

REPORTING FORMAT FOR THE GREAT BUSTARD MOU AND ACTION PLAN

This reporting format is designed to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan associated with the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of the Middle-European Population of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*). Reporting on the Action Plan's implementation will support exchange of information throughout the range and assist the identification of necessary future actions by the Signatory States. The questions presented here go beyond the scope of information already requested from CMS Contracting Parties for national reports to the CMS Conference of the Parties.

GENERAL INFORMATION

<p>Agency or institution responsible for the preparation of this report</p> <p>Mag. Rainer Raab, Technical office for biology Mag. Rainer Raab, Coordinator of the Austrian Great Bustard Conservation Project and surveillance officer for most great bustard sub-populations in Austria; rainer.raab@gmx.at</p>
<p>List any other agencies, institutions, or NGOs that have provided input</p> <p>Dr. DI Enrica Seltenhammer, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water management of Austria (BMLFUW); enrica.seltenhammer@lebensministerium.at</p> <p>Mag. Dr. Andreas Ranner, Conservation Department of the Government of Burgenland; andreas.ranner@bgld.gv.at</p> <p>Mag. Katharina Kölbl, Office of the State Government of Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), Nature Protection Department; katharina.koelbl@noel.gv.at</p> <p>Dr. Manfred Pöckl, Office of the State Government of Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), Nature Conservation Expert and representative of the Austrian Federal States within the MoU; manfred.poeckl@noel.gv.at</p>
<p>Reports submitted to date:</p> <p>First: Austrian National Report 2004 for the period 2000 to 2004 (Period covered) Second: Austrian National Report 2008</p>
<p>Period covered by this report</p> <p>(day) (month) (year) to (day) (month) (year): 19/09/2004 to 30/09/2008</p>
<p>Memorandum in effect in country since:</p> <p>[Date: dd / mm / yy]: Austria signed the memorandum on 28th November 2001</p>
<p>Designated Focal Point (and full contact details): Dr. DI Enrica Seltenhammer (Great Bustard CMS contact point), Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water management of Austria (BMLFUW), dept. II/4, Stubenbastei 5, OG 04/406, A-1011 Vienna, Austria; e-mail: enrica.seltenhammer@lebensministerium.at</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

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fully (>75%) <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fully (>75%) <input 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

The SPA “Westliches Weinviertel” was enacted under domestic legislation February 4th 2008 and SPA “Waasen - Hanság” was enacted under domestic legislation June 3rd 2008, SPA “Sandboden und Praterterrasse” and SPA “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden” will be enacted under domestic legislation within the next weeks. The breeding sites and leks of Great Bustard within the IBA “Feuchte Ebene – Rauchenwarther Platte” are not within SPA “Feuchte Ebene – Leithaauen” (population in autumn 2008: 1 male). From the end of 2008 forward more than 90% of the display, breeding, stop-over and wintering sites of Great Bustard will be protected under national law.

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

In Austria, extensive measures are taken for the management of all breeding areas and key migration and wintering sites of the Great Bustard. In promoting the implementation of Great Bustard species conservation many institutions and organisations are collaborating excellently. In particular these are: the two State Governments of Burgenland and Lower Austria as well as the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water management of Austria (BMLFUW), local councils, the NGOs like ÖGG (Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation), WWF Austria, BirdLife Austria, Naturschutzbund, Distelverein and others, but also the hunting associations and the farmers unions of Burgenland and Lower Austria. The majority of the conservation activities are co-financed by the EU.

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

In 2000, the WWF in the context of its campaign “Lass Sie leben” jointly with the BMLFUW raised the profile of Great Bustard species conservation efforts nationally and internationally leading to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of the Central-European Population of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) (MoU) and the publication of the Action Plan for the protection of the Great Bustard in Austria. Since 2000, the Great Bustard species protection project has been coordinated by a responsible manager, the author of the present report. In addition, regular (but not daily) surveillance is carried out in all Great Bustard ranges by surveillance officers. Erich Patak in the National Park around Lake Neusiedl (in Hungarian also called Lake Fertö), in all the other bustard areas in Lower Austria and Burgenland this work is done by Rainer Raab and his team, financed through European community funding. In the Federal State of Burgenland, this funding was provided under the INTERREG-III A – Programme for Austria and Hungary entitled “Species Protection Project for the Great Bustard in the areas Parndorfer Platte and Heideboden“ (Project No. HUBP5M2_0015, running from 2002 to 2007). In the Federal State of Lower Austria, the funding was provided under the Rural Development Programme “Species Protection Project for the Great Bustard in the areas Weinviertel, Marchfeld und Rauchenwarther Platte” (Project No. RU5-LE-152/000, running from 2002 to 2004).

