separatist-anarchic groups involved)

Hot Spots: Iraq (war against Islamic State islamist militants), Israel (war against islamist militants in Gaza Strip), Syria (civil war), Yemen (war against and between islamist militants)

AMERICAS:

(7 Countries and 32 between drug cartels, terrorist-separatist-anarchic groups involved)

Hot Spots: Colombia (war against rebel groups), Mexico (war against narcotraffic groups)

TOTAL: Number of Countries involved in wars: 69 Militias:Guerrilla wars: 842

Coronavirus pandemic 'will cause famine of biblical proportions'

More than 30 countries in the developing world could experience widespread famine, says David Beasley, chief of the UN's food relief agency.

The world is facing widespread famine "of biblical proportions" because of the coronavirus pandemic, the chief of the UN's food relief agency has warned, with a short time to act before hundreds of millions starve.

More than 30 countries in the developing world could experience widespread famine, and in 10 of those countries there are already more than 1 million people on the brink of starvation, said David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Programme.

"We are not talking about people going to bed hungry," he told the Guardian in an interview. "We are talking about extreme conditions, emergency status – people literally marching to the brink of starvation. If we don't get food to people, people will die."

Covid-19 is likely to be sweeping through the developing world but its spread is hard to gauge. What appears to be certain is that the fragile healthcare systems of scores of developing countries will be unable to cope, and the economic disaster following in the wake of the pandemic will lead to huge strain on resources.

"This is truly more than just a pandemic – it is creating a hunger pandemic," said Beasley. "This is a humanitarian and food catastrophe."

Beasley took his message to the UN security council on Tuesday, warning world leaders that they must act quickly in a fast-deteriorating situation. He urged them to bring forward about \$2bn (£1.6bn) of aid that has been pledged, so it can get to the frontline as quickly as possible.

Another \$350m (£285m) is also needed to set up the logistics network to get food and medical supplies – including personal protective equipment – to where it is needed, including air bridges where ground transport is impossible.

Even before the Covid-19 crisis, Beasley was appealing to donor countries to up food relief funding to the poorest, because conflict and natural disaster were putting severe strain on food systems.

"I was already saying that 2020 would be the worst year since the second world war, on the basis of what we forecast at the end of last year," he said. Added to that, earlier this year East Africa was hit by the worst locust swarms for decades, putting as many as 70 million people at risk.

But the Covid-19 pandemic, which no one could have foreseen, has "taken us to uncharted territory", he said. "Now, my goodness, this is a perfect storm. We are looking at widespread famines of biblical proportions."

According to a report produced by the UN and other organisations on Thursday, at least 265 million people are being pushed to the brink of starvation by the Covid-19 crisis, double the number under threat before the pandemic.

None of those looming deaths from starvation are inevitable, said Beasley. “If we get money, and we keep the supply chains open, we can avoid famine,” he said. “We can stop this if we act now.”

He said the situation even four weeks from now was impossible to forecast, stressing that donors must act with urgency. He urged countries not to put in place export bans or other restrictions on the supply of food across borders, which would lead to shortages.

But Beasley also warned that staving off the threat of famine would take months, so assistance would be needed well beyond the initial response. “Our grave concern is that we could begin to put Covid-19 behind us [in developed countries] in three or four months, and then the money runs out,” he said. “And if the money runs out people will die.”

Last year, the World Food Programme assisted about 100 million people in desperation, with a budget of about \$7.5bn (£6bn). “I could easily see that need [for budget] doubling,” said Beasley.

Money alone will not be enough, he added. It is difficult for relief workers to get through lockdowns around the world and set up air bridges when transport is paralysed. “We need money and access – not one or the other, both.”

Also crucial is ensuring that supply chains stay open in the face of lockdowns and the difficulty of getting workers into the fields to tend crops if they are sick or unable to travel easily. “If the supply chain breaks down, people can’t get food – and if they can’t get food for long enough, they will die,” said Beasley.

“We are in this together. We can stop this becoming a widespread famine. But we need to act quickly and smartly.”

