

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING THE MIDDLE-EUROPEAN
POPULATION OF THE GREAT BUSTARD**

GERMAN NATIONAL REPORT 2023

GENERAL INFORMATION

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<p>List any other agencies, institutions, or NGOs that have provided input</p> <p>Society for the Protection of the Great Bustard / Foederverein Grosstrappenschutz e. V. (e. V. = registered society)</p>
<p>Reports submitted to date:</p> <p>First: 2004 (1990-2003) Second: 2008 (2004-2007) Third: 2013 (2008-2012) Fourth: 2018 (2013-2017) Fifth: 2023 (2018-2023)</p>
<p>Period covered by this report</p> <p>01.01.2018–31.08.2023</p>
<p>Memorandum in effect in country since:</p> <p>September 2002</p>

PART I. GENERAL

This questionnaire follows the structure and numbering of the Action Plan annexed to the Memorandum of Understanding to make it easier to read the relevant action points before the form is filled in. In some cases, however, sub-actions were not listed separately for the sake of simplicity and to avoid duplications. They should however be taken into consideration when answering the questions.

0. National work programme

Is there a national work programme or action plan already in place in your country for the Great Bustard pursuant to Paragraph 4(g) of the Memorandum of Understanding?

Yes No

There are work programmes in both federal states of Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt. There is no *national* work programme since the legal responsibility for nature conservation in Germany is on the federal state level.

1. Habitat protection

1.1 Designation of protected areas.

To what extent are the display, breeding, stop-over and wintering sites covered by protected areas?

Designation of protected areas under national law	Classification of Special Protection Areas according to the requirements of Art.4.1 of the EC Birds Directive
<input type="checkbox"/> Fully (>75%) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High (50-75%) <input type="checkbox"/> Medium (10-49%) <input type="checkbox"/> Low (<10%) <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> Fully (>75%) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High (50-75%) <input type="checkbox"/> Medium (10-49%) <input type="checkbox"/> Low (<10%) <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable

There are three SPAs with vital bustard populations:

- “Havellaendisches Luch” (5,611 ha),
- “Belziger Landschaftswiesen” (4,461 ha), both in the state of Brandenburg,
- “Fiener Bruch” in Brandenburg (6,338 ha) and Saxony-Anhalt (3,667 ha).
- The two first mentioned SPAs in Brandenburg are nature conservation areas according to national law whereas there are only 143 ha designated in the “Fiener Bruch” in Saxony-Anhalt.

In a fourth area (SPA “Zerbster Land”, 6,207 ha) a re-introduction started in 2022.

What measures were taken to ensure the adequate protection of the species and its habitat at these sites?

- Designation of nature conservation areas (“Naturschutzgebiet”) under national law with regulations focussing on avoidance of disturbances, bustard-friendly farming practices and maintenance/improvement of the habitat suitability,
- Promotion of extensive farming (agri-environmental schemes, organic farming),
- Maintenance of the surroundings, e. g. buffer zone of 3 km free of wind turbines,
- Removal of windbreaks as fragmenting structures,
- Predation management incl. fenced-off areas of 12-30 ha,
- Use of drones for the search of nest sites (mainly prior to planned mowing) since 2022
- Reinforcement programme,
- Public awareness campaigns,

¹ The species occurs only irregularly, no regular stop-over or wintering sites identified.

- Year-round monitoring of and scientific investigations on Great Bustards and their habitat in the framework of the running landscape management. Direct implementation of monitoring results, e. g. for nest site protection.
- Underground cabling and marking of power lines

Where are the remaining gaps?

- There is no whole-German conservation programme (merely two programmes of the federal states of Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt). The Society for the Protection of the Great Bustard as an NGO is the basic link between both.
- Still, solutions for the problem of high predation pressure on clutches, juveniles and adults are lacking. Obviously, the running conservation measures support not only the target species but their opponents as well. The interrelations are not yet fully understood. Fenced-off areas (12-30 ha) in all GB areas can only be an emergency solution.
- The SPA “Fiener Bruch” is not yet adequately protected and managed - neither in Brandenburg nor in Saxony-Anhalt. In Saxony-Anhalt ca. 2/3 of the regularly used Great Bustard area are without conservation status. Only a small percentage of the area is managed in a bustard-friendly way. For both parts of this SPA management plans are existent as a first step for bustard-friendly management. However, there is no implementation (Brandenburg) or little implementation (Saxony-Anhalt) since the release of the plans in 2011 due to lacking capacities.
- Still, there are high-voltage power lines without markers existing (or not yet buried for medium-voltage lines).
- Existing agri-environmental schemes are not sufficient, mainly in arable land.
- Lacking capacities for satisfactory population and habitat monitoring.

Are currently unoccupied, but potential breeding habitats identified in your country?

Yes No Not applicable²

If yes, please explain how these areas are protected or managed to enable the re-establishment of Great Bustard.

- Most potential breeding sites are declared SPA.
- In some of these (SPA Rhin-Havelluch) there are agri-environmental schemes for meadow birds running.
- Re-colonisation of a fourth area (SPA “Zerbster Land”) started in 2022 after eight years of preparation (feasibility study, awareness campaign, habitat improvement, installation of a fence (13,5 ha).
- Inside the Great Bustard SPAs there are areas not used due to windbreaks. Several of these in the SPA “Belziger Landschaftswiesen” and “Fiener Bruch” were removed with remarkable success – areas were re-used, an old display site was reactivated, leading to several breeding attempts there, attacks of White-tailed Eagle were reduced. Unfortunately, eagle activity was again increasing later and is today even without windbreaks higher than ever.