In August 2005 the LIFE project “Cross-border Protection of the Great Bustard in Austria” (LIFE05 NAT/A/000077) started in Lower Austria and Burgenland. The LIFE Project with a project budget of 5,840,760 EURO is supported by the EU and the following project partners and co-financiers: EVN AG - Energy Supply Lower Austria PLC, BEWAG - Burgenland Electricity Commerce PLC, VERBUND-Austrian Power Grid PLC, ÖBB-Infrastructure Building PLC, State Government of Lower Austria, Department for Nature Conservation, State Government of Burgenland, Department 5.III for Nature Conservation and Protection of the Environment and Austrian Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water management (BMLFUW). The main objectives of this LIFE project are to deal with the threat of collision with overhead power lines, now the no. 1 mortality factor for adult and immature Great Bustards in Austria, and at the same time to continue Austria's intensive habitat management efforts. In addition to the LIFE project there is a Rural Development project in Lower Austria entitled "Cross-border Protection of the Great Bustard in Lower Austria", RU5-S-428/001-2005, running from August 2005 to July 2010, and financed by the State Government of Lower Austria and by the EU. Both projects are implemented by the Technical office for biology Mag. Rainer Raab on behalf of the Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation (ÖGG).

In addition, close cooperation with farmers, hunters and other local people is actively promoted by the project coordinator and surveillance officers to ensure good information exchange on all matters relevant to bustard conservation.

Lease or acquisition of land for bustard conservation is not feasible in Austria. Therefore, the maintenance of Great Bustard habitats both inside and outside the proposed Natura 2000 sites is carried out through special Great Bustard measures under “ÖPUL”, the Austrian Agri-environment scheme since 1995 (1995: 700 ha, 2000: 2 600 ha, 2007: 5 500 ha).

Where are the remaining gaps?

Currently there are no relevant gaps within the designation of protected areas for the Great Bustard due to the ongoing enlargement of the SPA “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden” and SPA “Waasen - Hanság”

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.

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

The identification of unoccupied areas which are potential breeding habitat of the Great Bustard is in progress.

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.).

As more than 90% of the display, breeding, stop-over and wintering sites will be covered by protected areas at the end of 2008 the question only applies to the area "Rauchenwarther Platte". There are a few hectares of special Great Bustard fallow land at the moment but it is planned to establish more special Great Bustard fallow land within the next years in this area.

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

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

The mapping of recently (over the last 20 years) abandoned Great Bustard breeding habitats of the Great Bustard is in progress.

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

Measures like special Great Bustard fallow land have been taken to encourage the return of Great Bustards to abandoned breeding habitats nearby established breeding sites inside protected areas.

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

Breeding of Great Bustard could be observed on these additional fallows near the current breeding areas. The population of Great Bustard increased especially in "Heideboden".

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.

Smaller infrastructural facilities (like wind farms with only few wind power stations) are not subject to an environmental impact assessment. However the impact of every infrastructural project has to be proven according to nature conservation law before implementation. Apart from that the deterioration of the ecological condition at the designation time is prohibited within the SPAs.

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

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.

Since 1969 hunting of Great Bustards has been banned in Austria. In all Great Bustard ranges hunters agree to take the species and its needs into consideration in agreement with the EU Bird Directive. In the breeding season most hunting activities are suspended voluntarily at the breeding sites. In general, hunting hides are only built or moved in agreement with the local surveillance officers. Nevertheless, seasonal hunting activities like Roe Deer hunting, particularly in May and July, and Brown Hare, pheasant and Grey Partridge hunting in the autumn can cause some degree of disturbance.

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?

