

## **Fourth Meeting of the Signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of the Middle-European Population of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*)**

*Bad Belzig, Germany, 14 – 15 March 2018*

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UNEP/CMS/GB/MOS4/REPORT

### **REPORT OF THE MEETING**

*Prepared by the Secretariat*

#### **Agenda Item 1.0: Welcoming remarks**

1. Dr. Caroline Schilde, State Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development, Environment and Agriculture of the Federal State of Brandenburg (interpreted by Dr. Torsten Langgemach, Brandenburg State Agency for Environment (LfU), Germany), opened the Meeting, welcoming participants. She especially welcomed the participants from Poland, emphasizing the fact that the State of Brandenburg would like to support their reintroduction efforts. She also thanked the Society for the Protection of Great Bustard (Förderverein Großtrappenschutz e. V.) for supporting the meeting.
2. Dr. Schilde pointed out that it was not only important to have good habitat, as predators and climatic variables played a major role for the Great Bustard populations as well. Germany benefitted from the experience of other countries with Great Bustard populations, especially Hungary and Austria.
3. She explained that the Great Bustard had been almost extinct in Germany, but thanks to conservation measures, the population had recovered. Dr. Schilde pointed out that, based on her experience, long-term conservation was only possible with involvement of the human communities. It was not “nature against humans”, she explained.
4. She wished all participants the best and was delighted that so many people had come to Brandenburg, thanking the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and all other participants for attending.
5. Mr. Klaus Rheda, State Secretary of the Ministry for the Environment, Agriculture and Energy of Saxony-Anhalt (interpreted by Mr. Oliver Schall, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany), expressed his gratitude for the invitation. He emphasized the good cooperation between the State of Brandenburg and the State of Saxony-Anhalt. Although the population in Saxony-Anhalt was still small, he saw the need to increase it in the future, cooperating with farmers, hunters and conservationists in the area. With the help of EU funding, Great Bustard habitat could be restored.

6. The State of Saxony-Anhalt was thinking about opening spaces for Great Bustards, specifically in the protected area, Zerbster Land. One difficulty of reintroducing individuals into this area was the amount of wind farms between this area and the already occupied ones. He too was happy that so many international experts were attending the meeting and thanked all participants.
7. Mr. Oliver Schall, CMS Liaison Officer at the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), Germany, welcomed the participants. He pointed out that on this day, a new government was being formed with a new Minister for the Environment. Nevertheless, there were promising indications that there would be continuity at policy level. He emphasized continuity as an important value for conservation. Many Germans might not know what a Great Bustard was and more public awareness raising would be needed. He was happy about the organization of the press conference, which was going to take place a few minutes later.
8. He thanked the States of Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt for their work on Great Bustard conservation and thanked the State of Brandenburg for hosting the meeting, as well as CMS for co-organizing it. The BMU provided support by co-financing this MOU Meeting and through the position of Mr. Tilman Schneider (CMS) as a Junior Professional Officer (JPO). He was happy to see this Memorandum of Understanding so successful. He thanked all participants in many different languages.
9. Mr. Marcus Borchert, Chairman of the Society for the Protection of Great Bustard (Förderverein Großtrappenschutz e.V.), welcomed all participants. He looked forward to useful and helpful results. He was pleased that this Meeting of Signatories was taking place in Brandenburg and that his NGO was able to support the preparation. He especially thanked Mr. Henrik Watzke (Förderverein Großtrappenschutz e.V.) for his continuous efforts before and during the meeting.
10. Mr. Borchert pointed out, that the conservation of the Great Bustard was a great example for good cooperation between governments and NGOs. He emphasized that the philosophy of his NGO was strong involvement of all stakeholders. Balancing the interests of all stakeholders was very important. The Great Bustard was a flagship species and protecting the Great Bustard meant supporting biodiversity. He wished the participants good and productive days.
11. Dr. Bradnee Chambers (CMS Executive Secretary) welcomed the participants through a video message. He especially welcomed the Range States and expressed hopes for more signatories. He urged the participants to make steady progress and to convert ideas into actions. He thanked Austria and Hungary for their great conservation effort with burying power lines.
12. Mr. Borja Heredia, Head of the Avian Team at the CMS Secretariat, welcomed all participants to the meeting. He thanked Germany, especially the BMU, for its support. He emphasized the importance of the Great Bustard and the privilege of having this species in Europe. The Great Bustard was a good indicator for environmental quality and sustainable agriculture. It served as an umbrella species for many others. He referred to the field trip on the previous day, pointing out that conservation was compatible with agriculture. The global population of the Great Bustard was now included in Appendix I of CMS, affording the species maximum international protection. CMS also focused on the Asian population, where there were still significant knowledge gaps. He and his staff would give all support for a successful meeting.

#### **Agenda item 2.0: Election of officers**

13. Mr. Borja Heredia (CMS) suggested Dr. Torsten Langgemach from Germany to act as Chair for the duration of the Meeting. As there were no objections, Dr. Torsten

Langgemach was appointed as Chair of the Meeting. Mr. Heredia then suggested Mr. Branislav Hrabkovsky from Slovakia to be the Vice-Chair. As there were no objections, Mr. Hrabkovsky was appointed as Vice-Chair. Mr. Heredia then handed over the presidency of the meeting to Dr. Langgemach.

### **Agenda item 3.0: Adoption of the agenda and meeting schedule**

14. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) introduced documents 3.1 and 3.2 (Provisional Agenda and Provisional Annotated Agenda). As there were no objections, the proposed Agenda and Annotated Agenda were adopted by the Meeting.

