



LIFE GREAT BUSTARD LAYMAN'S REPORT

Cross-border protection of the
Great Bustard in Central Europe
2016-2024

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Flying male of the Great Bustard
© Franz Josef Kovacs

Project description

Project title

Cross-border protection of the Great Bustard in Central Europe (LIFE15 NAT/AT/000834)

Acronym

LIFE Great Bustard

Beneficiaries and partners

The coordinating beneficiary is the Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation (ÖGG).

The project is implemented together with 9 project partners, 2 co-financiers and 2 cooperation partner.

Project duration

11.07.2016 – 31.10.2024

Project budget

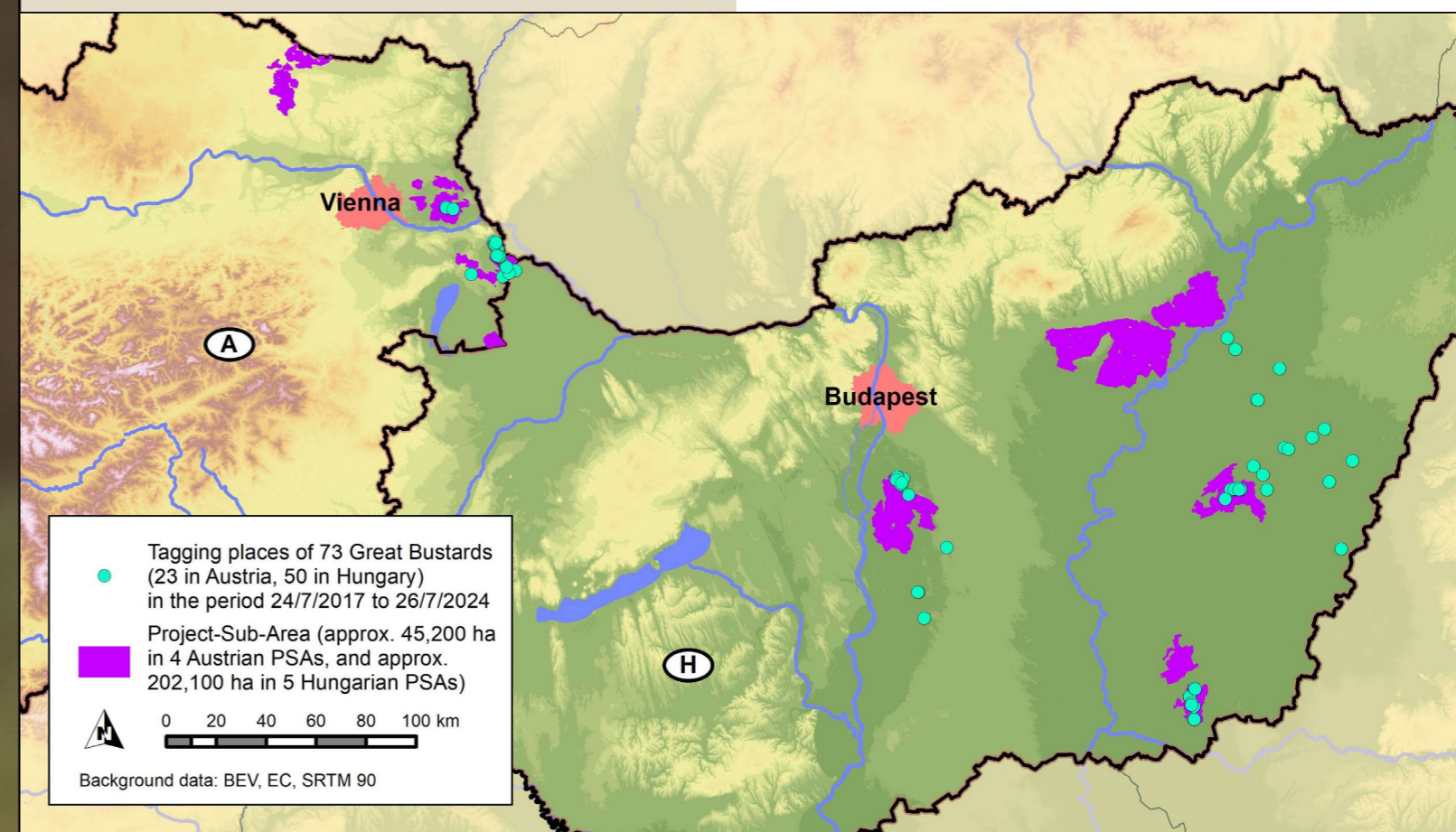
Total planned budget: 8,399,265 €
EU-financed: 5,962,905 € (70.99 %)

