

Red billed quelea, *Quelea quelea*

Biology

- The Red-billed Quelea is one of the weaver birds that build elaborate enclosed nests by weaving together strands of grass and other plant materials
- The flock breeds at times of abundant rainfall and young are ready to move with nomadic flock within six weeks which often coincide with ripening of grain crops.
- A nesting colony of Red-billed *Quelea* can extend over hundreds of acres, and a single flock may have millions of birds, moving together in a synchronized fashion.

Distribution

- The Red-billed Queleaa is a major pest of cereal crops in Africa and an important migratory pest.
- The bird has been reported to cause damage in all rice growing areas in the East Africa Region.
- Flocks trail the rain belt following InterTropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ).



Fig 1. Red billed quelea bird *Quelea quelea aethiopica* (wikimedia.org)

Damage on rice crop

- At planting, the birds dig out and eat the sown seed.
- Damage to the rice crop also occurs from the grain filling phase to harvest time. The most devastating period is at flowering when weaver birds converge in huge numbers.

Management Strategies

1. Cultural Control methods

- Use of
 - human scarer's
 - Scarecrows
 - Scaring devices
- Use of different kinds of nets to deter the birds.
- Plant trap crops early, close to trees and power lines to minimize bird damage to the main crop.

2. Chemical control

- The Red-billed Quelea is a notifiable pest. Farmers should report the presence of this pest to the Ministry of Agriculture staff who will make the necessary arrangements to control the pests.
- IRRI-Tape Bird Deterrent to keep unwanted bird pests. The tape has a reptilian sheen that scares away birds.



Fig 2. Empty panicles from bird damage at milky stages