

Rwanda: Eucalyptus Trees Under Threat From Strange Disease

By Jean d'Amour Mbonyinshuti 27 August 2015

André Mugemangango's eucalyptus shamba of about one hectare has been infested with strange insects for the past few years. The resident of Ruli Sector in Gakenke District worries that his source of income (firewood and construction poles) could be at risk.

Xavier Minani, another resident of Coko Sector in Gakenke, is also counting losses and says the problem is out of hand and his entire forest was affected.

The infection, known as Eucalyptus lice, has hit a large number of trees in the country, especially those in valleys, according to the Rwanda Natural Resources Authority, (RNRA).

RNRA officials describe the insects as *Leptocybe Invasa*, a wasp-like insect that is prevalent in many countries around the world, which damages young eucalypt plantations and nurseries.

Believed to have originated from Australia, the 'wasp' has spread to most eucalyptus-growing countries in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Europe, North America and the Near East.

Minani explained that the disease deforms the leaves before they turn yellowish and dry.

Adrie Mukashema, RNRA's deputy director-general for forestry and conservation, confirmed the existence of the disease, adding that it was due to insufficient water in the soil and lack of proper care for the trees.

"The lice are due to stress; the climate is changing and forests are affected due to lack of enough water. When it rains, the disease ebbs," she explained.

She said there were no official statistics of the affected areas, but admits that many areas were affected countrywide.

"We are not planning to apply pesticides as it can harm honey production. We advise farmers to ensure they take care of their forests and build terraces so that water is conserved," she said.

"We are also planning to promote a more disease-resistant variety. We also plan to improve the forest management by teaching farmers how to take care of their forests," she said.

Source:
<http://allafrica.com/stories/201508270923.html>