1.2 Measures taken to ensure the maintenance of Great Bustard habitats outside of protected areas.

Please describe what measures have been taken to maintain land-use practices beneficial for Great Bustard outside of protected areas (e.g., set-aside and extensification schemes, cultivation of alfalfa and oilseed rape for winter, maintenance of rotational grazing, etc.).

- No bustard specific measures, but general agri-environmental schemes and organic farming to some extent.
- Property of the Great Bustard Society is managed in a bustard-friendly way also outside protected areas.
- In a few cases wind farms on potential sites were not built.

² Countries *outside* of the historic (beginning of 20th Century) breeding range of the species.

To what extent do these measures, combined with site protection, cover the national population?

- Fully (>75%)
- Most (50-75%)
- Some (10-49%)

Little (<10%) Monitoring and GPS tracking has shown that a higher percentage of females could breed outside conservation areas than formerly expected (e. g. Fiener Bruch area).

- Not at all
- Not applicable¹

Are recently (over the last 20 years) abandoned Great Bustard breeding habitats mapped in your country?

- Yes No Not applicable¹

What habitat management measures have been taken to encourage the return of Great Bustard?

- Common extensification schemes (agri-environmental programmes following Directive EC 1698/2005) but no bustard specific measures targeted to these areas.
- Re-colonisation of abandoned areas and re-establishment of vanished leks without re-introduction programmes cannot be expected. There is not a single example, world-wide. Thus, it is questionable if “encouraging the return of Great Bustard” without active re-introduction is an applicable approach.

If there were any measures taken, please provide information on their impact.

1.3 Measures taken to avoid fragmentation of Great Bustard habitats.

Are new projects potentially causing fragmentation of the species’ habitat (such as construction of highways and railways, irrigation, planting of shelterbelts, afforestation, power lines, etc.) subject to environmental impact assessment in your country? Yes No Not applicable¹

Is there any aspect of the existing legislation on impact assessment that limits its effective application to prevent fragmentation of Great Bustard habitats? Yes No Not applicable¹

If yes, please provide details.

- EIA mainly focus on conservation areas and their surroundings. However, there are very limited chances to consider flyways between conservation areas, accordingly.
- The pressure on these flyways is increasing due to the German energy policy and the new Federal Nature Conservation Act from July 2022. For Great Bustards mainly wind turbines are considered to be problematic (habitat loss, barrier effects, collision risk). However, also solar panels planned in the buffer zones around GB conservation areas and even inside these areas may lead to loss of habitat.
- Inside conservation areas weak law enforcement (e. g. due to lacking personnel) might be a problem as happened with the first irrigation system in the SPA “Havelländisches Luch”.
- Cf. SCHWANDNER, J. & T. LANGGEMACH (2011): Wie viel Lebensraum bleibt der Großtrappe (*Otis tarda*)? Infrastruktur und Lebensraumpotenzial im westlichen Brandenburg. Ber. Vogelschutz 47/48: 193-206. // EISENBERG, A. H. WATZKE & T. LANGGEMACH (2018): Wechsel von Großtrappen (*Otis tarda*) zwischen den Schutzgebieten Belziger Landschaftswiesen, Fiener Bruch und Havelländisches Luch in den Jahren 2001 bis 2017. Natursch Landschaftspfl. Brandenburg 27: 30-45.

Have there been any such projects implemented in any Great Bustard habitat in your country since signing this Memorandum of Understanding? Yes No Not applicable¹

- An earlier case was described in the first report, already: Despite existing environmental impact assessment twenty wind mills were built in the IBA ST013 “Fiener Bruch” (later SPA) within a regular wintering and occasional breeding site in 2003.
- A first irrigation system was built in the SPA “Havelländisches Luch” in 2015. Only after objections from the conservation staff EIA started later.
- Generally, “yes”, if flyways are considered as part of the habitat (e. g. several wind farms).

Please, give details and describe the outcome of impact monitoring if available.

- The wind farm area in the SPA “Fiener Bruch” is still lost as GB habitat even if there is habituation to some extent (avoidance area earlier ca. 1,000 m around the wind farm, today mostly ca. 500 m, rarely closer, and only exceptionally single individuals inside the wind farm). Nearest nest sites were 280 and 480 m away from a wind turbine, most nests much farther away.
- Wind farms in the wider surroundings of GB areas are generally avoided by most of the bustards. Only certain birds approach the wind farm areas, but intruding these by bustards on the ground remains an exception (GPS data).
- Also flying bustards tend to avoid wind farms. Certain birds, however, approached wind turbine regularly till min. 20 m. It remains unclear if these birds crossed the wind farms or flew over. There is a tendency of crossing (or overflying) wind farms in gaps between the turbines or in areas with single turbine rows, only (GSP data).
- So far, no collided bustards are known, one uncertain case only.
- In case of the irrigation system (SPA “Havellaendisches Luch”) several measures were fixed subsequently: ex situ compensation measures, monitoring of selected annex 1 species (incl. Great Bustard) on the respective field, measures in case of any impairment there.