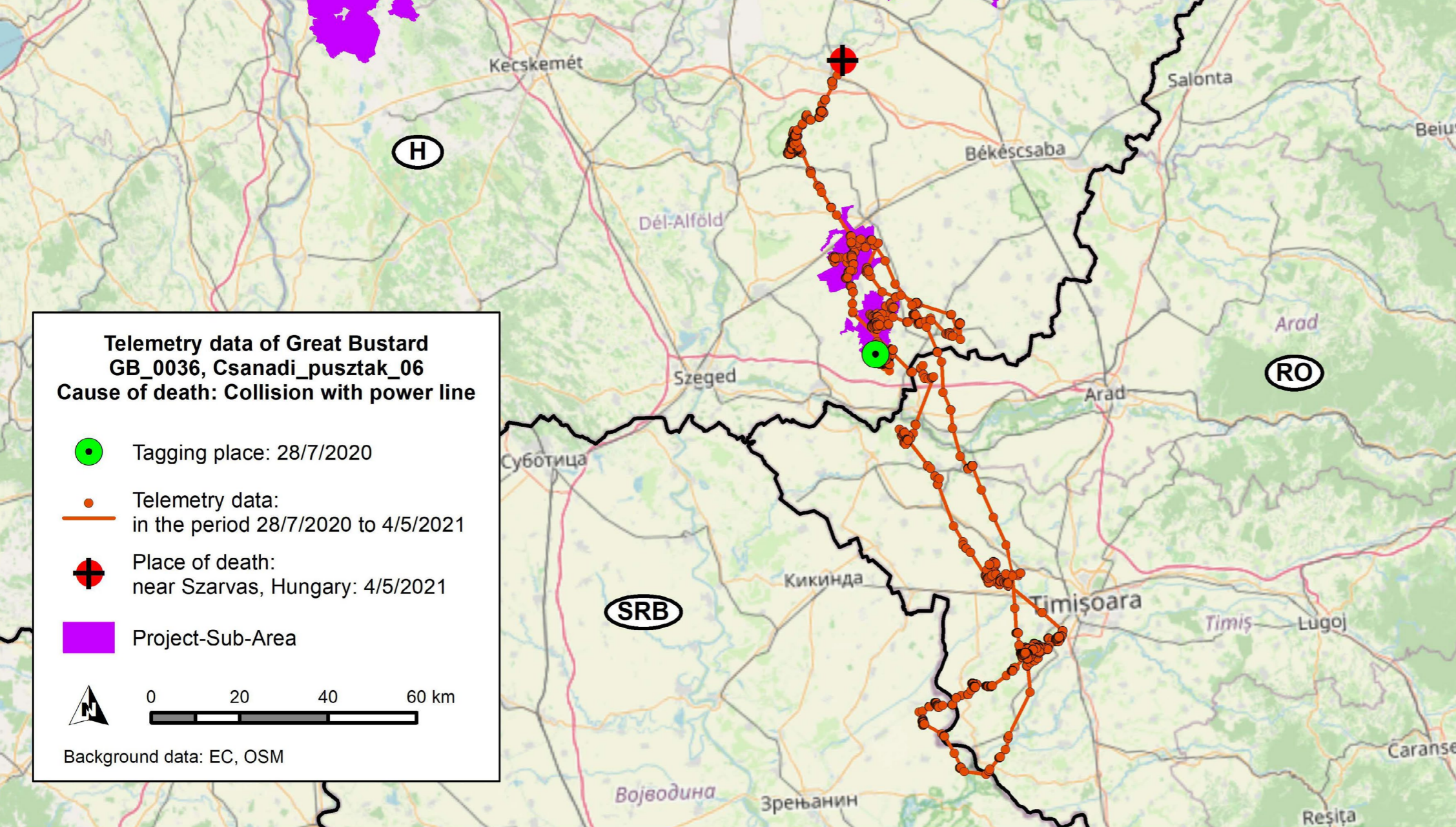


Main project objectives

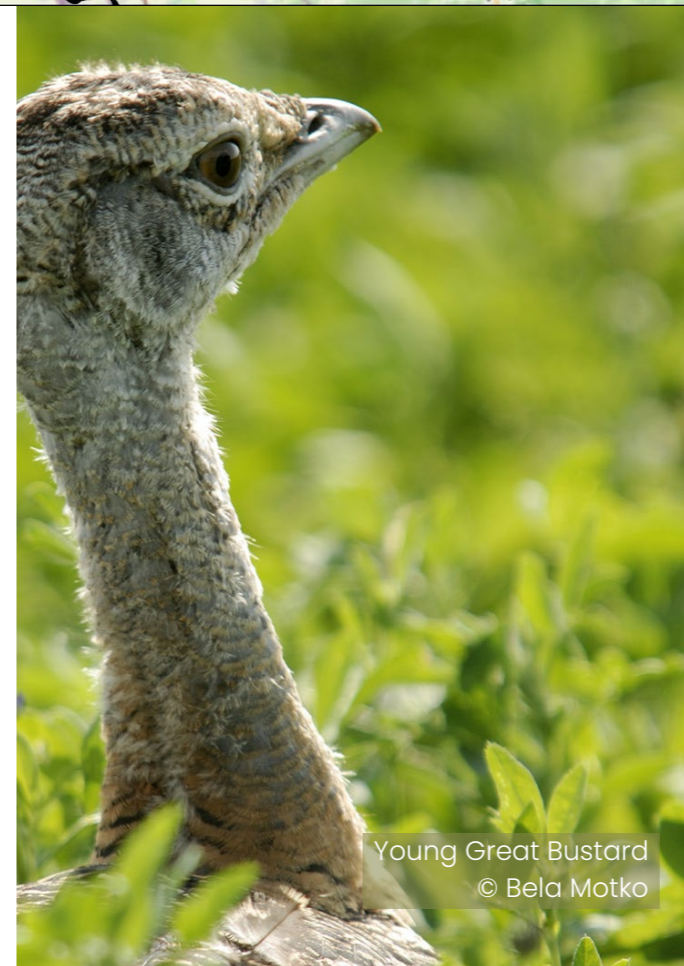
Austria (AT) and Hungary (HU) have been actively involved in Great Bustard conservation for several years. Following two Austrian LIFE projects and one Hungarian LIFE project, both countries jointly launched a major cross-border initiative to protect the Great Bustard population in Central Europe. Building on the success of previous efforts, this LIFE project aimed to *continue intensive habitat management and to reduce the risk of collisions with power lines*, for many years the no. 1 mortality factor for both immature and adult Great Bustards. An additional aim was *to decrease predation pressure*.

The project focused on *strengthening cross-border collaboration between Austria and Hungary* through coordinated conservation actions and enhanced communication.

