

# NEW MONSTER OF THE SEARCHES OUT LOCUST LAIRS

By DICK HOBSON



The Swamp Skipper, looking newest weapon in the fight ag

**R**OARING and blundering through 8ft. high grass, splashing into water and floating out of it on to dry ground, the Swamp Skipper has been brought in as the newest weapon in the year-round unending battle of man against locust in Central Africa. Most Rhodesians have not seen a locust in 20 years, and the reason for the absence of these once-dreaded, sky-darkening plagues, lies 600 miles to the north of Lusaka, at the little village of Abercorn, on the Tanganyika border.

Here, working with unpublicised efficiency, is the headquarters of the International Red Locust Control Service, whose staff, led by Dr. D. L. Gunn, planned the use of the giant float-wheeled amphibian which can reach into places impossible to man, beast or ordinary vehicle, and seek out the secret breeding places of the locust.

These breeding places are found only in two small areas—"outbreak areas"—in Africa. And there are very few, fortunately, on the whole surface of the world—where conditions are such that locusts, instead of living as they do in many places as a rare insect, can multiply by the million, form up into gregarious swarms and migrate into invasion areas.

### Evil homes

The two outbreak areas are Lake Mweru wa Ntipa in the far north-western corner of Northern Rhodesia, and Lake Rukwa in south-western Tanganyika.

Abercorn lies almost centrally between these two points, and became the headquarters of the I.R.L.C.S., whose funds are provided by the Governments of East Africa, the Rhodesias, the Belgian Congo, the Union of South Africa and Portuguese East and West Africa.

### Not so easy

It took years of investigation and exploration in the 1930s to discover these evil, aboriginal homes of the locust swarms, and it was not until 1941 that the International Organisation had its beginnings.

The work of the I.R.L.C.S., basically and briefly, is this: to keep the locusts confined within the outbreak areas, and to kill as many of them as possible.

This is not as easy as it sounds, and despite advances in insecticide spraying, research is constantly seeking the answer to the question: Why are Mweru wa Ntipa and Rukwa outbreak areas in the first place?

Meanwhile, there is plenty of field work to be done—and carried out under almost impossible conditions: both the outbreak areas, Mweru wa Ntipa and Lake Rukwa, are floodplains, and they often become flooded during the crucial breeding season.

### The Mudlark

The hoppers may then flourish on the tall grass over the floods. No ordinary vehicle can reach them, and it takes superhuman resolution to search for them on foot. No ordinary man can walk 10 or more miles out from a camp, search amid 8ft. grass in water for the locusts, and then return the same day.

But that problem has now been settled by the introduction of the enormous, ungainly, giant-wheeled contraption called officially the "Swamp Skipper," and less officially "The Mudlark."

cab has an eye-level 15ft. above the ground.

Slow-moving, and needing careful handling over rough ground, it is really in its element in flat swamp land. There, in the words of Dr. D. L. Gunn, head of the I.R.L.C.S.: "Nothing has ever stopped it."