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MIGRATORY PEST SITUATION DURING AUGUST 2026 AND FORECAST FOR SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 2026

1. OVERVIEW

During August 2026, the migratory pest situation across the IRLCO-CSA region remained relatively calm, with only low-density populations observed in most outbreak areas. Nevertheless, prevailing dry conditions, vegetation burning, and land clearing are expected to encourage pest concentrations, underscoring the need for continued vigilance.

1.1 Red Locust (*Nomadacris septemfasciata* Serville)

- **Current situation:** Isolated populations of immature adults were present at low densities in Malawi (Lake Chiuta, Lake Chilwa, Mpatsa Njoka Dambo), Mozambique (Buzi–Gorongosa and Dimba plains), Tanzania (Malagarasi Basin, Ikuu-Katavi, Rukwa Valley, Bahi Valley, Wembere Plain), and Zambia (Simalaha Plains, Kafue Flats, Lukanga Swamps)

- **Forecast**: With vegetation drying and grass burning underway, concentrations are expected to increase, raising the likelihood of swarm formation in September.

- **Advisory:** Member States are encouraged to strengthen surveillance and prepare for rapid control interventions to avert food security risks.

1.2 African Migratory Locust (*Locusta migratoria migratoriodes* R & F.)

- **Current situation:** Low populations persisted in Zambia's Simalaha Plains and parts of Western Province.

- **Forecast:** Dry conditions may encourage coalescing into concentrations and eventual swarms.

- **Advisory:** Vigilant surveys are essential to detect population increases early.

1.3 African Armyworm (*Spodoptera exempta* Walker)

- **Current situation**: No outbreaks were reported in Member States.

- **Forecast**: Risk remains low, but monitoring should continue to ensure early detection.

1.4 Fall Armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda* J.E. Smith)

- **Current situation:**
  - Malawi reported infestations across all Agricultural Development Divisions, affecting approximately 59,585 ha of maize, with 79% of the infested area treated using pesticides and botanical extracts.
  - Kenya reported infestations in South Rift, North Rift, and western counties.
  - Mozambique recorded low infestations in Dondo, Nhamatanda, and Gorongosa districts.
  - No outbreaks were reported in Tanzania, Zambia, or Zimbabwe.

- **Forecast:** Fall Armyworm remains a major threat, particularly for irrigated maize. Vigilance and control measures should be sustained.

1.5 Quelea Birds (*Quelea quelea* L.)

- **Current Situation:**
  - Kenya reported outbreaks in Tana River and Narok Counties, affecting rice and wheat.
  - Zimbabwe reported widespread outbreaks across Mashonaland, Manicaland, Midlands, and Masvingo Provinces, with successful drone-assisted control operations.
  - No outbreaks were reported in Tanzania.

- **Forecast:** Continued monitoring is required, especially in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, to ensure timely interventions before thresholds are exceeded.

1.6 Strategic Recommendations

- **Resource Mobilisation:** Member States are encouraged to support IRLCO-CSA and national ministries in conducting surveillance and control between September and October 2026.

- **Cross-Border Coordination:** Strengthen collaboration to prevent swarms escaping outbreak areas.

- **Farmer Support:** Expand technical assistance for Fall Armyworm control.

- **Monitoring:** Maintain vigilance for armyworm and quelea bird outbreaks.

2. WEATHER

Dry conditions prevailed across most red locust outbreak areas during August 2026, with only limited rainfall recorded in parts of Mozambique. Vegetation drying, land clearing, and burning are continuing. In several outbreak plains, fresh vegetation has emerged in burnt patches, creating favourable spots where immature adult red locusts are beginning to coalesce. This concentration effect is expected to intensify as dryness persists.

Rainfall Observations
Table 1 below summarises rainfall recorded at locations near outbreak plains. Most sites in Malawi, Zambia, and Tanzania reported no rainfall, while Mozambique recorded low amounts ranging between 7–11 mm.