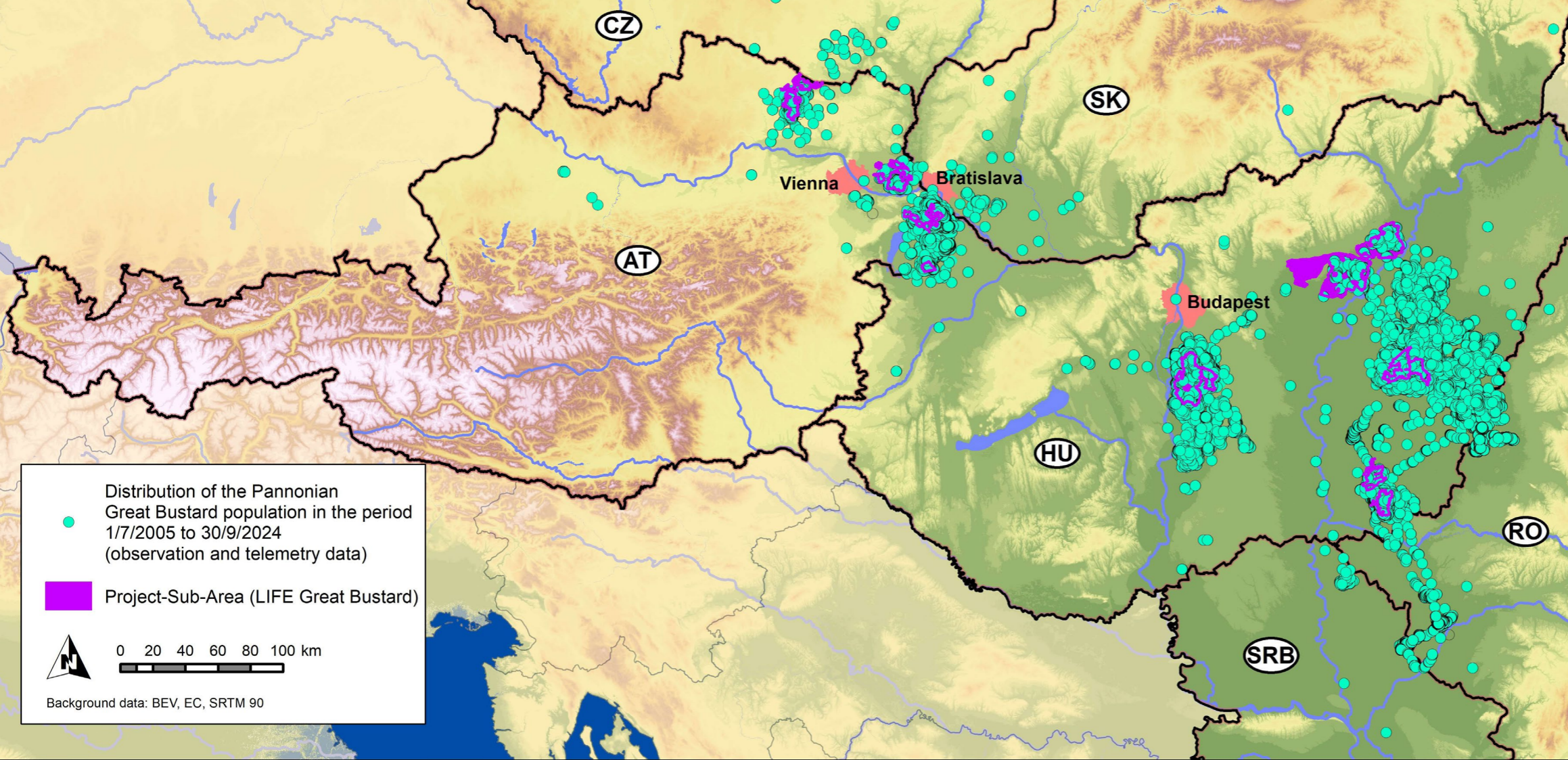




Between July 2017 and July 2024, 73 Great Bustards (23 in Austria and 50 in Hungary) were tagged, yielding valuable data. One notable example was a chick tagged on 28 July 2020 in Csanádi-Puszta, Hungary. It travelled through key habitats, wintered near Timișoara, Romania, and later ventured into Serbia. Tragically, on 4 May 2021, the bird collided with a power line near Szarvas, Hungary, while migrating north, despite being in excellent condition after surviving the winter alone in unfamiliar terrain.



Telemetry has proven vital in understanding the behaviour, habitat preferences, and movements of the Great Bustard. It enables informed decision-making for the species' conservation.

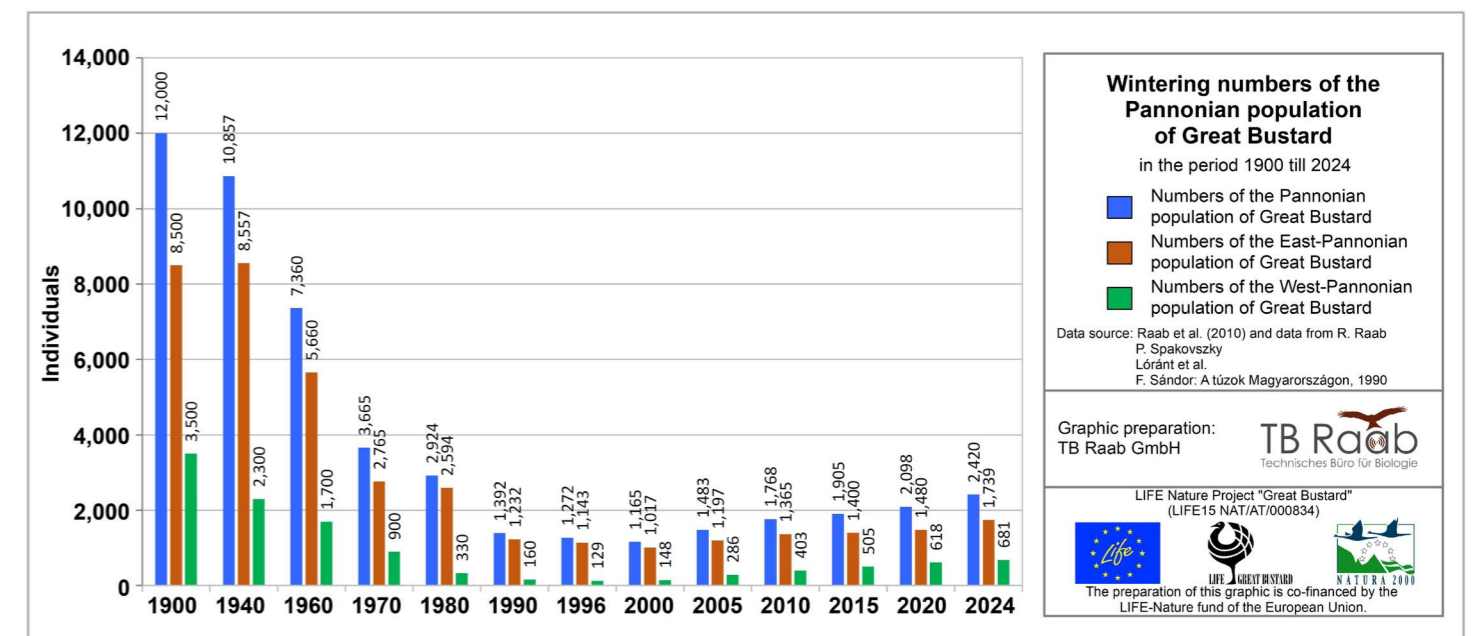


Over the past two decades, the Central European population of the Great Bustard *has increased by 64% in the Pannonian region.**

*from 1,483 individuals in 2005 to 2,427 in 2024.

