

Great Bustard Work Program of Hungary

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 'Conservation of *Otis tarda* in Hungary'
 (Kiskunság National Park, Kecskemét)

Introduction

The species action plan for Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) has been compiled by the experts and all competent national park directorates in Hungarian language. It summarizes most of the activities that have been carried out in Hungary, and determines the necessary actions to be taken in the future. Its last version, a study of 72 pages, was made in 2003. Inter alia with the action plan Hungary submitted a LIFE-Nature Project for the conservation of the Great Bustard countrywide.

Most of the Great Bustard leks and breeding areas in Hungary are situated in protected areas. The protected habitats have further enlarged recently by signing the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA).

Seven different habitats where Great Bustard stocks exist can be separated. These areas in quantity sequence are as follows (with the number of Great Bustard individuals counted in April, 2004 in brackets):

1) Dévaványa area	(463)
2) Kiskunság	(442)
3) Hortobágy	(120)
4) Kisalföld	(116)
5) Bihar	(110)
6) Hevesi-sík	(25)
7) Borsodi Mezőség	(22)
8) Sárrét	(1)

Total: **1299**

General measures

The main goal is to protect all the recently used suitable habitats, and to reduce disturbance in the whole area. As a further step, to improve the habitat conditions, both in the breeding areas (display sites and nesting grounds) and wintering sites.

For that purpose:

Part of the arable lands situated in Great Bustard habitats are planned to be converted into grassland.

It is planned to enlarge the alfalfa fields to provide suitable nesting sites around the breeding areas.

Crop rotation systems will be introduced in some areas providing undisturbed conditions and favorable habitat structure for the Great Bustard.

It is planned to reduce the number of predators, like red fox, badger, hooded crow and magpie, and the feral dogs (or better to say „night-hunting farm-dogs”) as well.

In one of the Great Bustard areas, namely the Borsodi-Mezőség, it is planned to remove and bury an 11-km section of power lines, which causes accidental collisions of 1 to 3 Great Bustard individuals annually.

About 150 ha of foraging fields must be made accessible in case of severe winters.

(This activity needs machines, or another alternative could be the placement of the rape fields on higher, windy parts of the area.)

Large parts of the Great Bustard habitats are in state possession in Hungary. The purchase of the most suitable Great Bustard habitats for the state by the nature conservation authorities is still to be continued.

Continue the practice of regular synchronized censuses carried out annually in springtime, mostly in early April at all Great Bustard habitats in Hungary. Sometimes a winter census is also organized, like in January 2004.

According to MoU paragraphs

4a) The Great Bustard has been legally protected in Hungary since 1970. According to the 13/2001. (V.9.) KöM ministerial decree it is a strictly protected species. It has the highest nature conservation value in Hungary, that is 1 million Ft per individual (approximately 4.000 Euro).

4b) Many of the Great Bustard habitats are situated inside protected areas. Most of the display sites are protected, while many of the scattered nesting places can be situated outside the boundaries of reserves or national parks.

The recent action of the designation process of Special Protected Areas (SPA) under the Natura 2000 network will provide a better coverage of Great Bustard habitats.

Concerning habitat restoration there are measures to be taken in the following years according to the recently proposed LIFE-Nature Project.

- 560 hectares of arable land is planned to be converted into grassland as a habitat restoration measure in four different Great Bustard sites. They are namely: Dévavány, Hortobágy, Kiskunság and Kis-Sárrét.

Recurring and non-recurring management activities are planned in the project to improve breeding and feeding conditions.

- 112 hectares of alfalfa will be established and cut in the areas of Dévaványa, Hevesi-sík and Hortobágy.
- 778 hectares of fallow will be cultivated at Bihar, Hortobágy, Kiskunság and Hevesi-sík.
- 159 hectares of oilseed rape will be sown each year as winter food-source for Great Bustards at Hevesi-sík, Hortobágy and Kiskunság.

4c) The main threats have been identified. They are as follows:

- habitat fragmentation and disturbance
- destruction of nests and females by the agricultural works
- predation
- collision with power lines
- winter mortality due to starvation
- insufficient public support
- insufficient technical and personal capacity

In order to mitigate habitat fragmentation national park directorates have purchased large areas of bustard habitats for nature conservational purposes in the last decades. Therefore large-scale habitat restoration actions could take place, and bustard friendly management measures have been introduced.

To avoid predation, a ~400 hectares enclosure was established in Dévaványa, closing out the foxes and other mammalian predators. It is planned to develop a Predator Management Plan in the frame of the LIFE-Nature project aiming to have a national strategy on the management of foxes, badgers, hooded crows and magpies.

4d) Fortunately, there are only a few recent cases when the Great Bustard abandoned its habitat. One of them is the case of Sárrét (no. 8 area). This area had been abandoned in the 1980s, but due to the proper habitat management the Great Bustard returned in small numbers.

4e) Identification and conservation of the *potential habitats* is very important. As the experiences in Kiskunság show, individuals from the nearby growing populations had moved to and occupied these preserved areas.

4f) Based on sporadic observations the main stopover sites are identified, as well as extraordinary wintering areas used in severe winters.

Planned cross-border measures

Find the way to help countries that want to reintroduce the Great Bustard.

Cooperation with Croatia, in trying to find wintering areas favorable for the Great Bustard, and than improving these wintering sites by cooperative measures. (E.g. establishing rape fields, educating the people in the surrounding areas for Great Bustard protection, forbidding hunting)

Cooperation with Serbia and Montenegro (potential Range State), trying to find the remnant Great Bustard population fragments that might exist in the area of northern Serbia.

Cooperation with Romania (potential Range State), trying to find the remnant Great Bustard population fragments that might exist in the southwestern part of the country.

There is an already existing trilateral cross-border program in the Hungarian-Austrian-Slovakian border for managing the Great Bustard population in this border region for several years.

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