### **Agenda item 4.0: Reports**

#### **Agenda item 4.1: Report of the Secretariat**

15. The Chair introduced Mr. Tilman Schneider (CMS). Mr. Schneider held a PowerPoint presentation about activities by CMS during the intersessional period, based on Document UNEP/CMS/GB/MOS4/Doc.4.1. He reported on the Memorandum of Understanding in general, its Signatories and Range States, participating non-governmental organizations as well as the expanded geographic scope of the MOU since the last Meeting.
16. He updated the Meeting, *inter alia*, on decisions during the CMS Conference of Parties COP11 and COP12, including the listing of the global population of the Great Bustard in CMS Appendix I, and in Category A of the African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP), and on a Concerted Action focusing on the Asian population under the lead of Mongolia.
17. Mr. Schneider informed the Meeting of the developments of other avian-specific initiatives under CMS, such as the Preventing Poisoning Working Group and its Lead Task Group, the Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean, the African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP), the Energy Task Force and the Strategic Plan of Migratory Species, and on the provisions of the related Resolutions that were adopted at COP11 and COP12.
18. He told the Meeting to feel free to contact CMS on any issues regarding the MOU, especially if a Range State would like to sign the MOU. He was delighted about the good representation and noted that this MOU was in good shape.
19. The Chair noted a short break for a press conference, after which the Meeting would resume.
20. Dr. Langgemach (Chair) reported that the press conference was successful. He asked Mr. Schneider (CMS) whether the list of the National Contact Points was updated. Mr. Schneider confirmed that the list of National Contact Points was up to date according to all information he had received from the countries.

#### **Agenda item 4.2: Report from Signatories**

21. The Chair asked the country representatives to give a small presentation of about five to ten minutes about the status of the Great Bustard in their country and activities with regard to the MOU during the reporting period.
22. Mr. Miklos Lóránt (Hungary) presented a selection of slides of the presentation that he had already shown at the Scientific Symposium. His report covered the last five years. Overall, there was a moderate increase of the total population of about 1,624 Great Bustards. He pointed out that in some areas numbers were declining. There were plans

to reestablish birds in some unoccupied areas, as well as continuing the current LIFE projects to put medium-voltage power lines underground and mark high-voltage power lines. During these projects it was also planned to involve more people, establish a visitor centre and continue to monitor birds. He emphasized the cooperation with his Austrian colleagues.

23. The Chair thanked Mr. Lóránt and asked if there were any questions. There were no questions on the presentation.
24. Mag. Dr. Rainer Raab presented the Report from Austria. He showed the population size and distribution of Great Bustards from the reporting period, pointing out that it was difficult to determine the national population size, since birds tended to move across the borders of Austria, Hungary and Slovakia. Thus, he preferred to show the whole West-Pannonian population. He pointed out that the population had doubled in the last ten years.
25. He stated the minimum population size to be 505 with a total of 5,000 hectares of protected areas for the Great Bustard. The main problem for the population was disturbance from eagles. The previous main threat, collision with power lines, had been eliminated through a LIFE project, where 100 kilometres of medium-voltage power lines were put underground and 150 kilometres of high-voltage power lines were marked with flight diverters. He pointed out that these measures were not only good for Great Bustards, but also for a wide variety of other species. During the period from 2014-2017, no collision-related mortalities of Great Bustards had been recorded in Austria.
26. In 2017, the first case of collision mortality with a wind power installation had been recorded. Mag. Dr. Raab explained that, prior to the construction of a wind farm, the area was Great Bustard habitat. Monitoring had revealed that one male had always occupied this area, most likely the one involved in the collision.
27. Mag. Dr. Raab continued to explain the LIFE project with Hungary, praised the international cooperation especially with Hungary and talked about the simultaneous count taking place in five countries (Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia).
28. Mr. Schall (Germany) asked if Austrian Great Bustards, like the German population, tended to migrate south during severe winters. Mag. Dr. Raab explained that the Austrian population had migrated southwards during the winter in 1996. But even in harsh winters, there were areas with less snow available where Great Bustards had access to food most of the time, and if food was lacking, rapeseed was prepared for the birds. Dr. Langgemach clarified that this was also the case in Germany and supplementary feeding helped preventing winter flights.
29. Dr. Volodymyr Domashlinets (Ukraine) stated that Ukraine had submitted a National Report, but would report major points orally without a PowerPoint presentation. He explained, that due to the political situation no studies had been conducted on Great Bustards in the south-eastern area of the Ukraine during the last four years. According to scientific opinion, the population was in decline, but he was confident, that it would recover. He reported that in 2016, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention adopted 271 sites for special protection under the Emerald Network, which is considered to be an extension of the Natura2000 programme outside of the EU. Several Emerald Network sites had been identified as Great Bustard habitats, the list of those sites can be found in the National Report. A law about Emerald Network sites, drafted by a group of experts, was being finalized and was expected to be submitted to the Ukrainian Parliament for adoption by the end of the year.
30. The Chair thanked Dr. Domashlinets and asked if there were any questions. There

were no questions from the participants.

