

## **BACKGROUND NOTE ON THE PROGRAMME FOR A TRIAL REINTRODUCTION OF THE GREAT BUSTARD IN GREAT BRITAIN**

The UK Government has agreed to allow a small number of Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) chicks to be introduced into a specific location in Southern England. This is being done as part of a ten year trial programme organised by the Great Bustard Consortium (GBC); comprising the Great Bustard Group (a group of interested individuals), the University of Stirling and the Zoological Society of London.

The release of this species, which has not been present as a breeding bird in the UK for 170 years, required two licences to be obtained from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra): one under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and another under the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Within Great Britain, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 prohibits the release of any animal not present in, or a regular visitor to, Great Britain in a wild state. However it is possible to derogate from this prohibition if the Secretary of State issues a licence for the release. A CITES licence was also required for the importation of the chicks because the Great Bustard is listed on Appendix II of CITES.

Any release of a non-native animal requires careful consideration of the risks to native wildlife and habitats, the donor population and the released animals themselves. In considering the application to licence the release, Defra consulted widely with interested parties including our Statutory Conservation Agencies. The consultation process revealed a number of potential risks:

Risk to native biodiversity. There were particular concerns with regard to the local ecosystem such as the endangered Stone Curlew, with which the Great Bustard may potentially compete for limited resources.

Risk to the Bustards and of failure. There were concerns of licensing a re-introduction attempt which may turn out to be unsuccessful. These concerns were resolved by initially issuing a short-term licence for 'trial' releases.

Risk to the donor population. Although the applicant had sought the backing of the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources, concerns remained about potential adverse effects on the donor population.

All the issues and concerns raised by consultees were resolved through further discussions with consultees, the Great Bustard Consortium and the Russian Bird Conservation Union (Birdlife partner), the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and by placing conditions on the licence, which require review by Defra on an annual basis.

In November 2003 a 10-year trial licence was granted, subject to the Consortium also obtaining a CITES import licence. The licence allows the release of up to 50 birds a year onto the Salisbury Plain and is subject to close monitoring and an annual review. The conditions attached to the licence are extensive; for information a copy of the licence is attached at Annex A. If there are any unforeseen negative impacts, in the UK or abroad, the trial will be terminated.

The first birds are due to be released onto Salisbury Plain (south England) this summer (2004). The project is at far too early a stage for predictions to be made regarding the likelihood of the project leading to the establishment of a self-sustaining breeding population in the wild. The application made by the consortium contained proposed measures of success throughout the project's lifetime, but provided no long-term measures other than an expectation that the first evidence of breeding should occur 5 years after introduction.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the success of this project, which is still in its very early stages, we cannot presently anticipate whether it will be successful in re-introducing a breeding population of Great Bustard in the UK, but will keep this under review. It is therefore considered premature to consider extending the agreement boundary to include the UK as a range state.

## ANNEX A

### DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

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#### LICENCE UNDER SECTION 16 OF THE WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981 FOR THE RELEASE OF GREAT BUSTARD

##### - TRIAL RE-INTRODUCTION LICENCE WCA\02\13 -

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The Secretary of State, in exercise of the powers conferred on her by section 16(4)(C) and section 16(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (“the 1981 Act”) and of all other powers enabling her in that behalf, hereby grants the following licence –

1. This licence applies in respect of the animal species *Otis tarda* known as Great Bustard (“Great Bustard”).
2. Subject to the conditions in paragraph 3 below, section 14(1) of the 1981 Act does not apply to the Great Bustard Consortium (“GBC”) releasing Great Bustard into Salisbury Plain for the purpose of a trial re-introduction.
3. This is not a licence under the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) and the GBC will have to obtain a separate CITES licence for each batch Great Bustard chicks imported.
4. This licence is granted subject to the following conditions –
  - (a) this licence only applies to disease free Great Bustards;
  - (b) the release will be carried out, maintained and monitored as set out in the GBC’s application dated 12 November 2002, and subsequent letter dated 4 April 2003;
  - (c) the Memorandum of Co-operation between GBC and the Russian Academy of Science must remain in force;
  - (d) the GBC must ensure that only eggs from nests in Saratov that are in danger of being destroyed or abandoned as result of agricultural operations are collected;
  - (e) the GBC will terminate egg collection in Saratov if it is discovered to be detrimental to the donor population;
  - (f) the GBC must take reasonable steps to avoid importation into the UK of imprinted Great Bustards, and must not release imprinted Great Bustards into the wild in the UK;
  - (g) the GBC must monitor the health and success of the re-introduced Great Bustard population;

- (h) the GBC must work with the local police in Salisbury to reduce the risk of persecution of the re-introduced Great Bustards;
- (i) the GBC will refer to the release as a trial re-introduction in all press/public communication and materials;
- (j) the GBC must set up a Consultative Committee to advise on the project, and include invitations of representation to JNCC, EN and RSPB; and
- (k) the GBC will supply the Secretary of State with a written report containing detailed information on the releases, at the following intervals: 6 months after the first release, thereafter each year by 1 April.

5. This licence shall be valid until 1 November 2014 subject to satisfactory annual review, and modification or revocation at any time.

Signed .....

**DR L M SMITH**

(Authorised by the Secretary of State for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs to sign in that behalf)

Date .....

**Licence Application Reference Number: WCA\02\13**