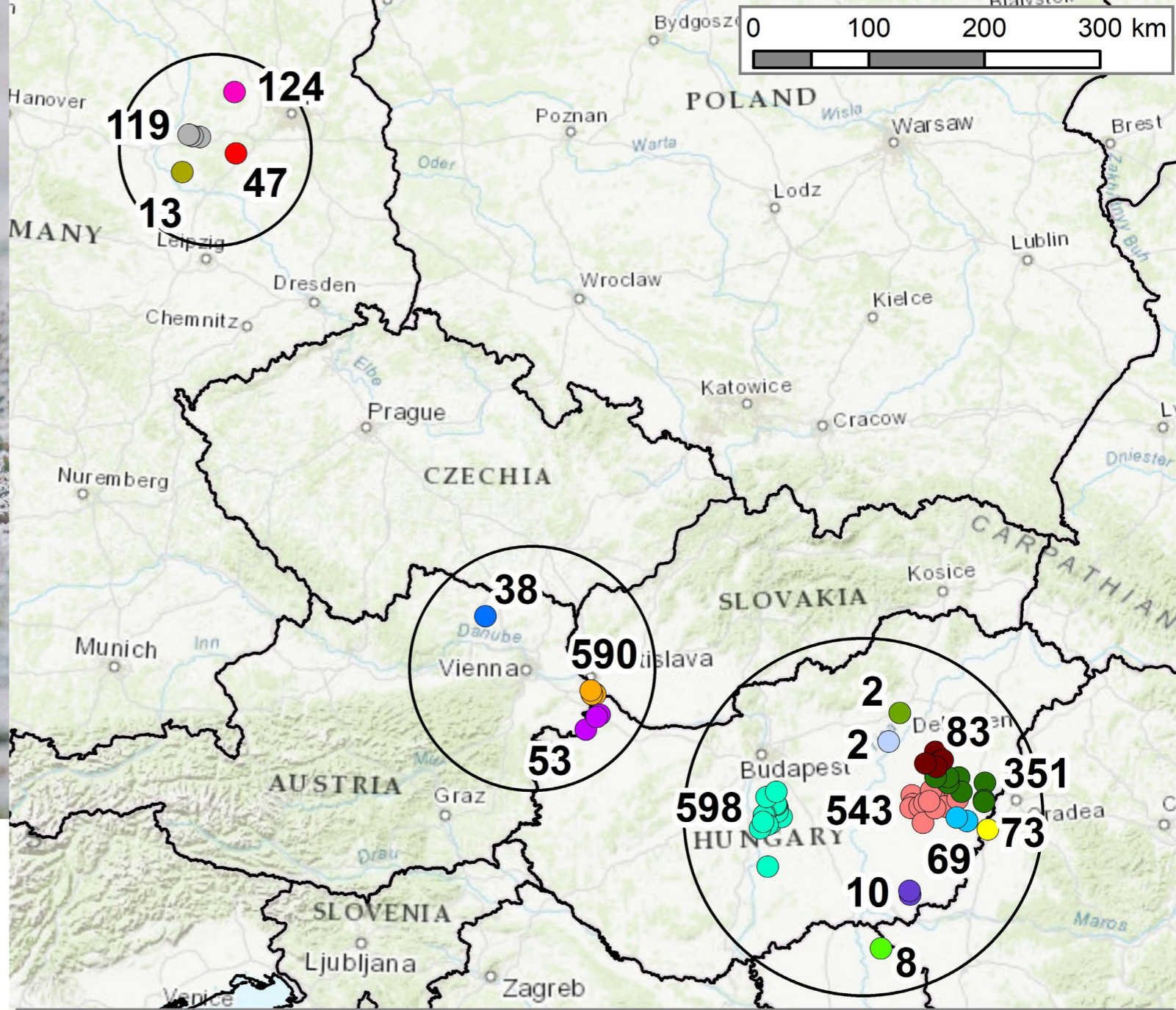
In contrast, both the global and European Great Bustard populations have declined by over 30% in just 11 years.*

Thanks to conservation efforts such as habitat management, reduction of the risk of collision with power lines and cooperation with farmers and hunters, the Great Bustard populations in Austria and Hungary and the entire Pannonian region increased.



*from 39,136 – 44,940 individuals in 2012 to 27,987 – 30,436 in 2023 in Europe.

Synchronous Winter Count of the Great Bustard in Central Europe



Since 2017 Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia have conducted synchronized winter counts of Great Bustards.

The results are encouraging: 1,751 individuals were counted in 2017, rising to 2,723 by 2024, a 56% increase over seven years in these 7 countries.

Results of synchronous winter count of all 3 Great Bustard populations (German, West-Pannonian and East-Pannonian population) in Central Europe - 13/1/2024 and 14/1/2024 (10/1/2024 - 17/1/2024; 2,723 Individuals)

German population (303 Ind.)

- Belziger Landschaftswiesen (47 Ind.)
- Fiener Bruch (119 Ind.)
- Havelländisches Luch (124 Ind.)
- Zerbster Land (13 Ind.)

West-Pannonian population (681 Ind.)

- Parndorfer Platte - Heideboden (590 Ind.)
- Waasen - Hanság, Mosonszolnok (53 Ind.)
- Westliches Weinviertel (38 Ind.)

East-Pannonian population (1,739 Ind.)

- Bihar (351 Ind.)
- Borsodi-sík (2 Ind.)
- Dévaványai-sík (543 Ind.)
- Hevesi-sík (2 Ind.)
- Felső-kiskunsági szikes puszták és turjánvidék (598 Ind.)
- Hortobágy (83 Ind.)
- Kis-Sárrét (69 Ind.)
- Vásárhelyi- és Csanádi-puszták (10 Ind.)
- Nagyszalonta (73 Ind.)
- Mokrín (8 Ind.)

