

**NATIONAL REPORT FOR THE GREAT BUSTARD MOU AND ACTION PLAN****AUSTRIAN NATIONAL REPORT 2012**

(Third Austrian National Report; Period covered: 01/10/2008 to 31/12/2012; prepared till 01/04/2013)

This reporting format is designed to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan associated with the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of the Middle-European Population of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*). Reporting on the Action Plan's implementation will support exchange of information throughout the range and assist the identification of necessary future actions by the Signatory States. The questions presented here go beyond the scope of information already requested from CMS Contracting Parties for national reports to the CMS Conference of the Parties.

**GENERAL INFORMATION****Agency or institution responsible for the preparation of this report**

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**Reports submitted to date:**

First: Austrian National Report 2004; Period covered: 28/11/2001 to 18/09/2004

Second: Austrian National Report 2008; Period covered: 19/09/2004 to 30/09/2008

**Period covered by this report**

Third: Austrian National Report 2012; Period covered: 01/10/2008 to 31/12/2012

**Memorandum in effect in country since:**

[Date: dd / mm / yy]:

Austria signed the memorandum on 28th November 2001

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## PART I. GENERAL

This questionnaire follows the structure and numbering of the Action Plan annexed to the Memorandum of Understanding to make it easier to read the relevant action points before the form is filled in. In some cases, however, sub-actions were not listed separately for the sake of simplicity and to avoid duplications. They should however be taken into consideration when answering the questions.

### 0. National work programme

Is there a national work programme or action plan already in place in your country for the Great Bustard pursuant to Paragraph 4(g) of the Memorandum of Understanding?

Yes  No

### 1. Habitat protection

#### **1.1 Designation of protected areas.**

To what extent are the display, breeding, stop-over and wintering sites covered by protected areas?

Designation of protected areas under national law	Classification of Special Protection Areas according to the requirements of Art.4.1 of the EC Birds Directive
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fully (>75%) <input type="checkbox"/> High (50-75%) <input type="checkbox"/> Medium (10-49%) <input type="checkbox"/> Low (<10%) <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <sup>1</sup>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fully (>75%) <input type="checkbox"/> High (50-75%) <input type="checkbox"/> Medium (10-49%) <input type="checkbox"/> Low (<10%) <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <sup>1</sup>

The SPA “Westliches Weinviertel” (16,904 ha in total, of them 7.411 ha for the Great Bustard) was enacted under domestic legislation on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and SPA “Waasen - Hanság” (3,007 ha in total) was enacted under domestic legislation on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008, SPA “Sandboden und Praterterrasse” (16,020 ha in total, of them 11,083 ha for the Great Bustard) was enacted under domestic legislation on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and SPA “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden” will be enacted under domestic legislation within the next weeks. The breeding sites and leks of Great Bustard within the IBA “Feuchte Ebene – Rauchenwarther Platte” are not within SPA “Feuchte Ebene – Leithaauen” (population in autumn 2012: 1 male). From the end of 2013 forward more than 90% of the display, breeding, stop-over and wintering sites of Great Bustard will be protected under national law.

What measures were taken to ensure the adequate protection of the species and its habitat at these sites?

In Austria, extensive measures are taken for the management of all breeding areas and key migration and wintering sites of the Great Bustard. In promoting the implementation of Great Bustard species conservation many institutions and organisations are collaborating excellently. In particular these are: the two State Governments of Burgenland and Lower Austria as well as the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water management of Austria (BMLFUW), local councils, the NGOs like ÖGG (Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation), WWF Austria, BirdLife Austria, Naturschutzbund, Distelverein and others, but also the hunting associations and the farmers unions of Burgenland and Lower Austria. The majority of the conservation activities are co-financed by the EU.

<sup>1</sup> The species occurs only irregularly, no regular stop-over or wintering sites identified.

In 2000, the WWF in the context of its campaign “Lass Sie leben” jointly with the BMLFUW raised the profile of Great Bustard species conservation efforts nationally and internationally leading to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of the Central-European Population of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) (MoU) and the publication of the Action Plan for the protection of the Great Bustard in Austria. Since 2000, the Great Bustard species protection project has been coordinated by a responsible manager, the author of the present report. In addition, regular (but not daily) surveillance is carried out in all Great Bustard ranges by surveillance officers. In all bustard areas in Lower Austria and Burgenland this work is done by Rainer Raab and his team, financed through European community funding.