Table 1. Rainfall (mm) Recorded during August 2026 at locations near Red Locust Outbreak Areas

LOCATION	COUNTRY	August 2026	Implication
Mafambisse (Buzi plain)	Mozambique	9.0	Limited rainfall; vegetation drying, fresh patches attract adults
Gorongosa (Gorongosa plain)	Mozambique	10.0	Similar conditions; adult coalescing likely
Caia (Dimba plains)	Mozambique	8.0	Drying vegetation; swarming risk
Buzi	Mozambique	11.0	Slight moisture but insufficient to sustain breeding
Dimba	Mozambique	7.0	Very dry; swarming risk
Masenge (Wembere Plain)	Tanzania	00.0	No rainfall; vegetation drying
Kaliua (Malgarasi Plain)	Tanzania	00.0	No rainfall; vegetation drying
Muze (Rukwa Valley)	Tanzania	00.0	No rainfall; vegetation drying

Mpanda	Tanzania	N/A	Data not available
Lifuwu (MpatsaNjoka Dambo)	Malawi	00.0	No rainfall; vegetation drying
Ngokwe (Lake Chiuta plains)	Malawi	00.0	No rainfall; vegetation drying
Khanda (Lake Chilwa plains)	Malawi	00.0	No rainfall; vegetation drying
Namwala (Kafue Flats)	Zambia	00.0	No rainfall; vegetation drying

N/A Not Available

Advisory

The Organisation notes that **persistent dryness, coupled with the emergence of fresh vegetation in burnt patches, is encouraging immature adult red locusts to coalesce into swarms**. Member States are therefore encouraged to:

- Maintain close monitoring of outbreak areas, especially burnt zones with regrowth.
- Support IRLCO-CSA in conducting aerial and ground surveys.
- Prepare for rapid control interventions should swarms emerge in September.

3. RED LOCUST (*Nomadacris septemfasciata* Serville)

Red locust populations across breeding areas in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia remained relatively calm during August 2026, with immature adults scattered at low densities in most outbreak plains. However, intensified burning and land clearing have created patches of fresh vegetation, which are now attracting locusts and encouraging them to coalesce. This aggregation behaviour is expected to continue as the dry season progresses, leading to the formation of swarms of varying densities in Lake Chilwa and Lake Chiuta plains in Malawi; Ikuu-Katavi plains, Rukwa Valley, and Malagarasi Basin in Tanzania; Kafue Flats in Zambia; and Buzi–Gorongosa and Dimba plains in Mozambique.

If not controlled in time, these swarms are likely to escape outbreak areas and invade crop farms, posing a serious threat to food security. Member States are therefore encouraged to avail resources to IRLCO-CSA and their respective Ministries of Agriculture to enable timely surveys and, where necessary, control operations to avert crop damage. Strengthened cross-border coordination will be essential to prevent swarms from spreading beyond outbreak areas.

4. AFRICAN MIGRATORY LOCUST (*Locusta migratoria migratoriodes*)

The African migratory locust situation remained relatively calm during August 2026. In Zambia, low populations persisted in the Simalaha Plains and parts of the Western Province, with no significant outbreaks reported. The Ministry of Agriculture continues

to monitor these areas vigilantly. In Zimbabwe, no outbreaks were recorded during the month under review. Although populations are currently low, the prevailing dry conditions may encourage locusts to concentrate further, and swarms could develop if unchecked. Sustained surveillance will therefore be essential to detect any changes early and to ensure timely control measures are in place to protect crops.

5. TREE LOCUST (*Anacridium* spp.)

The tree locust situation remained calm in both Kenya and Tanzania during August 2026. No outbreaks were reported, and populations appear stable. While the risk is currently low, Member States are encouraged to maintain routine monitoring to ensure that any localised increases are detected promptly.

6. FALL ARMYWORM (*Spodoptera frugiperda* J. E. Smith)

Fall armyworm infestations continued to be reported in Malawi during August 2026, affecting maize across all eight Agricultural Development Divisions. An estimated 59,585 hectares were infested, representing about 37% of the total maize area. Control measures were undertaken on approximately 46,834 hectares (79% of the affected area), using both synthetic pesticides and botanical extracts such as sisal, neem, and pepper.

In Mozambique, low infestation levels were observed in Dondo, Nhamatanda, and Gorongosa districts, with farmers carrying out control operations supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. Kenya also reported infestations in South Rift, North Rift, and several western counties, where second-season maize is grown. Extension officers provided technical support to affected farmers.