31. Mr. Samuel Pacenovsky (State Nature Conservancy, Slovakia) gave a presentation on the activities in Slovakia during the intersessional period. He explained that the species disappeared from the Danube Lowlands (former distribution area) and other areas north of the Danube River. The last remaining populations of the Great Bustard were located at the Austrian and Hungarian border, but the number of birds on the Slovakian side was very low. Numbers of wintering Great Bustards increased from a maximum of 86 – 90 wintering individuals in SPA Sysľovské polia in 1998 up to regularly 160 – 300 specimens wintering in 2016, with a maximum of 398 in winter 2017-18. A LIFE project had been implemented in 2005 - 2009 in those areas and thanks to conservation actions, a female was recorded breeding on the Slovakian side of the border repeatedly. The most important threats for the Slovakian population were intensive agriculture, collision with power lines, and pesticides. There were currently no projects specifically for the Great Bustard, but one for a systematic approach to solve the problem of bird collisions with power lines, which was applicable to the Great Bustard.
32. Prof. Nigel Collar (representing BirdLife International and the IUCN) asked whether the previous LIFE project could be considered a success or a failure. Mr. Pacenovsky replied that there were some successful points, but it was not as successful as they had wished. The greatest problem had been the management of the area. Farmers had not managed the areas appropriately. During the project, an area had been created where the first successful breeding attempt had been recorded. Later, a company had ploughed the grassland. In the future, the State Nature Conservation would receive compensatory areas for motorways built in other protected areas, which would be under their management.
33. Mr. Heredia (CMS) asked whether the Great Bustard population stayed in Slovakia during the whole winter. Mr. Pacenovsky replied that they stayed in one area most of the winter, if they were not forced to move. In that case, they would only stay for several months.
34. Ms. Vlasta Škorpíková, Authority of the South Moravian Region, held the presentation for the Czech Republic. She reported that there were currently no Great Bustards in the Czech Republic. The country used to have a small population of 40-50 individuals, which had gone extinct in the late 1980s. Since then, there had been only some irregular observations reported. The last successful breeding attempt was in 2006 and the last unsuccessful breeding attempt was recorded in 2012. The Czech Republic was trying to improve Great Bustard habitat in the South Moravian Region. The country had mapped the most important areas for Great Bustards and had started to protect some. Several fields appropriate for Great Bustard were established in formerly occupied areas with a total of 200 hectares with high biodiversity. An Action Plan had been prepared and the experts involved were hoping to implement it after approval by the Ministry of Environment. The main activity of this Action Plan would be habitat-related measures, not only in the main areas of Great Bustard habitat, but in the whole Pannonian Region. The colleagues involved were waiting for the cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture.
35. The Chair thanked Ms. Škorpíková, noting that the Czech Republic seemed to be prepared for a comeback. There were no questions.
36. Dr. Nela Miauta presented on the intersessional period for Romania. This report, as well as the National Report (Inf.6.6) had been prepared by the Ministry of Environment. In Romania, the Great Bustard was virtually extinct. All monitoring was conducted by an NGO, the Milvus Group. During the intersessional period, a total of 11 males and 22 females had been observed in the country.

37. She emphasized on the great coordination between the Romanian and the Hungarian ornithological societies and introduced an upcoming project to convince energy companies to identify locations of importance to mitigate collisions, as well as isolate some medium-voltage pylons in a few Special Protected Areas. In Romania, the Great Bustard was under full legal protection, which was enforced by national legislation, local environmental protection agencies and the Ministry.
38. The remaining gaps were a reintroduction of agri-environmental schemes, promoting sustainable farming techniques as well as providing compensation for environmentally friendly farming.
39. The Chair thanked Dr. Miauta for her presentation and asked if there were any questions. There were no questions.
40. The presentation on the report for Germany was held by Dr. Torsten Langgemach (Chair). He reported about the three different conservation areas for the Great Bustard in Germany, Havelländisches Luch, Fiener Bruch and Belziger Landschaftswiesen. These areas were the last ones out of a total of 30 former areas. They had a total size of 4,500 to 6,000 hectares. He reported, that a fourth area was considered for a possible reintroduction in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. A feasibility study had been done to assess the suitability of this area for the Great Bustard.
41. The existing areas were well managed. All of them were Special Protected Areas, but in Fiener Bruch only a small part was designated as a conservation area according to German law. In Germany, there had been a good cooperation between farmers and conservationists since 1979. Reinforcement was still in progress in two of the areas. He reported that conservation efforts had improved the habitat quality and increased biodiversity. The immediate risk of local extinction was banned, which could be indicated by an increasing insemination rate of eggs, which was higher than 90 per cent. This high rate was an indicator of a good population structure as well as good management of disturbance.
42. He described the remaining threats as lack of good habitat outside of the conservation areas with limited breeding potential, power lines as a threat for collisions as well as habitat loss, and wind turbines on flyways. The experts and conservationists involved were currently opposing the installation of further wind farms. Inside conservation areas, Great Bustards were facing the high level of maize growth, the increase in land use for energy crops, water management and new bustard-unfriendly irrigation systems. The threat of predation remained and needed to be solved soon.
43. In the future, he intended to continue the current positive development. He emphasized the importance of cooperation with farmers and giving prominence to biodiversity. He noted that a solution for the problem of predation was urgently needed and that this problem had been communicated to the media for the first time.
44. Prof. Nigel Collar (BirdLife International) referred to a picture from the presentation about a fallow field and asked if this could be potential Great Bustard habitat or if it would be hopeless to recover this type of habitat. Dr. Langgemach answered that the area displayed in this picture had especially good soil, making it difficult to compete with farmers in those areas. It would be easier to obtain land in areas with lower quality soil.
45. Dr. Langgemach noted that it was very difficult to create an overview report, since many national reports arrived late. He suggested to CMS to upload an excel sheet compiling all the national reports on their website. Mr. Schneider (CMS) stated that this sheet had been treated as an internal and rolling working document so far, but that the Secretariat would be happy to upload it on the website.

### Agenda item 4.3: Reports from Range States

46. The Chair asked the Non-Signatory Range States to give a short presentation about the status of the Great Bustard in their respective country.
47. Mr. Heredia (CMS) stated that Italy had submitted a short report on observations, which had been uploaded in the website. It differed from the usual reporting template.
48. Ms. Nermina Sarajlić (Bosnia and Herzegovina) stated that her country had not had an ornithologist until 1970. A report from 1974 stated that the last Great Bustard was observed in 1928. They used to have a wintering and migrating population. She reported that Bosnia and Herzegovina had some habitat for Great Bustards and had done work to improve it in the last 15 years. Until now, they had not spotted any Great Bustards. She hoped that the Serbian population would winter in their country.
49. The Chair thanked Ms. Sarajlić and asked if there were any questions. There were no questions.
50. Dr. Langgemach (Chair) asked the scientist from the Russian Federation to report on the situation in his country.
51. Mr. Aleksandr Antonchikov, Chairman of the Saratov Branch of the Russian Bird Conservation Union (NGO) reported that the situation in the Russian Federation had worsened compared to 10 to 15 years ago. The population had decreased by to one third during this period, and now there were not more than 3,000 birds. He stated that the Saratov Region was the most important region for the Middle-European population, since it was also the most southern one. He had received new information about new wintering grounds, but there were no special programmes in place for the Great Bustard. He informed the meeting that the development programme for Special Protected Areas was very weak, especially in the steppe area. Since he was occupied with conservation measures on the Little Bustard, he hoped to continue on the Great Bustard afterwards.
52. The Chair thanked Mr. Antonchikov and expressed his regret that no Russian official was attending. He stated that he would try to invite Russian officials again to the next meeting. Mr. Antonchikov said that he was not very confident that the Russian Federation would sign the Memorandum, but he supported the idea to invite Russian representatives to the next meeting.
53. Mr. Heredia (CMS) stated that the Russian Federation was a Range State. Given the news about the Russian situation, for example regarding poaching of Great Bustards, he informed the Meeting that the Signatories and Range States present would have the capacity to make a recommendation. He asked Mr. Antonchikov how the meeting could help the Russian population. Mr. Antonchikov said that he needed to think about it and would respond with a written document in the next few days.
54. Mr. Schall added that good signals had been received from the Russian Federation concerning accession to the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA). He saw good prospects for the Russian Federation to adopt a similar approach with regard to the Great Bustard MOU, since there were not too many conflicts related to this species.
55. Dr. Langgemach (Chair) said that poachers were still offering poaching safaris. He had spoken to Mr. Tamas Marghescu, International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), who was willing to provide support regarding this issue. Mr. Marghescu had said that the greatest enemies of hunters were the poachers and had