In August 2005 the LIFE project “Cross-border Protection of the Great Bustard in Austria” (LIFE05 NAT/A/000077) started in Lower Austria and Burgenland. The LIFE project with a planned project budget of 5,840,760 EURO was supported by the EU and the following project partners and co-financiers: EVN AG - Energy Supply Lower Austria PLC, BEWAG - Burgenland Electricity Commerce PLC, VERBUND-Austrian Power Grid PLC, ÖBB-Infrastructure Building PLC, State Government of Lower Austria, Department for Nature Conservation, State Government of Burgenland, Department 5.III for Nature Conservation and Protection of the Environment and Austrian Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water management (BMLFUW). The “Great Bustard” LIFE Project was successfully finalised on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

Collision with overhead power lines was the most significant mortality factor for fully grown (i.e. immature and adult) Great Bustards in Austria for many years. The main objective of this LIFE project was to deal with this threat and at the same time to continue Austria's intensive habitat management efforts to result in a long-term increase not only of the Austrian, but of the entire cross-border West-Pannonian population of the Great Bustard. Numerous measures were implemented in the project period from August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005 till July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010 to reach this aim. All of the undergrounding of in total 47,4 km (10% more than previously planned) medium voltage power lines is finished in the two project areas “Westliches Weinviertel” (33,2 km) and “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden” (14,2 km). Thus larger areas free of power lines are available for the Great Bustard due to the LIFE project. The marking of in total 153 km (22% more than previously planned) high voltage power lines (110, 220 and 380 kV) is finished in all of the 3 project areas (80,0 km in the project area “Westliches Weinviertel”). The total eligible expenditure after audit (= costs accepted by the auditors) at the end of 2012 is 5,721,139.83 EURO.

In addition to the LIFE project there was a Rural Development project in Lower Austria entitled “Cross-border Protection of the Great Bustard in Lower Austria”, RU5-S-428/001-2005, running from August 2005 to July 2010, and financed by the State Government of Lower Austria and by the EU. Both projects were implemented by the Technical office for biology Mag. Rainer Raab on behalf of the Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation (ÖGG). In Burgenland there was an additional project entitled “Cross-border Protection of the Great Bustard in Burgenland”, LPF: 5-N-A1025/148-2009, running from January 2007 to November 2010, implemented by the Technical office for biology Mag. Rainer Raab and financed by the State Government of Burgenland.

In October 2010 the LIFE+ project “Cross-border Protection of the Great Bustard in Austria - continuation” (LIFE09 NAT/AT/000225) started in Lower Austria and Burgenland. The LIFE+ project with a planned project budget of 4,508,481 EURO is supported by the EU and the following project partners and co-financiers: EVN AG - Energy Supply Lower Austria PLC, BEWAG - Burgenland Electricity Commerce PLC, Austrian Power Grid PLC, “Nationalparkgesellschaft Neusiedler See-Seewinkel”, State Government of Lower Austria, Department for Nature Conservation, State Government of Burgenland, Department 5.III for Nature Conservation and Protection of the Environment and Austrian Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water management (BMLFUW).

The main aim of the LIFE+ Project is the continuation of the successful concept of the LIFE Project “Great Bustard” in Austria until 2015 in all of the four important Great Bustard areas in Austria. As in two project areas the main mortality factor and therefore the main population threat have widely been removed (transfer of power lines below the soil and marking of power lines, respectively), further necessary transfer of power lines below the soil and marking should take place, particularly in the project area “Sandboden and Praterterrasse”. This should contribute to a further long-term increase of the Austrian and the whole cross-border West-Pannonian Great Bustard population, respectively.

In addition to the LIFE+ project there is a Rural Development project in Lower Austria entitled “Cross-border Protection of the Great Bustard in Lower Austria – continuation”, RU5-S-941/001-2011, running from April 2011 to March 2015, and financed by the State Government of Lower Austria and by the EU and there is a Leader project in Burgenland “Protection of the Great Bustard in Burgenland in the years 2012 and 2013”, running from January 2012 to December 2013, and financed by the State Government of Burgenland and by the EU. All projects are implemented by the Technical office for biology Mag. Rainer Raab on behalf of the Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation (ÖGG).

In addition, close cooperation with farmers, hunters and other local people is actively promoted by the project coordinator and surveillance officers to ensure good information exchange on all matters relevant to bustard conservation.

Lease or acquisition of land for bustard conservation is not feasible in Austria. Therefore, the maintenance of Great Bustard habitats both inside and outside the proposed Natura 2000 sites is carried out through special Great Bustard measures under “ÖPUL”, the Austrian Agri-environment scheme since 1995 (1995: 700 ha, 2000: 2 600 ha, 2007: 5 500 ha, 2012: 5.150 ha).

Due to undergrounding and marking of power lines and various other conservation efforts the Austrian as well as the entire cross-border West-Pannonian population of Great Bustard clearly increased in the last years.