2. Prevention of hunting, disturbance and other threats

2.1 Hunting.

Is Great Bustard afforded strict legal protection in your country? Yes No

Please, give details of any hunting restrictions imposed for the benefit of Great Bustard including those on timing of hunting and game management activities.

- Great Bustards belong to game birds in Germany but without hunting season.
- Some additional hunting restrictions came into force after safeguarding SPAs by national law as nature conservation areas in Brandenburg (e. g. restricted bird hunting, restricted hunting around display sites).
- Only limited restrictions in the SPA “Fiener Bruch” as there is only a small nature conservation area according to national law (143 ha) in Saxony-Anhalt: Hunting is completely forbidden there between 01 March and 31 July.

Please, indicate to what extent these measures ensure the protection of the national Great Bustard population?
The national population is covered by restrictions on hunting to prevent hunting-related disturbance:

- Fully (>75%)
 Most (50-75%)
 Some (10-49%)
 Little (<10%)
 Not at all
 Not applicable¹

2.2 Prevention of disturbance.

What measures have been taken to prevent disturbance of Great Bustard in your country, including both breeding birds and single individuals or small flocks on migration?

- Guiding system for the public (observation towers, closing of ways through and around the core areas),
- Attempts to guide air traffic (military and leisure), predominantly successful,
- Measures to prevent disturbances due to farming,
- Awareness campaigns for the public,
- Inspections within the SPAs - low level due to shrinking conservation staff,
- No special measures outside the conservation areas.

Please, indicate to what extent these measures have ensured the protection of the national population. The national population is covered by restrictions on other activities causing disturbance:

- Fully (>75%)
- Most (50-75%)
- Some (10-49%)
- Little (<10%)
- Not at all
- Not applicable¹

2.3.1 Prevention of predation.

What is the significance of predation to Great Bustard in your country?

- Predation is the major problem within the German Great Bustard project as revealed by intensive field observation, thermo-loggers in substitutive species (mainly lapwing) and radio-tracking of captive-reared birds after releasing.
- Despite improving habitat structures and sufficient nutritional basis there are nearly no successful broods in the field, except of seven areas of altogether 131 ha that are fenced-off to exclude larger ground predators.

What are the main predator species?

- Eggs: fox and raven, to a lesser extent racoon-dog and hooded crow, possibly badger, smaller mustelids and racoon,
- Juveniles: fox and white-tailed eagle, sometimes goshawk, possibly mustelids,
- Hand-raised juveniles after releasing: white-tailed eagle, goshawk and fox,
- Adults: white-tailed eagles (increasing population and increasing activity in agricultural areas, even healthy adult male great bustards are preyed upon), fox (much less relevant for adults).

What measures have been taken to control predators in areas where Great Bustard occurs regularly?

- Intensified recreational hunting of foxes and neozoons forced by incentives over 20 years proved to be unsuccessful in terms of the predation pressure on clutches and juveniles; effect on female survival remains unclear.
- Professional hunting is supposed to be more successful than recreational hunting under the present legal framework, but does not happen.
- Fencing of seven areas between 12-30 ha in size for breeding of wild (!) females proved to be successful and is the major source of offspring at present. Negative side-effects: high breeding density is attractive for aerial predators, density-dependent stress, mutual disturbances between females, and even attacks to chicks of other females, sometimes deadly.
- Scaring of ravens from breeding-sites in core areas and enclosures showed some limited success but needs steady presence and requires steadily new approaches.
- Hand-reared juveniles are mainly threatened by white-tailed eagles post release. This is tackled in two ways: 1) optimal rearing and release methodology in order to release fit and healthy birds well prepared for their future environment, 2) staff presence in the release period till October. Diversionary feeding of eagles in the release period remote from the release site did not work properly and was stopped again.

How effective were these measures?

- Effective (predation reduced by more than 50%)
- Partially effective (predation reduced by 10–49%, enclosures being most successful)
- Less effective (predation reduced by less than 10%)
- Not applicable¹

2.3.2 Adoption of measures for power lines.

What is the significance of collision with power lines in your country?

- Altogether 10 registered casualties in the period covered by this report, and 32 since 2001.

What proactive and corrective measures have been taken to reduce the mortality caused by existing power lines in your country?

- Several medium voltage lines are underground meanwhile, 3,1 km more in the report period (1,5 km Tucheim, 1,6 km Borne/Bergholz)
- 26,5 kilometres of a 220-kV-line in the SPA “Havellaendisches Luch” have been marked with bird diverters (RIBE marker).
- 22,5 kilometres of a 110-kV-line near the SPA “Belziger Landschaftswiesen” have been marked with bird diverters.

What is the size of the populations affected by these corrective measures?

- 100 %

How effective were these measures?

- Effective (collision with power lines reduced by more than 50%)
 Partially effective (collision with power lines reduced by 10–49%)
 Ineffective (collision with power lines reduced by less than 10%)
 Not applicable¹

2.3.3 Compensatory measures.

What is the size (in hectares) of Great Bustard habitat lost or degraded for any reasons since the Memorandum of Understanding entered into effect (1 June 2001)?