No outbreaks were reported in Tanzania, Zambia, or Zimbabwe during the month under review, although the pest may have been present at low levels in crops and pastures.

Fall armyworm remains a significant threat, particularly for irrigated maize, and vigilance is required as the seasonal rains approach. Member States are encouraged to sustain monitoring and strengthen farmer support to reduce population loads and avert crop losses.

7. AFRICAN ARMYWORM (*Spodoptera exempta,* Walker)

No outbreaks of African armyworm were reported across Member States during August 2026. The situation therefore remained calm, with no immediate threat to crops or pastures. While the risk is currently low, continued monitoring is important to ensure that any sudden upsurge is detected early. Early warning systems should remain active so that rapid response measures can be deployed if necessary.

8. QUELEA BIRDS (*Quelea quelea* L)

Reports of quelea bird outbreaks were received from Kenya and Zimbabwe during August 2026.

In Kenya, infestations were observed in Tana River and Narok Counties, where the birds attacked rice and wheat respectively.

In Zimbabwe, outbreaks were widespread, affecting cereals in Mashonaland East, West, and Central, as well as Manicaland, Midlands, and Masvingo Provinces. Control operations were undertaken in collaboration with affected districts, with significant populations put down using drone spraying technology. For example, in Mashonaland West alone, an estimated 228,000 birds were controlled, while other provinces reported tens of thousands of birds eliminated.

In Tanzania, no quelea bird outbreaks were reported during the month under review. Although control efforts have been successful, quelea birds remain a persistent threat to small grains, particularly as crops mature. Vigilant monitoring and timely interventions will be essential to prevent further damage.

9. FORECAST FOR THE PERIOD SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 2026

The outlook for the coming months indicates heightened risk of pest activity across outbreak areas.

For red locust, the prevailing dry conditions combined with the emergence of fresh vegetation in burnt patches are expected to accelerate the coalescing of immature adults into swarms during September. As rains commence in October–December, these swarms will mature and begin egg laying, leading to hopper emergence in early 2027 if not controlled.

African migratory locust populations, though currently low, may also concentrate under the same dry conditions, particularly in Zambia’s Western Province and neighbouring outbreak plains. Vigilant monitoring will be required to detect any early signs of swarm formation.

Fall armyworm remains a persistent threat, especially to irrigated maize and second-season crops in Kenya, Malawi, and Mozambique. Infestations are likely to continue, and farmer support for control measures will be essential to reduce damage.

Quelea bird outbreaks are expected to persist in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe as small grains mature. Timely interventions will be necessary to prevent losses, particularly in rice and wheat production zones.

Overall, the period September–November 2026 will be critical for surveillance and control. Member States are urged to mobilise resources, strengthen cross-border

collaboration, and support IRLCO-CSA in conducting aerial and ground surveys to avert crop damage and safeguard food security.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the prevailing conditions and the forecast for September–November 2026, Member States are urged to intensify surveillance and control measures across all outbreak areas. Particular attention should be given to red locust plains where immature adults are coalescing, as well as to regions vulnerable to fall armyworm and quelea bird infestations.

To avert crop damage and safeguard food security, Member States are encouraged to:

- Avail adequate resources to IRLCO-CSA and national Ministries of Agriculture to enable aerial and ground surveys, and to undertake timely control operations where necessary.
- Strengthen cross-border collaboration and information sharing, recognising that pest outbreaks often transcend national boundaries.
- Support farmer training and extension services, particularly in the use of integrated pest management techniques for fall armyworm and other migratory pests.
- Maintain vigilance in monitoring quelea bird populations, ensuring rapid interventions to protect small grains at critical growth stages.

The Organisation reaffirms its commitment to working closely with Member States to coordinate surveillance, provide technical support, and mobilise rapid response measures. Sustained collaboration will be essential to mitigate the risks posed by migratory pests and to secure regional food security.