#### Where are the remaining gaps?

Currently there are no relevant gaps within the designation of protected areas for the Great Bustard due to the ongoing enlargement of the SPA “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden”.

#### Are currently unoccupied, but potential breeding habitats identified in your country?

Yes       No       Not applicable<sup>2</sup>

If yes, please explain how these areas are protected or managed to enable the re-establishment of Great Bustard.

The identification of unoccupied areas which are potential breeding habitat of the Great Bustard is in progress.

#### **1.2 Measures taken to ensure the maintenance of Great Bustard habitats outside of protected areas.**

Please describe what measures have been taken to maintain land-use practices beneficial for Great Bustard outside of protected areas (e.g., set-aside and extensification schemes, cultivation of alfalfa and oilseed rape for winter, maintenance of rotational grazing, etc.).

As more than 90% of the display, breeding, stop-over and wintering sites will be covered by protected areas at the end of 2013 the question only applies to the area “Rauchenwarther Platte”. There are a few hectares of special Great Bustard fallow land at the moment, but it is planned to establish more special Great Bustard fallow land within the next years in this area.

#### To what extent do these measures, combined with site protection, cover the national population?

- Fully (>75%)
- Most (50-75%)
- Some (10-49%)
- Little (<10%)
- Not at all
- Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Countries *outside* of the historic (beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century) breeding range of the species.

Are recently (over the last 20 years) abandoned Great Bustard breeding habitats mapped in your country?  
 Yes       No       Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

The mapping of recently (over the last 20 years) abandoned Great Bustard breeding habitats of the Great Bustard is in progress.

What habitat management measures have been taken to encourage the return of Great Bustard?

Measures like special Great Bustard fallow land have been taken to encourage the return of Great Bustards to abandoned breeding habitats nearby established breeding sites inside protected areas.

If there were any measures taken, please provide information on their impact.

Breeding of Great Bustard could be observed on these additional fallows near the current breeding areas. The population of Great Bustard increased especially in "Heideboden".

### **1.3 Measures taken to avoid fragmentation of Great Bustard habitats.**

Are new projects potentially causing fragmentation of the species' habitat (such as construction of highways and railways, irrigation, planting of shelterbelts, afforestation, power lines, etc.) subject to environmental impact assessment in your country?  
 Yes       No       Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

Is there any aspect of the existing legislation on impact assessment that limits its effective application to prevent fragmentation of Great Bustard habitats?  
 Yes       No       Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

If yes, please provide details.

Smaller infrastructural facilities (like wind farms with only few wind power stations) are not subject to an environmental impact assessment. However the impact of every infrastructural project has to be proven according to nature conservation law before implementation. Apart from that the deterioration of the ecological condition at the designation time is prohibited within the SPAs.

Have there been any such projects implemented in any Great Bustard habitat in your country since signing this Memorandum of Understanding?  
 Yes       No       Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

Please, give details and describe the outcome of impact monitoring if available.

## **2. Prevention of hunting, disturbance and other threats**

### **2.1 Hunting.**

Is Great Bustard afforded strict legal protection in your country?  
 Yes       No

Please, give details of any hunting restrictions imposed for the benefit of Great Bustard including those on timing of hunting and game management activities.

Since 1969 hunting of Great Bustards has been banned in Austria. In all Great Bustard ranges hunters agree to take the species and its needs into consideration in agreement with the EU Bird Directive. In the breeding season most hunting activities are suspended voluntarily at the breeding sites. In general, hunting hides are only built or moved in agreement with the local surveillance officers. Nevertheless, seasonal hunting activities like Roe Deer hunting, particularly in May and July, and Brown Hare, pheasant and Grey Partridge hunting in the autumn can cause some degree of disturbance.

Please, indicate to what extent these measures ensure the protection of the national Great Bustard population?  
The national population is covered by restrictions on hunting to prevent hunting-related disturbance:

- Fully (>75%)
- Most (50-75%)
- Some (10-49%)
- Little (<10%)
- Not at all
- Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

## **2.2 Prevention of disturbance.**

What measures have been taken to prevent disturbance of Great Bustard in your country, including both breeding birds and single individuals or small flocks on migration?

The surveillance officers endeavour to keep disturbance of Great Bustards at a low level. The ÖPUL measures help to reduce agricultural activities in bustard areas, in particular during the breeding season. If parts of the fallow land are cut or mulched during the breeding season in order to provide fresh and low growth for the chicks, the surveillance officer accompanies the farmer in order to keep disturbances for the birds to a minimum or stop the work entirely if necessary. In addition, there is a general agreement with farmers and hunters to keep all disturbances in bustard areas to a necessary minimum. The surveillance officers in cooperation with hunters and farmers try to reduce disturbance through leisure activities such as dog walking, biking, Nordic walking, jogging and horse riding. There are agreements with the armed forces to prevent unnecessary disturbances through aircraft and helicopters. There are efforts to implement similar agreements with the private aviation bodies.