asked to collect and submit all weblinks of illegal hunting safaris to the CIC in order to send a joint letter with CMS to the Government of the Russian Federation and official hunting associations. This could be an issue for targeted action, he suggested.

56. Mr. Antonchikov answered that hunting of Great Bustard was illegal in Russia, but his NGO had very little information on any activities. Most of the information was only obtained through rumors, sometimes through social media. He said that available budgets for following these cases were very low, e.g. the yearly regional budget of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for his region was only €30.000. He pointed out that this was a major problem, which would be very hard to fix.
57. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) extended the offer from CIC to deal with the issue, but more data would be necessary. He asked the participants to collect links offering poaching safaris and send them to CMS, which will collect them and send them to CIC. He considered this as a good first step.
58. Dr. Mimi Kessler (Eurasian Bustard Alliance) reminded the participants of the threat of collecting eggs from small populations. The Great Bustard population in the northwest of Kazakhstan was small, declining and close to the Russian Federation. She mentioned that there were similar populations in the Russian Federation. The impact of collecting eggs from these populations for a possible reintroduction should be included in the discussion in this respect.

#### **Agenda item 4.4: Reports from Cooperating Organizations**

59. No Reports were given.

#### **Agenda item 4.5: Results from the Scientific Symposium (12-13 March 2018)**

60. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) gave a small summary of the Scientific Symposium from the preceding two days. He talked about the contributions from Hungary, Austria and Germany and the presentation about the genetic structure of Great Bustards and the populations in Kazakhstan by Dr. Kessler (Eurasian Bustard Alliance). He described the afternoon session of the first day, mentioning the discussion on the Polish reintroduction plans based on the background of guidelines and other comments from the United Kingdom and Germany. He praised the evening presentations from the Scientific Symposium and spoke enthusiastically about the field trip on the morning of the second day. He also mentioned the overview report on the activities by CMS from Mr. Schneider (CMS).
61. He reported that the Scientific Symposium identified the most urgent factors as land use and fragmentation and powerline-collision caused mortality. Especially in Austria, powerline-collision caused mortality was less problematic nowadays, but the loss of habitat due to powerlines was still considered as a threat. He stressed that burying of powerlines would lead to more available habitat for the Great Bustard. He noted that, unfortunately, the meeting had to address the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation and its effect on the populations of the Great Bustard.
62. He said that they had heard a great deal about solutions to increase biodiversity and suggested to focus on insect biomass in the next few years. He congratulated Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and Germany on their mostly successful, large-scale burying and marking of power lines and noted it was very impressive to see so many of them marked now. He stated that they had not talked about predation in much detail, since it had been discussed in a meeting the previous year.
63. He welcomed the offer from Hungary to publish the findings about predation in the magazine *Aquila*. He explained that the Scientific Symposium had worked on and

updated the Action Plan to be ready for adoption, the last remaining changes should be only editorial.

64. The Medium-Term International Work Programme (MTIWP 2018-2023) was merged with the Joint Research Programme under point 1.4 of the framework table. This document should also be ready for adoption. It was made more precise and slightly shortened as well as changed in a way to include more action.
65. Dr. Langgemach said that the meeting still had to discuss the different guidelines on Great Bustard conservation. There was no question regarding this report.

#### **Agenda item 5.0: Review of MOU and Action Plan Implementation**

##### **Agenda item 5.1: Review of the conservation status of the Great Bustard populations in the agreement area and Agenda item 5.2: Status of the implementation of the Medium-Term International Work Programme**

66. As the participants were unsure about the procedure for this agenda item, Mr. Schneider (CMS) suggested to have a quick “tour de table” discussion. He mentioned that the meeting had already heard plenty of information about the conservation of the Great Bustard during the intersessional period and encouraged the participants to share any information for both agenda item 5.1 and 5.2.
67. Mr. Heredia (CMS) encouraged the participants to give their impression on the implementation of the MTIWP and consider successes as well as difficulties during the recent intersessional period.
68. Mr. András Schmidt (Hungary) stated that the MTIWP had been useful and implemented in Hungary in many ways. He pointed out, that the main difficulty was the harmonization of agriculture and conservation. Overall, it had been successful in Hungary, but he urged the participants to work continue and enforce their efforts. Hungary will emphasize on Natura 2000 and arable land in the future. Other difficulties included selling land and purchasing it.
69. The Chair asked the participants to consider joining the MTIWP and the Joint Research Programme. As there were no objections, the two programmes were merged by adoption.

#### **Agenda Item 6.0: Future implementation and further development of the MOU and Action Plan**

##### **Agenda Item 6.1: Amendment of the MOU’s Geographic Scope**

70. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) handed over the chairing of the meeting to Mr. Branislav Hrabkovsky (Vice-Chair, Slovak Republic). The Vice-Chair asked the participants if there were any suggestions for the amendment of the MOU’s Geographic Scope. As there were no suggestions, the meeting proceeded with the next item.

