

TAXON SUMMARY

Australian Bustard

1	Family	Otididae
2	Scientific name	<i>Ardeotis australis</i> (J. E. Gray, 1829)
3	Common name	Australian Bustard
4	Conservation status	Near Threatened: c

5 Reasons for listing

Though the species' population size is still substantial, there has been a massive historical decline in abundance in southern Australia and a patchy mix of declines in northern Australia that are only partly offset by localised increases (Near Threatened: c). Because such a large proportion of the population is in Australia, global status is also Near Threatened.

Australian population	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	6,500,000 km ²	high
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	50,000 km ²	low
trend	fluctuating	high
No. of breeding birds	100,000	low
trend	decreasing	medium
No. of sub-populations	1	high
Generation time	10 years	low
Global population share	99 %	high
Level of genetic exchange	low	medium

6 Intraspecific taxa

None described.

7 Past range and abundance

Found throughout mainland Australia and southern New Guinea, and breeding throughout range (Blakers *et al.*, 1984). Occasional localised fluctuations in numbers in response to patchy rainfall (Marchant and Higgins, 1993).

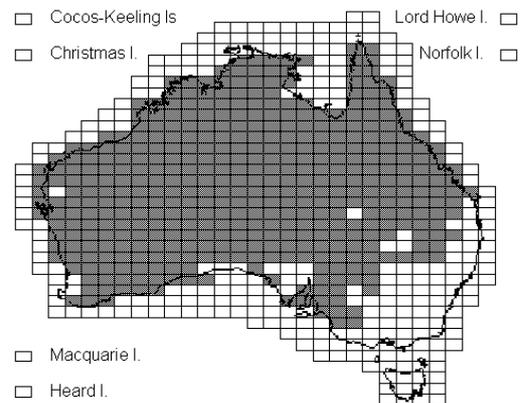
8 Present range and abundance

All but disappeared from south-eastern Australia, and less abundant elsewhere, particularly south of the tropics, but also across northern Australia (Blakers *et al.*, 1984, P. Whitehead), where may be less common in areas invaded by woody weeds (J. Woinarski). May be more abundant in parts of northern Australia in response to recent clearing (Blakers *et al.*, 1984, J. Woinarski).

9 Ecology

Australian Bustards are found in tussock grassland, *Triodia* hummock grassland, grassy woodland, low shrublands, and structurally similar artificial habitats, such as croplands and golf-courses. They will also use denser vegetation, when this has been temporarily opened up by recent burning. They lay one, or

occasionally two, eggs on the ground, where possible along a boundary between open grasslands and more protective shrubland or woodlands (Marchant and Higgins, 1993). They feed on insects, small vertebrates, seeds and fruit (Blakers *et al.*, 1984, Marchant and Higgins, 1993), apparently moving in response to local variations in food supply. They are often found near water, be it natural or artificial (Marchant and Higgins, 1993).



10 Threats

The widespread decline of the Australian Bustard has probably been caused by a combination of intensive agriculture, invasion of pastoral land by woody weeds, hunting and fox predation (Berney, 1936, Harrington *et al.*, 1984, Marchant and Higgins, 1993). Bustards readily desert nests in response to disturbance by humans, sheep or cattle (Downes, 1982, K. Fitzherbert in Blakers *et al.*, 1984). Pesticides, either directly or indirectly ingested, are also held responsible for local extinctions (Rolls, 1969). Although predation of eggs and chicks by foxes has been thought to be of secondary importance (Berney, 1936), the area where bustards have declined corresponds with the distribution of foxes in Australia, a distribution that is slowly expanding north. Traditional and illegal hunting by people is also considerable and may be contributing to the perceived decline in northern and central Australia (A. A. Burbidge, P. Whitehead).

11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Initiate vehicle-based bustard counts, such as those that have been conducted for raptors, and relate counts to land use.

- 11.2 Assess data available from annual kangaroo counts to give information on numbers in remote areas.
- 11.3 Monitor bustard numbers (possibly using technique in 11.1 and 11.2) and model in relation to regional rainfall.
- 11.4 Initiate studies of factors affecting bustard breeding success.
- 11.5 Quantify traditional hunting pressure and work towards regulation of take as necessary.

12 Bibliography

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