



STATE  
NATURE CONSERVANCY  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



MINISTRY  
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# Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) conservation, overview of the present situation in Slovakia

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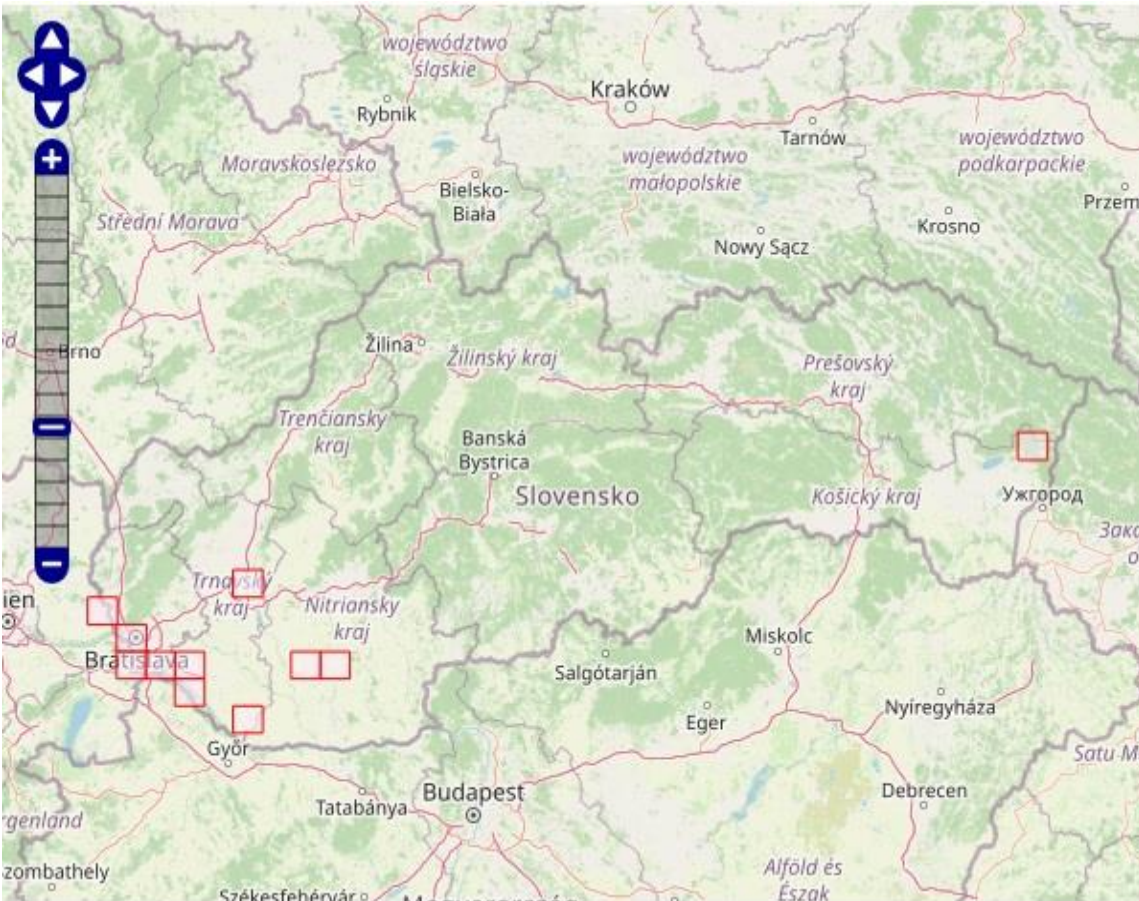
Bratislava, Slovakia







# Distribution and population status of Great Bustard in Slovakia in years 2018-2023



## Distribution map of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) for years 2018-2023 in Slovakia.

Most data come from Sysľovské polia SPA at Bratislava.

Other records: accidental occurrence of individual birds or small flocks (up to 4 birds) 10-80 km from Sysľovské polia SPA reached different sites in Danube Lowlands and Záhorie Lowlands, mostly from end of summer and autumn. One odd record from foothills of the Vihorlat mountains in E Slovakia, July 2022, probably a bird from E Europe.

## Breeding season:

[Sysľovské fields SPA](#) (located close to neighbouring SPAs Moson Plain in Hungary and Parndorfer Platte and Haidenboden in Austria, covering area of the Western-Pannonian population):

For years 2018-2023 breeding population is 1-10 females.