##### **Agenda Item 6.2: Amendment of MOU’s Action Plan**

71. The Vice-Chair introduced the document (Doc.6.2), revised by the Scientific Symposium, and suggested to go through it step by step. If there were no comments, the version revised during the Scientific Symposium would be adopted.
72. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) suggested updating the population data from non-Range States in table 2. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) agreed to collect data for Portugal, Spain and Turkey and send it to the Secretariat. Mr. András Schmidt (Hungary) agreed

to send contact information for Turkey to Mag. Dr. Raab.

73. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) asked Prof. Collar (BirdLife International and IUCN) if he had information or contacts for Portugal. Prof. Collar replied that he had information on Portugal and will send it to Mag. Dr. Raab.
74. Mr. András Schmidt (Hungary) stated that Hungary had been approached by Portugal for bilateral cooperation and that he would contact the country again.
75. Dr. Langgemach (Chair) asked the participants to provide a deadline. The participants agreed that all data will be sent to Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) by the end of May.
76. Dr. Miauta (Romania) asked about population information displayed for her country. She pointed out that the quality of data for Romania in table 2 should be considered poor, since it was not confirmed and published by a governmental organization. The quality of the data was changed back to poor.
77. The Chair pointed out that on page 14, a reference which had been published in the meantime should now be cited properly. He encouraged Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria), the author of the reference, to provide the appropriate citation. Mag. Dr. Raab stated that the appropriate reference would be found on page 14 of the national report from Austria and would be updated later.
78. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) asked whether there was a deadline for the revision of the entire Action Plan. Mr. Heredia (CMS) answered that only small changes should be made. If the complete document was subject to revision, BirdLife International would have to take the lead. He asked Prof. Collar (BirdLife International) whether any such plans existed. Prof. Collar answered that he was currently unaware of any plans, but would take it back to the responsible people and ask about their intentions.
79. Dr. Miauta (Romania) asked to include her country to the table about national policies and ongoing activities.
80. Mr. Branislav Hrabkovsky (Vice-Chair, Slovak Republic) added that countries where the Great Bustard was a game species without a season should all be shown as closed throughout the whole year.
81. Dr. Miauta (Romania) suggested changing the headline for the Framework for Action Table from Results to expected results. There were no objections.
82. She also asked to move the column Results to the very right of the table. The Chair clarified, that it was not the objective of the meeting to make significant changes to the document. He suggested to only implement small changes and wait on BirdLife International's plans for the revision of their Action Plan. Mr. Schneider (CMS) clarified that the table was in line with the framework table of the Medium-Term International Work Programme 2018-2023. Changing the format would hamper comparison. The format was also in line with the general approaches for programme management and related documents such as international work programmes.
83. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) asked whether there was updated information for Turkey, Portugal or Ukraine. Prof. Nigel Collar (BirdLife International and IUCN) had no information about Turkey, but said that he would send updated population data to Mag. Dr. Raab, if reminded.
84. Mr. Yuri Andryshchenko (Schmalhausen Institute of Zoology, Ukraine) clarified that the data from 2010 in the table were the most currently available data for Ukraine.

85. Dr. Kessler mentioned that the population of Kazakhstan should be updated as well and offered to send the data to the Secretariat.
86. The Chair asked the meeting if the Action Plan should be adopted after editorial work was done. The meeting adopted the edited version of the Action Plan for the MOU.
87. Mr. Heredia (CMS) informed the meeting that the new Action Plan would be uploaded on the CMS website and will be updated once CMS received new information.

**Agenda item 6.3: Development of the new Medium-Term International Work Programme 2018-2023**

88. Mr. Schneider (CMS) introduced the document (Doc.6.3 version revised during the Scientific Symposium) and explained the proposed changes, including changing the time frame for the Medium-Term International Work Programme from three to five years.
89. The Chair proceeded to go through the document step by step, explaining the changes to the pre-session document.
90. Prof. Collar (BirdLife International and IUCN) suggested adding a point on the effectiveness of different flight diverters to point 1.4, Knowledge gaps filled. The meeting agreed.
91. The Chair pointed out, that the column “measures to be taken” was the most important one and asked the meeting to focus on it.
92. Mr. Schmidt (Hungary) informed the meeting that experts from Hungary and the Russian Federation were establishing bilateral relations. On the previous day (13 March 2018), there had been an expert meeting in Moscow. The Russian experts had seemed to be very enthusiastic about Great Bustard conservation.
93. Mr. Schmidt also explained that the next plans for the next budgetary projects were starting. He asked CMS whether they could liaise with the European Commission on both an international and a national level. He asked them to focus on agri-environmental schemes. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) welcomed the suggestion, adding that the Great Bustard could be used as the umbrella species in this context.
94. Mr. Heredia (CMS) answered that he was happy to contact the European Commission through its CMS focal point who belonged to the Environment Department.
95. Ms. Sarajlić (Bosnia and Herzegovina) added that a translation of this document into Polish and Bosnian languages might be useful.
96. Mr. David Waters (Great Bustard Group) added that finding the closest donor country for reintroductions should be added under the appropriate point.
97. Mr. Schall (Germany) pointed out that attention should be dedicated to insect biomass availability, since chicks needed to be provided with large amounts of arthropods during rearing. In Germany, it had been found out that in many areas a very low arthropod diversity and abundance was remaining. It was agreed that this would be incorporated under measures taken into the document.
98. Ms. Ruth Manvell (Great Bustard Group) added that not necessarily a veterinarian was needed to check for diseases. An expert would also be sufficient. The Meeting agreed to change the wording to “competent person”.

99. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) suggested adding reference to the IUCN Guidelines on Reintroduction to the document under the point on reintroduction efforts.
100. After these changes were made, the new Medium-Term International Work Programme 2018-2023 was adopted, provided that formal editorial changes would be made by the Secretariat.
101. Mr. Heredia informed the Meeting about an event taking place one week later in Hungary, celebrating the burying of medium-voltage power lines.
102. Mr. Schmidt (Hungary) extended the request from CIC to especially honor the Deputy Prime Minister of Hungary for his exceptional initiative to bury powerlines. The honour should come from CMS and the Meeting of Signatories. The meeting agreed.

