

The global Great Bustard conservation publication

# Otis



**GREAT  
BUSTARD  
GROUP**



Winter 2011

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## *Breeding successes in Russia*



### **The new recruits**

*Exciting times in the skies of Wiltshire as this year's birds find their wings and fly*

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# A word from the Director

## GREAT BUSTARD GROUP



The Great Bustard Group is the UK registered charity and membership organisation formed in 1998 to re-introduce the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* to the UK.

The GBG is actively involved in Great Bustard conservation and is working with other organisations, both nationally and internationally to save the world's heaviest flying bird.

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David Waters, GBG Founder and Director

The big development to report on in this issue of Otis is the second release site. The extra resources from the LIFE+ project are really starting to make themselves felt. The staffing and equipment demands of the second site had always been beyond the resources of the GBG alone.

The location of the second site is one which I am obliged to treat as confidential. Our hosts are extremely

supportive, as are all those who use the land at the site, but the location does not lend itself to any numbers of visitors. As I write I am aware that it is still very much early days in respect of this years release, but so far, the results are favourable. At the original Project Site, and at the second release site, an extensive system of monitoring, recording and controlling foxes is underway under the management of Austin Weldon (introduced later in this issue), and the results are already discernable. Foxes have made their presence felt at the original site, but at the second, things really could not be going better at this stage. Only time will give us the full picture, but the situation is a very encouraging one.

It should come as no surprise that we should seek, and expect, better results from a second release site. Releasing Great Bustards into the wild in an organised reintroduction project has never been tried before, and we are the only people to have undertaken the task. It is natural that our experiences during the early years should enable us to achieve better results as the project develops. Everyone in the project team is looking forward eagerly to the coming season to see how the new birds will fare through the winter.

There has been so much to report on since the last Otis. The visit by the Russian school - a first for us and them, wind power coming to the GBG, the Warminster Art Project, GBG's naked calendar and so on. New and exciting work is planned with the A.N. Severtsov Institute in Saratov and the Director Mikhail Oparin is keen to expand the scope of the research into the Great Bustard and will receive the continued support of the GBG to achieve this.



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## Russian School Visit

GBG would like to extend its thanks to all who helped to make the Russian school visit such a success. Vicky Williams, Commercial Manager (North) of Wilts & Dorset buses kindly donated free tickets for the visitors to see the sights of Wiltshire, the Hawk Conservancy Trust and Paulton's Park opened their doors to us and we were overwhelmed with support and warm welcomes from Ann Edwards C of E School in South Cerney and St Edmunds Girls School in Salisbury. The GBG has made regular visits to schools in the Saratov region and has developed a strong relationship with School Number 1 in Krasny Kut, the closest town to the Field Station where the bustards are raised. Two pupils and two teachers from this school visited the UK side of the Great Bustard project on a trip organised jointly by the GBG, AA1 Media and Badger School International and were assisted by a grant through St Edmunds School in Laverstock, Salisbury. Read more on page 22.



Russian teachers Natasha and Angela with St Ann Edwards Headteacher Stephen Richardson

## Austrian Project

The previous issue of Otis mentioned the trip some project members made to visit the Austrian Great Bustard Project. This time it is to report on a visit to the UK by the head of the Austrian project.

Rainer Rabb, and his two sons, Reinhard and Maximilian were hosted by David and Karen Waters and Allan and Julie Goddard during their visit to the UK. They were shown the Project Site and the way visitors are hosted without causing disturbance to the birds themselves. This aspect of the work of the GBG was of particular interest to Rainer and is an area where there may be some future developments in Austria.

Rainer and his sons were also able to join in the final cycle ride and barbeque to mark the end of the Cycle to Saratov event.



Rainer with Paul Goriup & Allan Goddard

## Great Bustard breeding program

The importance of being able to breed Great Bustards in captivity has always been recognised by the GBG. It was with delight that we learned of the big steps taken by Moscow Zoo earlier this year. A simple but controlled management plan gave males access to female Great Bustards, but only for limited periods, and a total of 8 eggs were laid. Two of these were fertile and one of them hatched. Sadly the chick hatched before it had fully absorbed the yolk sac and this led to an infection which killed the chick after some 10 days. Nevertheless, the hatching of a chick is a significant result and more can be expected next year. The curator of birds at the Moscow Zoo Breeding Centre is Pavel Rozchov and he leads their work on the Great Bustards with his wife Tatiana. They were pleased to tell us that their daughter Veronica also had a successful breeding project of her own this year. (Right)



Pavel Rozchov with GBG Project Director David Waters

## Healthy new chicks arrive in Britain

The GBG imported 35 Great Bustards in early August. Many of you will recall the huge fires that swept across so much of western Russia last year and covered the airport in choking smoke. It was a far more pleasant trip this year with the birds arriving at Moscow's Domodedovo airport to be met with a glorious sunrise. A vehicle was hired for the Saratov Oblast Government vehicle pool to get us as far as Moscow as the van we had used in previous years was judged to be getting on in years, and something of a risk when years worth of hard work was being transported with the fixed deadline.

All the birds took the two day journey in their stride and were safely accommodated in the GBG quarantine unit on Salisbury Plain late on the night of 4th August.



*(Above) Saratov to Moscow (Right) Moscow sunrise*

## A wonderful wind turbine

The GBG office on Salisbury Plain is a wonderful place to work. The former mobile home was kindly given to the project in 2006 and has been slowly evolving since then. One reoccurring problem has been getting a reliable supply of electricity. The existing set up does give us a reasonable supply for most of the time, but when it fails it can take quite a while to get back on stream. Being as we are dependent on computers these days, work virtually ceases without electricity. We can always find a gas heater or two for the winter, but this does not help with computers.

A step forward has been made with the donation by the RSPB of some unwanted wind turbine generators equipment. David Waters and Charles Hibberd travelled to an RSPB reserve on the Somerset Levels to collect the small wind turbine and all the associated equipment. Preparations are underway to get everything installed on the Plain. The small wind turbine should give enough power to run our wireless Internet, a host of laptops and computers

and a light or two. To cover the windless days, which are rare on Salisbury Plain, the system will charge a bank of batteries which will keep us going for a day or two.

The GBG is, as always, indebted to Charles and all the volunteers involved in this project, and of course the RSPB for donating the equipment.



*Charles Hibberd*

## New release site

With the increased resources from the LIFE+ Project we have been able to use a second release site for the first time this year. Its location is not being revealed as the site does not lend itself to visitors. The GBG is delighted to be able to report that at the time of writing the new site is giving every indication of being very successful indeed. The progress of the birds there is being monitored by the whole LIFE + team with the University of Bath and RSPB as well as GBG checking on the birds on a very regular basis. More details can be found in Bustard-watch from page 14. The original Project Site is still in use, and this years birds were split between the two sites. The original site marks the first place where Great Bustards have been released as a part of a sustained reintroduction programme. The new site reflects all the information and experiences gained by the project since 2004.

All the project partners are grateful to those at the new site who have made the release of Great Bustards there possible.

## Successful veterinary trip



*John Chitty performs the health checks*

In July David Waters was joined by the regular team, John Chitty (GBG Consultant Vet) and Ruth Manvell (Virologist) on the pre import trip to the Field Station at Diakovka. The party was also joined by Professor Jill Heatley, a friend and colleague of John's from Texas A&M University. They met a rather jet-lagged Prof. Heatley at Moscow airport and, after a day to recover and to see some of the sights in Moscow, met with John and Ruth the following day and headed South

to Saratov by train.

The main purpose of this annual trip is to check the health of the bustards raised during the year, to examine any unhatched eggs or dead chicks and to collect the samples and swabs which need to be tested in the UK before the birds may be imported. In addition to assisting John and Ruth with this work, Jill also collected samples of egg shells for testing in Texas. The type of detailed analysis planned for these samples has never been done on Great Bustard eggs and may show levels of pollutants or other chemicals at levels not apparent by cruder testing. All Great Bustard samples need CITES export permits before they can be exported, and agreements have been made to share the



*(Above) Prof Jill Heatley joins the team*

results and any resultant publications with all the parties concerned. The pre-import health tests on the samples were carried out in the UK and all results were negative.