- About 450 ha due to the wind farm in Zitz in the SPA “Fiener Bruch” (since 2003),
- More than 5.000 ha of wind farms are situated on flyways and former bustard areas which were still used occasionally. Barrier effects for an additional 10.000 ha which ceased to be breeding areas before wind farm erection but are now even lost as wintering areas.
- A circuitous road for the village Dahnsdorf fragments the winter habitat of the Belzig population.
- Maize cultivation area inside the Great Bustard SPAs and around still on high level since 2012, slightly decreasing (mainly energetic use).
- A new asparagus field of 20 ha in the wintering area of the Belzig population raised concern but remained the only one, so far.

What is the size of the populations affected?

- More or less the whole population is affected.

Were these habitat losses compensated?

- Yes Partially No Not applicable¹

If yes, please explain how.

- Altogether three wind-farms in Brandenburg were compensated by
 - extensification of 50 ha grassland and 20 ha arable land,
 - purchase of 42 ha agricultural area for conservation reasons,
 - construction of three fox-free enclosures (12 ha, 13 ha and 30 ha) as refuges for free-living females in the framework of the predation management strategy.
- The circuitous road for the village Dahnsdorf is compensated by bustard-friendly management of 50 ha fields (set-asides, winter food) and grassland in the SPA “Belziger Landschaftswiesen” over 25 years.

- There are no compensation measures for maize as maize cultivation is considered as “agriculture according to the rules”. If more maize is grown for energetic use merely habitat loss due to the biomass factory is compensated but not habitat lost by maize cultivation even if high nature value farmland gets lost.
- One new cow stable was compensated by 1,5 ha fallow-land (SPA Fiener Bruch, Saxony-Anhalt).

Were these measures effective? Yes Partially No Not applicable¹

Please, give details on the effectiveness or explain why they were not effective if that is the case.

- Extensification of compensation fields / grassland results in better food supply during the breeding season (arthropods).
- Well situated winter food (oil-seed rape) helps in critical weather situations and is, additionally, a tool to integrate released birds into the wild leks.
- Chances of breeding success are better due to reduced disturbances by farming measures. Regarding breeding success, these positive results are more or less neutralised by high predation pressure.
- Fox-free enclosures are the strongholds of reproduction.
- Barrier effects on flyways (e. g. by wind farms) can be only compensated by improvements inside the lek areas.

3. Possession and trade

Is collection of Great Bustard eggs or chicks, the possession of and trade in the birds and their eggs prohibited in your country? Yes No

How are these restrictions enforced? What are the remaining shortcomings, if any?

- The Great Bustard belongs to the species under the hunting law (additionally to conservation law).
- In contrast to conservation law, hunters have the exclusive right to acquire carcasses of game animals in their own hunting area.
- This enables unchecked manipulation beyond legality. E. g. hunters are obliged to kill injured game incl. threatened species which happened to a male bustard in one strange case that has not been solved completely (December 2010).

Please indicate if any exemption is granted or not all of these activities are prohibited.

- Exemptions are granted within the frame-work of the running conservation programme, e. g. for taking first clutches for artificial incubation and reinforcement (cf. 4.1!); permit is necessary according to conservation and hunting law.

4. Recovery measures

4.1 Captive breeding* in emergency situations.

Is captive breeding playing any role in Great Bustard conservation in your country? Yes No

* In effect, “captive breeding” should be read as “captive rearing” according to current practices.

Please, describe the measures, staff and facilities involved and how these operations comply with the IUCN criteria on reintroductions.

- The measures in practice are not really “captive breeding” with a captive breeding stock.
- Instead, eggs from the wild are taken for artificial incubation and later population reinforcement from
 - broods in emergency situations, mainly by farming measures,
 - clutches without chance of success (e. g. near fox dens or ravens’ nests),
 - clutches in the early vegetation period because of high predation pressure in this time (nest survival nearly zero according to monitoring data).
 - clutches on unsuitable land or in unsuitable agricultural crops (maize).
- Taking the eggs strictly follows a system of decision criteria in each case.
- The hatchery and rearing centre is part of the Brandenburg State Bird Conservation Centre in Buckow/ Nennhausen.
- Hatched chicks are hand-reared and released into the wild in summer/autumn (both in the states of Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt). As well, the re-introduction in the SPA “Zerbster Land” is basing on the release of hand-reared and released birds.
- The whole reinforcement programme is carried out by 10 persons (seasonal).

4.2 Reintroduction.

Have there been any measures taken to reintroduce the species in your country? Yes No

If yes, please describe the progress. If there was any feasibility study carried out, please summarize its conclusions.

