1. Background

Quelea is a finch species endemic to Africa and is a nationally declared pest in the Republic of South Africa. This pest birds migrate between South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The largest local colonies red-billed quelea migrate between South Africa and Botswana. Grass seed is red-billed quelea's preferred food. When grass seed is scarce, they will descend upon small grain crops such as wheat, sorghum, barley, rice and oats. Based on field studies, it is calculated that quelea eat about 10% of their body weight per day. It is therefore an average of about 4 g cereal seed per day, destroyed by each of the birds. The birds travel in great swarms of approximately 400 000 birds and this translates to about 1.6 tons of small grains consumed daily but such a colony.

Fig. 1: Red-billed quelea (A) male and (B) female

2. Introduction

The Agricultural Pest Act (Act No. 36 of 1983), declared quelea as a pest. The Department of Agriculture: Directorate Land Use and Management is responsible for its management and currently two Control methods used: paraffin/gasoline explosion and aerial chemical spraying.

3. Procedures that the complainant must follow to report quelea

Before an official of the Department arrives for a physical inspection will need the following procedures / steps followed by a complainant:

   a) The correct identification of the sleeping or breeding ground of that swarm of finches causing damage.

   b) If the identified area is not the property of the complainant, the complainant must consent to the entry and possible control action obtained from the land owner.

The following information about the sleeping grounds will be useful for the official to get an indication about what control method possible may be implemented:

- Type of habitat eg. gum plantation
- Area size in hectares (estimate)

The complainant can contact Mr John Tladi with the above information (numbers below to text) for logging quelea swarms. After which the complainant will call one of the Departmental Inspectors and make an appointment for an inspection to be done with the complainant at the specified sleeping or breeding grounds.

4. Responsibilities of the complainant before, during and after a particular control method

4.1 Paraffin / petrol explosion

- Collect empty poison drum (Officer will determine the size during the inspection).
- Transport of empty drums to the nearest supplier of paraffin or petrol (Cooperative or local petrol station. The relevant supplier must accept fuel cards).
- Transportation of full bins to the specified area.
- Accessibility of area for explosives expert (e.g. making footpaths through habitat/forest).
- Provide manual labour for the placement of bins in the forest.
- Perform reasonable requests from officer to the best of his ability.
- Clearance of "site" to control action.
- Informing local residents about planned control action.
- Provide fire hazard precautions if so requested by the officer.

4.2 Areal Chemical Sprays

- Making torches that will be used to give an indication to the pilot of the layout and size of the control area (empty oil or beverage cans, steel pole, Mutton cloth or sack and ±5 liters of diesel). The officer will determine how many torches will be needed.
- Removal of any people, sheep, cattle and poultry from the affected area.
- Provide adequate manual labour for clearing poisoned and dead finches. The work must be at sunrise in the control area to ensure that no non-target species of birds (eagles, hawks, etc.) are in the area.
- Inform workers that any poisoned or dead animal in the area is not used for food.
- Destroy all poisoned animals by burying or burning such animals.

5. Contact phone numbers

Mr. John Tladi

Assistant Director: Migrant Pests

(012) 319 7568

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Colin Burke

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