- approved breeding of 4-5 females in 2018 at Sysľovské fields SPA
- breeding of 1 female observed in year 2019
- 3 young birds observed in the flock of adult females on 24.7.2020,
- up to 30 adults in breeding season in 2021, possible breeding of up to 6 females, (1 predated)
- 2 nests located in 2022 with documented offspring and further 2-4 females has probably bred,
- estimated 10 females bred in 2023 at Sysľovské fields SPA.

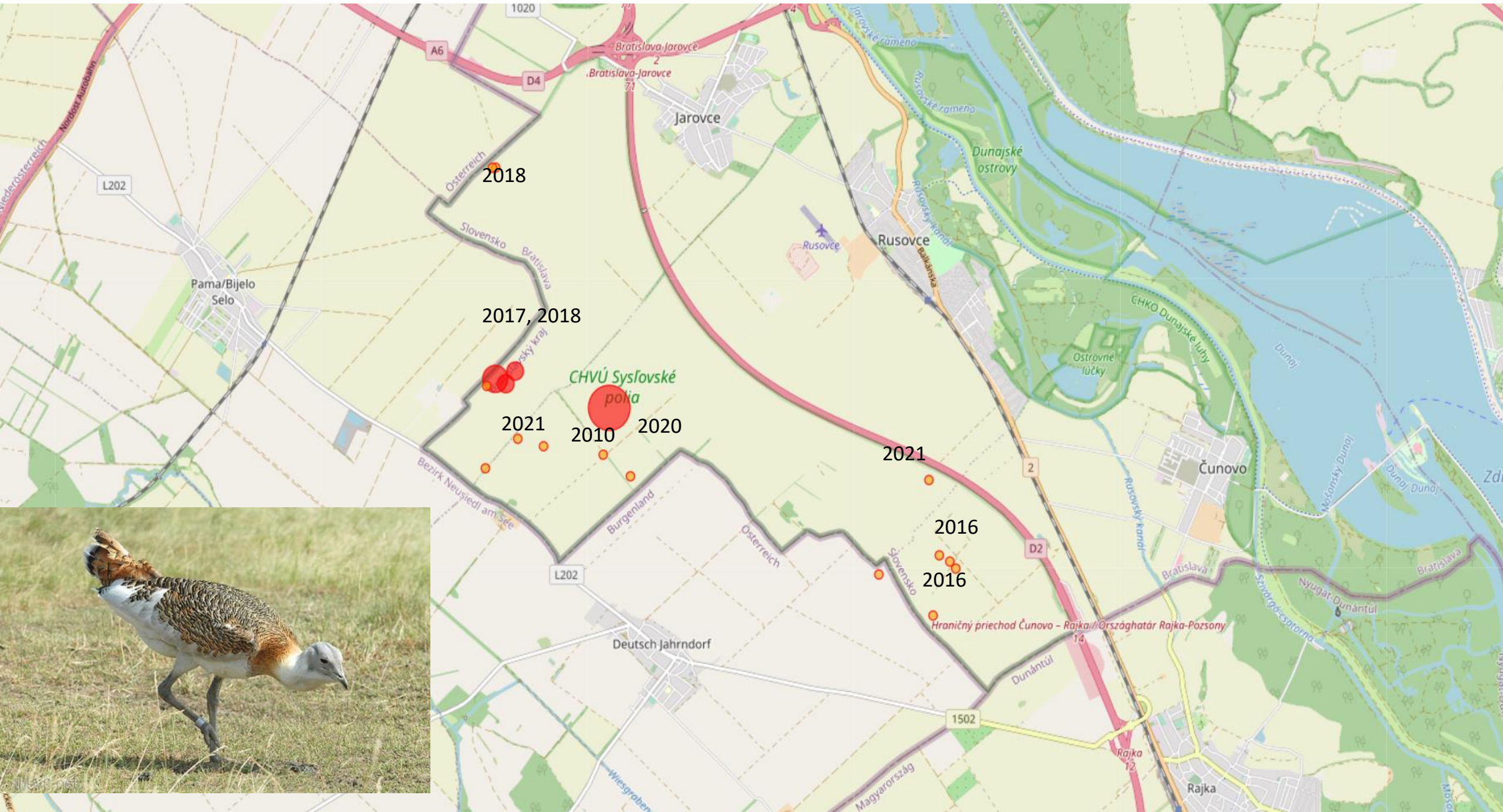
## Non-breeding season:

- 100 – 440 specimens wintering in 2018-2023 (highest number 440 spec. on 10.1.2019).

- These wintering sites are situated at the border with Hungary and Austria and birds come from adjacent Austrian SPAs and Hungarian SPAs.

