Chemical Coaxes Locusts to Swarm

Student Comprehension Worksheet

Directions: After reading the online Science News article “A single molecule may entice normally solitary locusts to form massive swarms,” answer the following questions. A version of the story, “Chemical coaxes locusts to swarm,” can be found in the September 12, 2020 issue of Science News. If you are reading the print version, skip question No. 8.

1. What are locusts? Why does the author describe them as both harmless loners and plagues?

2. How large can locust swarms get?

3. What area of the world is currently plagued by locusts? Why do you think the author included this information in the article?

4. What do scientists suspect causes locusts to swarm? How might it work?

5. Name the molecule that scientists identified as a potential locust aggregation pheromone. What effect does it have on locusts?

6. What evidence do the scientists present supporting the claim that the molecule is an aggregation pheromone?

7. List three ways this discovery could be used to improve locust control measures.

8. According to the online Science News article, what are potential drawbacks of some of the proposed measures?
9. What does the expression “smoking gun” mean? It is an example of a literary device called an idiom. Based on the context of the article, explain what an idiom is.

10. Is there evidence that the newly identified molecule is the smoking gun when it comes to locust swarm formation?