- First considerations based on MoU criteria, e. g. which areas were recently abandoned and may still have suitability → SPA “Zerbster Land” ranking first
- Feasibility study (FÖRDERVEREIN GROßTRAPPENSCHUTZ 2019: Machbarkeitsstudie zur Wiederansiedlung der Großtrappe im Zerbster Land. http://www.grosstrappe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PDF_Machbarkeitsstudie-Zerbster-Land_28_06_19.pdf)
 - legal background
 - analysis of the re-introduction in England
 - investigation of general suitability of Zerbster Land and of current threats there
 - calculation of necessary measures and existing funding opportunities
 - acceptance study / socio-economic implications
 - development of a strategy including selection of the core area for release
 - effects on the ecosystem / possible target conflicts
 - indicators of success / monitoring
 - schedule and costs
 - exit strategy
 - conclusions in consideration of the IUCN guidelines (2012): clear recommendation for the start of a re-introduction project.
- project implementation starting 2019, including:
 - technical exchange / consultations with responsible authorities and interest groups
 - intensive advice to local farmers on suitable agri-environmental measures in favour of the great bustard
 - public relations / cooperation agreements
 - construction of an anti-predator fence
 - acquisition of funding and start of EAFRD pilot project (2021-2024)
 - development of infrastructure (project office, monitoring, visitor management, etc.)
 - start of habitat improvement and predation management
 - first release of hand-reared juveniles: 2022: 10 (6 alive next spring), 2023: 15 (ongoing)

4.3 Monitoring of the success of release programmes.

Are captive reared birds released in your country? Yes No

If yes, please summarize the experience with release programmes in your country. What is the survival rate of released birds? What is the breeding performance of released birds?

- Reinforcement buffered the population decline in the 1980s and 1990s, saved the species from extinction and has been contributing to the positive population trend during the last 25 years.
- Survival rates of released birds until next spring varied between 22.6 and 76.2 in the reporting period with an average of 63,7 % (n = 190 released birds). These are minimum values as single birds might have been overlooked. The survival is much higher since 2011 than before but low for the birds released in 2021. Only a few birds are imprinted on humans and had to be recaptured.
- Monitoring data proved that most of the released birds show normal behaviour and are soon integrated into the free-ranging population. As members of the leks they breed as soon as they are fertile, and there is no evidence that insemination rates of these birds are lower than in wild birds.
- The survival of released birds is mainly depressed by white-tailed eagle predation. Adaptive management reduced mortality due to eagles from 2011 on but increasing presence of WTE in the bustard areas entails pressure on a critical level for released birds for the free-ranging population, as well.

What is the overall assessment of release programmes based on the survival of released birds one year after release?

- Effective (the survival rate is at least the same as in wild-born chicks)
 Partially effective (the survival rate is lower than 75% of the wild birds)
 Ineffective (the survival is less than 25% of wild birds)
 Not applicable³

5. Cross-border conservation measure

Has your country undertaken any cross-border conservation measures with neighbouring countries?

- Yes No Not applicable⁴

Please, give details of your country's collaboration with neighbouring countries on national surveys, research, monitoring and conservation activities for Great Bustard. Especially, list any measures taken to harmonise legal instruments protecting Great Bustard and its habitats, as well as funding you have provided to Great Bustard for particular conservation actions in other Range States.

- The German population is completely isolated.
- There is long-term contact to Poland with respect of the planned re-introduction there.
- Earlier international activities mainly by the Society for the Protection of the Great Bustard ("Foerderverein Großtrappenschutz") were described in the first report.
- Afterwards there was more informal interchange with partners abroad than joint projects, e. g. with the British re-introduction project.

6. Monitoring and research

6.1.1 Monitoring of population size and population trends.

Are the breeding, migratory or wintering Great Bustard populations monitored in your country?

- Yes No

³ No release is taking place in the country.

⁴ For countries which do not have any transboundary population.

What proportion of the national population is monitored?

All (>75%)

Most (50-75%)

Some (10-49%)

Little (<10%)

None

Not applicable¹

What is the size and trend in the national population?⁵

Breeding/resident population only. Population size in spring
2023: 307 individuals

No. of males: 91

No. of females: 216

Trend: Declined by ___% over the last 10 years

Stable

Fivefold increase since 1997 (minimum of 57 inv.
in Germany) and 18.5 % increase within the
reporting period.

Non-breeding population (on passage,
wintering)

No. of adult males: _____

No. of females: _____

No. immature males: _____

Trend: Declined by ___% over the last 10
years

Stable

Increased by ___% over the last 10
years

For countries where the species occurs only occasionally, please give the details of known observations within the reporting period:

6.1.2 Monitoring of the effects of habitat management.

Is the effect of habitat conservation measures monitored in your country?

Yes Partially No Not applicable¹

Please, provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published.

- Habitat monitoring comprises
 - plant communities at control plots,
 - selected invertebrate groups (species, activity), for other groups merely sporadic samples,
 - arthropod biomass (sweep nets, ground traps),
 - small mammals (abundance, Barn Owl pellets),
 - breeding birds (control plots for common breeding birds, complete censuses of rare birds).
- Indirect data on invertebrate fauna result from stomach analyses of bustards found dead.
- LANGGEMACH, T. & H. WATZKE (2013): Naturschutz in der Agrarlandschaft am Beispiel des Schutzprogramms Großtrappe (*Otis tarda*). Julius-Kühn-Archiv 442: 112-125.
- LITZBARKI, B. & H. LITZBARKI (2015): Schutzprojekt Großtrappe – 40 Jahre Naturschutzarbeit in der Agrarlandschaft. Berichte Naturforschende Gesellsch. Oberlausitz 23: 1-39. (See also 2008 report!).

What can be learned from these studies?

- Declining levels of nutrients in the landscape (mainly potassium, phosphorus, nitrogen) result in increasing species richness in plants and invertebrates, and a better vegetation structure.
- Extensification and habitat management work well regarding habitat structure, nutritional basis for the bustards, and biodiversity in total.