Map preparation: TB Raab GmbH
Background data: Basemap

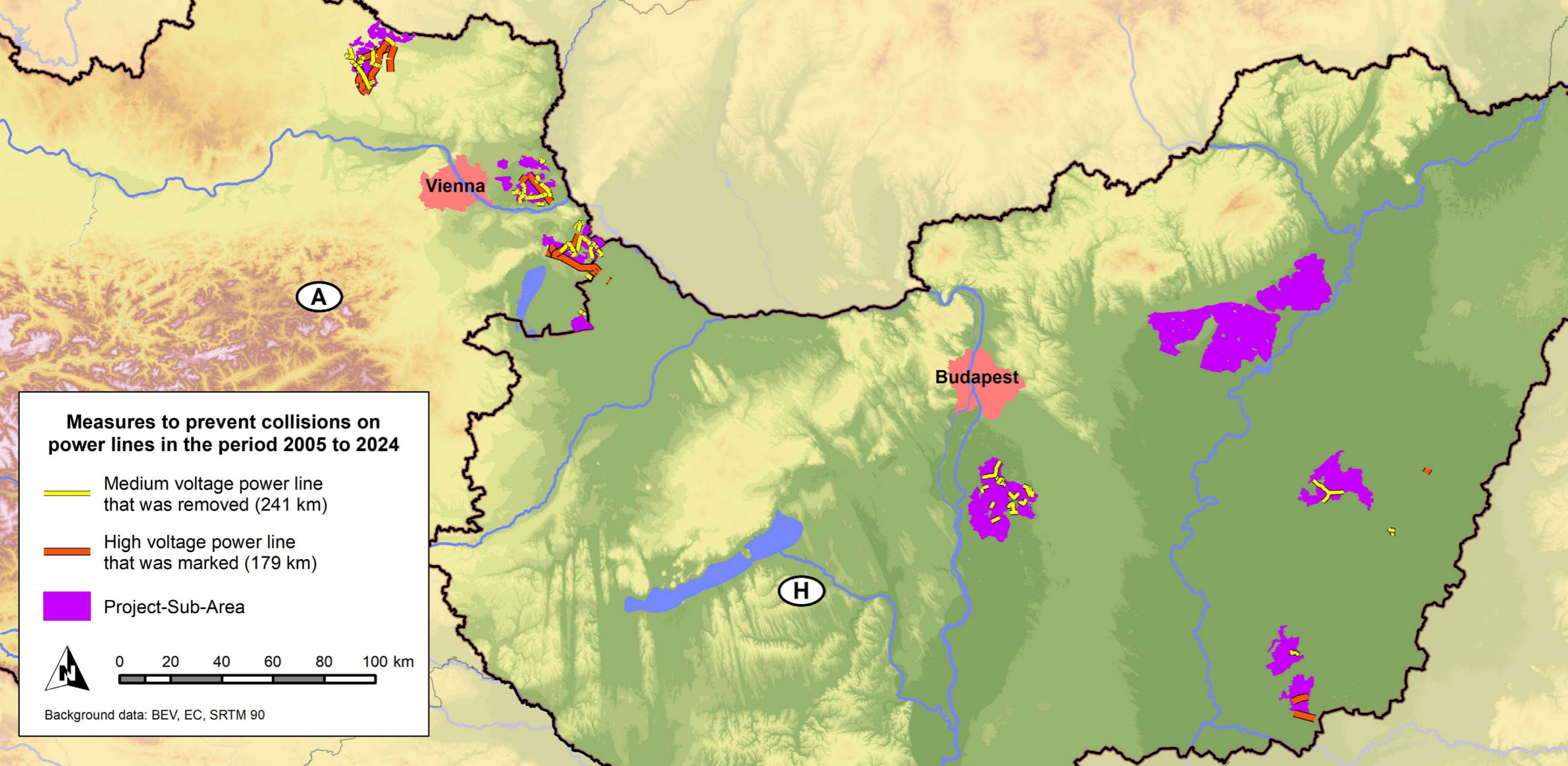
LIFE Nature Project "Great Bustard" (LIFE15 NAT/AT/000834)

LIFE GREAT BUSTARD

NATURA 2000

The preparation of this map is co-financed by the LIFE-Nature fund of the European Union.

Data source:
Marcus Borchert et al. (Germany)
Dávid Grabovac et al. (Serbia)
Miklós Lóránt et al. (Hungary)
Attila Nagy (Romania)
Rainer Raab et al. (Austria, parts of Hungary and Slovakia)



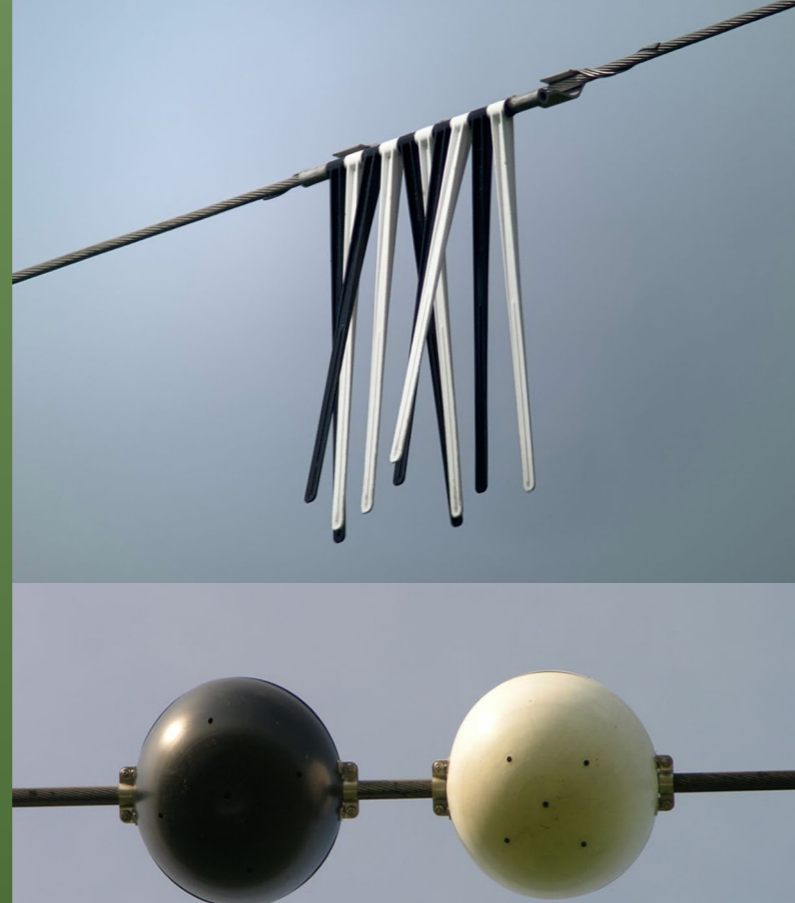
Over the past 20 years, approximately 241 km of medium voltage power lines were first placed into the ground and then the overhead power lines and pylons were removed, 154 km in Austria and 87 km in Hungary.

Additionally, 179 km of high-voltage power lines have been marked in the Pannonian region (162 km in the West-Pannonian and 17 km in the East-Pannonian regions) to improve their visibility.