## No escape for Ruth!



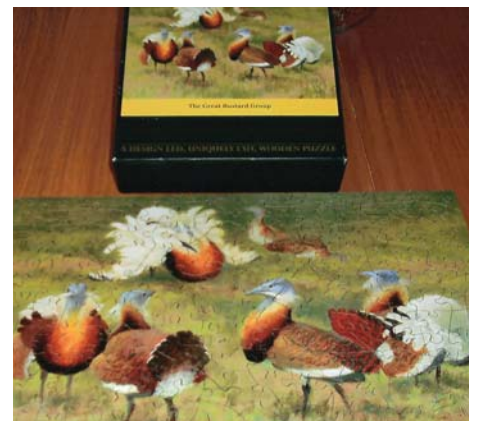
The GBG consultant vet, John Chitty is well known to all within the GBG. What is less well known however is the support GBG receives from his whole family. John's wife, Kate, (also a vet with her own practice) often stands in for John, dealing with any injuries, sickness or other problems with either the wild birds or the captive flock. Kate is also licenced as an official quarantine vet and covers these duties. The family commitment to the bustards goes wider still as John and Kate have two daughters, Ruth and Ellie, who have

been dragged along to countless bustard events, have sat through endless bustard discussions at their home, and endured the unique and powerful smell of bustard droppings as their house and family cars have been used to give temporary shelter and transport for recovering bustards over the last 8 years. Both Ruth and Ellie are Life Members of the GBG and are keen supporters of the project, but in September Ruth left home to go to University to read Biology (and presumably to get away from bustards). After the traditional first week of festivities and settling in Ruth sat down with enthusiasm and high expectations for her first lecture. To say she was a little dismayed to be shown the GBG Great Bustard film and be given a project to do on the Great Bustard would be an abuse of the understatement!

## New GBG jigsaws now in stock

A great new range of merchandise has been added to the GBG shop including some very challenging jigsaws. Made by Wentworth from superb quality wood and with rare bird shaped pieces interspersed, this range of puzzles is perfect for Christmas, making the ideal gift for any bird lover.

Otis reader Rita Smithson of Thatcham in Berkshire kindly completed one of these jigsaws and sent us a photograph to inspire others and prove that they can be done!



## Successful census in Russia



Mikhail Oparin during the census

David Waters joined Mikhail Oparin and his staff for the annual Autumn Great Bustard census in Saratov at the end of September and the first week of October. Supporting the

census is a part of the agreement the GBG has with the A.N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology (Saratov Branch). The autumn gives a unique chance to see the flocks of females with the young of the year before they head south west to avoid the worst of the winter weather, and it is a time when the adult females can be distinguished from the male and female chicks of that year. This information can give a good indication as to the productivity of the year with the numbers of chicks being compared with the numbers of adults.

A slight gamble with attempting a census at this time of the year is the weather - rain makes the fields impassable. Luckily the weather held dry until the evening of the final day for David and the steady rain during the homeward journey showed how lucky he had been.

Under Mikhail's direction the census quadrats were half the size used in previous

years (now at 10 km by 20 km) which gave a more sensible area for a days censusing. David was able to visit some new sites for the first time and managed to find *some* Great Bustards every day. The lowest count was two (and that was an awful lot of searching for just two birds) and the highest was 138 birds. The census will be written up by Mikhail and the results summarised in the next Otis, but on casual inspection the figures look to be good.

One change in the landscape was the huge amount of Sunflower grown this year in Saratov. Mile after mile of Sunflowers were found covering the better part of some of the quadrats. In itself when growing, the crop does not offer much to the Great Bustard, but when harvested the stubble gives a good winter feed crop (and is much favoured by wintering Great Bustards in Ukraine). It will be interesting to see if the huge acreage of Sunflower will attract Bustards to stay in Saratov this winter.

## Saratov Business School talk

David Waters was invited to speak to the students and client of the Saratov Business School when he was in the area for the Autumn Census. The lecture and subsequent discussion groups were held to develop links between conservation initiatives and the business world and to give some of the businessmen and women learning English a chance to test their language skills. It is hoped the evening will be the first in a series.

Another chance to link the business and conservation worlds came through Badger School International, the language teaching school directed by Anastasia Barsukova, the GBG translator/interpreter and representative in Saratov. Anastasia and David met with a local construction company who were receptive to proposals for contributing to both conservation education projects and assisting with the costs of direct conservation work. Both of these avenues will be actively explored in the coming months.



David spoke with the students and caused much interest among the groups

## Big Visitors

During the first week in October the GBG hosted a group of visitors from the Essex Bird Watching Club. It is always super to host visitors who are willing to travel for long distances to see the bustards but what made this trip special for the GBG was the numbers. A 50 seater coach was booked for the visit and 38 seats were filled. This was by far the largest group the GBG had ever hosted in one go. Lynne Derry, the GBG Visits Manager, worked out a tight logistical plan with Colin Maddocks, John Mackenzie-Grieve and David Waters variously driving the vehicles or explaining the workings of the project under Lynne's precise time keeping. The day was judged a great success by both the GBG and by the Essex Bird Watching Club. The GBG may now advertise its ability to host coach trips and hopefully this new capacity will help promote and raise funds for the project.

Our thanks to the Warden of our local church for allowing the coach to park there.



## Goodbye (again) old friend



*Our much missed Range Rover*

In the last issue of Otis we covered the sad departure of one of the project vehicles. The Range Rover, which was donated by Peter Raven, was wrongly depicted in the photo accompanying the news item. The Range Rover is shown above during its service with the GBG. We are extremely grateful to Peter Raven for his kind and generous support and apologise for the previous error.

## Caption Competition



This picture shows Torsten Lanngemach (Head of the German Great Bustard Project), GBG's Farm Liaison Allan Goddard and Chris Davis MRCVS at a recent project Technical Working Group. Someone has seemingly said something doubtful, but what captions can you come up with? The best caption received by post or email will be printed in the next edition of Otis and the winner will receive an Emma Bridgewater mug. Email [office@greatbustard.org](mailto:office@greatbustard.org) or post your suggestion to Caption Competition, 1, Down Barn Close, Winterbourne Gunner, Wiltshire, SP4 6JP.

## DEFRA indecision

Following on from the visit to the project by the DEFRA Minister (as reported in Otis 37), was a visit by the staff of the DEFRA Wild Birds Policy Unit. After some confusion over the location of the project they eventually arrived. They then surprised the project staff by seeking confirmation as to the identity of the flock of birds running around in the farm yard on the way to the GBG office. The distinguished advisors were reassured the flock was not composed of Great Bustards, but of Guinea Fowl.

The main point of discussion was how to get the Great Bustard the higher level of legal protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This has been an on going struggle by the GBG since the project started. Various objections, excuses and hurdles have been offered by DEFRA officials and ministers from two governments. The specific hurdles have been addresses and

cleared, but nothing close to progress has been possible. Despite the requirements of an EU Directive on the matter, the general result from the meeting was the explanation that no additions could be made to a law until an old law was dispensed with. This was a new and different response to the question which had been asked so many times before.

The GBG will continue to press for the UK's rarest breeding bird to be given the higher levels of legal protection.



## Write to us



*Suzy Elkins - Otis Editor*

We would love to hear your views on Otis magazine, the topics discussed within and all conservation or Great Bustard matters. Otis Editor Suzy Elkins can now be contacted directly on [editor@greatbustard.org](mailto:editor@greatbustard.org) or by post at 1, Down Barn Close, Winterbourne Gunner, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 6JP. Your letters will all be read and some of the best will appear in future editions of Otis, so if you'd like your views aired please get in touch now or use our feedback form on the website.

## David Waters

Director of the GBG, Countryman and Speaker



(Above and inset) David filming with Dr Manuel Hinge (Below) Two of David's dogs Zulu and Roan

### Elizabeth Grant meets David Waters, Director of the GBG.

Readers of this magazine and members of the Great Bustard Group will be familiar with the public face of David Waters, the Group's founder and Director.

We have seen photos of him, read articles by him, and many of us have met him at various fund raising events held throughout the year. My first encounter with him was a couple of years ago when he was guest speaker at a meeting of the garden club I attend. We,

who knew next to nothing about bustards (Great what's? murmured my puzzled neighbour)

were most impressed by the energy and enthusiasm

of this big, bluff, affable man, who gave us a half hour talk - without notes - on the big bird which appears on the Wiltshire Coat of Arms, with the aid of his stuffed travelling sidekick, Hercule. At the end of the evening, there wasn't much we didn't know about the large, charismatic bird with the rather rude-sounding name. **But what do we really know about David himself? What makes him tick? And where did all this enthusiasm and passion for these great birds come from?**

I visited David at his home near Salisbury just before he left for his latest trip to Russia to find out a little bit more about him.

Like me, you may have assumed that David is Wiltshire born and bred, but in fact he is of Welsh stock, being born in Cardiff and only moving to this part of the world

when he was three years old as a result of his father being offered a job in Southampton.

He attended school in Romsey and, when asked if he had enjoyed

his time there, thought for a moment before quoting one of his heroes, Winston Churchill: "I loved learning but I hated being taught." He admits that he found lessons boring and as a teenager was something of a rebel, ending up as the only punk in the school! He had boundless energy and his real interests lay in the great outdoors, rather than what went on inside the classroom.