⁵ Only for countries where the species occurs regularly.

- Structures necessary for bustards are far from those under usual agricultural business. Therefore, there is absolute need for habitat improvement in still unmanaged areas, mainly in the SPA “Fiener Bruch” (two management plans, but only small scale management in the Saxony-Anhalt part of the SPA), and in the re-introduction area in the SPA “Zerbster Land”.
- Small mammals (as a part of biodiversity) seem to be more abundant in extensively than conventionally used grassland. Therefore, predation pressure which is a general problem for ground-breeding birds in large parts of Germany might be additionally boosted in conservation areas. The resulting conflict is not yet solved.
- Hot and dry breeding seasons such as between 2018 and 2022 entail smaller insect abundance.

What are the remaining gaps and what measures will your country do to address these gaps?

- More monitoring plots and more target species groups would better reflect the effects on biodiversity.
- In the SPA “Fiener Bruch” monitoring other than Great Bustard monitoring is still in infancy stadium.
- Management-effect relations should be better monitored.
- Management of predator populations and predation interactions is highly desirable.
- Further research addressing the role of small mammals and the influence of certain agricultural practices and AEM on their populations is necessary.
- Lacking staff is critical for any monitoring!
- Financial incentives for farmers are not attractive enough to adapt land use.

6.2.1 Comparative ecological studies.

Have there been any comparative studies carried out on the population dynamics, habitat requirements, effects of habitat changes and causes of decline in your country in collaboration with other Range States?

Yes No Not applicable¹

Please, provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published

- See 2008 report! No additional studies in the report period.

What can be learned from these studies?

- Bustard-friendly habitats essentially need low intensity farming practices.
- Habitats modified by human land-use are more attractive for Great Bustards than natural steppe habitats.
- Breeding densities of bustard populations are highest in fallow or extensively used arable land.
- Fallow-land is most attractive and suitable for Great Bustards in the first one or two years.
- Stable or increasing populations with sustainable reproduction rates exist only in landscapes with low predation pressure.
- Predation management by professional hunters may be an alternative land-use approach and can markedly raise bustard populations.
- German bustard habitats are not as wide and open as in other regions. Consequently, measures were taken to improve this habitat feature, mainly by cutting poplar windbreaks.
- Losses of migratory birds mainly caused by power lines and hunting.

What are the remaining gaps where the Memorandum of Understanding could assist?

- Predation pressure is evidently a problem for a lot of ground-breeding bird species in central Europe. The Great Bustard could be used as a flagship species not only in habitat but also predation management. This should be addressed by comparative scientific studies to better understand the phenomenon and its environmental context but also by joint practical attempts to solve the existing problems.
- Since rabies vaccination is at least a part of the problem it should be legitimate to take chemical or biological methods of fertility control into consideration in the framework of predation management.

6.2.2 Studies on mortality factors.

Are the causes of Great Bustard mortality understood in your country?

Yes Partially No Not applicable¹

Please, provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published.

- Running Great Bustard monitoring scheme in combination with a Brandenburg state monitoring on reasons of mortality in large bird species (incl. post-mortem investigations).
- Post-release monitoring of captive-reared juveniles incl. colour-ringing and radio-tracking (since 1992, GPS necklaces since 2019).
- Power-line and wind-farm surveys.
- Latest paper: LANGGEMACH, T., P. SÖMMER, B. BLOCK & T. DÜRR (2009): Langzeituntersuchungen zu den Verlustursachen bei Greifvögeln, Eulen und anderen Vogelarten in Brandenburg. *Populationsökologie Greifvogel- und Eulenarten* **6**: 27-46.
- For more references see report 2008!

What can be learned from these studies?

- In juveniles radio-tracking is a valuable approach for several questions (cf. 4.3). Necklaces are the method of choice, whereas backpacks led to increased mortality mainly due to predation (also in adults).
- Solar-powered GPS necklaces from *Ornitela* proved worthwhile regarding well-being of the birds and reliable long-term data.
- Mortality in juveniles is mainly caused by predators. From November on, the lek sizes usually remains stable over the winter.
- The main problem regarding mortality (ad. and juv. bustards) is meanwhile predation by White-tailed Eagles. Power-lines still cause fatalities but probably decreasing! Some fatalities and injuries by baler-twines are documented. Both have been addressed by several conservation and awareness campaigns. So far, there are no bustard casualties known at wind-farms in Germany (but three fatalities in Spain and one in Austria).
- In females there is often a striking difference between spring and autumn numbers probably caused by predation on the nest or farming measures.

What are the remaining gaps and what measures will your country do to address these gaps?

- Generally adult mortality is much too high; only a part of the fatalities are clear.
- Losses of broods and breeding females due to agriculture may be sometimes concealed by the farmers.
- GPS data for males are lacking - necklaces are not suitable for males, and back-packs in earlier attempts led to enormous increase of mortality due to White-tailed Eagles.

6.2.3 Investigation of factors limiting breeding success.

Are the factors limiting breeding success in core populations understood in your country?