The surveillance officers endeavour to keep disturbance of Great Bustards at a low level. The ÖPUL measures help to reduce agricultural activities in bustard areas, in particular during the breeding season. If parts of the fallow land are cut or mulched during the breeding season in order to provide fresh and low growth for the chicks, the surveillance officer accompanies the farmer in order to keep disturbances for the birds to a minimum or stop the work entirely if necessary. In bustard areas close to the border where soldiers usually patrolled the border line, an agreement existed between State Government nature conservation bodies and the armed forces which ensured that for three months every year during the breeding season the breeding sites were not disturbed (no more necessary since 21st December 2007 - Schengen). In addition, there is a general agreement with farmers and hunters to keep all disturbances in bustard areas to a necessary minimum. The surveillance officers in cooperation with hunters and farmers try to reduce disturbance through leisure activities such as dog walking, biking, Nordic walking, jogging and horse riding. There are agreements with the armed forces to prevent unnecessary disturbances through aircraft and helicopters. There are efforts to implement similar agreements with the private aviation bodies.

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?

The role of predation in Austria depends obviously on the weather conditions. In some years (for example 2002) it is playing a certain role for the clutches. If the vegetation is developing slowly the pressure of predation is higher.

What are the main predator species?

The main predator species is in all probability the Red fox. The role of other predators is not really well known, but it looks like that Hooded Crows are also playing a certain role. However there are some other maybe relevant predators, such as Marsh Harrier, White tailed Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, badger and Raccoon dog.

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

Populations of foxes, Hooded Crows, Raccoon dog and wild boars are hunted within legal limits, but this is mostly not enough to control these populations. So they are still increasing and in the coming years higher negative impacts cannot be excluded.

Since Red Foxes are a serious threat to juvenile Great Bustards, a good cooperation between hunters and conservationists is very valuable in this regard. The Eastern Imperial Eagle and the White-tailed Eagle are also critically endangered species in Austria which require protection measures themselves. A deliberate reduction of these rare species which can also be a threat to bustards is naturally not the aim of conservation activities.

How effective were these measures?

- Effective (predation reduced by more than 50%)
- Partially effective (predation reduced by 10–49%)
- 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?

For many years collisions of flying Great Bustards with power lines were the most serious threats to the Great Bustard population in Austria. In the period from June 2001 to May 2008, 27 Great Bustards have been proven to have died through collision with power lines in Austria (14 in the area of the “Western Weinviertel”, 12 in the area of “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden”, and 1 in the area of “Marchfeld”).

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

In the frame of the LIFE project between August 2005 and September 2008 approx. 45 km of existing medium voltage power lines have been transferred below the soil and 125.2 km of high voltage power

lines have been marked with bird protection markings. Since that time no individual died on marked sections.

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

About 300 individuals in winter and approx. 150 individuals in the breeding time are affected by these measures. Therefore a major part of the West-Pannonian population (365 individuals in February 2008) is affected.

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)?

In Austria, there is currently no need for compensatory measures, as any activities which will create new loss or degradation of Great Bustard habitat or longer term disturbance of the species are kept at bay. However, if degradation should occur in future, it should be compensated by appropriate measures. Only some hectares were lost due to creeping changes (asphalting of farm tracks, enlarging of settlements).

Great Bustard habitat did not get lost but partially the quality of the habitat changed. Due to changed EU legislation in the new rural development programme period (2007 – 2013) the preservation and establishment of bustard fallow land became extremely hard. In the eastern part of Austria hundreds of hectares of fallow land (in and) especially outside of the Great Bustard habitats have been ploughed and changed back to cultivated fields within the last years.

What is the size of the populations affected?

The minor loss of Great Bustard habitat has no significant effects on the Austrian population.

Were these habitat losses compensated? Yes Partially No Not applicable¹

If yes, please explain how.

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.

Not applicable.

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 is a strictly protected species in Lower Austria and Burgenland. In both federal states, the Great Bustard is counted as game under the hunting laws and is therefore not subject to nature conservation law. However, there is no hunting season, i.e. there is an all-year ban on hunting. Furthermore, the collection of eggs or chicks, the possession of and trade in the birds and their eggs is strictly prohibited and the restrictions are controlled. In Austria, no specimen is in private or other possession such as zoos.

Austria joined the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES or the Washington Convention), the comprehensive control system on trade in endangered species in 1982. Offences are punishable by fines between €726 and €36,336. Particularly severe offences may entail prison sentences of up to two years.

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

Authorization is only granted out of nature conservation interests.

