



BRINGING BACK THE EASTERN GREAT BUSTARDS

Conserving East Asia's last remaining populations

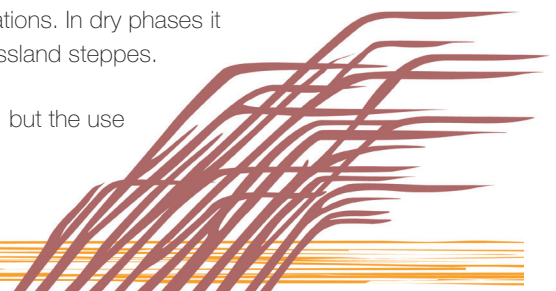


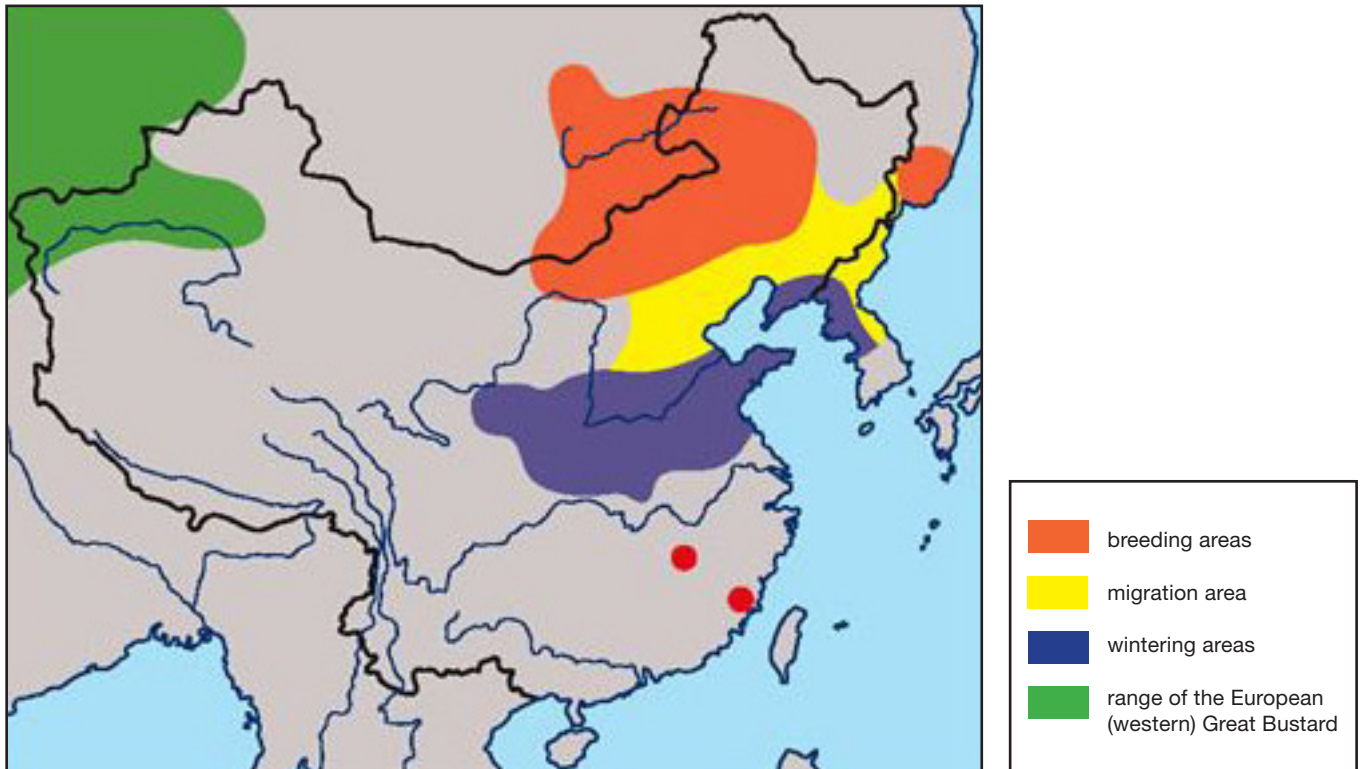
Photo: Vadim Kiriliuk
Bustard in Daurisky Biosphere Reserve

East Asia's Iconic Bird

The Eastern Great Bustard (*Otis tarda dybovsky*) is an iconic bird species of the Daurian steppe and other grasslands of East Asia. With a wingspan of up to 2.5 metres and weighing 10-16 kilograms, this huge bird species is considered the heaviest flying bird in Asia, if not the world. In the Dauria area the species migrates widely both seasonally and during different phases of the region's 30-year climate cycle, but birds display preferences to certain nesting and staging locations. In dry phases it prefers forest-steppe habitats, while in wet years it favors the vast expanses of the grassland steppes.

For centuries the meat of the Eastern Great Bustard was prized by Mongolian nomads, but the use of sustainable traditional hunting practices ensured that bird numbers remained stable.





The historic range of the Eastern Great Bustard in East Asia

The Challenge and Opportunity to Make a Difference

Since the 1950's, through environmental degradation and increased human interference, the number of Eastern Great Bustards has decreased every year, and the total population is currently estimated at only 1000–1500 birds (Goroshko O., DIPA, 2007). The breeding range of the species has shrunk significantly, and is now limited to the Dauria Steppe. If these trends continue the Eastern Great Bustard will very soon face extinction.