#### **Agenda item 6.4: Adoption of Guidelines**

103. The Vice-Chair asked Hungary to present its current work on the guidelines concerning habitat management.
104. Mr. Miklós Lóránt (Hungary) presented Hungary's plans on creating and finalizing guidelines. They were planning to create three guidelines: agri-environmental schemes, successful wintering and predator management. Mr. Lóránt explained the status of guidelines and future plans.
105. Mr. Lóránt told the Meeting that Hungary was currently in the process to produce guidelines for farmers as part of an ongoing LIFE project. He suggested combining these guidelines with the CMS Guidelines on agri-environmental schemes and on successful wintering to one document, since they inherently belonged together. Since the draft for the guidelines on successful wintering were focused on the Carpathian basin, the CMS guidelines should include other populations. Hungary would need information from other Signatories for these guidelines.
106. Mr. Heredia (CMS) suggested the meeting to take this offer of combining the guidelines. They could be adopted either in a written way during the intersessional period or at the next Meeting of Signatories.
107. Mr. Lóránt (Hungary) offered to collect the necessary information. Just before the guidelines were ready for printing, he would circulate the documents and welcome any comments. He mentioned that the guidelines were to be finished by the end of 2018, as they were also applicable to the LIFE project.
108. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) said that it was good to see Hungary under some pressure through the LIFE project.
109. The meeting agreed, that Hungary will produce the guidelines for agri-environmental schemes and wintering as one document and a second document on predation. Hungary would circulate drafts by the end of October and prepare the final versions by end of November. This decision was reverted later in the meeting. The participants agreed to produce separate guidelines on agri-environmental schemes and successful wintering (see point. 133 and 150).
110. Mr. Schneider (CMS) introduced the document (Doc.6.4.2). The Chair noted, that this document had been adopted at the last meeting under the condition that certain changes were made. These changes had not been done.
111. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) noted that these guidelines were outdated. If the Meeting wanted to have useful guidelines, some changes had to be made. He told the Meeting

that it might be an appropriate time now, given new developments in research.

112. Mr. Heredia (CMS) offered that CMS could do language editing on the final document.
113. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) offered to give input on the guidelines.
114. The Meeting agreed that Austria, with the help of Germany, would update the guidelines by the end of June. Then, it will be circulated to the Signatories with a four-week response period and then language checked by CMS. (This was confirmed later in the meeting).

**Agenda item 6.4.1: Guidelines for monitoring of population parameters of Great Bustard and of the effects of management measures**

115. Mag. Dr. Rainer Raab (Austria) presented the document (Doc.6.4.1) and mentioned that this guideline was already adopted and there was no need to change much. The main difference concerned the annexes. He encouraged participants to use the guidelines, saying that they provide good parameters for monitoring.
116. He thanked Germany for providing pictures for the Annexes.
117. The Participants adopted the guidelines for monitoring of population parameters of Great Bustard and of the effects of management measures.

**Agenda item 6.4.2: Guidelines for best practice on mitigating impacts of infrastructure development and afforestation on the Great Bustard**

118. Mag. Dr. Rainer Raab (Austria) presented the document (Doc.6.4.2) and mentioned that there was need to update some of the information, especially the chapter about wind farms. This would be done within the next weeks. The chapter about powerlines could also be renewed. He offered to finalize the guidelines by the end of June.
119. He pointed out, that Box 1 of the document related to the Action Plan and asked CMS if it should be changed. Mr. Schneider (CMS) answered that this information related to the old MOU Action Plan. Mr. Heredia (CMS) added that since the Meeting was already updating the document, CMS could update the box. They would send the updated version of the Box to Mag. Dr. Raab.
120. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) offered to update chapter two of the document and asked Dr. Kessler and Prof. Collar to send any available information on the topic to him. Dr. Kessler had already sent some material to Mag. Dr. Raab. She suggested updating Table 2 of the document with contact information on where particular flight diverters had been tested, to get a better understanding on their effectiveness..
121. Mag. Dr. Raab asked if the participants could send some information on powerline collisions, especially the prevention of them, to him to include it in the document. He specifically asked Germany, Hungary and the Great Bustard Group to provide some input concerning this topic in their countries by the end of May.
122. Mr. Heredia (CMS) added that in the introduction of the Guidelines, the Energy Task Force under CMS should be mentioned. He offered to send some information about this task force to Austria. Mag. Dr. Raab asked whether an expert from this meeting should be a member of this task force. Mr. Heredia agreed.
123. Mag. Dr. Raab stated that information on the best suited high-voltage power line markers will be added to the document.

124. The Meeting provisionally adopted the Guidelines on best practice on mitigating impacts of infrastructure development and afforestation on the Great Bustard. Experts could provide input to Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) by the end of May. At the end of June, the prepared version will be circulated for four weeks and will be finalized until the end of June.