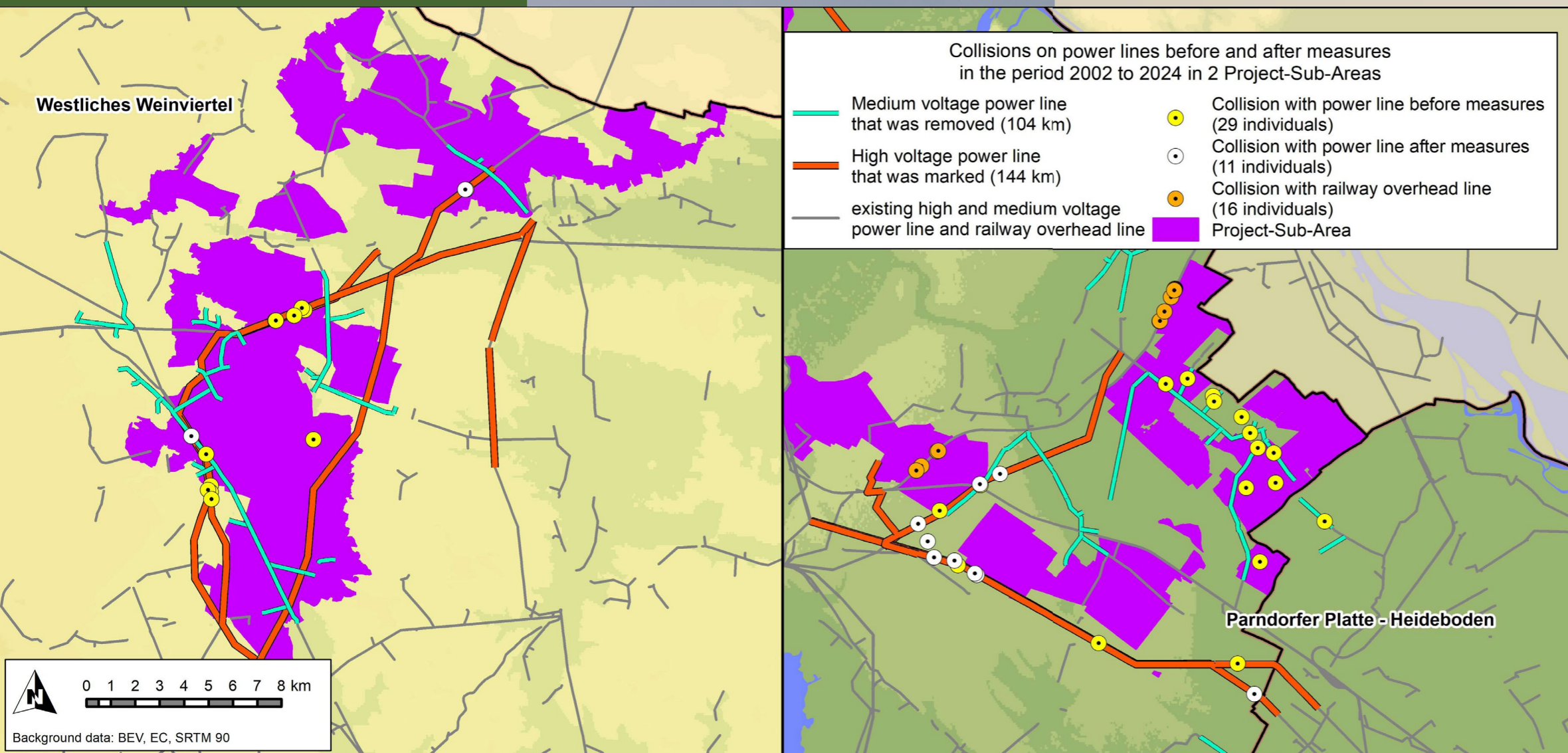
Reduction of the risk of collision with power lines by **marking and underground cabling.**

Marking of power lines and underground cabling are the **most effective** measures to protect the Great Bustards.



Different types of power line markers were used within the LIFE Great Bustard project in Austria (for example bird flight diverters and black and white bird warning balls) and in Hungary.
© LIFE Great Bustard

Marking of High Voltage Power Lines: By the end of 2023, two major collision hotspots were identified in Hungary, prompting urgent action. In the Csanádi-Puszták project area alone, more than 15 km of power lines were marked. This area, home to around 30 birds, is a crucial link to bustard habitats in Serbia.



Before the implementation of LIFE-funded mitigation measures, 29 Great Bustards died from power line collisions in the Westliches Weinviertel and Parndorfer Platte – Heideboden areas.

After the measures, the number dropped to 11.

While several regions are now safer, certain habitats – especially those near railway lines – still require intervention. To date, 16 bustards have collided with railway overhead lines.



Marking of high voltage power lines in Austria
© TB Raab GmbH



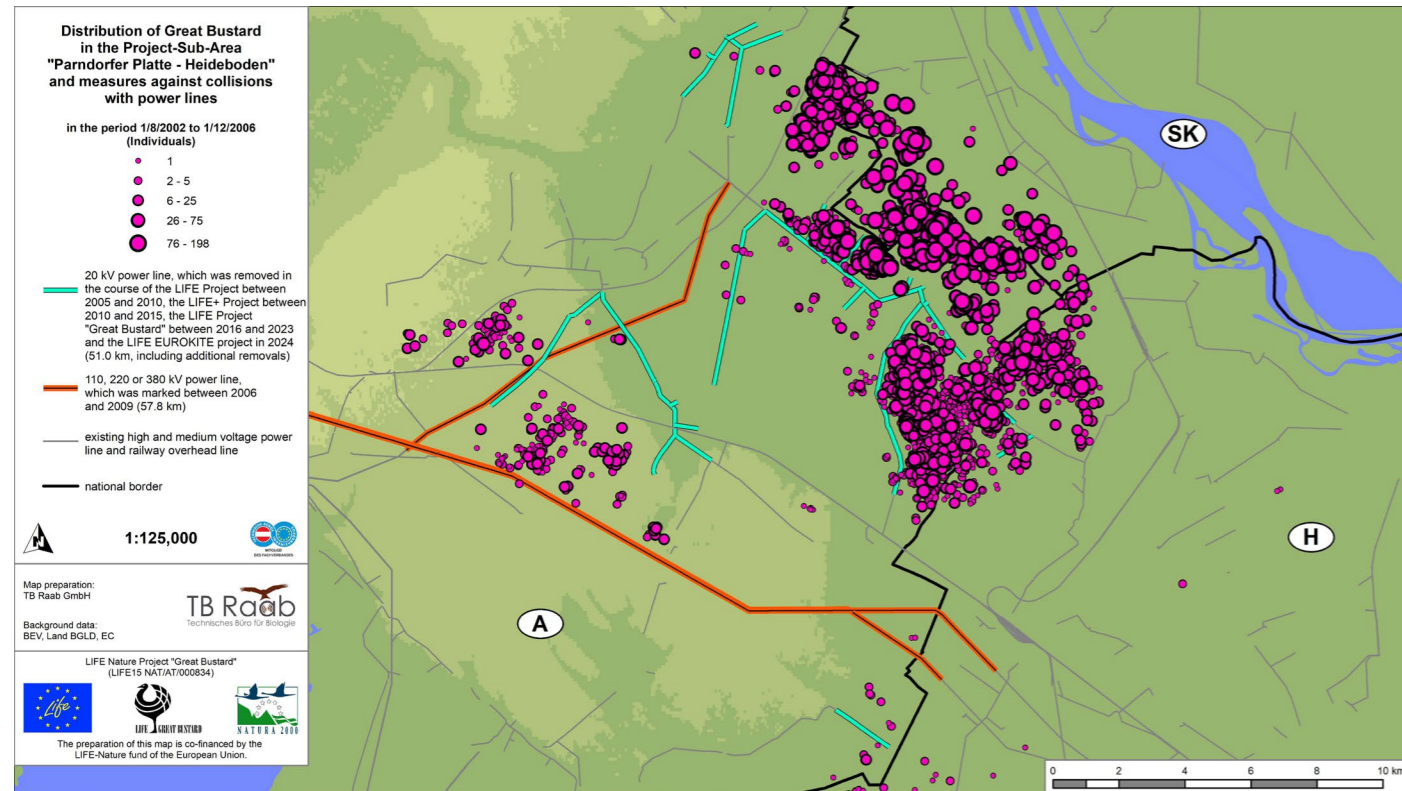
Underground installation of a 12-kilometer section of a 110 kV power line in Burgenland in Austria
© TB Raab GmbH