Please, indicate to what extent these measures have ensured the protection of the national population.  
The national population is covered by restrictions on other activities causing disturbance:

- Fully (>75%)
- Most (50-75%)
- Some (10-49%)
- Little (<10%)
- Not at all
- Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

### **2.3.1 Prevention of predation.**

What is the significance of predation to Great Bustard in your country?

The role of predation in Austria depends obviously on the weather conditions. In some years (for example 2002) it is playing a certain role for the clutches. If the vegetation is developing slowly the pressure of predation is higher.

What are the main predator species?

The main predator species is in all probability the Red fox. The role of other predators is not really well known, but it looks like that Hooded Crows are also playing a certain role. However there are some other maybe relevant predators, such as Marsh Harrier, White tailed Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, badger and Raccoon dog.

What measures have been taken to control predators in areas where Great Bustard occurs regularly?

Populations of foxes, Hooded Crows, Raccoon dog and wild boars are hunted within legal limits, but this is mostly not enough to control these populations. So they are still increasing and in the coming years higher negative impacts cannot be excluded.

Since Red Foxes are a serious threat to juvenile Great Bustards, a good cooperation between hunters and

conservationists is very valuable in this regard. The Eastern Imperial Eagle and the White-tailed Eagle are also critically endangered species in Austria which require protection measures themselves. A deliberate reduction of these rare species which can also be a threat to bustards is naturally not the aim of conservation activities.

#### How effective were these measures?

- Effective (predation reduced by more than 50%)
- Partially effective (predation reduced by 10–49%)
- Less effective (predation reduced by less than 10%)
- Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

### **2.3.2 Adoption of measures for power lines.**

#### What is the significance of collision with power lines in your country?

For many years collisions of flying Great Bustards with power lines were the most serious threats to the Great Bustard population in Austria. In the period from June 2002 to December 2012, 35 (45 %) out of 77 Great Bustards have been proven to have died through collision with power lines in Austria (12 in the area of the “Western Weinviertel”, 17 in the area of “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden”, 2 in the area of “Marchfeld” and 4 in other areas).

In the reporting period 01/10/2008 to 31/12/2012 a total of 31 dead Great Bustards were found in Austria, 11 (35 %) died through collision. Out of these 11 casualties 5 died on medium voltage power lines, 4 on high voltage power lines and 2 on train power lines.

In September 2012 an article about the effects of underground cabling and marking of power lines on the West-Pannonian Great Bustard *Otis tarda* population was published in the scientific journal Bird Conservation International, volume 22, issue 03 (Citation: Raab, R., Schütz, C., Spakovszky, P., Julius E. and Schulze, C. H. (2012). Underground cabling and marking of power lines: conservation measures rapidly reduced mortality of West-Pannonian Great Bustards *Otis tarda*. Bird Conservation International, 22, pp 299-306.).

#### What proactive and corrective measures have been taken to reduce the mortality caused by existing power lines in your country?

In the frame of the LIFE project between August 2005 and July 2010 approx. 47 km of existing medium voltage power lines have been transferred below the soil and 153 km of high voltage power lines have been marked with bird protection markings. In the frame of the LIFE+ project between June 2012 and July 2012 approx. 4 km of high voltage power lines have been marked with bird protection markings. Together with other projects some hundred km of high voltage power lines have been marked with bird protection markings within the last years. Since that time only few individuals died on marked sections.

#### What is the size of the populations affected by these corrective measures?

About 400 individuals in winter and approx. 250 individuals in the breeding time are affected by these measures. Therefore a major part of the West-Pannonian population (more than 440 individuals in December 2012) is affected.

#### How effective were these measures?

- Effective (collision with power lines reduced by more than 50%)
- Partially effective (collision with power lines reduced by 10–49%)
- Ineffective (collision with power lines reduced by less than 10%)
- Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

### 2.3.3 Compensatory measures.

What is the size (in hectares) of Great Bustard habitat lost or degraded for any reasons since the Memorandum of Understanding entered into effect (1 June 2001)?

In Austria, there is currently no need for compensatory measures, as any activities which will create new loss or degradation of Great Bustard habitat or longer term disturbance of the species are kept at bay. However, if degradation should occur in future, it should be compensated by appropriate measures.