He had always been interested in wildlife, birds in particular, and his ambition was one day to become warden of a bird reserve "Or something like that." His imagination was stirred by the story of the Great Bustard, one of the heaviest flying birds in the world, which once roamed the open spaces of England, but which was now extinct in the wild in Britain. He became aware that a small flock was living in a large penned area on Ministry of Defence land on Porton Down, under the auspices of an organisation called the Great Bustard Trust, headed up by the Hon. Aylmer Tryon. He wrote to the Trust, who were amazingly welcoming to this 13 year old, and soon he was a regular visitor to Porton Down, helping out and learning everything he could about bustards. Eventually, the Trust made him a life member. He couldn't know it then, but his future was thereby set.





*In the grounds of the Kremlin with a Goshawk belonging to the Kremlin Guard*

The objective of the Trust was to rear in captivity chicks from Portugal or Hungary then to encourage them to breed. However, this captive breeding programme proved unsuccessful and in 1989 the surviving birds were transferred to Whipsnade Animal Park in Bedfordshire, where the last bird died in 1999.

Meanwhile, the young David had left school and joined the Army, a career which suited him perfectly, allowing him to indulge his love of the great outdoors, "running around in the woods, making loud bangs." He was immensely disappointed when a serious knee injury ended his promising career and he was discharged on medical grounds.

Nothing daunted, he joined the Wiltshire Constabulary, becoming a rural police officer and was subsequently posted to Amesbury. Out on the beat one day, he passed the house belonging to Aylmer Tryon and popped in for a chat, catching up on all the latest bustard news. After that he visited Aylmer whenever he was passing and this went on for some time until Aylmer's death and the ensuing wind-up of the Trust in 1998. This could have spelt the end of the line for bustards in Britain, but David decided that if the Great Bustard Trust had to go, he'd better form something similar, and so the Great Bustard Group came into being.

Their aim was to reintroduce the Great Bustard to Britain, but with few members, no resources to speak of and hardly any money, the project surely seemed doomed to failure. Well, you'd think so, but, if nothing else, David loves a challenge, and besides, by now he had a secret weapon.

At the police station where he worked, he had met Karen, who not only shared his interests in conservation and wildlife, but also seemed interested in him. David had found his life partner, and it seemed that opposites really do attract, for where David describes himself as more of an ideas man, keen to get on with things and make them happen, Karen excels at planning and organisation, taking care of practical matters, and thus allowing her husband to spend his time fundraising and travelling, giving talks and after dinner speeches. They play to each other's strengths, so that after a while he was able to work part-time, then, as the Group grew, to leave the Police altogether and concentrate all of his considerable energies on his beloved bustards.

What the Great Bustard Group has achieved in a relatively short period of time is nothing short of amazing. Thanks to the partnership established between the Group and its Russian partners, the Great Bustard once again struts its stuff on Salisbury Plain. The work goes forward apace and the dream of the young teenager is a dream no longer, but a fact. But what lies ahead for David, himself?

Well, who knows, but he has recently become involved in the making and presenting of wildlife films, and with his gift for narration, coupled with his endearingly boyish exuberance, it occurs to me that he bears more than a passing resemblance to another, at present rather more famous, David, a fellow wildlife enthusiast. I wonder if we might just be looking at the next David Attenborough? Watch this space.



*Studying bustards in Austria*



*Filming with Dr. Manuel Hinge*



*An antique bustard gun from the 1700's*

### *International Bustard Conservation*

*By Nigel Collar*



***Think bustards, think grasslands: their fates are intertwined. Africa is the bustards' main home, just as it is the main home of the world's grasslands: some 18 species are confined to the continent's tropical regions.***

Three species are exclusive to the Palearctic, three to the Oriental region, and one to Australasia. But widespread as bustards are, and wide open though their habitats be, widely known they are not. Being among the largest of grassland birds they are also, inevitably, a magnet for predators. So their guiding principle for survival has always been prudence: crypsis, vigilance and stealth have cut for them a narrow, secret passage through millions of years of evolutionary history that has led them virtually intact down to the present. Unfortunately, of course, the very shyness and caution that have been their long-term saviour have also

been the barriers to their study by ecologists, the one group of people most likely to be able to help them keep a place on the planet in the new era of environmental destruction we are coming to call the Anthropocene.

***Their basic message to us is, however, very simple to grasp: so long as large tracts of open grassland survive, there will be bustards.***

The message comes to us as the inverse of what we see happening to them: such is the modern pressure of human demands on open spaces like grasslands that five of the 25 species of bustard (20%) are already threatened and five (20%) are Near Threatened, proportions that are way above those for birds in general (12% and 8% respectively). However, in many parts of the family's range the notion of large tracts of open grassland is, alas, something of a pipe-dream these days.

Natural grasslands are such obvious targets for human ambitions, being land that needs nothing more than a plow or a starter herd of livestock to turn into a valuable source of food. And the production of food is never an easy thing for conservationists to oppose, in part because there are commonly so many mouths to feed, in part because the grasslands to be converted are, to begin with at any rate, seemingly so limitless, and in part because most species of wildlife, even the bustards, seem to be able to persist in the initially altered landscapes, albeit in reduced numbers. In some cases and contexts, indeed, low-intensity farming may well have helped the bustards—think back two centuries to the German children being given the day off school to drive Great Bustard *Otis tarda* flocks from the cabbages, and to the farmers in Spain who once complained loudly about bustards in their bean fields.

It is the intensification of farming that really makes the difference. Mechanised irrigation, pesticide spraying and harvesting all create disturbance, which no bustard likes; the spraying destroys the varied food-base of the birds; and the harvesting destroys their eggs and young.

***Little by little the birds disappear, probably not by moving to other areas so much as by failing to reproduce themselves in their ancestral areas, to which they frequently show great attachment.***

This is at least what we think is happening to the Great Bustard throughout its range, and to its sympatric companion the Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*. Something like this is now driving the precipitate decline of the world's largest population of the Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*: the floodplain of the Tonle Sap in Cambodia used to be a great expanse of non-intensive pastures and seasonal ricefields, and across it there were hundreds and perhaps thousands of floricans, but in the past few years—only since the turn of the century—agrobusinesses apparently from the Middle East and China, aiming to provide long-term food security for their countries, have been taking over the land at an astonishing speed and converting it to industrial-scale irrigated

rice production. In India the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* has this year joined the Bengal Florican on the Critically Endangered list as a result of increasing conversion of grassland to crops and the overrunning of nature reserves by land-hungry farmers.

There are of course many other twists of the knife. Crops are increasingly being fenced off and pastures fenced in, none of which favours bustards (Great Bustards can suffer terribly with barbed wire fences). The balance of livestock is shifting increasingly to cattle, whose impacts on grassland compared to sheep can be severe. However, too much grazing by any animal is a serious problem for wildlife, and in the broad desert fringes in North Africa and Central Asia the Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* has to contend with unrealistically large herds of livestock degrading its fragile habitat. On top of that there are other, new land-uses emerging: in the glorious landscapes of south-west Iberia, for example, huge areas have been given over to solar farms, while others are flooded for essential water storage. Then, cutting a swathe across many of these landscapes come the powerlines which are so deadly to large, heavy and therefore fast-flying and unmanoeuvrable birds like bustards and swans. All over Europe these cables criss-cross plains where bustards live, and despite



*A predated bustard*

the various markers intended to make the wires more visible, birds are dying in droves. This is now happening on a frighteningly large scale to Ludwig's Bustard *Neotis ludwigi* in South Africa.

Finally, there is hunting. The biggest victim to date has been the Houbara, which has suffered terribly from excessive Arab falconry throughout its range, but there is now increasing alarm for the Nubian Bustard *Neotis nuba*, the ecological counterpart of the Houbara on the south side of the Sahara, in the Sahel, with reports that Arab hunting parties have already exterminated it entirely in Mauritania. Captive breeding and some enlightened habitat conservation will see the Houbara through, but the Nubian Bustard lives mostly in areas beyond the reach of conservation. The same is true of the Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs*, which has much the same range. These birds are now so hard of access that gathering the data that can tell us how to manage their dwindling populations represents a fearsome challenge to conservation biologists—one of many they will have to rise to if the bustards are going to keep their place in the steppelands and savannas of this increasingly overcrowded planet.



*Kori bustard in flight*



## A very successful trial

*Tracé Williams reports on the second release site*



*One of the attractions of the new release site was that the farm has regularly been visited by Great Bustards over the years, and has been the favourite place of our oldest surviving bird O15 who was released in 2004.*



*The bustards have taken to their new habitat admirably*

During our visits to the site to plan where the soft-release pens would be located, O15 was regularly seen, even in the very field that was eventually chosen!

The field selected was 20ha (49acres) and had been sown with a mixture of fodder rape and stubble turnips, so the soft-release pens would be constructed upon this crop to provide the birds plenty of food over the coming months.

