



GLOBAL FLYWAYS SUMMIT, APRIL 23-26 2018

Bustard conservation: status, trends and achievements

Bustards are one of the most threatened bird families, with 31% of the 26 species threatened with extinction, a further 27% considered Near Threatened, and several species in very rapid decline. Much greater global attention and action is needed for bustards to reverse their rapidly deteriorating situation. The threats and solutions needed are broadly similar across many of these species, and the following actions were highlighted as being priorities for bustard conservation overall:

- Manage **farmland habitats** (particularly extensive, contiguous areas) in ways that are compatible with bustard ecology
- Bury the most dangerous **powerlines**, re-route or mark other powerlines with anti-collision devices, and research further the most effective designs for such devices
- Minimise the impacts of **roads and fences**; and ensure that the needs of bustards are reflected in Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments
- Wherever possible and appropriate, manage **protected areas** for bustards (especially for the threatened species)
- Ensure that **illegal killing/poaching** is strictly prevented; and ensure that **hunting** of Asian and African Houbara is regulated and sustainable
- **Raise awareness** through education and communications to build understanding and support for bustard conservation
- Develop **multi-stakeholder global action plans** integrating the range of solutions needed and identifying immediate and long-term actions

Bustards are excellent **flagship species** for steppe/grassland/ farmland bird communities, hence conserving bustards helps to conserve grassland habitats and biodiversity more generally. Furthermore, all bustard species depend on 'cultural landscapes', so conserving bustards requires supporting rural livelihoods to deliver bustard-compatible land-management.

Strong commitment and excellent progress has been made with the conservation of Houbara species, with major efforts being led by the

IFHC. However, given the serious declines in a number of bustard species, particularly Great Indian Bustard, eastern populations of Great Bustard, Little Bustard, and Bengal and Lesser Florican, greater international coordination and cooperation are needed. The session recommended exploring the potential and opportunity to advance the conservation of these species under the UN Convention on Migratory Species, including considering adding some of these species to the CMS appendices, and potentially following the approach that has been taken to support conservation of vultures through developing a **CMS multi-species action plan**.

Building on examples of particular successes and positive outcomes, the following species-specific priority actions were identified (see also Annex 1):

Lesser Florican

1. **Improve breeding success** through: establishing carefully designed predator-proof-fencing in protected areas with breeding floricans; prohibiting livestock grazing in breeding sites during July–August; and removing free-ranging dogs from breeding sites
2. **Manage habitat in protected areas** supporting floricans to promote mosaics of short and tall grass, and by removing excessive shrubs such as *Prosopis*
3. **Reduce habitat loss outside protected areas** by a) consolidating priority sites as Conservation Reserves; b) curtailing infrastructure/industrial growth in important landscapes, even if categorised as 'wastelands' by government; and c) incentivising florican-friendly land-uses
4. Garner public support through **outreach programs** to link florican conservation with improved livelihood/health outcomes
5. Undertake **research and monitoring** to improve knowledge of the status of different populations and to better understand non-breeding ecology using tracking/telemetry

Bengal Florican

1. Strictly prevent encroachment on key **protected areas**, and

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ensure that the species' conservation needs are considered as fully as those of other high profile species in evidence-based management

2. **Outside protected areas**, work with farmers to ensure bustard-friendly practices (e.g. in Cambodia, farm dry-season rice in a way that enables Bengal Florican to breed successfully, potentially with legume fallows and maintaining deep-water rice and extensive grazing regimes elsewhere)
3. Encourage local communities and other stakeholders to manage a **network of private or community grasslands and other habitats** suitable for this species
4. Undertake **habitat restoration** to aid recolonization of birds to former breeding locations, especially in corridors connecting key breeding populations
5. Mitigate the risk of collision from **powerlines** (including through determining the most effective means of marking lines)
6. Eliminate targeted and incidental **poaching**
7. Promote the species as a **flagship for the terai grassland and floodplain ecosystems** in India and Nepal
8. Consider adding the species to the **CMS appendices**
9. **Improve the understanding** of nesting ecology, habitat requirements, non-breeding season movements and threats to birds in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in north-east India

Great Indian Bustard

1. **Improve breeding success** by ensuring that breeding areas are seasonally strictly protected, through patrolling and use of carefully designed predator-proof fencing
2. Reduce mortality risk through: a) mitigating impacts of **infrastructure (particularly powerlines)** in high-risk areas; b) raising public support for companies to implement the government decree requiring them to address risks in sensitive areas; and c) strengthening planning requirements/implementation to consider potential impacts on this species
3. Build local support through linking bustard conservation with improved **livelihoods**, including through relevant incentives
4. Develop a **conservation breeding program** to 'buy time', act as insurance and for reintroduction, and/or explore 'head-starting' for increasing reproductive success. The former should not lessen the urgency of in situ measures to retain opportunities for subsequent reintroduction. Addressing existing threats, particularly powerlines, is a prerequisite for reintroduction and head-starting.
5. Consider adding the species to the **CMS appendices**