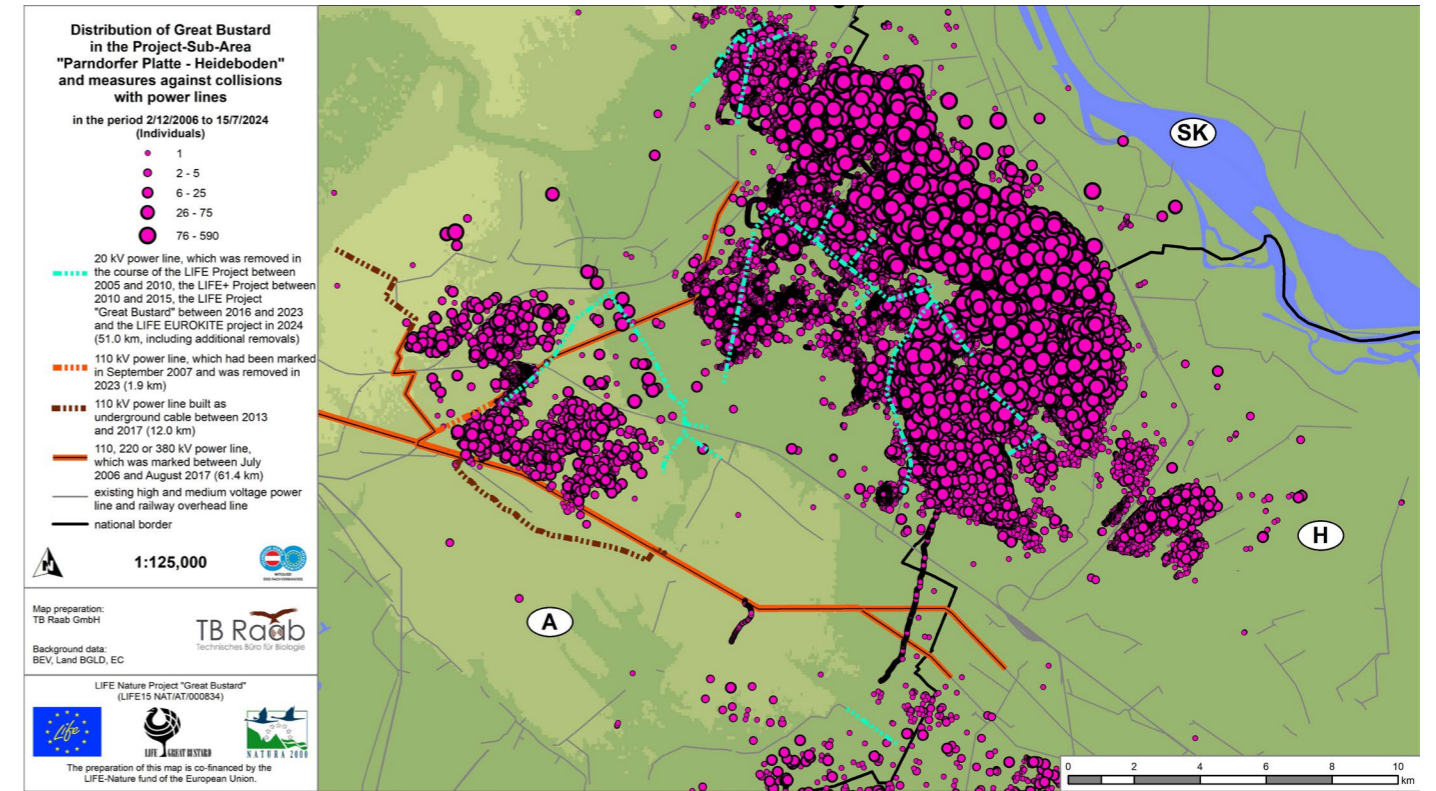
Marked high voltage power lines in Austria
© TB Raab GmbH

Thanks to a ground-breaking agreement with regional energy providers, it was decided that no new overhead power lines would be built in Austria's most important Great Bustard habitats. A newly built 12 kilometer section of a 110 kV power line in Burgenland was placed underground between 2013 and 2017, ensuring that these critical habitats have remained overhead line-free for over two decades.