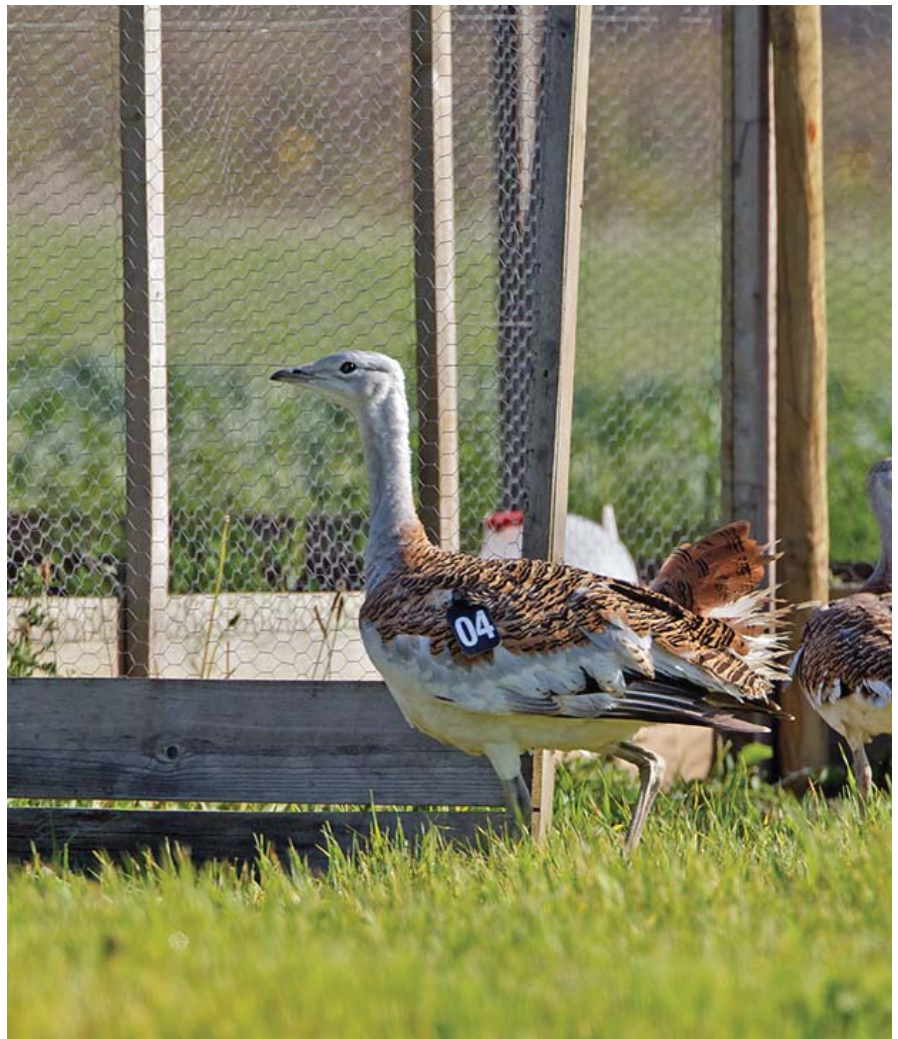
Even though there is regular control of foxes at the new site, as well as on the surrounding farms, we still needed to provide a secure yet temporary enclosure and finally decided upon 1.1m high electrified poultry netting with an additional single steel wire around the outside of that to deter foxes. We fenced the entire field – only the best for our birds!

Outside of the release pens at some distance to them was located an automatic feeder distributing pelleted food. In addition, several plastic bustard decoys were situated in the release field near to the feeder. The function of these, along with a whole field of food, was to 'home' the birds to the site, so that they could grow and exercise in a safe environment. We also hoped that O15 would stay around for them to learn from.

The birds were moved into the soft-release pens for one week (see page 16). From day one, O15 was always on site just outside of the release pens. Initially she would fly off when the birds in the pen were fed, but by

the end of the week she would simply hide between the decoys. Thirteen birds were released on September 15th. Once the doors of the soft-release pens were open, all of the

birds came out within ten minutes; they found the food we had scattered outside of the pens and then started to explore the field.



*The bustards pre-release*



*Andrew Taylor and Tracé Williams joining nets for use in the soft release pens*

Over the following week there were many excursions outside the release field; birds would fly out and explore the stubble fields, then walk back. The immediate success has been that the birds have 'homed' to the site, so when they have spent time outside the field they have wanted to get back to the others inside. Unfortunately we learnt a harsh lesson with this behaviour, as one bird was found dead having become tangled in the perimeter netting – trying to get back in. Our immediate response was to open up a length of netting first thing in the morning, closing it again in the evening. To date we have had no further deaths here.

For most of the first week, there were two groups of birds; O15 spending time with a group of four males, the other eight birds

forming another group. There have been some spectacular flights seen; one morning just after the fog had lifted all the birds were standing in a line facing the sun, after a short feed one took off and circled high overhead before landing back down close to the others. The amazingly hot days we saw in late September found the birds loafing around feeding and preening, with very little movement. During the third week after release there was lots of movement, Red Kites caused all the birds to leave the field one evening and different young birds have spent the night outside the pen with O15 usually in the middle of a stubble field. During the evening checks it was wonderful to see a drove of bustards walking back across a stubble field with the sun setting behind them. Who knows when they will leave the

area, but hopefully when they do, O15 will go with them to pass on the secret of how she has survived all these years.



*A new release - free for the first time*

## Bustard releases 2011

Andrew Taylor reports on a successful year



*On 4th August, just before midnight, 35 young Great Bustards arrived at our quarantine facility after their two-day journey from Saratov in Russia.*

A number of improvements awaited them, as part of our attempts to improve the feather condition of released birds. For the first time the quarantine pens were partly roofed, to keep food dry, and each had at least one window. This was the first time that birds in quarantine had been able to see their surroundings, and it seemed to make them much calmer. We also removed drop nets, which may have been responsible for feather abrasion, from around the perimeter of the pens.

### Soft release

Unfortunately a small number of birds were lost or disabled during the quarantine period, with injuries associated with keeping a large and powerful bird in a confined space. This meant that as we reached release time, 30 birds were available to be moved into soft release pens. These pens were also different in design to previous years, with wire mesh around the outside and soft netting on top. The 16 bustards which remained at this site were split between three pens in the same groups as in quarantine, but for the first time they were able to see the other groups of birds. Even the two adult bustards in residence, Purple 5 and Pink 2, became used to the routine. At the beginning of the soft release period, they flew away each morning when the young birds were fed, but by the end of the week they did no more than wander calmly away. Final checks of feather condition the day before release did not reveal any birds which should be held back, so all sixteen were released as scheduled. The efforts we had made on feather

condition certainly appeared to have paid off, with birds looking markedly better than in 2010.

### Release

On 15th September at 9am, we quietly approached the pens and opened a side panel in each, to allow the birds to wander out at their leisure into the larger release pen and freedom. They certainly were very leisurely about the process – indeed some did not leave the soft release pens all day! Black 1 led the others out, and by early afternoon we had seen the first flight, Black 6 circling high above the release pen before landing back inside. We had already observed that Black 6 had superb feather condition, and she also turned out to be by far the most adventurous – she left the pen for good on day two and has since been spending her time a few miles from the site.

The remainder of the birds stayed together, and for the first few weeks, aside from brief forays into adjacent fields, stayed in the release pen with the two adult males. While the younger and older birds never seem to be far apart, there has been little direct interaction between the two. The soft release period appears to have been successful, helping to tie the birds to the site where they can practise flying in relative safety from predators. Equally important is the ample supply of food in the release pen. Two plots of oil seed rape, sown a month earlier than commercial crops, have grown vigorously thanks to the expert work of Allan Goddard, and could supply food to the bustards throughout the winter if they remain in the area. We also have an automatic feeder supplying pelleted food, but this has been unused – the bustards much prefer the rape.

There have been some casualties, due to fox predation and a collision with a fence. This is an unfortunate but expected part of the process of

releasing inexperienced young birds, and we hope that the birds remaining together as a large group at the release site will benefit from safety in numbers once they start to explore the surrounding countryside.

This was the second release within the LIFE+ project but the first to be influenced by the resources of LIFE+, so for the new staff working on the project it has been a relatively new experience. There have been many challenges over the last few months since the new birds arrived, but at the time of writing in October we are optimistic that the changes we have made have had a positive effect at this crucial time of year.





## Monitoring

By Kate Ashbrook



*With this year's birds being released only a short time ago, the monitoring team has been working hard to keep tabs on the birds at and around the release sites.*

This year, thirty birds were released, being split into two groups; one group went to the long-term Project Site and the other group went to a new release site. This is the first year that birds have been released at two sites; it is hoped that birds will become established at this new site and form a second sub-population, with movement of birds between the two sub-populations. The selection of a second release site began in the spring, involving visits to several 'bustard-friendly' areas, before assessing the areas according to key factors in Great Bustard habitat selection and ensuring that any mild difficulties could be overcome quickly. The private farm which hosts the second release site this year was chosen as it boasts, amongst other things, the highest number of bustards visiting the area after the original release site. The farmland is flat and open, with a good mix of arable habitats for bustards, and also a low density of buildings and roads, which will hopefully allow the birds to remain relatively undisturbed.

