

Recent status and distribution of the Great Bustard, *Otis tarda*, in Turkey

(Aves: Otidae)

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Abstract. The records of the Great Bustard, *Otis tarda* (Linnaeus, 1758), in Turkey from the period 1989-2008 were compiled and analysed to update a previous assessment published in 1989. Despite a sharply increased birdwatching activity in Turkey, only 106 records could be found from published and unpublished sources for this 20-year period. 870 of the total of 1066 individuals were recorded during the breeding season and 196 in the non-breeding season. The population is split into two subpopulations; one focused in Inner Anatolia and the other in East and South-east Anatolia, with the latter exceeding the Inner Anatolian population in numbers. Both subpopulations have declined significantly since the 1989 assessment, although, in the absence of comprehensive field surveys, it is not possible to quantify the degree. As several breeding sites have been abandoned, the size of the distribution area has shrunk in recent decades. In particular, the species is no longer present at several sites situated at the edge of the distribution area. The species winters in south-eastern Anatolia and in small numbers also in the large river deltas on the Black Sea and Mediterranean coasts. However, the winter population is also sharply decreasing. The Turkish Great Bustard population is much smaller than predicted, and apparently comprises 200-300 breeding pairs at the most.

Key words: Great Bustard, Otidae, conservation, population decline, distribution, conservation management, habitat, Turkey.

Introduction

The Great Bustard (*Otis tarda* Linnaeus, 1758) is a globally-threatened species, classified as “vulnerable” by IUCN (IUCN 2008). The species has been showing population declines across most of its range, mostly owing to the loss and fragmentation of its habitat (CRAMP 1998, BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2008), except in Iberia, where populations are considered stabilised, and in Russia, where an increase has been reported (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2004). Great Bustards are generally declining because of increasing use of steppe areas for arable farming, modernisation of agriculture and irrigation methods, changes in land-use, pesticides and intensive agricultural activities (CRAMP 1998). The current world population is estimated at about 45,000 individuals, while Turkey’s population was estimated as 3000-4000 by GORIUP & PARR (1985), 800-3000 by KOLLAR (1996), 145-4000 by KASPAREK & BILGIN (1996), 764-1250 by KILIÇ & EKEN (2004) and about 800-3000 individuals by BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL (2008). The Turkish population is the third or fourth largest in Europe after Spain and Russia (KOLLAR 1996). The species occurs in Turkey in two discrete sub-populations, one in Inner Anatolia and the inner part of Southern Anatolia, the other in Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia (KASPAREK 1989, GÜRKAN et al. 2003).

KASPAREK (1989) compiled all the Turkish Great Bustard records from published and un-