China to send 'duck army' to help Pakistan fight locusts

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Beijing: China is planning to dispatch a 100,000-strong army of ducks to help Pakistan combat a massive locust infestation, a local newspaper reported Thursday.

The legion of lotus-eating waterfowl will be sent from the eastern province of Zhejiang following the earlier dispatch of a team of Chinese experts to Pakistan to advise on a response to the infestation that is being called the worst in 20 years, the Ningbo Evening News said.

China deployed ducks, whose natural diet includes insects, to fight a similar infestation in its northwestern region of Xinjiang two decades ago, reportedly with considerable effectiveness. Their use is both much less expensive and environmentally damaging than the use of pesticides, the paper quoted Zhejiang Provioncial Institute of Agricultural Technology researcher Lu Lizhi as saying.

Ducks are also more suited to the task than other poultry, such as chickens, Lu said.

â€œDucks like to stay in a group, so theyâ€™re easier to manage than chickens,â€• he said. A duck is also capable of eating more than 200 locusts per day, compared to just 70 for a chicken, Lu said. â€œThey have three-times the combat capability,â€• he added.

Calls to the provincial government press office seeking confirmation of the report rang unanswered Thursday and a number provided for the publicity department at the agricultural sciences institute was constantly engaged.

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- AP