6. **Improve understanding** of the size of the population in Pakistan and its connectedness to Indian populations; **consider trans-boundary conservation initiatives**

Great Bustard and Little Bustard

1. Reduce **powerline** collisions by a) burial, re-routing and marking; b) requiring the route and design of any new powerlines to take into account their potential impact on bustards
2. Reform the **EU Common Agricultural Policy** to include incentives for farming that support suitable habitat for Great and Little Bustard and other grassland birds particularly in relation to the management of Special Protection Areas
3. Strengthen the current network of **EU Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** for bustards, particularly in Spain, and manage SPAs appropriately, including through agri-environment measures that promote key breeding and post-breeding habitat
4. **Eliminate poaching and poisoning** through: a) enforcement of existing laws; b) development of flexible mobile enforcement units that can respond to bustard movements; c) increased training; d) media outreach; e) support to local engagement in conservation; and f) funding to support these
5. Implement additional **locally relevant measures** including control of dogs, limiting steppe fires, and protecting suitable habitat
6. Implement the **CMS Action Plan** for the central European population of Great Bustard, and update and implement the Action Plan for Asian populations.
7. Consider adding Little Bustard to the **CMS appendices** and developing an **action plan**

African and Asian Houbara

1. Adopt an integrated approach, combining **in-situ and ex-situ conservation** measures
2. Devote research and resources to understanding and reducing the impact of **unregulated hunting and illegal killing**
3. Address **trapping for falcon training** (e.g. through promoting use of captive-bred birds)
4. Mitigate **powerline** collision risk, including investigating the most effective design of markers
5. Strengthen **international collaboration** for Houbara conservation, including greater collaboration in research activities

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Annex 1. Table of conservation actions and research needs for the most threatened bustard species.

	Key sites	Wider landscapes	Powerlines & other infrastructure	Illegal killing & hunting	Other interventions	Communications	Research needs
Lesser Florican	Predator-proof fences; prevent grazing; eliminate dogs; promote grass mosaics; remove shrubs	Curtail infrastructure & industrial growth; incentivise florican-friendly land-uses				Outreach linking florican conservation with improved livelihood/health outcomes	Status of different populations; non-breeding ecology
Great Indian Bustard	Seasonal strict protection; patrol; predator-proof fences	Strengthen planning requirements & implementation	Prioritize high risk areas where infrastructure development (particularly powerlines) is controlled		Develop conservation breeding program to 'buy time', act as insurance and for reintroduction; and/or explore 'head-starting'	Build local support by linking bustard conservation with improved livelihoods. Build public support to force powerline companies to respond to government decree	Pakistan population size & connectedness to Indian populations; movements (radio-telemetry studies)
Bengal Florican	Strictly prevent encroachment; integrate species' needs into management plans. Consider habitat restoration in former breeding locations	Ensure bustard-friendly farming (e.g.in Cambodia, farm dry season rice appropriately)	Mitigate collision risk (incl. through determining the most effective means of marking lines)	Eliminate poaching		Promote the species as a flagship for the terai grassland and floodplain ecosystems	Habitat requirements, nesting ecology, non-breeding season movements and threats to birds in India and Nepal
Great & Little Bustard	Protect key sites, implement agri-environment measures to improve breeding habitat	Reform CAP to incentivise farming that supports suitable habitat; regulations and/or incentives for compatible farming	Reduce powerline collisions by burial, re-routing and marking; and require the route and design of any new powerlines to consider their potential impact on bustards	Eliminate poaching and poisoning through law enforcement; mobile enforcement units; training; and funding to support these	Revise & implement Action Plan for Asian populations of Great Bustard; locally relevant measures incl. dog control, fire management; promote conservation in Morocco	Media outreach to support local engagement	Population censuses in key countries; movements in Eastern Europe and Asia; causes of reproductive failure in Asia
African & Asian Houbara	Protect key sites	Manage important areas sensitively	Mitigate powerline collision risk	Address unregulated hunting illegal killing & trapping for falcon training (e.g. through promoting use of captive-bred birds)	Adopt an integrated approach, combining in-situ and ex-situ conservation. Strengthen international collaboration	Local engagement	Strengthen collaboration in research activities; investigate powerline markers design

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