The survival of newly-released birds through their first winter has been highlighted as a critical factor limiting the growth of the UK population and many changes have been introduced this year to try to increase the quality of birds that are released. With the LIFE+ project funding we have more resources to keep track of the birds when they leave the release areas and the monitoring team, consisting of volunteers and project staff, have already begun daily checks on the new birds.



*Professor Juan Carlos Alonso fitting harnesses assisted by David Waters*

*After the quarantine period was completed, the birds were fitted with a variety of devices to assist with monitoring.*

The largest males were fitted with satellite transmitters attached to a backpack harness, transmitting their location between one and four times a day. These were expertly fitted by Professor Juan Carlos Alonso. Several females were fitted with radio-tag necklaces which will allow us to follow their movements via radio-tracking. All other birds were fitted with wing-tags, which are black with white numbering this year. Only one marking method has been used on each bird this year to cut down on the number of devices each individual carries, so birds fitted with satellite or radio-transmitters do not have wing-tags.

*In addition, we have a number of camera traps set up around both release sites which will record Great Bustards in the area during daylight and darkness, and also any predators.*

We are utilising smartphone technology this year to collect data on bustards in the field;

this will allow quick and easy data recording of the whereabouts and behaviour of the birds, which will be automatically uploaded to an online database for later analysis.

We hope that increased monitoring will not only help us to keep better track of the birds, but also provide information that will enhance the success of future releases.



*Farm Liaison Allan Goddard in the pens*



## *Introducing Rainer Raab Austrian Great Bustard Project Director*



*Rainer Raab - Austrian Great Bustard Project Director*

***Rainer Raab has been working in the field of Great Bustard protection since 1999 under the international Great Bustard species conservation project.***

He has been in charge of an ever increasing territory in Austria, starting with the Marchfeld area in 1999, adding Rauchenwarther Platte in 2000, Western Weinviertel and Parndorfer Platte - Heideboden in 2002, and Waasen - HansÄjg in 2008. He has also been in charge of coordinating the project as a whole since 2000. From 2005 to 2010 he was working as project assistant and Central European Great Bustard coordinator within the framework of the LIFE-Project "Cross-border protection of the Great Bustard in Austria". Since October 2010 he has also been working as project assistant and Central European Great Bustard coordinator within the framework of the LIFE+ Project "Cross-border protection of the Great Bustard in Austria". The objective of the Austrian LIFE+ Project is the continuation of the successful work undertaken in the previous LIFE Project and will last until 2015 covering all four of the important Great Bustard areas in Austria. In

two of the project areas the main mortality factor and therefore the main population threat was power lines and these have widely been removed or at least marked, further burying and marking of power lines will take place, particularly in the project area Sandboden and Praterterrasse.

***These measures should contribute to a further long-term increase of the Austrian and the whole cross-border West-Pannonian Great Bustard population, respectively.***

Planned actions in Burgenland and Lower Austria include burying around 33.1 km of power lines and then the existing power lines will be removed. Therefore larger power line-free areas will

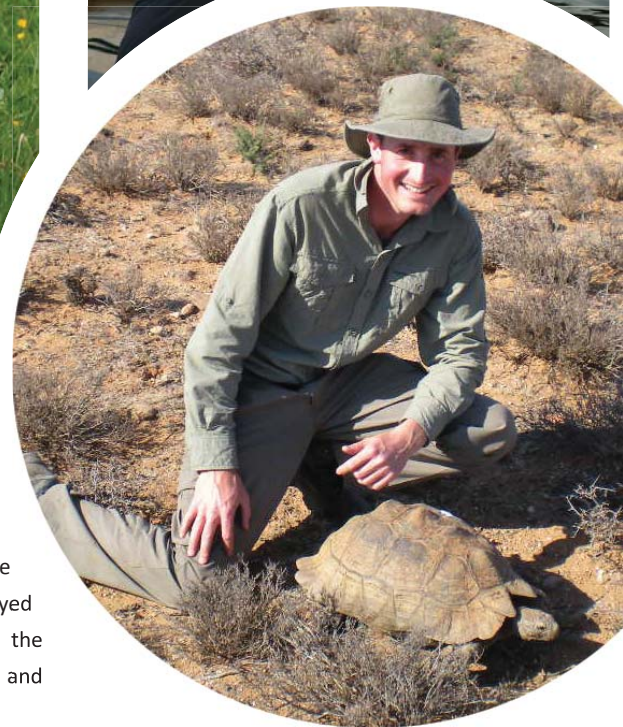
be created for the Great Bustard by means of the LIFE+ Project. Within the project around 3.9 km of high voltage power lines will be marked with bird warning flags. Parts of two shelter belts, each 100 m, will be removed to extend and to improve the connectivity of the Great Bustard habitat.

***Due to these actions and due to further intensive conservation efforts and the extensive habitat management, the Austrian Great Bustard population of 244-274 individuals at the breeding time 2010 should further increase.***

A key to the success of Great Bustard conservation in Austria is the cooperation of nature conservation officials, local farmers and hunters. At the moment around 550 farmers and more than 100 hunters are involved in the project. As Great Bustards don't mind borders, an intensive cooperation between Austria and its neighbouring countries Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic will be carried out in the future within the LIFE+ Project concerning the cross-border protection of the West Pannonian Great Bustard population.



## Introducing Austin Weldon Project Officer



(Above) Austin with one of his dogs and (Right) on his travels

### **New GBG Project Site Manager Austin Weldon has a diverse background in wildlife and rural land management.**

He grew up on a mixed farm in Hertfordshire where he was given ample opportunities to come into contact with wildlife. Whilst reading for a degree in Environmental Studies, Austin got the opportunity to complete his industry year with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), formerly The Game Conservancy Trust, at Fordingbridge. This led to a wide variety of opportunities including; radio-tracking hundreds of pheasants on a daily basis in the UK and Austria, gamebird diet studies, parasitology investigations, vegetation and songbird surveys and electro-fishing amongst other things! Upon completion of his first degree he was invited back on a full-time basis to work for the Predation team working on projects to develop more humane, target-specific methods of managing predators, such as foxes, corvids and mink.

Having worked for the GWCT for three years, Austin was lucky enough to get the chance of a lifetime and work abroad in Africa on safari operations in Namibia and Tanzania. This was a very special experience which he combined with working as a self-employed deer manager in the UK, moving as the seasons dictated between the northern and southern hemispheres.

Austin then returned to the UK full-time to read for an MSc in Rural Estate Management at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester. For his thesis Austin looked at the conflict and collaboration between gamekeepers and deerstalkers. This was part of the Geoffrey Craghill Memorial Scholarship which Austin was awarded.

On completion of his Masters, Austin started work for Moors Valley Country Park as a Ranger for two and a half years. This was a diverse role involving practical conservation

work on heathland, grassland, woodland and riparian habitats, the management of volunteers, catering for large groups, environmental education with school groups and the reintroduction of water voles into Moors Valley, combined with a coordinated approach to controlling mink with local landowners.

Austin is extremely interested in all wildlife and countryside matters. A keen rifle shooter and fly fisherman in his spare time, he also enjoys working his gundogs on shoot days.



## New merchandise for Christmas

Alex Stott reports



*As the festive season draws ever-closer, we always enjoy updating our shop with a few seasonal favours.*

This year is no exception and sees not only Christmas items but an expansion of other products sure to please bustard supporters and collectors alike.

To get you into the full swing of Christmas, we've introduced bustard reindeer. We should point out that rather than being a clever hybrid, these are in fact seasonal reindeer proudly wearing tiny Great Bustard Group t-shirts. They make a perfect companion to the Bustard Bears also available in the store. Why not indulge your inner arctophile?

Our most popular items have to be memberships. As well as being brilliant value for money, affording you the opportunity to visit the Project Site free of charge (not to mention coming with a free subscription to Otis as well as a GBG pin badge) memberships make unique and intriguing gifts. Both single gift memberships and family gift memberships are available in our shop and from our online store.



Mugs are another of our best sellers. The Emma Bridgewater Great Bustard mug remains expensive and elusive elsewhere, but is only £15.95 from our online store and this includes free postage to anywhere in the UK. We also stock a range of mugs featuring photographs of UK Great Bustards taken by GBG photographer David Kjaer which have now been expanded to include mugs featuring many of the birds of Salisbury Plain such as Stone Curlews, Corn Buntings, Partridges, Yellowhammers and Skylarks. Another popular entry into the shop is a trio of mugs featuring Great Bustard paintings by Wiltshire artist Philip Hutchings. These mugs are available individually and exhibit three of

the most exciting aspects of Great Bustards; a female with her chick, a male in full display and a Great Bustard in flight showing off its immense wingspan.

