



Reintroducing the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) to Southern England

Great bustards are the world's heaviest flying birds, with males reaching an incredible 20kg in weight. They have a wingspan of 2.5 metres and stand over one metre tall. They are on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, and European populations have been in long term decline, only arrested by conservation projects in some areas.



Great bustards are a priority species for EU LIFE funding. *LIFE+ Reintroducing the Great Bustard* is a five-year project that began in September 2010. The project partners, RSPB, Great Bustard Group, University of Bath and Natural England, aim to significantly increase the small population of great bustards already established on Salisbury Plain.



Great bustards in the UK originate from Saratov in Russia. They spend 30 days in quarantine before being released into secure areas of ideal habitat, where they can socialise with older birds and explore their new surroundings. There will be an annual late-summer release of great bustards for the duration of the LIFE+ project.



A major aim of the LIFE+ project is to undertake comprehensive monitoring of the birds, gathering information from satellite transmitters and using radio tracking. Each bird is also fitted with a unique wing tag or leg ring to help both staff and the public to identify individuals.



The LIFE+ project will utilise agri-environment schemes to promote bustard friendly habitat. We will seek to manage areas important for lekking or breeding, by providing advice in key areas for bustards and helping to secure funding for landowners and farmers who wish to help.



Habitat suitable for great bustards is also beneficial for many of our declining farmland birds. Through our work with Natural England and farmers, location of the right habitat in the right places will also help species such as grey partridge and corn bunting, which utilise wild bird seed mixtures and nectar mixes.



Great bustards are already breeding in the Wiltshire countryside! Three chicks have fledged over the last three years. The LIFE+ project will build upon this success, develop new release sites and refine management to ensure increased survival.



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This project is made possible through the contribution of the LIFE financial instrument of the European Community. It is important in establishing the Natura 2000 network of protected sites.