**Agenda item 6.4.3: Guidelines on measures to secure the successful wintering of Great Bustards**

125. Mr. Miklós Lóránt (Hungary) introduced the document (Doc.6.4.3) and explained that it was still in a draft version. He suggested to go through the document step by step. He raised the question whether there were differences in wintering inside and outside the Carpathian Basin, asking Germany and Ukraine for comments.
126. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) asked Mr. Lóránt what measures were taken to provide additional food for the birds during the winter. Mr. Lóránt answered that snow was removed and measures of compensation for farmers for damage to cabbage were taken.
127. Dr. Langgemach said, that he would prefer a general chapter at first. It should contain topics such as the climate in Central Europe. Then, measures taken could be described based on the location (Germany, Carpathian Basin, other countries). The last chapter would consist of recommendations, reflecting on what had worked and what had not. He and the German NGO (Förderverein Großtrappenschutz e.V.) would provide the information on Germany as well as some recommendations for the last chapter. He noted that Great Bustard behaviour was difficult to predict and that it would make sense to be precise on how much snow needed to be cleared.
128. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) offered to provide inputs about Austria. He stated that he could add to the document. He also mentioned the possible negative effects of clearing fields. A cleared field led to higher hare density which led to a higher White-tailed Eagle density, diverting female Great Bustards from using the field.
129. Mr. Lóránt asked Mr. Antonchikov (Russian Bird Conservation Union) and the delegation from Ukraine if they were able to provide additional input. Mr. Antonchikov stated that there was no recent information from the Russian Federation. There was one new update on a new wintering place in the Russian Federation mentioned in an article, but more research was needed for clarification. He assumed that the military conflict in the eastern Ukraine and the Russian occupation of Crimea were the reasons for the sharp population decline. Mr. Lóránt asked which areas Great Bustards used for wintering in the Russian Federation. Mr. Antonchikov answered that birds did not only winter in the Saratov Region, but sometimes further north. There was no clear information and need for more research. He assumed that occasional wintering might happen in those regions.
130. Dr. Domashlinets (Ukraine) stated that the situation in Ukraine seemed to be similar to that in the Russian Federation. No research had been conducted in the last few years due to the military conflict. He would only be able to give recommendations based on assumptions. More research was needed in Ukraine.
131. Dr. Miauta (Romania) thanked Germany, Austria and Hungary for drafting guidelines on the Great Bustard and sharing their experience.
132. Dr. Kessler (Eurasian Bustard Alliance) thanked Mr. Lóránt for preparing such a useful document. There was a small amount of measures taken in Kazakhstan and China that she would share with him. Mr. Lóránt thanked Dr. Kessler for this offer.

133. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) suggested to not combine the measures on wintering with the measures on agri-environmental schemes. Mr. Lóránt agreed.
134. The meeting provisionally adopted the guidelines. Input would be sent to Mr. Lóránt by the end of May. The final draft would be circulated to the Signatories at the end of June and finalized at the end of July.
135. At this point Mr. Branislav Hrabkovsky (Vice-Chair, Slovak Republic) left the meeting and thanked the participants for the wonderful meeting. It had been his first time as a Vice-Chair of such a meeting. He thanked the Secretariat and all other participants for the presentations and Germany for hosting the event.

#### **Agenda item 6.4.4: Guidelines on Predator Control Strategies**

136. Mr. Lóránt (Hungary) introduced a draft document containing the future table of contents. He told the Meeting, that the Guidelines on Predator Control strategies would be finished within this year. These guidelines would be specifically targeted to be used by hunters. For any species not present in Hungary, they would require input from other countries.
137. Mr. David Waters (Great Bustard Group) asked whether the text on protected species would mention or acknowledge eagle species. Mr. Lóránt answered that the authors would list all species and briefly describe their situation, but they would give no recommendation on actions that would harm eagles. He noted that it would be important to mention the effect that other protected species could have on Great Bustards.
138. Mr. Waters responded that some people thought that any problems with eagles were suppressed. He wanted to make sure that it was not taken wrongly by hunters. Another problem would be if it was known that information was not made public. Mr. Schmidt (Hungary) added that the wording had to be very careful. Otherwise this information would be abused. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) added that it could be said that predation occurs but as part of the natural food-chain.
139. Mr. Schall (Germany) said that besides eagles, the Wolf was also an important topic. He would prefer to exclude reference to wolves from these guidelines.
140. Dr. Kessler (Eurasian Bustard Alliance) pointed out that domestic species could also have an effect on populations and should be considered in the guidelines.
141. Mr. Lóránt (Hungary) agreed to finalize the draft by 1 September and then circulate it for comments until the end of October. Then he would prepare a final version.
142. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) suggested writing a resolution to the Polish government concerning the reintroduction project. He suggested Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) to take the lead in this respect. The meeting should discuss the main points of the resolution and put it in proper wording.
143. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) pointed out that the Meeting wanted to help Poland. He added that countries with significant populations and experience in reintroduction wanted to give their support. He suggested to create a steering group consisting of Dr. Langgemach, Mr. Lóránt, Mr. Walters and himself as representatives. He suggested, that Poland should first go through the CMS Guidelines on reintroduction and reinforcement, then meet with the experts again and finally start the reintroduction process. He said that it would be a pleasure to assist Poland in the next few years. The experts were sure that reintroduction was possible and wanted to give their support.

144. Ms. Monika Lesz (Poland) mentioned that she was unsure whether such a resolution was needed. If the meeting thought that it was needed, it should be addressed to all countries that considered reintroduction of Great Bustards. She added that it would have been nice to see more enthusiasm from the participants.
145. Mr. Heredia (CMS) pointed out that the Polish idea of a proposal was a good one. There were some positive elements in Poland's proposal, which needed to be elaborated further. He was looking forward to a fully-fledged proposal checking all the IUCN guidelines. It was important to prevent a failure, since this would reflect badly on the MOU. The proposal needed to be drafted with a good scientific background and a Steering Committee would be advisable. He noted that there was considerable support in the room.
146. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) pointed out, that it might be a good idea to use the steering group in the framework to organize an intersessional meeting. This could take place in either 2019 or 2020. He suggested the meeting to take place in Poland near the release site or breeding centre.
147. Ms. Lesz (Poland) said that she would like to avoid the creation of a Steering Committee and the meeting in Poland. The participants should give Poland the chance to invite them to a meeting, after having the chance to talk about these issues. She would communicate with colleagues in Poland and give a response later in the meeting.