Another addition sure to please collectors is back copies of Otis magazine.

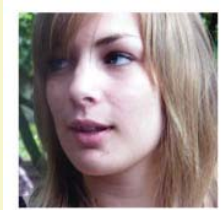
Issues stocked, date from Spring 2010 – present and new editions will be added after publication.

We also stock ornate and beautiful silver Bustards made by W. Carter and Son of Salisbury and two bustard themed pocket watches which make wonderful gifts and are sure to bestow a distinguished, even Great Bustard-like air on any owner.

The shop itself sports a clean new look and you can now create a wish list, ideal for dropping hints to loved ones or just useful for remembering to buy something later on. There's no need to sign up when you make a purchase and there's free postage on every single item. We're always adding new items and special offers to the site, so log on and find something truly original today! <http://greatbustard.org/shop>

## Hannah Rose

### LIFE+ Project Assistant



*Although not a new member of the Great Bustard Project team, having been a*

*part time employee for a year and a half, Hannah Rose has recently taken on a new role, funded through the LIFE+ Project.*

She first became involved with the Great Bustard Group in January 2009, when she completed three weeks of (very cold) work experience for her studies at Sparsholt College where she was taking a two year course - a National Diploma in Countryside and Habitat Management. Hannah continued

to volunteer whenever she could over the following autumn/winter once she had finished college and became an employee in March 2010, mostly running the 'bothy' GBG's information centre at the Hawk Conservancy Trust, and spending a day a week helping out at the Project Site. Hannah has now taken on a further two days per week, in order to help Tracé Williams with the many administrative duties – mountains of paperwork and spreadsheets, logging purchases and staff time to name but a few - that go with the LIFE+ Project and also to relieve Karen Waters of some of the admin that she deals with for the GBG in between her many other jobs. She finds herself doing a variety of different jobs, from monitoring the birds to hands-on site maintenance, or sorting out purchase orders the next. Hannah grew up on a smallholding so she has always loved the countryside and its wildlife, birds in particular, so she is delighted to now find herself more involved in the project.

## Would you like to volunteer?

Do you have a few hours to spare here and there? We are looking for volunteers to help out with the 'Bustard Bothy' at the Hawk Conservancy Trust from around March next year. You do not need to know the ins and outs of Great Bustards or the project, but an interest in both as well as a friendly and polite persona is vital. Entirely flexible, do as little or as much as you like! [Hannah.rose@greatbustard.org](mailto:Hannah.rose@greatbustard.org)



## Predation Studies with Austin Weldon



The new addition to the GBG staff, Austin Weldon, brings a wealth of experience with him, and in particular expertise on predation and foxes. Austin has been tasked with investigating and dealing with the predation

issues the project faces. The use of motion activated infra red cameras is one of the technologies Austin is using to work out fox populations and movements. One of the foxes caught on camera is shown above.

### *A dream comes true*

### *GBG's Russian visitors report on their trip to Britain*



(Above) Visitors and GBG staff with St Ann Edwards Headmaster Stephen Richardson. (Top right) British student Claire Smithson with penpal Sasha Rebenok

#### **Russian teachers Natasha Lazareva and Angela Bagdyan report on their recent visit to Britain.**

“Hurray! At last we’re here!” were the first words we spoke when we arrived at Heathrow airport. It was so wonderful to visit Great Britain in October for the first time. The impressions were magnificent. Everything here was so familiar and yet so new at the same time. We were delighted with unusual sight and exotic landscapes which usually draw crowds of tourists. We admired different places where even every stone and tree were friends to us. People in streets were so friendly that we were not afraid to get lost.

On the first day of our trip we enjoyed beautiful nature. It was as green as in Spring and we were interested in different kinds of plants, trees and flowers. Our adventures began

from the Great Bustard Group Project Site. We met our old and new friends there. We were glad to have communication with all of them and we were so impressed to see Great Bustards in the field. We were proud of Russian bustards living there. Our students didn’t believe that they really became lucky to see all these nice things with their own eyes.

#### **All of us had a good chance to see the work of many people who were involved to the conservation project.**

David Waters, director of GBG is our best friend and one of the founders of the Children’s Organisation of International Relations in school №1, and he helped arrange our trip. We come from the town of Krasny Kut which is situated not far from Dyakovsky forest and biological station.

Thanks to David and many other supporters we had a perfect and useful trip. David and his wife Karen, GBG’s Marketing Representative Suzy Elkins and her wonderful family looked after us very well and we had a lot of experience in exploration of culture and traditions of Great Britain. We learned various styles of life and people’s behaviour in different situations.. The main purpose of our visit was to link Russian and British schools, to find pen pals for Russian students and to begin cultural exchange between students of both countries. There is no doubt we were eager to interest British adults and children in Russia, its culture, customs, food and holidays. We wanted to show the spirit of Russia to British people. And, of course, we learned much about British spirit. We liked everything in those places we had been: landscapes, people, manners, traditional food (we tried to eat every dish new to us).



(Above) The visitors with staff and pupils of Ann Edwards C of E Primary School in South Cerney



*GBG volunteer and friend of the bustard Fred with Russian student Georgii Mezirov*

We enjoyed every minute of our stay with our new friends. (We talked to them so much, asked so many questions and sometimes we were afraid that quiet British people would tire of us).

During our visit we managed to see many interesting sights, to have many involving excursions, and to communicate with colleagues, students and head teachers. The first two days were very useful for our group because of schools.

***We visited St. Edmunds Girls School in Salisbury, Ann Edwards School in South Cerney and Deer Park School in Cirencester.***



Our students showed presentations about Russia, Krasny Kut, our native town, and our school. They really enjoyed talking to native speakers, playing different games and doing

sports together with them. (Georgii, one of our students, was glad to show his sport abilities in playing football). We are very grateful to GBG's Karen Waters and Suzy Elkins, and School Headteacher Stephen Richardson who were organisers of these events and gave us opportunities to be present at lessons of History, Languages, Religion, Drama, IT and Music. Because of our career we were especially interested in methods of teaching, school facilities and subjects, and were amazed that the most popular foreign language was Spanish.

***The school atmospheres were very friendly, the teachers were very sociable and helpful. So we analysed everything, discussed differences and similarities and remembered best things about schools.***

We hope they will be our twin schools from now on. As for different attractions, they became fantastic in fact. We saw Stonehenge and didn't believe that we were there. Our students and we had been dreaming of visiting this historic monument for a long time and standing very close to Stonehenge we realised that dreams become true if you want them very much. We had unforgettable magic feelings.

Next day was in Bath with Roman Baths, street attractions and of course shopping. We'll never forget Salisbury Cathedral with its magnificent atmosphere and spirit of ancient times. We had a chance to see beauty and greatness of Salisbury at night time while walking along the streets and in the Queen Elizabeth Gardens.



Hawk

Conservancy was splendid. We are very thankful to Fred and Rona for their help. They were so enthusiastic that we wanted to be with them more and more. They showed and told us very interesting facts about birds and their habits. We were surprised with the size and abilities of those clever birds.

***Last day of our stay was London. We were looking forward to seeing it most of all. We read about London sights, saw films, taught our children but we didn't know all the details about each sight.***

How exciting we were now standing next to the Tower of London, the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. Having a tour of sightseeing in a double-decker bus we saw St. Paul's Cathedral, Hyde Park, Tower Bridge, Trafalgar Square, National Gallery and a lot of magnificent buildings. How wonderful was London from the River Thames! At the end of the day our group moved to Madame Tussaud's museum and spent there some hours exploring, taking photos with life-size outstanding figures and entertaining in the cinema hall. Everyone from our group became a part of ancient England looking at different scenes from old black taxis. We had a very lovely meeting with the mayor of Salisbury, Councillor Mr. John Abbott JP, who was so kind as to give us a wonderful excursion around the Guildhall, telling us different stories connected with history. ***We'd like to thank GBG, Ann Edwards C of E School, St Edmund's Girls School and all supporters and people who were involved in this project for doing their best to make our dreams come true.***



*The visitors gave presentations to the 'Friends of the bustard' monthly meeting group*

### *The link between British and Russian schools*

*Natasha Karavaeva reports on behalf of Badger School International*



(Above) David and Suzy visiting School No 1 (Right) Anastasia Barsukova, Badger School Director

***Badger School International represents the school project of the GBG in Saratov, the purpose of which is to increase the ecological awareness among children in Britain and Russia and encourage interest towards other cultures and the world in general.***

It all started last year and since then has been on the list of our priorities.