Only some hectares were lost due to creeping changes (asphalting of farm tracks, enlarging of settlements). Great Bustard habitat did not get lost but partially the quality of the habitat changed. Due to changed EU legislation in the new rural development programme period (2007 – 2013) the preservation and establishment of bustard fallow land became extremely hard. In the eastern part of Austria hundreds of hectares of fallow land (in and) especially outside of the Great Bustard habitats have been ploughed and changed back to cultivated fields within the last years.

What is the size of the populations affected?

The minor loss of Great Bustard habitat has no significant effects on the Austrian population.

Were these habitat losses compensated?  Yes  Partially  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

If yes, please explain how.

Were these measures effective?  Yes  Partially  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

Please, give details on the effectiveness or explain why they were not effective if that is the case.

Not applicable.

### **3. Possession and trade**

Is collection of Great Bustard eggs or chicks, the possession of and trade in the birds and their eggs prohibited in your country?  Yes  No

How are these restrictions enforced? What are the remaining shortcomings, if any?

The Great Bustard is a strictly protected species in Lower Austria and Burgenland. In both federal states, the Great Bustard is counted as game under the hunting laws and is therefore not subject to nature conservation law. However, there is no hunting season, i.e. there is an all-year ban on hunting. Furthermore, the collection of eggs or chicks, the possession of and trade in the birds and their eggs is strictly prohibited and the restrictions are controlled. In Austria, no specimen is in private or other possession such as zoos.

Austria joined the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES or the Washington Convention), the comprehensive control system on trade in endangered species in 1982. Offences are punishable by fines between € 726 and € 36,336. Particularly severe offences may entail prison sentences of up to two years.

Please indicate if any exemption is granted or not all of these activities are prohibited.

Authorization is only granted out of nature conservation interests.

#### **4. Recovery measures**

##### **4.1 Captive breeding\* in emergency situations.**

Is captive breeding playing any role in Great Bustard conservation in your country?  Yes  No

Please, describe the measures, staff and facilities involved and how these operations comply with the IUCN criteria on reintroductions.

There was no captive breeding in Austria in the period covered by this report (01/10/2008 to 31/12/2012). If injured or seriously ill Great Bustards are found, they are taken into captivity and cared for until they have recovered and are then released again as soon as possible. Captive breeding of bustards is only carried out in exceptional circumstances, when a nest has been abandoned, with only four eggs incubated between 2001 and 2012 in the years 2002 and 2004. There is no specific station for Great Bustards in Austria. Injured or seriously ill Great Bustards are taken to the “Eulen- und Greifvogelstation” (owl and bird of prey station) Haringsee. Bustards receive excellent veterinary care from Professor Frey, but the housing among birds of prey is not ideal. For this reason, the two Great Bustard chicks hatched in captivity in 2004 were taken to Hungary on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004 for transfer to the Great Bustard Rescue Station at Dévaványa.

##### **4.2 Reintroduction.**

Have there been any measures taken to reintroduce the species in your country?  Yes  No

If yes, please describe the progress. If there was any feasibility study carried out, please summarize its conclusions.

##### **4.3 Monitoring of the success of release programmes.**

Are captive reared birds released in your country?  Yes  No

If yes, please summarize the experience with release programmes in your country. What is the survival rate of released birds? What is the breeding performance of released birds?

What is the overall assessment of release programmes based on the survival of released birds one year after release?

- Effective (the survival is about the same as of the wild ones)
- Partially effective (the survival rate is lower than 75% of the wild birds)
- Ineffective (the survival is less than 25% of wild birds)
- Not applicable<sup>3</sup>

#### **5. Cross-border conservation measure**

Has your country undertaken any cross-border conservation measures with neighbouring countries?

Yes  No  Not applicable<sup>4</sup>

Please, give details of your country’s collaboration with neighbouring countries on national surveys, research, monitoring and conservation activities for Great Bustard. Especially, list any measures taken to harmonise legal instruments protecting Great Bustard and its habitats, as well as funding you have provided to Great Bustard for particular conservation actions in other Range States.

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\* In effect, “captive breeding” should be read as “captive rearing” according to current practices.

<sup>3</sup> No release is taking place in the country.

<sup>4</sup> For countries which do not have any transboundary population.

The Austrian population of the Great Bustard is a part of the West Pannonian population (located on parts of the area of the 4 countries Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic). The protection of the West Pannonian population is implemented by Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with the coordination of Austria. A monthly coordinated census of Great Bustards is carried out in cooperation with Hungary and Slovakia in the area Parndorfer Platte - Heideboden. Good contacts exist with ornithologists working on Great Bustards in these countries and ornithologists from the Czech Republic. Joint meetings and research field trips are organised regularly. Since the start of the LIFE Projects in Hungary, Slovakia and Austria, the cross-border cooperation on Great Bustard conservation for the common populations around the Austrian borders to Hungary and Slovakia has been intensified. In the coming years, cross-border conservation measures will be continued in this region, but also around the Austrian border to the Czech Republic.