Idaho House OKs resolution to end Gov. Little’s coronavirus emergency declaration

Ruth Brown, Idaho Statesman

August 26

As the House debated a concurrent resolution that would end the coronavirus emergency declaration that Gov. Brad Little signed in March, spectators in the gallery on Tuesday, Aug. 25, silently indicate their approval for speakers who supported the resolution. | Katherine Jones, Idaho Statesman BOISE (Idaho Statesman) — Lawmakers debated for two hours on Tuesday morning about whether they should move forward with a concurrent resolution that they said would eliminate the governor’s emergency declaration regarding the coronavirus pandemic.

Debate in the Idaho House of Representatives revolved around Rep. Steven Harris’ House Concurrent Resolution 1, which would end Gov. Brad Little’s disaster declaration first imposed months ago.

Supporters of the resolution argued that Little exercised overreach by continuing to extend the declaration. Opponents of the resolution outlined that if the disaster declaration ended, Idaho would no longer be eligible for some needed FEMA funding. FEMA has paid for things such as personal protective equipment used by hospitals and long-term care facilities.

Ultimately, the concurrent resolution passed with a 48-20 vote, with two members absent. It still must be approved by the Senate.

There also was disagreement about whether the legislators even had the right to debate ending Little's declaration because it was not included in the governor's proclamation calling the Legislature into special session. Article IV, Section 9, of the Idaho Constitution states clearly that "when so convened it (the Legislature) shall have no power to legislate on any subjects other than those specified in the proclamation."

"I just feel that we are taking up something that we're not constitutionally authorized to take up," said Rep. Scott Syme, R-Caldwell.

Rep. Brent Crane, R-Nampa, said he thought the subject matter of the resolution did fall within the bounds of the governor's special session proclamation.

Harris, R-Meridian, argued that the disaster declaration has had an emotional, financial and mental impact on residents.

"The main objection of course was to ensure hospitals weren't overrun," Harris said about the governor's declaration. "It turns out in Idaho we've never even come close."

Harris' statement was not true, as both the Nampa and Meridian St. Luke's ICUs have previously reported reaching or nearing capacity because of the coronavirus.

Rep. Vito Barbieri, R-Dalton Gardens, supported lifting the governor's declaration, largely saying he doesn't believe coronavirus is an emergency.

"This declaration should have been done two months ago," Barbieri said prior to the vote.

He went on to claim that masks are only a "political statement" and have no value. That statement is false, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as multiple local health professionals, have repeatedly said that masks can help prevent transmission.

At one point, Barbieri actually claimed that hospitals are inflating COVID-19 numbers to get more federal funding. "Hospitals are making up the statistics," he said.

Hospital officials from St. Luke's and Saint Alphonsus Health Systems refuted the statement later Tuesday. No evidence exists that health care systems have lied about COVID-19 admissions or numbers.

Other lawmakers, including Rep. Brooke Green, D-Boise, expressed concern about how removing the governor's emergency declaration could affect FEMA funding.

"We may think and we may hope and we may wish this virus away, but it's not going away," Green said prior to the vote.

Green noted that FEMA funding is used not only for the pandemic, but also for issues such as fires and floods.

"In coming months, we do not know what this is going to throw our way," she said. "We have an obligation to provide for our communities."

Republican Rep. Laurie Lickley, of Jerome, was also concerned about access to FEMA funding. "The financial impact is not acceptable," Lickley said prior to her no vote.

House Speaker Rep. Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, supported the concurrent resolution. "It should be improper to extend a disaster declaration ad infinitum," Bedke said prior to his yes vote.

Bedke felt the Legislature should be involved in decisions about continuing to extend declarations and argued that Little hadn't involved them.

"The legislative branch lacks the tools, the government lacks the tools to act in a balanced way in a crisis," Bedke said from the floor.

ELECTIONS

The House State Affairs Committee unanimously passed a bill Tuesday that would allow county clerks to open absentee ballots seven days before Election Day, to start verifying signatures and scanning ballots. But the county clerks would not count the votes until Election Day in November.

A second bill that would have allowed for voting centers in November failed to make it past the House State Affairs panel on Tuesday. The committee voted 10-5 to hold the bill.

County clerks supported the bill because they are concerned about being able to get enough volunteers to the work the polls in November. As a possible solution, the legislation would have allowed voters to go to any voting center in-person, requiring fewer poll workers.