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

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

If injured or seriously ill Great Bustards are found, they are taken into captivity and cared for until they have recovered and are then released again as soon as possible. Captive breeding of bustards is only carried out in exceptional circumstances, when a nest has been abandoned, with only four eggs incubated between 2001 and 2008 in the years 2002 and 2004. There is no specific station for Great Bustards in Austria. Injured or seriously ill Great Bustards are taken to the "Eulen- und Greifvogelstation" (owl and bird of prey station) Haringsee. Bustards receive excellent veterinary care from Professor Frey, but the housing among birds of prey is not ideal. For this reason, the two Great Bustard chicks hatched in captivity in 2004 were taken to Hungary on 27th May 2004 for transfer to the Great Bustard Rescue Station at Dévaványa.

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.

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?

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

- Effective (the survival is about the same as of the wild ones)
- Partially effective (the survival rate is lower than 75% of the wild birds)

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

- 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.

A monthly coordinated census of Great Bustards is carried out in cooperation with Hungary and Slovakia. Good contacts exist with ornithologists working on Great Bustards in these countries and ornithologists from the Czech Republic. Joint meetings and research field trips are organised regularly. Since the start of the LIFE Projects in Hungary, Slovakia and Austria, the cross-border cooperation on Great Bustard conservation for the common populations around the Austrian borders to Hungary and Slovakia has been intensified. In the coming years, cross-border conservation measures will be extended further in this region, but also around the Austrian border to the Czech Republic. After Hungary already finished an EU LIFE project, there are ongoing plans that Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia will hand in a LIFE+ project for the West-Pannonian population in the autumn of 2009.

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

What proportion of the national population is monitored?

- All (>75%)
 Most (50-75%)
 Some (10-49%)
 Little (<10%)
 None
 Not applicable¹

³ No release is taking place in the country.

⁴ For countries which do not have any transboundary population.

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

Breeding/resident population
Breeding time 2007

Non-breeding population (on passage, wintering)
Winter 2007/2008

No. of adult/immature males:	84-97	No. of adult males:	103
No. of females:	101	No. of immature males:	14 (last year's)
Total No. individuals:	185 - 198	No. of females:	203
		Total No. individuals:	320

Trend: Declined by ___% over the last 10 years
 Stable
 Increased by approx. 300 % over the last 10 years

Trend: Declined by ___% over the last 10 years
 Stable
 Increased by approx. 300 % over the last 10 years

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

In winter the 320 individuals (February 2008) spend most of the time in Austria, but sometimes up to 270 individuals can be found on the Slovakian or Hungarian side close to the border.

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.

Monitoring of effects of habitat management is carried out regularly at all sites, but not published yet.

What can be learned from these studies?

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

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

Comparative studies on the different sub-populations in Austria and for the whole West-Pannonian subpopulation (A, CZ, H and SK) are carried out, but not published yet.

What can be learned from these studies?

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

⁵ Only for countries where the species occurs regularly.

The cooperation between Austria and the Czech Republic is existing, but has a great potential to be intensified. An important step would be the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding of the Czech Republic.

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.

Mortality factors are studied whenever possible, for example targeted searches are carried out when individual birds go missing. This has been important for example in identifying collisions with power lines as an important mortality factor. The results are not published yet.

What can be learned from these studies?

In the 7 year period from June 2001 to May 2008, 47 Great Bustards (without juveniles) have been found dead in Austria, 21 in the area of “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden”, 19 in the area of the “Western Weinviertel”, 4 in “Hanság”, 2 in the area of “Marchfeld” and 1 in the area of “Rauchenwarther Platte”. Of these 47 dead individuals 27 have been proven to have died through collision with power lines (14 in the area of the “Western Weinviertel”, 12 in the area of “Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden”, and 1 in the area of “Marchfeld”).

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

The mortality factors of the adult and immature individuals are studied in detail. The mortality factors for clutches and juveniles are not surveyed, only occasional observations are recorded. The reason is on the one hand to avoid additional disturbances to the clutches and on the other hand the constant increase of Austrian Great Bustard population.

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

Intensive studies on breeding success have been carried out, but certain conclusions about the reasons for failure are difficult to reach. The results are not published yet.

What can be learned from these studies?

The main factor limiting breeding success in Austria was for many decades the disturbance through agricultural activities. Due to effective design and placement of the large-scale protected areas and the special Great Bustard fields, this limiting factor is reduced nowadays. Nowadays weather conditions in the breeding time are playing an important role for the breeding success.

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

⁶ Only for breeding countries.

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?