An important step within the next months will be the enlargement of the Austrian Great Bustard database. At the moment Austria has all available data of the West Pannonian population in one cross-border database. In future all available data of the whole Middle-European Population will be in the Austrian database. For example to produce overview distribution maps and to produce detailed maps of the "Important Great Bustard Areas" in all member states of the MoU.

## **6. Monitoring and research**

### **6.1.1 Monitoring of population size and population trends.**

Are the breeding, migratory or wintering Great Bustard populations monitored in your country?

Yes  No

What proportion of the national population is monitored?

- All (>75%)
- Most (50-75%)
- Some (10-49%)
- Little (<10%)
- None
- Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

What is the size and trend in the national population?<sup>5</sup>

The Austrian Great Bustard population declined from a total of 700-800 individuals around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to a low of about 60 individuals at the end of the century. By the breeding season of 2012 it had increased again to a population size of 213 to 253 individuals. Remarkably, population trends were different in each study area. At Rauchenwarther Platte the breeding population became extinct by the breeding season of 2005. At Marchfeld there was a huge decline in the population between 1990 and 1998 and since then the population has remained more or less stable. At Hanság the population has remained more or less stable since 1990. At Parndorfer Platte there has been an increase in population size since 2007 and in the Austrian part of Heideboden as well as in Westliches Weinviertel there has been a huge increase since as long ago as 1998.

In winter the 394 individuals (February 2012) spend most of the time in Austria, but sometimes up to 331 individuals can be found on the Slovakian or Hungarian side close to the border.

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<sup>5</sup> Only for countries where the species occurs regularly.

Breeding/resident population  
Breeding time 2012

No. of adult/immature males: 90-105  
No. of females: 123-148  
Total No. individuals: 213-253

Non-breeding population (on passage, wintering)  
Winter 2011/2012

No. of adult males: 117  
No. of immature males: 39 (last year's)  
No. of females: 238  
Total No. individuals: 394

Trend:  Declined by \_\_\_% over the last 10 years  
 Stable  
 Increased by approx. 250 % over the last 10 years

Trend:  Declined by \_\_\_% over the last 10 years  
 Stable  
 Increased by approx. 250 % over the last 10 years

For countries where the species occurs only occasionally, please give the details of known observations within the reporting period: Not relevant

### 6.1.2 Monitoring of the effects of habitat management.

Is the effect of habitat conservation measures monitored in your country?

Yes  Partially  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

Please, provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published.

Monitoring of effects of habitat management is carried out regularly at all sites, but not published yet.

What can be learned from these studies?

What are the remaining gaps and what measures will your country do to address these gaps?

### 6.2.1 Comparative ecological studies.

Have there been any comparative studies carried out on the population dynamics, habitat requirements, effects of habitat changes and causes of decline in your country in collaboration with other Range States?

Yes  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

Please, provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published

Comparative studies on the different sub-populations in Austria and for the whole West-Pannonian sub-population (A, CZ, H and SK) are carried out, but not published yet.

What can be learned from these studies?

What are the remaining gaps where the Memorandum of Understanding could assist?

### 6.2.2 Studies on mortality factors.

Are the causes of Great Bustard mortality understood in your country?

Yes  Partially  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

Please, provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published.

In September 2012 an article about the effects of underground cabling and marking of power lines on the West-

Pannonian Great Bustard *Otis tarda* population was published in the scientific journal Bird Conservation International, volume 22, issue 03 (Citation: Raab, R., Schütz, C., Spakovszky, P., Julius E. and Schulze, C. H. (2012). Underground cabling and marking of power lines: conservation measures rapidly reduced mortality of West-Pannonian Great Bustards *Otis tarda*. Bird Conservation International, 22, pp 299-306.).

What can be learned from these studies?

Mortality factors are studied whenever possible, for example targeted searches are carried out when individual birds go missing and more than 700 people are involved in the project. The results from 2002 to 2010 are published. This has been important for example in identifying collisions with power lines as an important mortality factor.

What are the remaining gaps and what measures will your country do to address these gaps?

The mortality factors of the adult and immature individuals are studied in detail. The mortality factors for clutches and juveniles are not surveyed, only occasional observations are recorded. The reason is on the one hand to avoid additional disturbances to the clutches and on the other hand the constant increase of Austrian Great Bustard population.

**6.2.3 Investigation of factors limiting breeding success.**

Are the factors limiting breeding success in core populations understood in your country?