**Agenda item 6.4.5: Study on the different agri-environmental schemes for the benefit of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*)**

148. Mr. Lóránt (Hungary) introduced the document (Doc.6.4.5) to the participants. He pointed out that three countries (Austria, Germany and Hungary) should contribute to the guidelines. The document should take farming and particularly sustainable farming into consideration. Also, it should describe schemes implemented in all three countries. Next, it should contain a recommendation, taking into consideration that all schemes should take farming into account. If a scheme had negative implications for farming, it would not be sustainable.
149. Mag. Dr. Raab (Austria) explained that they had published some results in *Aquila*, which could serve as a source. For the recent period, Austria could provide additional information. He welcomed Mr. Lóránt's idea of using different countries as examples.
150. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) proposed starting the recommendations with ecological needs, distinguishing between the macro and micro scale. The target of these schemes should be a high abundance of insects. Biomass was of great importance and the rearing period of Great Bustards should be added.
151. Mr. Lóránt thanked Mag. Dr. Raab and Dr. Langgemach for their valuable comments. He offered to proceed in the same timeframe as the guidelines on predator control strategies. He would circulate the final draft in September and receive feedback by the end of October before finalizing the document in November. Hungary would take the lead in this regard.
152. Dr. Miauta (Romania) thanked the Participants for creating these guidelines. Romania would implement these measures nationally.
153. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) mentioned that it would be helpful to prepare a resolution addressed to the European Commission to push for set-asides and sustainable planning. Mr. Heredia (CMS) stated that the Secretariat could convey this message to the European Commission via its Focal Point. It could communicate that these guidelines existed and would be maintained and improved. Dr. Langgemach

added that the wording should be chosen carefully, emphasizing on the ecological needs of the Great Bustard and its function as an umbrella species. Mr. Heredia agreed and offered that the Secretariat would draft the letter.

154. Ms. Monika Lesz (Poland) returned after consulting her colleagues about a possible recommendation. She suggested avoiding a recommendation and rather sending a letter from the CMS Secretariat. This letter should be addressed to the Minister of Environment.
155. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) suggested that CMS should take the lead on writing a letter to the Polish Government. Mr. Heredia (CMS) agreed.

#### **Agenda item 6.4.6: Guidelines for capturing and radio-tracking Great Bustards**

156. The Chair suggested not opening the content of these guidelines, as they were already adopted and there was no need to update them. There were no objections and the Meeting proceeded to the next agenda item.

#### **Agenda item 6.4.7: Guidelines for Reinforcement and Reintroduction of the Great Bustard *Otis tarda***

157. The Chair asked the participants if there was any need to discuss the already adopted guidelines or if there was any need for updating the document. There were no questions or comments and the Meeting proceeded to the next agenda item.

#### **Agenda item 7.0: Update of the Great Bustard Joint Research Programme**

158. Since the Meeting had been already informed that the Great Bustard Joint Research Programme had been integrated into the Medium-Term International Work Programme and the integrated items had already been discussed, the Meeting proceeded to the next agenda item.

#### **Agenda item 8.0: Signing ceremony**

159. Since there was no Representative of any Range State with the intention to sign the MOU, the Meeting proceeded to the next agenda item.

#### **Agenda item 9.0: MOU Coordination**

160. Mr. Heredia (CMS) introduced the document (Doc.9). He suggested that in the future, only one country would take the lead in coordinating the MOU and that rotation of countries during the intersessional period should be avoided. He proposed that the country taking over the MOU coordination would also organize the next Meeting of Signatories. This country would always receive the support of the Secretariat.
161. Dr. Langgemach (Chair, Germany) welcomed the idea and stated that he was willing to finalize all items under his coordination prior to this meeting. Afterwards, his official work for the coordination of the MOU will be finalized, except for the contributions to the guidelines.
162. It was agreed that the coordination would be linked to the next host-country, and the Meeting proceeded to the next agenda item

#### **Agenda item 10.0: Date and venue of the next Meeting of Signatories**

163. Mr. Heredia (CMS) asked the participants if any country had the intention of hosting the next meeting. Since no country volunteered, he informed the Meeting, that Slovakia,

which had left the Meeting early, was considering hosting the next meeting. Slovakia had to check and would confirm later.

164. The Chair asked the Meeting if the change of the intersessional period from three to five years should be adopted. Since there was no objection, this change was adopted by the Meeting.

#### **Agenda item 11.0: Any other business**

165. Mr. Schall (Germany) recommended inviting the Netherlands to the next Meeting. He read that the Great Bustard had been present in the Netherlands in the 1800s and still breeding into the 1900s. In 2010, the last occurrence of the Great Bustard had been recorded in the Netherlands. He pointed out that this country seemed to be part of the range of the Middle-European population. He also thanked all participants for their great contributions, the Chair for his great work, and the Secretariat for its support.
166. Dr. Miauta (Romania) supported Germany's proposal to extend the geographic scope to include the Netherlands. She thanked Germany for hosting the event and for its great hospitality.
167. Mr. Heredia (CMS) said that there was still the pending issue on addressing the Russian Federation about its declining Great Bustard population as well as illegal hunting. He asked Mr. Antonchikov (Russian Bird Conservation Union) for any ideas. Mr. Antonchikov said it would be better if he drafted a letter and send it to the Secretariat.
168. He added that the letter should stress on the importance of the Russian population. It should try to improve cooperation and invite Russian representatives not only to Hungary, but also to Germany. He provided two contacts (Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation) as recommendation for addressing the letter to.
169. Mr. Schmidt (Hungary) mentioned that if the bilateral relationships between the Russian Federation and Hungary were mentioned in the letter, he would like to check the wording.
170. Mr. Heredia thanked the Organization Förderverein Großtrappenschutz e.V., the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany, the Brandenburg State, his staff, all participants and especially the Chair, Dr. Torsten Langgemach, for a productive meeting. He handed over a small CMS present to Dr. Langgemach as a token of appreciation.

#### **Agenda item 12.0: Closure of the Meeting**

171. The Chair, Dr. Torsten Langgemach (Germany) said that he considered this meeting as successful. He pointed out that a meeting did not only depend on one person. It was a pleasure for him to work with the CMS Secretariat, especially Mr. Schneider, with whom he had contact for about a year prior to the meeting. He thanked his colleagues from the Förderverein Großtrappenschutz e.V., especially Mr. Henrik Watzke, who had worked tirelessly to organize and manage the meeting. He thanked the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety for its funding and advice, as well as the British Great Bustard Group for its work on the brochures. He thanked all participants, noting it had been a very good meeting and wished everyone safe travels home.
172. The Meeting closed at 12:13 hrs. on 15 March 2018.