

Locust plague hits eastern Australia

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Swarms of locusts have been ravaging crops in a vast section of eastern Australia following recent floods in the region, a top official has said.

Swarms of locusts have infested a huge area of eastern Australia roughly the size of Spain after recent floods, ravaging farmland, a top official said Wednesday.

Chris Adriaansen, head of the Australian Plague Locust Commission, said the quick-breeding creatures had hit from Longreach in Queensland in the northeast to Melbourne and Adelaide -- about 500,000 square kilometres (190,000 square miles).

"What we've got certainly is a very large and widespread infestation," he told AFP. "It's simply a reflection of the fact that we've had widespread rain across that entire area."

Adriaansen said some swarms covered areas as large as 300 square kilometres, and with about 10 locusts per square metre, "that's a lot of locusts."

Local media said the insects had already wiped out thousands of hectares (acres) of crops and were also damaging grazing areas and gardens in the key agricultural area.

"One farmer has about 400 hectares (1,000 acres) which will have to be resown," an agronomist in the town of Forbes, Graham Falconer, told public broadcaster ABC. "The [locusts](#) are doing considerable damage."

Adriaansen said the insects, which had destroyed some early planned cereal crops but mostly fed on pasture, were set to multiply in coming months as their offspring hatch.

"Come the middle of September through to October across that entire inland area... we expect there to be some very large infestations again," he said.

Swarms are expected in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales, areas which last month were flooded after [heavy rains](#) broke almost a decade of drought.

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