Yes Partially No Not applicable⁶

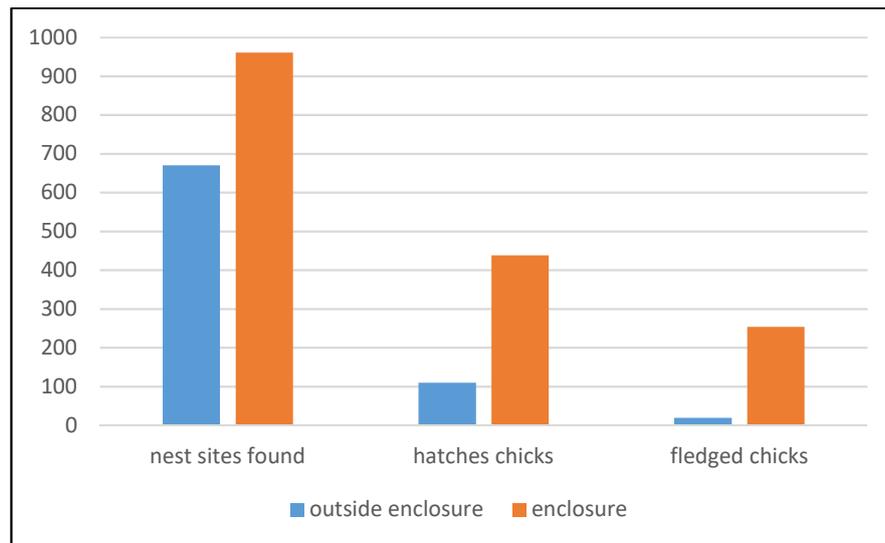
Please, provide a list of on-going and completed studies with references if results are already published.

- LITZBARSKI, B. & H. (1999): Zur Fortpflanzungsbiologie der Großtrappe (*Otis tarda* L.) in Brandenburg. *Otis* **7**: 122-133.
- LITZBARSKI, B. & H. (2008): Untersuchungen zum Bruterfolg des Kiebitz (*Vanellus vanellus*) im Havelland – ein Beitrag zur Prädation im Lebensraum der Großtrappen. *Otis* **15**: 77-88.
- Predation overview for Germany in FLADE, M., V. DIERSCHKE & T. LANGGEMACH (eds.) (2005): Prädation und der Schutz bodenbrütender Vogelarten. *Vogelwelt* **126**: 259-384.
- LANGGEMACH, T. & H. WATZKE (2013): Naturschutz in der Agrarlandschaft am Beispiel des Schutzprogramms Großtrappe (*Otis tarda*). *Julius-Kühn-Archiv* **442**: 112-125.

⁶ Only for breeding countries.

What can be learned from these studies?

- The breeding success in the German Great Bustard population is much too low for a long-term survival.
- The main limiting factor is predation – in Great Bustards as well as in many other ground-breeding bird species.
- In most studies on ground-breeding birds, predatory mammals account for low nest survival (most often between 70 and 80 % of predation altogether). Juveniles are threatened by a mixture of mammals and birds.
- Fox-free areas that are fenced-off proved to be successful source habitats (see fig. for the period 1990-2021, SPA “Havellaendisches Luch”, n=961 nest sites in enclosures, n=670 outside these). Ravens and Hooded Crows cause losses of broods inside. White-tailed Eagles are increasingly a nuisance for breeding females.



- Anti-predation fences (enclosures) must be well-situated in order to provide enough food. Otherwise they might act as ecological traps.
- The current success of predatory mammals (incl. neozoons like racoon and racoon dog) is a result of rabies vaccination and nearly unlimited resources for these species.
- Hunting pressure on ground predators must be very high for any effect. Low or medium level hunting pressure has no positive effect; in contrast it could even accelerate population dynamics if the mammal species.
- Predation has to be considered in the context of a variety of environmental factors.
- Climate change could become an additional threat: during the last years extreme weather events affected the breeding success negatively, mainly severe rainfalls with flooding of the destroyed, hydrophobic fen ground, but also lacking insect food and even dicot plants in periods of drought.

What are the remaining gaps and what measures are you going to take to address these gaps?

- The role of small mammals and the influence of different farming practices on small mammal populations are insufficiently understood.
- Predation and its environmental implications have to be addressed by further studies.
- There is urgent need in basic research on non-lethal control of predators, mainly foxes and neozoons (chemical fertility control, conditioned taste aversion etc.). Parallel to that, ethical discussion about this kind of wildlife management has to be continued.

6.2.4 Studies on migration.

Were there any studies on migration routes and wintering places carried out in your country?

Yes Partially No Not applicable¹

Where are the key sites, and what is the size of the population they support?

- Ground-tracking since 1992, and additionally GPS-tracking since 2019 (37 females). Basic work by monitoring.
- Exchange between the three GB areas was analysed by EISENBERG, A. H. WATZKE & T. LANGGEMACH (2018): Wechsel von Großtrappen (*Otis tarda*) zwischen den Schutzgebieten Belziger Landschaftswiesen, Fiener Bruch und Havelländisches Luch in den Jahren 2001 bis 2017. Natursch Landschaftspfl. Brandenburg 27: 30-45. → Monitoring / ringing data / ground tracking.
- Key sites are known but GPS tracking revealed new insights into movements:
 - Larger overlap between breeding and wintering areas than assumed before – clear separation no longer useful
 - Better definition of the borders of the three leks
 - Nest sites inside and outside bustard SPAs at places formerly not known
 - Large range of migration/dispersal behaviour between individuals with very large flight distances (thousands of km) in some birds, and hardly any movements of birds on the other side.
 - Better understanding of dispersal with stepwise prolongation of exploring flights around the SPA sites; in some females this period comprises several years but flights between areas tend to be more and more focussed over years.