The Eastern Great Bustard faces many threats including:

- Habitat degradation and loss due to mineral exploration, infrastructure, cropland expansion
- Conflict with new agricultural machinery
- Competition from livestock
- Collisions with powerlines and windmills
- Poisoning by pesticides and other chemicals
- Hunting and egg collection.

In recent years the Great Bustard has been the focus of global conservation attention, however much of the recovery effort has been focused on the European subspecies (*Otis tarda* L.). The European subspecies is now on its way to recovery, with the population estimated to have nearly doubled to 40,000 birds during the last ten years.

It is speculated that recovery is partly due to the European subspecies' adaptation to agricultural landscapes and the use of croplands and their fringes as breeding and staging areas. Hunting pressure and egg-removal pressure has also decreased in many countries. The success of the European subspecies gives hope that recovery can be similarly achieved for its Eastern cousin.

In March 2009 the first symposium on Eastern Great Bustard conservation and management in China was held at Beijing Forestry University. The "China Great Bustard Conservation and Monitoring Network" was established, consisting of front-line ornithologists and conservationists. In cooperation with the Tumuji protected area, a radio-tracking system for the Great Bustard was established, and the Great Bustard protection web site was established (www.otistarda.org and www.otistarda.com). As a follow-up to this initial symposium and first conservation actions, the first International Symposium on the Conservation of the Eastern Great Bustard was held in April 2010, supported by China's State Forestry Administration.



Photo: Guo Yumin
A Bustard released into the wild in Tumujil
National Nature Reserve, September 2009

Scope of the Project

This project seeks to expand the Eastern Great Bustard conservation and monitoring network to ensure that the network includes representative experts from all key breeding, wintering and migration locations of the species. The project will also implement an educational program for local communities and involve them in bird monitoring and conservation activities. The first phase of the project focuses on implementation of conservation activities in China and on expanding the international support network.

Project Actions

The project will consist of a number of components:

1. Inventory of migration/wintering habitats and mortality

causes: Critical baseline research on the Eastern Great Bustard will be undertaken to produce an inventory of wintering habitats in China and an analysis of Bustard migration to and from various key habitats. Bird mortality will also be analysed to research the key threats to the species.

2. Preventing egg-taking and encaptivating birds:

An educational campaign will be used to address the widespread phenomenon of egg- and chick-taking by local herdsman. The project will work with nature reserves to publicize that these activities are illegal. An additional widespread practice is for chicks taken from the wild by local people to be brought in to nature reserve administrations where they are raised in captivity. As a result, instead of protecting wild populations, nature reserves raise 'domesticated' bustards, and less and less birds are left in the wild. To counteract this practice, awareness raising will be undertaken to ensure that local people know that rewards will not be given for chicks brought in to nature reserve administrations. Protected area managers will also be educated to ensure that only sick and injured individuals are accepted.

- 3. Anti-poaching activity, bustard-livestock conflict:** The Eastern Great Bustard network will be engaged to support anti-poaching activities carried out by protection staff at local nature reserves. The project will enlist the help of volunteers to record crimes and assist seizure and punishment of poachers. The penalties that are given to poachers will be publicized through the network to deter further violations.
- 4. Awareness raising program:** An awareness raising campaign, undertaken through local and national media outlets and the distribution of materials such as a calendar, will be used to highlight the Eastern Great Bustard conservation program and to help regulate grazing pressure on grassland habitat of the Bustard.
- 5. Conservation management planning:** A management conservation strategy will be developed to drive long term conservation efforts for the Eastern Great Bustard. This plan will utilise the preliminary information on migration routes and wintering areas gathered during this project.
- 6. Support of the first International Great Bustard Symposium:** The first International Great Bustard Symposium is scheduled for April 2010 in Beijing. The Symposium aims to refine conservation management plans for the species. Essential to the conservation planning process is the participation of representatives from Russia and Mongolia and international experts with experience in Great Bustard conservation. This project will support participants from these locations to attend the conference in China.

Implementing Agencies and Partners

The project will be a partnership between the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative (TGCI) and the Institute of Nature Conservation – Beijing Forestry University, China.

Implementing Agency

- Institute of Nature Conservation – Beijing Forestry University

Cooperating Agencies

- Dauria International Protected Area (DIPA)
- Tumuji National Nature Reserve
- Birdlife Asia
- China State Forest Administration
- Secretariat of Convention of Migratory Species
- IUCN Commissions – particularly Species Survival Commission (SSC) and World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)
- IUCN Secretariat through the Asia Programme

Funding Requirements and Timetable

The project will be implemented over a one year period with a funding requirement of \$75,600US.

ACTIVITIES	TOTAL (US\$)
1. Inventory of migration/wintering habitats and mortality causes	18,000
2. Preventing egg-taking and encaptivating birds	6,000
3. Anti-poaching activity, bustard-livestock conflict	6,000
4. Awareness raising program	3,600
5. Report preparation and related coordination activities	6,000
6. Support of the first international Great Bustard symposium	12,000
Project Management and IUCN staff time	24,000
TOTAL BUDGET (US\$)	75,600



Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative

http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/wcpa/wcpa_what/wcpa_conserving/wcpa_grasslandstf/

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