Yes  Partially  No  Not applicable<sup>6</sup>

Please, provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published

Intensive studies on breeding success have been carried out, but certain conclusions about the reasons for failure are difficult to reach. The results are not published yet.

What can be learned from these studies?

The main factor limiting breeding success in Austria was for many decades the disturbance through agricultural activities. Due to effective design and placement of the large-scale protected areas and the special Great Bustard fields, this limiting factor is reduced nowadays. Nowadays weather conditions in the breeding time are playing an important role for the breeding success.

What are the remaining gaps and what measures are you going to take to address these gaps?

**6.2.4 Studies on migration.**

Were there any studies on migration routes and wintering places carried out in your country?

Yes  Partially  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

Where are the key sites and what is the size of the population they support?

The key sites are “Heideboden” (331 individuals in February 2012) and “Westliches Weinviertel” (57 individuals in February 2012) and in some years also “Waasen – Hanság” and “Marchfeld”. The whole West-Pannonian population is wintering in or close to these key sites. In winter 2011/2012 442 individuals were observed in total, most of the time up to 394 individuals wintered on the Austrian side.

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<sup>6</sup> Only for breeding countries.

Do you have any knowledge about the origin of these birds supported by ringing or other marking methods?

Since currently no satellite telemetry, ringing or other marking methods are carried out, migration patterns are understood only incompletely. Nevertheless, observations of Great Bustards but also of flying bustards are carefully recorded. The observations showed that there was no major migration in Austria within the last years.

What are the remaining gaps and what measures will your country do to address these gaps?

Since there are exchanges between the protected areas, there is a necessity to carry out specific studies on this topic. A feasibility study on satellite telemetry for Great Bustards was carried out in the frame of the LIFE project in 2010. This is a potential topic for the next decades.

**7. Training of staff working in conservation bodies**

Is there any mechanism in place in your country to share information on biological characteristics and living requirements of Great Bustard, legal matters, census techniques and management practices to personnel working regularly with the species?  Yes  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

If yes, please describe it.

The project coordinator carries out frequent personal meetings and field trips to Great Bustard areas with staff from conservation bodies.

Have personnel dealing with Great Bustard participated in any exchange programme in other Range States?

Yes  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

If yes, please give details on number of staff involved, country visited and how the lessons were applied in your country.

1 person; Hungary.

**8. Increasing awareness of the need to protect Great Bustards and their habitat**

What measures have been taken to increase the awareness about the protection needs of the species and its habitat in your country since signing the Memorandum of Understanding?

Austria has undertaken major efforts to increase the awareness about the protection needs of the species and its habitat since signing the Memorandum of Understanding especially within the LIFE and the LIFE+ project "Great Bustard". There are special actions raising awareness among stakeholders in all Austrian Great Bustard habitats.

More than 50 information events for farmers and landowners have been carried out in cooperation with the farmers' chamber, and hundreds of hours of personal talks with farmers. This has led to important successes, such as nearly 100% of farmers in the bustard range of Western Weinviertel participating in the "ÖPUL" Great Bustard measures.

Occasional TV, radio, newspaper and interest group (farmers, hunters, etc.) magazine coverage of Great Bustard issues has been promoted by the project coordinator and the Lake Neusiedl National Park, but so far without making detailed habitat locations outside the National Park public.

A dedicated internet site exists since 2001: [www.grosstrappe.at](http://www.grosstrappe.at). Since the beginning of the LIFE project in August 2005 the website is renewed and is available in German and English. Parts of the website have been translated into 5 additional languages and have been put online in August 2007. The website is continuously

updated and includes summaries and photos of events and press releases related to the bustard protection project.

The illustrated book „Die Großtrappe in Mitteleuropa. Erfolgreicher Schutz der westpannonischen Population“ from Raab, R., Kovacs, F. J., Julius, E., Raab, S., Schütz, C., Spakovszky, P. und Timar, J., which was produced in 2010 within the LIFE project (1,500 copies) with the financial support of the project partner Austrian Power Grid AG (covering printing cost), was handed out to 381 stakeholders by R. Raab. Additional 17 project-municipals and 6 project-partners got an information board till December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

The LIFE programme celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in May 2012. To mark this important milestone in the history of the EU's financial instrument for the environment, the Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation invited a lot of stakeholders to take part in the anniversary with the opening of the new bird watch tower LIFE+ Great Bustard Andau. The anniversary event was organized in Andau and was open for the public and attended by the Federal Minister for the Environment, Niki Berlakovich.

In order to raise acceptance of the large-scale protected areas for Great Bustards in Austria, and of Natura 2000 sites in general, a lot of effort will go into raising public awareness on these issues also in the coming years.

