



**CONVENTION ON  
MIGRATORY  
SPECIES**

UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.32.2.7

8 June 2023

Original: English

14<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES  
Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 12 – 17 February 2024  
Agenda Item 32.2

**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONCERTED ACTION  
FOR THE GREAT BUSTARD IN ASIA\***

Summary:

The Government of Mongolia, Eurasian Bustard Alliance and Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia have submitted the attached report on the implementation of the Concerted Action for the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) in Asia, UNEP/CMS/Concerted Action 12.8.

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## REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONCERTED ACTION FOR THE GREAT BUSTARD IN ASIA

### UNEP/CMS/CONCERTED ACTION 12.8

#### 1. CONCERTED ACTION

Title: Concerted Action for the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) in Asia

Document number: UNEP/CMS/Concerted Action 12.8

2. This report is completed by the Government of Mongolia, along with the Eurasian Bustard Alliance and Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia.

#### 3. TARGET SPECIES/POPULATION

Class: Aves

Family: Otididae

Order: Otidiformes

Species: *Otis tarda*

Population: Asia

#### 4. PROGRESS IN ACTIVITIES

This report describes activities during the second triennium of the Concerted Action (2020-2023), as document UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.28.1.8 covered activities during the initial phase of the Concerted Action (2017-2020).

The development of a revised Action Plan for the Great Bustard in Asia has been a central focus of the current Concerted Action. Over thirty regional experts working in all Asian range states of the Great Bustard have contributed data and review to this document. The Plan contains detailed range maps, a list of sites important to the conservation of this species in each country, threat rankings and recommended actions. Funding was identified in the form of a small IUCN SSC EDGE grant to format the final document and translate the text into three major regional languages: Chinese, Mongolian and Russian. The revised Action Plan is submitted to CMS COP14.

Research activities have included:

- The existing Great Bustard Research Center in northwestern Iran was equipped by Department of Environment, and annual surveys are undertaken of the remaining population in Boukan.
- During 2020 and 2021, winter surveys were conducted in Uzbekistan within the framework of a project led by Uzbekistan Society for Protection of Birds (UzSPB). As Great Bustards gather in larger flocks in winter, these surveys have played an important role in establishing the regional population size and identifying sites for conservation action.
- Annual surveys in Kyrgyzstan have identified a small wintering group and a small breeding group of Great Bustards.
- Range country researchers produced articles for a special volume of the journal *Sandgrouse*, edited by IUCN SSC Bustard Specialist Group Co-chairs. The 17 articles within it comprehensively cover the Great Bustard's range in Central Asia, and describe the status, threats to, and recommendations for conservation of the

species in this region (Fedosov & Dzhamirzoyev 2022; Kashkarov & Mitropolskaya 2022; Farajli 2022; Muratov & Talbonov 2022; Rustamov 2022; Nefedov 2022; Koshkin *et al.* 2022; Kulagin 2022; Shakula, Shakula, Shakula, *et al.* 2022; Prokopov 2022; Wang & Yang 2022; Shakula, Shakula, Baskakova, *et al.* 2022; Kessler & Bidashko 2022; Özgencil *et al.* 2022; Abdulkarimi 2022; Kessler 2022; Kessler & Collar 2022). An online supplement to the volume provides translation of findings of each article into a major language of that country.

- Experts in Asia contributed data towards a scientific article reviewing the extent of bustard collisions with powerlines and effectiveness of mitigation (Silva *et al.* 2023).
- A team of Mongolian and Chinese researchers published findings from satellite monitoring of Great Bustards breeding in Eastern Mongolia (Wang *et al.* 2022).
- Researchers in southern Kazakhstan analyzed twenty years of Great Bustard survey counts (Shakula *et al.* 2021).
- Coordinated winter surveys of Great Bustard were published in Turkmenistan (Khodzhamurdov & Rustamov 2020) and Uzbekistan (Ten *et al.* 2020).
- Transboundary (Mongolia - Russian Federation) breeding season counts in the Onon River Basin were undertaken and published (Malkov 2022).
- A research group in eastern China investigated the extent of genetic differentiation and population structure across the non-breeding distribution in the Eastern Great Bustard (Liu *et al.* 2022).
- In western China, a group analyzed habitat suitability for the Western Great Bustard (Zhuo *et al.* 2021).
- At seven Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) for Great Bustards in China, community conservation teams continue to conduct censuses of overwintering Great Bustards. These CCAs were established by China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation.