- Important is, that in some winters up to 70% of breeding population of the Great Bustard in Austria and north-western Hungary is wintering in Slovakia and therefore this SPA Sysľovské fields is a key site for conservation of that species.





# Gradual increase of grasslands at Sysľovské fields SPA

- One of the first grasslands in the area, a plot of SOS/BirdLife Slovakia
- In 2020 7,2 ha of land converted to grassland (0,4 % of all SPA area)
- **In year 2021 finally new 37 ha land converted to grassland** (more than 2 % of area), in total 42 ha, breeding of up to 6 females of Great Bustard (1 predated)
- Further conservation opportunity – town Bratislava has over 100 ha in ownership, a challenge to convert land in suitable way to Great Bustard





- A grassland plot of SOS/BirdLife Slovakia in a distant part of the area, utilised for conservation from 2016, surrounded by breeding habitats of Great Bustards in Austria





6 ha plot of grassland, owned by SNC, in 2022





Another smaller, 1 ha long, grassy plot, a contribution to increase biodiversity of the area





Large plot of fallow land in a corner near Zeiselhof, a compensation from NDS company





Fallow land, 37 ha –  
compensation for motorway





Successful reproduction of Great Bustard in year  
2021





- Syslovské fields SPA, May 2023

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- Immature male of Great Bustard, Sysľovské fields SPA, July 2020







- Syslovské fields SPA, suitable breeding habitat – moderately high wheat in May



- **We have two SPAs designated for protection of Great Bustard in Slovakia:**

- **Sysľovské polia SPA**
- **Lehnice SPA**
- Slovak Government adopted the Management plan developed for Sysľovské polia SPA for period 2017 – 2049 with protection measures for *Otis tarda* population and its habitat.
- Regulations through which respective SPAs have been designated establish restrictions to prevent disturbance of the species, for instance access of public/visitors to SPA is prohibited, except on short nature trail on the edge of SPA Sysľovské polia;
- A new part of the area has been made accessible for the public in 2023 through a nature trail + bike-route at a limited part of the SPA with a temporary access from 1<sup>st</sup> July – 30<sup>th</sup> September in Sysľovské fields SPA





- Lehnice SPA, area designed for conservation of Great Bustard. Last proved breeding of 1 female occurred in 2010, but still suitable habitats are available at the site.