Do farmers, shepherds, political decision makers and local and regional authorities support Great Bustard conservation?  Yes  Partially  No

What are the remaining gaps or problems and how are you going to address them?

A documentary film about the conservation of Great Bustard in Austria could be helpful to communicate the success of the efforts made within the ongoing projects.

## **9. Economic measures**

Have there been any initiatives taken to develop economic activities that are in line with the conservation requirements of Great Bustard in your country?

Yes  Partially  No  Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

What percentage of the population is covered in total by these measures?

- All (>75%)
- Most (50-75%)
- Some (10-49%)
- Little (<10%)
- None
- Not applicable

How effective were these measures?

- Effective (more than 50% of the targeted area is managed according to the species' needs)
- Partially effective (10–49% of the targeted area is managed according to the species' needs)
- Ineffective (less than 10% according to the species' needs)
- Not applicable<sup>1</sup>

## 10. Threats

Please, fill in the table below on main threats to the species in your country. Use the threat scores categories below to quantify their significance at national level. Please, provide an explanation on what basis you have assigned the threat score and preferably provide reference. Add additional lines, if necessary.

### Threat scores:

**Critical:** a factor causing or likely to cause **very rapid declines** (>30% over 10 years).

**High:** a factor causing or likely to cause **rapid declines** (20-30% over 10 years).

**Medium:** a factor causing or likely to cause relatively **slow, but significant, declines** (10-20% over 10 years).

**Low:** a factor causing or likely to cause **fluctuations**.

**Local:** a factor causing local declines but likely to cause **negligible declines at population level**.

**Unknown:** a factor that is likely to affect the species but it is unknown to what extent.

Threat name	Threat score	Explanation and reference
Habitat loss	Local	The minor loss of Great Bustard habitat has no significant effects on the Austrian population.
Losses of eggs and chicks	Low	Influence only in extreme or adverse weather conditions during the breeding period.
Predation	Low	The role of predation in Austria depends obviously on the weather conditions. If the vegetation is developing slowly the pressure of predation is higher.
Collision with powerlines	Until 2006: High, in some areas Critical, since 2006: Low, in some areas Medium	Within the LIFE project a lot of measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of collisions with power lines and additional measures will be implemented within the LIFE+ project.
Human disturbance	Low	The surveillance officers endeavour to keep disturbance of Great Bustards at a low level.
Pesticides	Low	On special Great Bustard protection fields the use of pesticides is forbidden or restricted.
Illegal hunting	Low	Illegal hunting is normally no problem for Great Bustards in Austria.
Extreme or adverse weather conditions during the breeding period (strong downpours of rain, hail and cold periods during the hatching period).	Unknown	Annual fluctuations in breeding success have been observed in the last years.

## PART II. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC ACTIONS

**Please report on the implementation of the country-specific actions listed for your country in Part II of the Action Plan and provide information if that is not already covered by your answers under Part I. Please describe not only the measures taken but also their impact on Great Bustard or its habitat in the context of the objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding and the Action Plan. Where you have already answered on country-specific actions in Part I, please only add a reference to the relevant answer here.**

*Endeavour to extend the ongoing set-aside and habitat management schemes.*

Since the Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Austria in 2001, the ongoing set-aside and habitat management schemes have been extended significantly (see above).

*Ensure the control of all populations locally and the care for breeding females in the field.*

Regular surveillance is carried out in all bustard ranges by a surveillance officer. In all bustard areas in Lower Austria and Burgenland it is Rainer Raab and his co-workers (see above).

*Improve and strengthen cross-border co-operation with neighbouring countries by reviewing and coordinating existing and/or developing new programmes for the research, monitoring and protection of Great Bustards.*

In September 2004 Austria hosted a scientific symposium on Great Bustard conservation and the first meeting of the signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Since the start of the LIFE Projects in Hungary, Slovakia and Austria, the cross-border cooperation on Great Bustard conservation for the common population around the Austrian-Hungarian-Slovakian border has been intensified. In the coming years, cross-border conservation measures will be extended further in this region, but also around the Austrian-Czech border. After Hungary already finished an EU LIFE project, there are ongoing plans that Austria and Hungary will hand in a LIFE+ project for the West-Pannonian population within the next years.

An important step within the next months will be the enlargement of the Austrian Great Bustard database. At the moment Austria has all available data of the West Pannonian population in one cross-border database. In future all available data of the whole Middle-European Population will be in the Austrian database. For example to produce overview distribution maps and to produce detailed maps of the “Important Great Bustard Areas” in all member states of the MoU (see above).