

September 2004

Locusts

Greetings everyone

Hope all's well. Chuck's arranging a Golf Tournament for Monday - Labor Day. It's become a tradition to have a golf outing on each American holiday. We're having it at the Meridien Golf Club -- "The Pebble Beach of West Africa". Yesterday the course was strewn with cadavers -- of dead locusts.

September 3rd

A Plague of Locusts

Meet Jiminy. He's a cricket. He's bright yellow, about 3"-5" long, and can eat his weight every day. He and billions like him are now wreaking havoc in West Africa.

We've heard about the swarms of locusts as they've moved west and south from Mali and Mauritania into the farmlands of eastern Senegal. President Wade sent troops there armed with insecticide pumps. They were ineffective. Now the locusts have arrived in Dakar, and it's an amazing sight for us two sojourners to behold. How many of you remember the gypsy moth invasion of 1982? I remember the stories of cars sliding off roads that were covered with squished gypsy moth caterpillar bodies. We're hearing the same stories here about car accidents caused by locusts.

First let's talk terminology. In these parts the locust is called "criquet pelerin", or pilgrim cricket. They look like grasshoppers on steroids. A locust with Sweetie our cat:



Yesterday driving to work, we first came across several locusts flying this way and that. Then there were a few more. As we approached the Mamelles area we saw what appeared to be yellow smoke. As we entered the "smoke", our car was hit by hundreds of the critters. Every leaf of the surrounding bushes, trees and plants was covered with locusts. Actually it was a beautiful sight. The yellow insects against the green leaves looked like forsythia in the full bloom of early Spring.

All at once, like a cloudburst, we were through it. Anzie gets on her cellphone to Amidou at home: "Amidou, take every bedsheet we have out of the closet. Take them out in the yard and cover as many bushes and plants as you can."

"But madam", replied Amidou, " We have no locusts here. They will fly away as soon as they feel the warmth of the sun."

"Amidou, give the sheets to Omar (guard). I'll call back later", says Anzie.

On the way home from work, I passed through the same area. The locusts were still evident in great numbers, but not nearly as numerous as before. The tops of most bushes were stripped of green down about 12 ".

At home I spotted several locust corpses and no sheets in the yard. I let the cats out to hunt down any stragglers. After about ten minutes of acting as huntresses, Sweetie and Snooty both stretched out under a tree and went to sleep. Omar, our guard, explained that a swarm of locusts flew over while he was watering the lawn. He immediately aimed the hose in circles over his head. The swarm flew on without landing.

This morning the locusts were gone, I know not where. Mamadou, an agricultural expert with Peace Corps, told Anzie that the worst is yet to come. The adults we saw yesterday laid eggs that will hatch into larva in 2-3 weeks. These larvae - they resemble large black ants and are called "hoppers"-- have ravenous appetites. Mamidou has seen them strip five acres of knee-high green beans in less than a day.

In the meantime, President Wade is now pointing his finger at all of the countries that supply aid to Senegal, complaining that their financial aid is taking too long. His Minister of Agriculture estimates that the cricket problem can be solved with an infusion of \$100 million. [More photos of troops outfitted with insecticide pumps.](#)

Guess what, folks. You're too late. The time to fight the locusts effectively is when they're in the larval stage. Once they're flying, it is next to impossible to eradicate them from the ground. It's not that the powers that be haven't had adequate forewarning. They knew about this impending disaster since last October.

Maybe now that the disaster has reached Dakar, people will join forces and fight this pest in an effective manner. When the babies are born in 2-3 weeks, that's when the battle can be fought, and won.

Here are a series of BBC [articles](#) and a BBC [gallery](#) of locust pictures.

A la prochaine,

Chuck