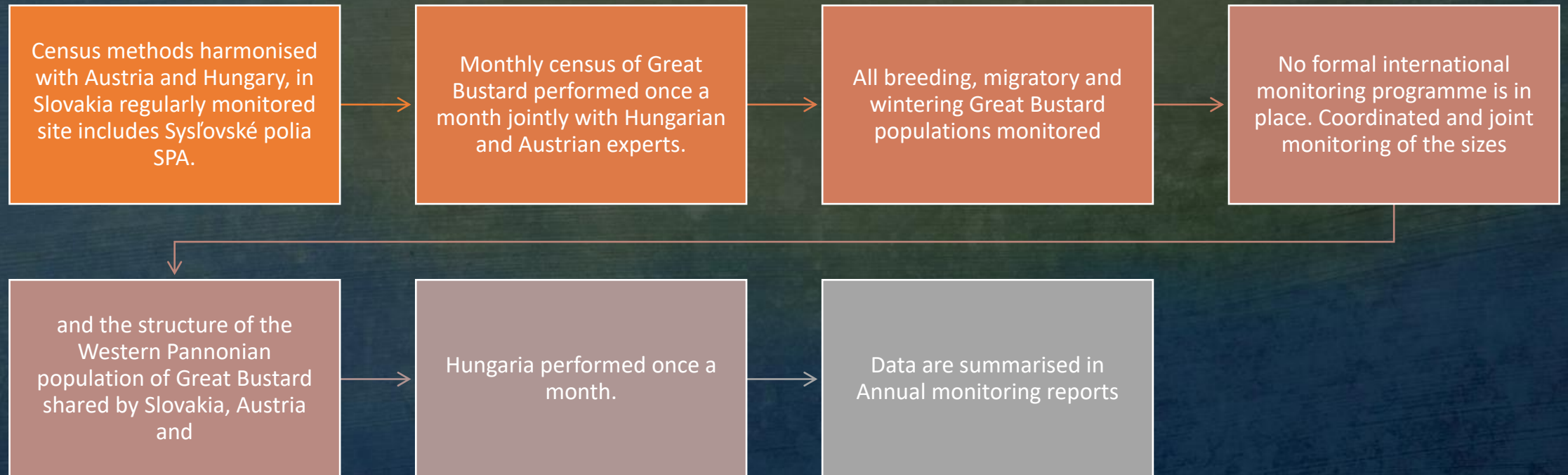




- Lehnice SPA



# Monitoring of population of Great Bustard





# Existing legislation measures at the national level

- **Act. No. 543/2002 Coll on Nature and Landscape Protection** as amended Order of the Ministry of the Environment of Slovak Republic No. 170/2021 Coll which implements Act No. 543/2002 Coll which implement EU Habitat and Birds Directives
- According to national legislation societal value of the species is established at **30 000** €/specimen
- Species is also protected by **the Act No. 15/2005 Coll** on the conservation of wild animals and plants by regulating trade
- According to **Act No. 274/2009 Coll on Hunting** as amended the species is included as all-year round protected game species. More restrictions by Order of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic to establish the SPAs - No. 377/2005 Coll (Lehnice SPA) and No. 234/2006 Coll (Sysľovské polia SPA):
- Hunting restrictions in Lehnice SPA: Prohibited hunting from 16. 1. to 15. 5. except for predators (fox, martens, raccoon dog, European polecat). Prohibited falconry. Hunting restrictions in Sysľovské polia SPA: Prohibited falconry within the whole area of the SPA, prohibited hunting from 1. 1. to 30. 6. except for predators within the specified part of the SPA, prohibited hunting on all goose and duck species within the specified part of the SPA.
- Rescue programme for better conservation of Great Bustard has been approved in 2000, realised in 2001 - 2005.
- In 2023 – 2024 the program was updated.
- Management plan developed for Sysľovské polia SPA for period 2018 – 2047 with protection measures for Great Bustard population and its habitat, the program was approved by the government.



# Threats

## **Habitat loss**

The Sysľovské polia SPA has been designated for conservation of Great Bustard. It has an approved management plan, as well. Still, suitable breeding habitats are not very abundant at the site. These include: wheat fields, fallow land (2 nests in 2023 were located at fallow land), balk between two fields. During non-breeding season, especially in winter time rape seed fields are important feeding sites for the species. Habitat loss includes a lack of some of above mentioned habitat types due to improper management of agricultural land.

## **Intensive agriculture**

Despite to existence of an approved management plan, intensive agriculture still remains a threat at Sysľovské polia SPA. Most of fields are large scale plots, with low diversity. Even if Great Bustards are used to agriculture machinery, besides of disturbance of birds also some nest damage has occurred (at least 2 documented cases). Injured bird in April 2023 found at Tomášov 30 km NE from Sysľovské fields, immature male, died after injuries.

## **Predation**

Significant predator species are fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), stone marten (*Martes foina*), some Corvidae species and stray dogs. One nest has been predated at Sysľovské polia SPA in May 2023, probably by fox.

## **Disturbance**

Disturbance can be caused by agricultural machinery (nest damage, disturbance of incubating birds, etc.) and by visitors, tourists. To most parts of the Sysľovské fields SPA human entrance is restricted (except agricultural management), apart from a nature trail functioning in 2023 from July till end of September.



# Projects supporting conservation of Great Bustard

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- Project LIFE „Conservation of Great Bustard in Slovakia“ has been realised from 08/01/2005 till 31/12/2009.
- Project LIFE13 NAT/SK/001272 “*Energy in the Landscape - power lines and conservation of priority bird species in the Natura 2000 sites*” has been implemented since 2014. It is the first project with a systematic approach to solving the problem of bird collisions with power lines through the design of suitable methods for the identification and elimination of risks. The project area included Lehnice SPA.
- The Slovak RDP 2014–2020 was approved by the European Commission on 04/02/2015 and it includes several measures for biodiversity protection. The AES for Great Bustard with title "The Great Bustard Protection" with the scope for support for 3000 ha of arable land.
- The AES is applicable in Sysľovské polia and Lehnice SPAs, both areas designated for the protection of Great Bustard in Slovakia.
- Ongoing project:
  - LIFE Steppe on Border. Long-term conservation of Great Bustard and Red-footed Falcon in border region of Hungary and Slovakia. LIFE20 NAT/SK/001077. Start date: 01/02/2022 , end date: 30/04/2027. The LIFE STEPPE ON BORDER project aims to prevent the extinction, and support the long-term growth of populations, of the red-footed falcon (*Falco vespertinus*) and the great bustard (*Otis tarda*) in the Slovakia-Hungary-Austria region, on the western border of the distribution ranges for breeding population of both species in Central Europe.



Thank you for your attention