Conservation activities have included:

- Through efforts of the Mongolian Government and the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia, the newly established Khurkh Khuiten Nature Reserve in eastern Mongolia protects an important breeding area for the Eastern Great Bustard.
- The Department of Environment of Iran purchased 23 ha of land for conservation of the last remaining population of Great Bustards in the country. Borders of these habitats were marked, and informational boards were installed containing information about the Sootav and Hammamian Plain Wildlife Refuge. A 360-degree online surveillance camera was installed inside the area.
- Awareness raising programmes at this refuge have resulted in farmers leaving 100-1000 m<sup>2</sup> areas of their fields unharvested until chicks are large enough to leave the area. To support this contribution to conservation, the Department of Environment of Iran purchased the product of 40 ha of these agricultural lands from the relevant farmers.
- A quarantine center for Great Bustards was established by Department of Environment of Iran.
- Iran's Nature Tourism Center in cooperation with GEF, SGP, UNDP and the Department of Environment implemented the project "Participatory conservation of Great Bustard through local communities of villages around Dashte Soutav in Bukan to raise awareness and engage local communities in the conservation of the species.

- An Important Bird and Biodiversity Area description has been prepared for a wintering site in Uzbekistan by Juru Energy Consulting. The process of designating the site as an IBA is planned for 2023. Reports on the supporting research have been sent to the Uzbekistan State Committee on Ecology and are currently with the Ministry of Natural Resources.
- Funding was secured from Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund in spring 2023 for conservation activities for the transboundary Great Bustard population in southern Kazakhstan and northern Uzbekistan. The grant will be implemented by Biodiversity Research and Conservation Center (BRCC-Kazakhstan) and UzSPB. The grant is managed by Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU-Germany) and advised by Eurasian Bustard Alliance (EBA).
- A capacity-building project was initiated in Iran with the support of an IUCN SSC Internal Grant. This project undertakes development of a new carpet design depicting Great Bustards, training and supplying of materials to carpet weavers at the only remaining Great Bustard site in Iran. This work develops alternative livelihoods and local pride in the species.
- A two-year project on conservation of the Great Bustard was undertaken in Eastern Siberia (the Russian Federation) by Daursky Nature Reserve and WWF. This work included production of videos, media interviews, and printed outreach materials including an educational pamphlet for hunters.
- Community visits and surveys were conducted near a Great Bustard wintering site in the Beijing metropolitan area, with the aim of developing a mechanism for long-term protection of the agricultural site.
- CCA community patrols continue to monitor for dangers to Great Bustards, and communicate with Forestry Officials about activities of concern. Community conservation teams undertake public awareness campaigns and distribute educational materials at CCAs. At Cangzhou CCA, wheat farmers spread poison baits across their seeded fields to reduce intrusion by sheep herders. However, this results in poisoning of birds including Great Bustards. CCA volunteers work to reduce this conflict between wheat farmers and sheep herders.
- CCAs along the Yellow River region in Henan and Shandong Provinces collaborate on conservation activities.
- A CCA in Jinzhou has worked to reduce extensive winter burning of farmland which reduces food availability to wintering Great Bustards

## 5. CHANGES TO THE CONCERTED ACTION

The draft of the revised Action Plan for Great Bustards in Asia was compiled as planned. In-person activities over the past triennium were constrained by the coronavirus pandemic, during which many nations closed their borders for extended periods. Instead of an in-person meeting, draft review by data contributors and experts was conducted online during the global coronavirus pandemic and the revised consultation draft presented electronically to CMS focal points of participating countries. An in-person discussion was held at the fourth meeting of Range States to the Central Asian Flyway (CMS CAF4).

It was intended that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea would be invited to join the Concerted Action, as historically, the Eastern subspecies of Great Bustard regularly wintered in the Korean Peninsula and is known to still utilize these wintering sites to some degree. However, contact became challenging after national closures due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Turkmenistan, an important winter range state of the Great Bustard in Asia, became a Party to CMS in 2021.

We propose an extension of the Concerted Action into the coming triennium, with suggested activities to include:

- Sharing of information and best practices between range countries
- Coordinated and synchronized winter counts of Great Bustards across the flyway of the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Data sharing concerning the numbers of birds counted will inform understanding of regional population size and fluctuations. Information about the date and location of Great Bustard flocks will be shared to assist anti-poaching activities, including public outreach.

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## 7. ACTION

Action renewed.

The aims of the second triennium of the Concerted Action are completed. We recommend extension of the Concerted Action. The Government of Mongolia welcomes one of the participating Parties to undertake leadership of the Concerted Action in the coming triennium.