

## U.S. locusts related to African locusts

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A DNA study has linked the genetic lineage of Western Hemisphere insects to African desert locusts.

Researchers theorize about 3 million to 5 million years ago a massive swarm of locusts left Africa, flew across the Atlantic Ocean and colonized the New World.

Using genetic evidence from more than 20 species of locusts, scientists from the Universities of Toronto, Arizona, and Maryland; Cornell University; and the U.S. Department of Agriculture believe their theory explains why the closest relatives of the African desert locust are found in the New World, rather than Africa.

Nathan Lovejoy of the University of Toronto and co-author of the study said it's unclear how the locusts made the trans-Atlantic flight, since they don't have the capability to power a trip lasting several days.

"One unlikely hypothesis is that while the locusts were flying across, as their brethren died and landed in the ocean, they formed huge floating mats of dead locusts," says Lovejoy. "The other locusts would land on these mats, rest and feed on the dead bodies, then take off and keep flying."

The study appears in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*.

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