

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Zulfu Farajli
Project Title	Tackling the issues of Little Bustard (<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>) conservation in Azerbaijan
Application ID	40679-1
Date of this Report	20.02.2024

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Collection of data on wintering Little Bustard population of Azerbaijan				Field surveys carried out during project implementation allowed the project team to collect comprehensive and highly valuable data on the current population of wintering little bustards, their habitat preferences, and the various threats, both human-induced and natural, present in the area. A total of more than 97 000 little bustards (~40% of the global population, Birdlife International, 2024) were counted and two new wintering sites identified along with historical known locations.
Raising awareness on the conservation of the species				<p>In our efforts to raise awareness and engage government authorities and local communities in combating the illegal killing of little bustard, we collaborated closely with governmental bodies. During the fieldwork phase, we discovered roadside markets selling little bustard meat alongside other game species. Through collaboration with local authorities, we successfully halted this marketplace, with the police pledging to take necessary actions to curb such illegal meat trade, considering the species' protected status as a Red Book species. Our effort in this case is highlighted in local media (https://bizim.media/az/cemiyet/173514/?fbclid=IwAR3xvI2bRNN5W4FintDbTRtGmJ8V2N9fGaRbx7lxA7TzlehavyX_mAyl https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0oXPOecWQU&t=111s, https://az.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/3852902.html)</p> <p>Furthermore, during the fieldwork, we</p>

			<p>developed and distributed brochures among local communities and stakeholders, including farmers, hunters, and government officials. We also conducted several meetings with local youth to underscore the importance of species conservation, supplementing our discussions with insights gleaned from previous conservation challenges. Unfortunately, despite our efforts, we encountered a group of falconers from Qatar targeting little bustards during our fieldwork. Despite presenting evidence of this poaching incident, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources levied fines on only one individual, which were considerably lower than the penalties stipulated by law. The remaining individuals involved in the incident subsequently left the country. We are aiming to reach more robust solution for the issue of falconers in the country along side with IUCN Bustard Specialist Group.</p>
Halting market offering for the hunt of Little Bustards to foreigners			<p>In addition to on-site research and community engagement, we leveraged various social media platforms by employing different combinations of keywords, such as "hunting," "little bustards," and "Azerbaijan," to identify potential advocates of illegal hunting of the species. Through this approach, we have identified several accounts, local guides, and firms allegedly involved in such activities. This information has been compiled and presented to the relevant governmental body for investigation, which is currently underway at the time of this report.</p>

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a) One aspect of the project involved discovering new wintering spots for the species and studying how it's adapting to changes in agricultural habitats within the country's shifting landscape. By identifying these areas and understanding how the

little bustards are responding to changes in farming practices, we aimed to improve our conservation methods and safeguard crucial habitats for their survival.

b) To raise awareness about the little bustard, we actively engaged with local stakeholders and distributed informative materials. Through targeted outreach efforts and sharing educational resources, we aimed to deepen the understanding of the species' importance and the need for its protection among local communities, farmers, hunters, and government officials.

c) During the fieldwork phase, we made a concerted effort to involve local communities in the conservation project. By actively collaborating with residents and stakeholders in the regions where little bustards live, we aimed to cultivate a sense of responsibility and care for the species' well-being. This involvement not only bolstered community support for conservation efforts but also provided invaluable insights and resources about the species distribution that complemented our scientific research and conservation endeavours.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

Despite our best efforts and prearrangements, in two privately owned agricultural areas known to be frequented by the species did not grant us permission to conduct fieldwork. Nonetheless, we endeavoured to estimate the population size by gathering information from external observations and conversations with local residents.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.

Recognising the crucial role of local communities in conservation endeavours, we made concerted efforts to engage various groups within these communities in our project. This included organising joint population counts alongside local national park workers, on-site training on counts, facilitating meetings with youth to share our research findings, involvement of local media to make a news article about the threats for the species, and initiating discussions with agricultural landowners regarding the viability of non-invasive deterrents for the species as an alternative to poaching.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes. Regrettably, our partners from Portugal encountered setbacks that prevented their participation in a joint fieldwork aimed at capturing and GPS tagging some of the birds. Nonetheless, we have devised plans to undertake this endeavour in the

forthcoming years, with the goal of gaining deeper insights into the population's movements both within the country and beyond its borders. Furthermore, through collaboration with local stakeholders, we have come to recognise the critical importance of implementing long-term monitoring measures for the species' survival, particularly due to the potential conflicts arising from its habitat usage. Notably, in extensive agricultural fields, the species has been perceived as a pest, impacting the profitability of these areas. Hence, it has become evident that conservation efforts must be closely intertwined with the interests and perspectives of such stakeholders to ensure the continued existence of the species.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

This year, the "Sandgrouse" journal of OSME (Ornithological Society of the Middle East) has decided to dedicate its special issue to the little bustard. We intend to contribute an article summarising our research findings for this journal by April 2024. Additionally, there are plans for an online conference concerning the distribution of the little bustard in Asia, and we are committed to participating in and presenting our findings at this event.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps.

Habitat Conservation: Little bustards thrive in diverse grassland ecosystems. Thus, preserving and restoring these habitats, including grasslands within agricultural landscapes managed in a bird-friendly manner, is crucial for their survival. This entails protecting grasslands from habitat loss due to agricultural intensification, urban expansion, and infrastructure development. Similarly, some landowners shared their concerns about birds posing threat to their crop productivity. Non-invasive little bustard deterrent methods should be investigated and offered to farmers.

Threat Mitigation: Identifying and addressing threats such as habitat loss and fragmentation due to human activities is paramount. Measures to mitigate risks associated with infrastructure, such as collision hazards with power lines and wind turbines, are essential. These efforts involve implementing technologies and management practices to reduce the impact of these threats on little bustard populations.

Monitoring and Research: Regular monitoring of little bustard populations and their habitats is necessary for effective conservation management. This includes assessing population trends, identifying key habitats, and evaluating the success of conservation actions. Research into bustard ecology, behaviour, and migration patterns provides valuable insights for conservation planning and adaptive management strategies.

Community Engagement: Engaging local communities, landowners, and stakeholders is essential for the success of conservation efforts. This involves raising awareness about the importance of little bustards and their habitats, promoting sustainable land management practices, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to address conservation challenges collectively.

Legislation and Enforcement: Enforcing existing wildlife protection laws and implementing regulations to mitigate threats to little bustards are crucial. This includes monitoring and patrolling key habitats to prevent illegal activities such as poaching, habitat destruction, and disturbance. Effective law enforcement is crucial considering the current state of poaching of the species in the country. As the next step, advocating for increased inclusivity within government bodies, such as joining the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and fulfilling legal mandates to protect endangered species, can yield significant benefits.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

We created brochures that we distributed to local stakeholders during our fieldwork, incorporating the logo onto them (available upon request). Additionally, we showcased the logo during a meeting with various local communities, using it within a slideshow to educate them about the species.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Zulfu Farajli (coordinator/outreach/data collection).

Elvin Mammadsoy (counter/data collection).

Leyla Muslim (counter/data collection).

10. Any other comments?

Reference:

BirdLife International (2024) Species factsheet: Tetrax tetrax. Downloaded from <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/little-bustard-tetrax-tetrax> on 19/02/2024. Recommended citation for factsheets for more than one species:

BirdLife International (2024) IUCN Red List for birds. Downloaded from <https://datazone.birdlife.org> on 19/02/2024.