11. REGIONAL WEATHER OUTLOOK.

The strengthening **El Niño event** is expected to significantly influence rainfall patterns across the IRLCO-CSA region during the **2026/27 rainy season**. Forecasts indicate that southern breeding areas (Malawi's Lake Chilwa, Mozambique's Buzi–Gorongosa, Zambia's Tondwa, Zimbabwe's Chipinge) will experience **below-normal rainfall and hotter conditions**, while northern zones (northern Zambia, northern Malawi, northern Mozambique, much of Tanzania) may see **normal to above-normal rainfall**. This north–south contrast is a direct consequence of El Niño's disruption of African weather systems, producing **severe drought in some regions** and **heavy rainfall in other areas**.

The implications for migratory pests are profound. **Red locusts and African migratory locusts** are expected to concentrate into swarms in drought-affected floodplains, while wetter northern areas may support expanded breeding cycles and hopper band formation. **Armyworm risks** remain variable, with fall armyworm likely to persist under warmer conditions. **Quelea bird outbreaks** may intensify where rainfall variability produces flushes of grass seed.

Scenario Outlook

- **Heavy Rains (Above-Normal)** → Breeding expansion, hopper band formation, and **major swarms expected May–July 2027**.
- **Lower Rains (Below-Normal)** → Suppressed breeding but **localized swarm concentrations** in drought-affected plains, appearing earlier and more confined.

Key Outlook

- Southern outbreak plains (Malawi, Mozambique, Southern Zambia, Zimbabwe) → **Drier than normal**, favouring swarm formation.
- Northern outbreak plains (Northern Zambia, Northern Malawi, Tanzania) → **Wetter than normal**, favouring breeding expansion and hopper band development.
- Cross-border zones (Kazungula, Zambezi Plains, Simalaha) → Require **joint surveillance and rapid response**.

Outbreak Area	Country	Expected Weather	Primary Locust Risk	Impact on Outbreak Dynamics
Lake Chilwa & Lake Chiuta Plains (Khanda, Ngokwe)	Malawi	Below-normal rainfall, hotter conditions	Red Locust	Vegetation drying → concentration into swarms
Mpatsa Njoka Dambo (Lifuwu)	Malawi	Below-normal rainfall	Red Locust	Localized swarming risk
Buzi–Gorongosa Plains (Mafambisse, Gorongosa, Caia, Dimba)	Mozambique	Below-normal rainfall	Red Locust	High outbreak potential; hopper suppression but adult swarms likely
Wembere Plain (Masenge)	Tanzania	Normal–above-normal rainfall	Red Locust	Breeding expansion; hopper bands formation
Malagarasi Plain (Kaliua)	Tanzania	Normal–above-normal rainfall	Red Locust	Breeding supported by wetter conditions
Rukwa Valley & Mpanda	Tanzania	Normal rainfall	Red Locust	Moderate breeding risk
Kafue Flats (Namwala)	Zambia	Below-normal rainfall	Red Locust	Concentration into swarms
Simalaha Plains	Zambia	Below-normal rainfall	Red Locust	Swarming risk; cross-border spread
Lukanga Swamps	Zambia	Below-normal rainfall	Red Locust	Vegetation drying → swarm concentration

Mweru-wa-Ntipa	Zambia	Normal–above-normal rainfall	Red Locust	Breeding expansion possible
Kazungula & Zambezi River Plains	Zambia/ Zimbabwe	Below-normal rainfall	Red Locust & African Migratory Locust	High outbreak potential; cross-border swarm spread
Chipinge Plains	Zimbabwe	Below-normal rainfall	Red Locust	High outbreak potential

Advisory

Member States are advised to integrate these climate-linked pest scenarios into national preparedness plans. Surveillance and control resources should be pre-positioned in both drought-affected southern outbreak plains, where swarm concentrations are likely, and in wetter northern zones, where breeding expansion and hopper band formation are expected. Cross-border outbreak areas such as Kazungula, the Zambezi Plains, and Simalaha require joint surveillance and rapid response to prevent transboundary spread. Coordinated action, backed by timely resource mobilisation, will be essential to mitigate the dual risks posed by El Niño and to safeguard regional food security.

12. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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IRLCO-CSA also acknowledges the support of regional and international partners who have provided technical guidance, resources, and coordination in strengthening surveillance and control capacities. The Organisation remains committed to working closely with Member States and partners to safeguard food security and livelihoods across the region.