Do you have any knowledge about the origin of these birds supported by ringing or other marking methods?

- All migrating and wintering birds are from the German population.
- Identification of the birds by colour-rings (incl. camera traps) and radio-transmitters.
- Year-round monitoring allows classification of flocks in many cases even without ring identification.

What are the remaining gaps and what measures will your country do to address these gaps?

- GPS tracking markedly improved our knowledge on dispersion and migration. However, data on males is lacking as the proven method (solar-powered necklaces) is not suitable for males.
- It remains unclear if the data from released females are representative for wild-born birds.

7. Training of staff working in conservation bodies

Is there any mechanism in place in your country to share information on biological characteristics and living requirements of Great Bustard, legal matters, census techniques and management practices to personnel working regularly with the species? Yes No Not applicable¹

- Not relevant, since the staff is more or less stable for many years.

If yes, please describe it.

Have personnel dealing with Great Bustard participated in any exchange programme in other Range States? Yes No Not applicable¹

If yes, please give details on number of staff involved, country visited and how the lessons were applied in your country.

- Not in the report period, but see earlier reports!

8. Increasing awareness of the need to protect Great Bustards and their habitat

What measures have been taken to increase the awareness about the protection needs of the species and its habitat in your country since signing the Memorandum of Understanding?

- intensive collaboration with farmers and hunters,
- contacts to politicians and stakeholders of land-users,
- awareness campaigns via the media, exhibitions, leaflets and brochures,
- sponsorships for individual bustards
- visitor centres in all three Great Bustard areas,
- guided tours for the public, observation towers.

Do farmers, shepherds, political decision makers and local and regional authorities support Great Bustard conservation? Yes Partially No

What are the remaining gaps or problems and how are you going to address them?

- Energy crop cultivation is much better subsidized than AEM and thus much more attractive. Awareness campaigns cannot solve this conflict.
- Filling local people with enthusiasm is much more difficult than visitors from far away.

9. Economic measures

Have there been any initiatives taken to develop economic activities that are in line with the conservation requirements of Great Bustard in your country?

Yes Partially No Not applicable¹

What percentage of the population is covered in total by these measures?

- All (>75%)
- Most (50-75%)
- Some (10-49%)
- Little (<10%)
- None
- Not applicable

How effective were these measures?

- Effective (more than 50% of the targeted area is managed according to the species' needs)
- Partially effective (10–49% of the targeted area is managed according to the species' needs)
- Ineffective (less than 10% according to the species' needs)
- Not applicable¹

10. Threats

Please, fill in the table below on main threats to the species in your country. Use the threat scores categories below to quantify their significance at national level. Please, provide an explanation on what basis you have assigned the threat score and preferably provide reference. Add additional lines, if necessary.

Threat scores:

Critical: a factor causing or likely to cause **very rapid declines** (>30% over 10 years).

High: a factor causing or likely to cause **rapid declines** (20-30% over 10 years).

Medium: a factor causing or likely to cause relatively **slow, but significant, declines** (10-20% over 10 years).

Low: a factor causing or likely to cause **fluctuations**.

Local: a factor causing local declines but likely to cause **negligible declines at population level**.

Unknown: a factor that is likely to affect the species but it is unknown to what extent.

Threat name	Threat score	Explanation and reference
Habitat loss	High	Fragmentation around, inside and between conservation areas. Only small core areas are suitable covering hardly more than 1 % of the former distribution in Germany. Modern agriculture outside conservation areas provides no bustard habitats for decades. Inside conservation areas high level of maize cultivation for energetic use decreases the extent of suitable habitat.
Losses of eggs and chicks	Critical	The survival of the population completely depends on 1) the areas fenced-off and 2) reinforcement.
Predation	Critical	Offspring outside fenced areas near Zero (19 chicks fledged between 1990 and 2023). Mortality of juv. and ad. birds due to white-tailed eagle predation is becoming a new threat on critical level.
Collision with powerlines	Medium	32 fatalities documented since 2001, 10 in the period covered by this report.
Human disturbance	Local	Mainly outside conservation areas; sometimes disturbances inside due to air traffic or illegal presence of visitors.
Pesticides	Medium	Toxicological findings did not reveal any problem (LITZBARKSKI, B. 1997: Zum Pestizidgehalt in Eiern, Küken und erwachsenen Tieren der Großtrappe <i>Otis tarda</i> . Natursch. Landschaftspfl. Brandenburg 5: 107-112) but food chain affected, at least outside conservation areas.
Illegal hunting	Low	One case in 2010 (after an interval of >20 years).
Others (specify)	Low	Sometimes bustards collide with pasture fences or get entangled in baler-twine leading to injury and death.

PART II. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC ACTIONS

Please report on the implementation of the country-specific actions listed for your country in Part II of the Action Plan and provide information if that is not already covered by your answers under Part I. Please describe not only the measures taken but also their impact on Great Bustard or its habitat in the context of the objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding and the Action Plan. Where you have already answered on country-specific actions in Part I, please only add a reference to the relevant answer here.

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