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### **Big birds lose out in a crowded world**

One of the world's largest species of bird is on the brink of extinction according to the 2011 IUCN Red List™ for birds, just released by BirdLife International.

Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* has been uplisted to Critically Endangered, the highest level of threat. Hunting, disturbance, habitat loss and fragmentation have all conspired to reduce this magnificent species to perhaps as few as 250 individuals.

Standing a metre in height and weighing in at nearly 15 kg, Great Indian Bustard was once widespread across the grasslands of India and Pakistan but is now restricted to small and isolated fragments of remaining habitat.

"In an ever more crowded world, species that need lots of space, such as the Great Indian Bustard, are losing out. However, we are the ones who lose in the long run, as the services that nature provides us start to disappear", said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife's Director of Science and Policy.

This year's update brings the total number of threatened bird species to 1,253, an alarming 13% of the world total.

"Birds provide a window on the rest of nature. They are very useful indicators of ecosystem health: if they are faring badly, then so is wildlife more generally", said Dr Stuart Butchart, BirdLife's Global Research and Indicators Coordinator. "The changes we have documented in this year's update will feed into the Red List Index for birds, a measure of trends in the state of the planet used by the world governments, global businesses and the United Nations, among others".

Another species on the edge is Bahama Oriole *Icterus northropi*, also newly listed as Critically Endangered. Recent survey work suggests the population of this beautiful black and yellow Caribbean bird could be as low as 180 individuals. The orioles live in mature woodland, and nest in coconut palms. Lethal yellowing disease of these palms has wiped out nesting trees in areas where the oriole was previously common but is now absent. However, apart from losing nesting habitat, the oriole is also threatened by the recent arrival of the Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis* – a brood parasite that lays its eggs in other species' nests

“Although the situation appears bleak for many species, this year’s update does highlight several species where targeted conservation work has turned around their fortunes”, said Andy Symes, BirdLife’s Global Species Programme Officer.

Campbell Island Teal *Anas nesiotis* has benefitted from a massive programme to eradicate rats, plus captive-breeding of remaining individuals. The species has now returned to New Zealand’s Campbell Island and the majority of birds are now thriving, resulting in a reclassification of the threat status to Endangered.

Three species of Atlantic island pigeon are also benefitting from conservation. Madeira, White-tailed and Dark-tailed Laurel Pigeon (*Columba trocaz* of Madeira and *C. junoniae* and *C. bollii* of the Canary Islands) have all been classified at lower threat levels after threats such as habitat loss and hunting were addressed, coupled with an increased protection of suitable habitat.

“In the space of a year another 13 bird species have moved into the threatened categories”, said Jean-Christophe Vié, Deputy Director, IUCN Global Species Programme. “This is a disturbing trend; however the figure would be much worse if conservation initiatives were not in place. The information collected by the BirdLife partnership is crucial in helping us to continue improving conservation efforts. This is now more important than ever as the biodiversity crisis is already affecting our wellbeing and will continue to do so unless we do more to stop it.”

“Birds are so intertwined with human culture all around the world that they present a very visible picture of the state of nature. Good examples abound of how we can save threatened birds. We need to redouble our efforts to do so, otherwise we risk not just losing magnificent creatures like the Great Indian Bustard, but unravelling the whole fabric of our life-support systems”, said Dr Bennun.

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### Notes for Editors

1. BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries and territories that, together, are the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting them.
2. BirdLife is the Red List Authority for birds for the IUCN Red List. Categories include: Critically Endangered (facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild), Endangered (facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild), Vulnerable (facing a high risk of extinction in the wild), Near Threatened (close to qualifying for Vulnerable) and Least Concern (species not qualifying for the other categories, including widespread and abundant species). Species are assigned to categories using criteria with quantitative thresholds for population size, population trend, range size and other parameters. For more information visit: <http://www.iucnredlist.org>
3. Total number of species recognised by BirdLife is 10,052. Number of species by category as follows: Extinct 132; Extinct in Wild 4; Critically Endangered 189; Endangered 381; Vulnerable 683; Near Threatened 843; Least Concern 7757; Data Deficient 62.
4. To learn more and read case studies on threatened species visit <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb/spotthreatbirds>
5. For more species, regional and country information about the IUCN Red List visit the BirdLife Data Zone
6. To find out more about the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme visit [www.birdlife.org/extinction](http://www.birdlife.org/extinction)

7. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ (or the IUCN Red List) is the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of plant and animal species. It is based on an objective system for assessing the risk of extinction of a species should no conservation action be taken. Species are assigned to one of eight categories of threat based on whether they meet criteria linked to population trend, population size and structure and geographic range. Species listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable are collectively described as 'Threatened'. The IUCN Red List is not just a register of names and associated threat categories. It is a rich compendium of information on the threats to the species, their ecological requirements, where they live, and information on conservation actions that can be used to reduce or prevent extinctions. [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org) The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is a joint effort between IUCN and its Species Survival Commission, working with its Red List partners BirdLife International, Conservation International's Center for Applied Biodiversity Science, NatureServe, and the Zoological Society of London.
8. IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges by supporting scientific research; managing field projects all over the world; and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN, international conventions and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice. The world's oldest and largest global environmental network, IUCN is a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists and experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. IUCN's headquarters are located in Gland, near Geneva, in Switzerland. [www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)

### **Other regional highlights**

#### **Americas**

Pale-headed Brush-finch *Atlapetes pallidiceps* has been downlisted from Critically Endangered to Endangered.

Black-backed Thornbill *Ramphomicron dorsale* has been uplisted from Least Concern to Endangered.

#### **Pacific**

Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* has been uplisted from Near Threatened to Endangered.

Samoan Flycatcher *Myiagra albiventris* has been downlisted from Vulnerable to Near Threatened

#### **Asia**

Sula Megapode *Megapodius bernsteinii* has been uplisted from Near Threatened to Vulnerable

White-throated Wren-babbler *Rimotor pasquieri* has been uplisted from Least Concern to Endangered

#### **Africa**

Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius* has been uplisted from Least Concern to Vulnerable.

Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* has been uplisted from Least Concern to Endangered.

#### **Europe and the Middle East**

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* has been downlisted from Vulnerable to Least Concern

Socotra Buzzard *Buteo socotraensis* is newly described and has been listed as Vulnerable.

To find out more about all these and other species visit

[www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/search](http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/search)