The key sites are “Heideboden” and “Westliches Weinviertel” and in some years also “Waasen – Hanság” and “Marchfeld”. The whole West-Pannonian population is wintering in or close to these key sites. In winter 2007/2008 365 individuals were observed in total, most of the time more than 300 individuals wintered on the Austrian side.

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

Since currently no satellite telemetry, ringing or other marking methods are carried out, migration patterns are understood only incompletely. Nevertheless, observations of Great Bustards but also of flying bustards are carefully recorded. The observations showed that there was no major migration in Austria within the last years.

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

Since there are exchanges between the protected areas, there is a necessity to carry out specific studies on this topic. A feasibility study on satellite telemetry for Great Bustards will be carried out in the frame of the LIFE project in 2009. This is a potential topic for the proposal of the LIFE+ project from 2011 onwards.

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

If yes, please describe it.

The project coordinator carries out frequent personal meetings and field trips to Great Bustard areas with staff from conservation bodies.

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.

1 person; Hungary

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?

Several information events for farmers and landowners have been carried out in cooperation with the

farmers' chamber, and hundreds of hours of personal talks with farmers. This has led to important successes, such as nearly 100% of farmers in the bustard range of Western Weinviertel participating in the "ÖPUL" Great Bustard measures.

Occasional TV, radio, newspaper and interest group (farmers, hunters, etc.) magazine coverage of Great Bustard issues has been promoted by the project coordinator and the Lake Neusiedl National Park, but so far without making habitat locations outside the National Park public. Several photo exhibitions about Great Bustard conservation have been organised by the project coordinator in cooperation with the wildlife photographers Franz Kovacs and Josef Timar in Vienna and Budapest and in different cities and towns of Lower Austria and Burgenland. A dedicated internet site exists since 2001: www.grosstrappe.at. Since the beginning of the LIFE project in August 2005 the website is renewed and is available in German and English. Parts of the website have been translated into 5 additional languages and have been put online in August 2007. The website is continuously updated and includes summaries and photos of events and press releases related to the bustard protection project. In order to raise acceptance of the large-scale protected areas for Great Bustards in Austria, and of Natura 2000 sites in general, a lot of effort will go into raising public awareness on these issues in the coming years.

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?

A documentary film about the conservation of Great Bustard in Austria could be helpful to communicate the success of the efforts made within the ongoing projects.

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	Local	The minor loss of Great Bustard habitat has no significant effects on the Austrian population.
Losses of eggs and chicks	Low	Influence only in extreme or adverse weather conditions during the breeding period.
Predation	Low	The role of predation in Austria depends obviously on the weather conditions. If the vegetation is developing slowly the pressure of predation is higher.
Collision with powerlines	Until 2006: High, in some areas Critical, since 2006: Low, in some areas Medium	Within the LIFE project a lot of measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of collisions with power lines.
Human disturbance	Low	The surveillance officers endeavour to keep disturbance of Great Bustards at a low level.
Pesticides	Low	On special Great Bustard protection fields the use of pesticides is forbidden or restricted.
Illegal hunting	Low	Illegal hunting is normally no problem in Austria
Extreme or adverse weather conditions during the breeding period (strong downpours of rain, hail, cold periods during the hatching period).	Unknown	Annual fluctuations in breeding success have been observed in the last years.

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.

Endeavour to extend the ongoing set-aside and habitat management schemes.

Since the Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Austria in 2001, the ongoing set-aside and habitat management schemes have been extended significantly (see above).

Ensure the control of all populations locally and the care for breeding females in the field.

Regular surveillance is carried out in all bustard ranges by a surveillance officer. In the Lake Neusiedl National Park this is Erich Patak and in all other bustard areas in Lower Austria and Burgenland it is Rainer Raab and his co-workers (see above)

Improve and strengthen cross-border co-operation with neighbouring countries by reviewing and coordinating existing and/or developing new programmes for the research, monitoring and protection of Great Bustards.

In September 2004 Austria hosted a scientific symposium on Great Bustard conservation and the first meeting of the signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Since the start of the LIFE Projects in Hungary, Slovakia and Austria, the cross-border cooperation on Great Bustard conservation for the common population around the Austrian-Hungarian-Slovakian border has been intensified. In the coming years, cross-border conservation measures will be extended further in this region, but also around the Austrian-Czech border. After Hungary already finished an EU LIFE project, there are ongoing plans that Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia will hand in a LIFE+ project for the West-Pannonian population in the autumn of 2009 (see above).