The idea of establishing contact between Russian and British school students occurred a couple of years ago and has been growing ever since. First, the teachers of Krasny Kut School #1 started the International Children's Organisation, and later they were joined by two schools in Saratov, School #75 and #89.

Last winter the Saratov children met English visitors for the first time - David Waters and Suzy Elkins - which was a major event for them, as they got the chance to practice their skills of English and connect their classroom activities with real life. This meeting gave them a new ground for learning, as now they really know what they do it for. I was faced

with some funny questions afterwards, like, "Do they really think in English?", "Are they real English people?", "Can they truly speak no Russian at all?"

These questions might seem amusing and even strange, but that is exactly why the school project is so important. It gives the children a broader outlook on the world, and this is vital for productive education. The meeting with David and Suzy definitely boosted their curiosity as well, as the more you get to know, the more questions arise.

***On the basis of the school project our school partners in Saratov now introduce English into their environmental activities.***

For example, the poster competition promoting care for the nature among the children of 5th and 6th school year was arranged in English, as well as the quiz devoted to the International Day of Birds in April. It is always encouraging to see the enthusiasm of the teachers and students to do things. The information about all this got on the news on the local radio and newspaper, which popularises the project in the city. As a result,

we've been approached by children from schools that don't participate yet, inviting us to visit them.

Now that another school year has started, we are planning a series of school events aimed at involving more children and teachers in the club. In cooperation with our British friends we are hoping to make it ever so exciting and thrilling for everyone. It also should be noted that the project now is growing and extending the age limits, as there's more and more interest expressed by university students, which is very much supported by the children who got involved in the project as pupils and now are continuing their education after leaving school. Thanks to the meetings with British visitors they can find out more about Great Bustard, Great Britain, the English language etc and share this knowledge with their groupmates, thus fostering more interest in peers.

On the whole, the project now seems to integrate people of various age groups and occupations which gives it an opportunity to develop and embrace more ideas to benefit every participant.



**Prof. Estlin Waters writes**  
*A fascinating account*



Estlin Waters Prof.

**Here Estlin looks at TH Nelson's *The Birds of Yorkshire: a historical Account of the Avifauna of the County published by Brown and Sons, London in 1907.***

It is in two volumes as befits England's largest county. With over two hundred illustrations, they were printed at £1-5/- and a nice set now would cost a hundred times as much. The three main areas of the former breeding population of Great Bustards were: Wiltshire, East Anglia and Yorkshire. Anyhow, these three areas had the most written about the Bustard.

Thomas Hudson Nelson (1856 – 1916) was interested in natural history in general and ornithology in particular. He has been described as following no profession, probably due to ill-health which also affected his brothers and his one son, all of whom died very young.

Nelson lived the life of a semi-invalid and was advised by his doctor to live on more level ground. He chose Redcar. It was entirely owing to his friend Eagle Clarke's persuasion that he undertook his "stupendous task" of writing this book. It has nine of 843 pages devoted to the Great Bustard. The book was commenced by Eagle Clarke but was rewritten and bought up to date by Nelson after Eagle Clarke moved to Scotland in 1888. The title pages honour the co-operation of Eagle Clarke and F Boyes, the latter having a

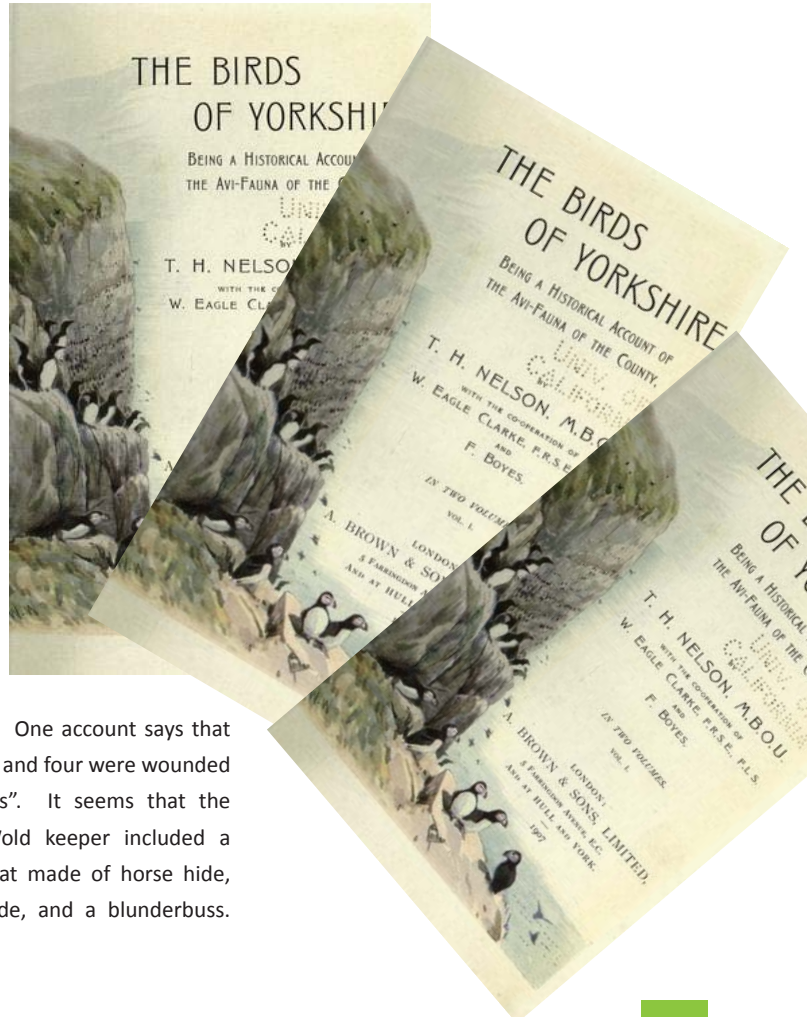
particular knowledge of East Yorkshire birds. There is an early reference to Bustards in the Earl of Northumberland's regulations in 1512 for principal feasts in his Castles of Wressill and Leginfield in Yorkshire. Nelson regrets that almost all the records of the bird's existence in Yorkshire date from after its extinction there. The exact date of the extinction, as so often elsewhere, is uncertain but Nelson believes that the last bird was seen at Foxholes near Scarborough about 1835.

Nelson suggests that the lack of earlier records may be explained by the very abundance of the species! Despite the paucity of contemporary records, Nelson summarised the Bustard as "formerly resident in great numbers on the Wolds of eastern Yorkshire, when in their virgin state as undulating barren sheepwalks".

The largest number mentioned is Sir William Strickland's memory of a flock of 25 on the Wolds between Reighton and Bridlington. Near Sledmere is the location of an infamous event that happened about 1808. Mr St Quintin's keeper killed 11 Bustards at a shot with a blunderbuss – so heavy that it was more than the strong man could hold without a rest. One account says that seven fell to the gun and four were wounded and "got afterwards". It seems that the equipment of a Wold keeper included a stalking horse, a coat made of horse hide, with the hair outside, and a blunderbuss.

Most records were of birds shot and often served at meals. Sir William Strickland in an invitation to dine at Boynton Hall described the principal dish as probably "the last of his race" but a few lingered after this. Bustards were often given as gifts and one was presented to George IV then Prince Regent. Nelson believed that one of the main causes of extinction was the Enclosure Acts. These are not now thought to be so important but Nelson described them as giving the Bustard "notice to quit". After the extermination, Nelson could find only two occurrences of vagrants up to the publication of his book. One female was shot in February 1861 and another female was picked up in the sea "dead but still warm" near Bridlington Quay in November 1864.

**Estlin Waters**



### **Go Bustard!**

#### *Lesley Fudge reports on a new and interesting art initiative*



*Lesley with one of her paintings*

***In 2009, Lesley Fudge, artist and GBG supporter explored the Cloth Road Art Trail. Here she writes about the start of a very interesting journey.***

As an artist I visit all the local art trails; we are so lucky to have such talented people around us. I had bought a painting from one of the artists, Melissa Wishart and when I went to collect it after the exhibition, she had a naked fibre-glass lion model in her dining room. She told me that she was one of the artists for the Lions of Bath. She talked to me about the project and on my drive home, I thought how Bradford on Avon, where she lived and Frome, seem to have an art 'soul' and whilst we have so many really talented people in and around Warminster, it didn't feel as though we have anything similar. I wondered what 'our' icon would be if we had an art project like the Lions and Pigs of Bath, the

Donkeys at Weston, the Whales and Dolphins in Vancouver and recently the Gorillas in Bristol; the inspiration? I am a member of the Hawk Conservancy and the Great Bustard Group and of course, the Eureka! moment was - the Great Bustard. After all, it's on the Guide and Scout badges, the Wiltshire flag and so many other places and they are being reintroduced on our doorstep on Salisbury Plain.

So the concept was that I didn't want this to be an elitist art project but something that really involved the community to bring people from Warminster and surrounding villages together and to raise the spirits in what is such a difficult time for so many.

***I didn't want my vision to be something for only 'artists' and celebrities to be involved with, but little ones, schools, teenagers, military, elderly, able-bodied and disabled alike.***

It would be totally inclusive. We could enable any group that wanted to be part of the fun to have their own bustard to paint or decorate even if they had no money. They would be supported if they needed help by an artist and since this has become 'news' many offers of support from artists have been given.

I spoke to the Art Society. I am the secretary of Warminster Art Society, and whilst people were keen for the project to happen, many are older or not physically able and would not therefore be able to help. When the likely extent of the bustard project was thought about, I as a retired nurse (I still work part-time) did not have the capacity to do this alone or with a couple of fellow artists. We had, as an art group taken part in a joint exhibition with the camera club and the 2011 Warminster Calendar competition, both organised along with the Warminster and Villages Development Trust (WVDT). I mentioned my vision for the bustard project

at an art exhibition Preview evening and I was then invited to join the WVDT Board to get an artistic element into the group. As WVDT had the structure, the Art Society partnered with them to help the bustard vision to materialise.

***We have had businesses, individuals, villages, a disability group and schools already asking for their own bustard!***

A primary school is considering how there might be a pen pal communication with the children from the town in Russia where the reintroduced bustards on the Plain are sourced. I have of course, discussed the project with David Walters of the Great Bustard Group (GBG) and he is delighted that the profile of this iconic bird will be raised in another way. He has offered prizes for the 'best' bustard within categories (children, elderly etc), days out at the bustard project and anything else they can do to support the project.

A street survey was organised to find out from 1,000 people in four towns, Warminster, Trowbridge, Melksham and Devizes, how many people recognize the bustard from a photo. "Can you name this bird?" is the question they have been asked – not a competition to give it a name of course! The feedback has been recorded by age and gender. The recognition rate is currently low. When we repeat the survey at the end of the project, we hope that most people will recognise our County icon.



*The Lions of Bath*



Lesley, Ian and GBG's Lynne Derry

2012 is going to be a year of celebration with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics and the launch of a flock of bustards will be an 'event' in Warminster Park to open the Warminster Festival in October 2012. The models will also be seen around the town and villages.

We hope to have a bustard trail, taking visitors around the locations. People will have a 'passport' and complete the trail finding all

the bustards and stamping their passport as they find them, winning a prize when they have collected all the bustards on the trail - we will hopefully add the bustard locations to 'Google Maps' and searchers can use Sat Nav to find them or opt for a simple plan, a bit like a treasure trail. This fun tour of the town and villages will increase business for pubs, shops etc. across our area as will the workup to and the 'event' itself.

*So where are we now? Ian Hooper, a wonderful sculptor from Westbury, sculpted the larger than life size model. This was then cast in fibre-glass at Country Leisure in Cholderton whose MD Malcolm Brown very kindly donated our first model which was then painted Wiltshire green.*

He is Percy, "The Peoples' bustard' and he currently lives in Warminster Library where he is busy collecting autographs for donations to raise funds for groups who want to have, but can't raise funds themselves for, a model.

The residents of one of our elderly care homes desperately want to have their own model so the first tranche of funds will go to them supported by a donation from a very generous couple who attended the GBG garden party and offered to support an elderly group.

## Buy a beautiful bustard bronze

A stunning bronze has also now been made by Ian Hooper. With modern patinating techniques, the colours are amazing. Bronzes can be ordered from Ian by contacting him on 01373 858435.



## Other projects



*Lions of Bath 2010 was a public art event for the World Heritage city of Bath, which saw 100 life-size lion sculptures displayed in pride of place in locations all over the city from May-September 2010 and then auctioned, raising over £65,000 for local charities.*

The sculptures were individually designed and decorated in a wide range of styles, from graffiti to abstract and mosaic, by a many talented artists from Bath, Scotland, London, France, Moscow and China, including well known figures such as Sir Peter Blake, Rolf Harris and Cath Kidston. The lions were kindly sponsored by businesses, organisations, local communities and individuals. Many such projects have since been undertaken, all drawing together the community and creating a sense of teamwork during their creation. Lesley now hopes to see the Wiltshire bustards take off in the same way. We wish Lesley the very best for this project and look forward to reporting on its success in future issues of Otis.



The Donkeys of Weston

## ***Bustards in the Buff***

### *Suzy Elkins reports on GBG's naked calendar*

***Ever since Calendar Girls brought bare bottoms to the British countryside there has been an air of cheeky delight in the charity naked calendar.***

So here at GBG we thought it would be great to come up with our own for 'posterity' and to raise funds for the project in 2012.

While the weather on Salisbury Plain was still warm the staff and volunteers at GBG gamely shed their clothes in the name of fun and funding and 'Bustards in the Buff' 2012 was born. The calendar is causing quite a stir and pre-orders have already begun hitting Project Director David Waters mat. The calendar is tastefully photographed with the modesty of

all participants intact, and is respectable enough to grace the wall of any home or office. Some of the delectable country girls featured in the calendar, though they blush slightly at the recollection, show below that the calendar was put together in the name of a good cause and a bit of fun.

## **And the bits we'll be leaving out!**

When the final calendar is produced there will be a few images left out for the sake of grace and decency, amongst which are Fergus' antics when his owner and keeper Karen Waters kindly intervened to save our model's pains. From thistles under bottoms to mischievous Fergus attempting a sneaky peck it's been a lot of fun photographing the calendar and we hope you like the results.



Fergus isn't sure about this!



Model ready, Fergus not so



And then he's gone!



Lying naked on thistles?



Perfectly posed pets..?



Reserve your copy of 'Bustards in the Buff' now. Simply go to [www.greatbustard.org/shop](http://www.greatbustard.org/shop) and let us know how many copies you'd like at £10 each.

Enclose payment, glue here, seal and post to the address overleaf

## Join the GBG & help us to bring the bustard back

[www.greatbustard.org](http://www.greatbustard.org) • [membership@greatbustard.org](mailto:membership@greatbustard.org)

Postal address: 1 Down Barn Close, Winterbourne Gunner, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP4 6JP

### MEMBERSHIP

Pay monthly from just £1.66 a month



**Become a member of the Great Bustard Group to help secure the future of this amazing bird.**

Simply fill out the form & send to the address shown above or give to a GBG staff member. Membership includes:

Quarterly magazine OTIS • Booklet about the Great Bustard • Free guided visits of the release site • Invitations to all Fundraising and Social Events • Membership badge • Car sticker

#### Annual Membership (tick box)

Ordinary £20  Family £25  Fellow £75  Life Member (Single payment of min £500)  Renewal

#### Your details

Organisation (if applicable) .....
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#### Payment method (please tick)

Cheque (payable to the Great Bustard Group)  Monthly Standing Order

#### Instruction to your Bank/Building Society to pay Monthly Standing Order

To the Manager Bank/Building Society
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Post Code

Account Name .....
Sort Code .....
Account Number .....

Please pay the Great Bustard Group (Nat West, 48, Blue Boar Row, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP1 1DF, Account Number 29562325, Sort Code 54 - 41 - 19) the sum of (**minimum £1.66**) £ ..... on 1st day of each month until further notice.

#### Donation

I would like to make a donation to the Great Bustard Group of £ .....

#### Gift Aid.

If you are a UK taxpayer, the Inland Revenue will give us an extra 25p for every pound you give.

Please tick the box and sign. It's that simple!

*I am a UK taxpayer and request that my membership and all gifts of money that I have made in the past four years and all future gifts of money that I make to the Great Bustard Group from the date of this declaration be Gift Aid donations. I understand that I must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6th April one year to 5 April the next) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that the charity will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year.*

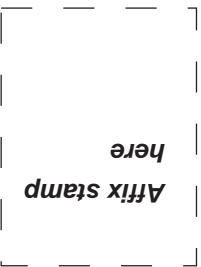
Signature ..... Date .....

**GBG is a registered charity number 1092515**



[www.greatbustard.org](http://www.greatbustard.org)

*Fold here, glue or tape edges closed*



**Membership Secretary,  
The Great Bustard Group,  
1 Down Barn Close,  
Winterbourne Gunner, Salisbury,  
SP4 6JP.**

# We need you!

We need volunteers, all year round, especially weekends, hours are totally flexible but one regular day per week is desirable

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# Coming soon - 'Bustards in the Buff'

Our charity calendar 'Bustards in the Buff' will soon be available online and in selected stores to purchase in time for Christmas

£10



See [www.greatbustard.org](http://www.greatbustard.org)

Wiltshire Council  
Where everybody matters



This project is part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for European Development 2007-2013: Europe investing in rural areas. It is being delivered through the Local Action Group on Salisbury Plain, and the South West of England Regional Development Agency with Defra as the Managing Authority