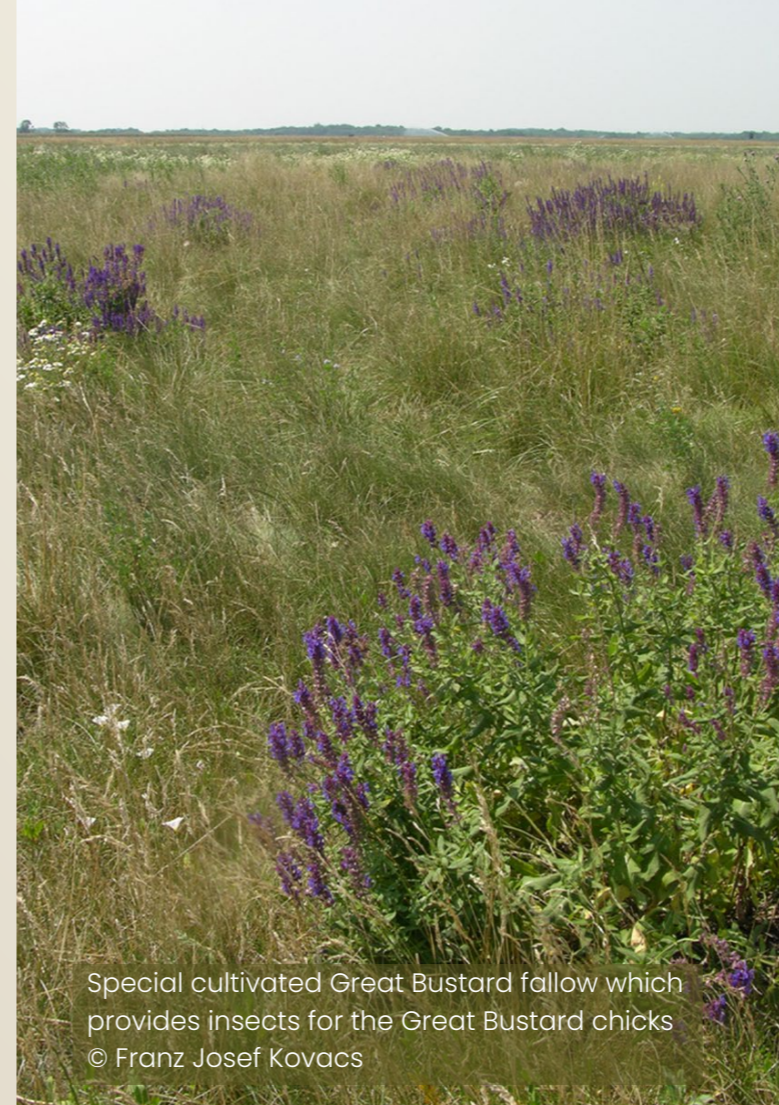
Before measures against collisions with powerlines were implemented, there were few Great Bustards in the SW sector.



After measures against collisions with powerlines were implemented, Great Bustards have begun to increase and to re-inhabit the SW sector.



The LIFE Great Bustard project fostered **strong collaboration with farmers, hunters, and local officials** to create suitable breeding sites across 9 Project Sub-Areas (approx. 45,200 ha in 4 Austrian PSAs, and approx. 202,100 ha in 5 Hungarian PSAs) and to protect them against disturbance.



Special cultivated Great Bustard fallow which provides insects for the Great Bustard chicks
© Franz Josef Kovacs

Austrian farmers joined the ÖPUL agri-environmental scheme (with 6,749 ha in 2024), while Hungarian farmers participated in the “High Natural Value Areas (HNVA)” programme (with approx. 70,000 ha in 2021), cultivating special fields and ensuring winter food supply.



Farmers ensured the access to rape fields for the Great Bustards in winter
© Franz Josef Kovacs










Farmers keep disturbances as low as possible
© Franz Josef Kovacs

Farmers and hunters played an essential role in **minimizing disturbance** and participated in **monitoring conservation measures**.

Germany

Poland

Analysis of Great Bustard Areas in Central Europe (6 countries) in the period 2005 to 2024

-  area with high importance (283,389 ha, important breeding or feeding area)
-  area with medium importance (170,813 ha, regular observations or single broods)
-  area with low importance (392,785 ha, only few observations)
-  area with irregular presence (929,242 ha, only single observation)
-  flight corridor (52,419 ha, only single observation)
-  potential Great Bustard habitat (56,176,589 ha, without Great Bustard observations in the analysis period)
-  settlements, infrastructure and water bodies (no Great Bustard habitat)

 state border



Map preparation:
TB Raab GmbH



Background data:
OSM, EC

LIFE Nature Project "Great Bustard"
(LIFE15 NAT/AT/000834)



The preparation of this map is co-financed by the LIFE-Nature fund of the European Union.

Czech Republic

Slovakia

Austria

Hungary

Romania

Italy

Slovenia

Serbia

Croatia

0 50 100 150 200 km





Flock of Great Bustard males and a roe buck
© Franz Josef Kovacs

In Austria, more than **700 people** – including **550 farmers** and over **100 hunters** – have been involved in Great Bustard conservation projects.



Mag. Dr. Rainer Raab with hunters
© TB Raab GmbH

2024 WINGSPAN



Participants of the Wingspan conference in 2024
© Hansruedi Weyrich



From 15–17 October 2024, TB Raab, in cooperation with the Renewables Grid Initiative and the Elia Group, hosted “Wingspan 2024 – Partnerships for a Bird-Friendly Energy Transition” in Brussels, Belgium. This inaugural conference brought together conservationists, scientists, grid operators, renewable energy developers, and policymakers to share strategies for a nature-positive energy transition.

With support from LIFE EUOKITE, LIFE Great Bustard, and LIFE SafeLines4Birds, the event welcomed 155 in-person participants from 32 countries, and 165 joined online.

The next Wingspan conference is scheduled for 2026 in Berlin, Germany.

Since the start of the LIFE project, over 40 information events and workshops have been held in Austria with local stakeholders, including farmers and school groups. Mayors from 22 project communities received personal briefings about the project's goals and actions. The project has also gained visibility through more than 55 press articles, 3 TV features, and 2 interviews promoting the LIFE programme.



Introduction of LIFE Great Bustard and LIFE EUROKITE project to local people in Sandl, Austria
© TB Raab GmbH



Educational activities with schools in Austria
© TB Raab GmbH



Educational activities with schools in Austria
© TB Raab GmbH

Cooperation between different stakeholders is essential for the protection of *endangered species* like the Great Bustard.



Meeting of hunters from Hungary and Austria
© LIFE Great Bustard

In Hungary, a broad collaboration has been established between the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Chamber of Agriculture, the Paying Agency, and the Hungarian National Hunting Chamber. Regular information sharing has strengthened the protection of agricultural habitats.

A joint proposal was developed with stakeholders, including wildlife and beekeeping representatives, to enhance biodiversity. A special agri-environmental measure for Great Bustards was partially integrated into the national support scheme. Joint training sessions and awareness events were also held for agricultural advisors and agency staff to further conservation objectives.



Signing agreement between National Hungarian Beekeeping Association, the Hungarian national chamber of Hunting and Birdlife Hungary (MME) in 2020.
© LIFE Great Bustard



Drones were used to assess their potential conservation benefits for the agro-technology.
© LIFE Great Bustard

Practical demonstrations of effective habitat management have been organized *in Hungary* for farmers and professionals in agriculture and wildlife. These sessions focused on how to protect agricultural habitats for Great Bustards.



Press trip in Hungary
© LIFE Great Bustard

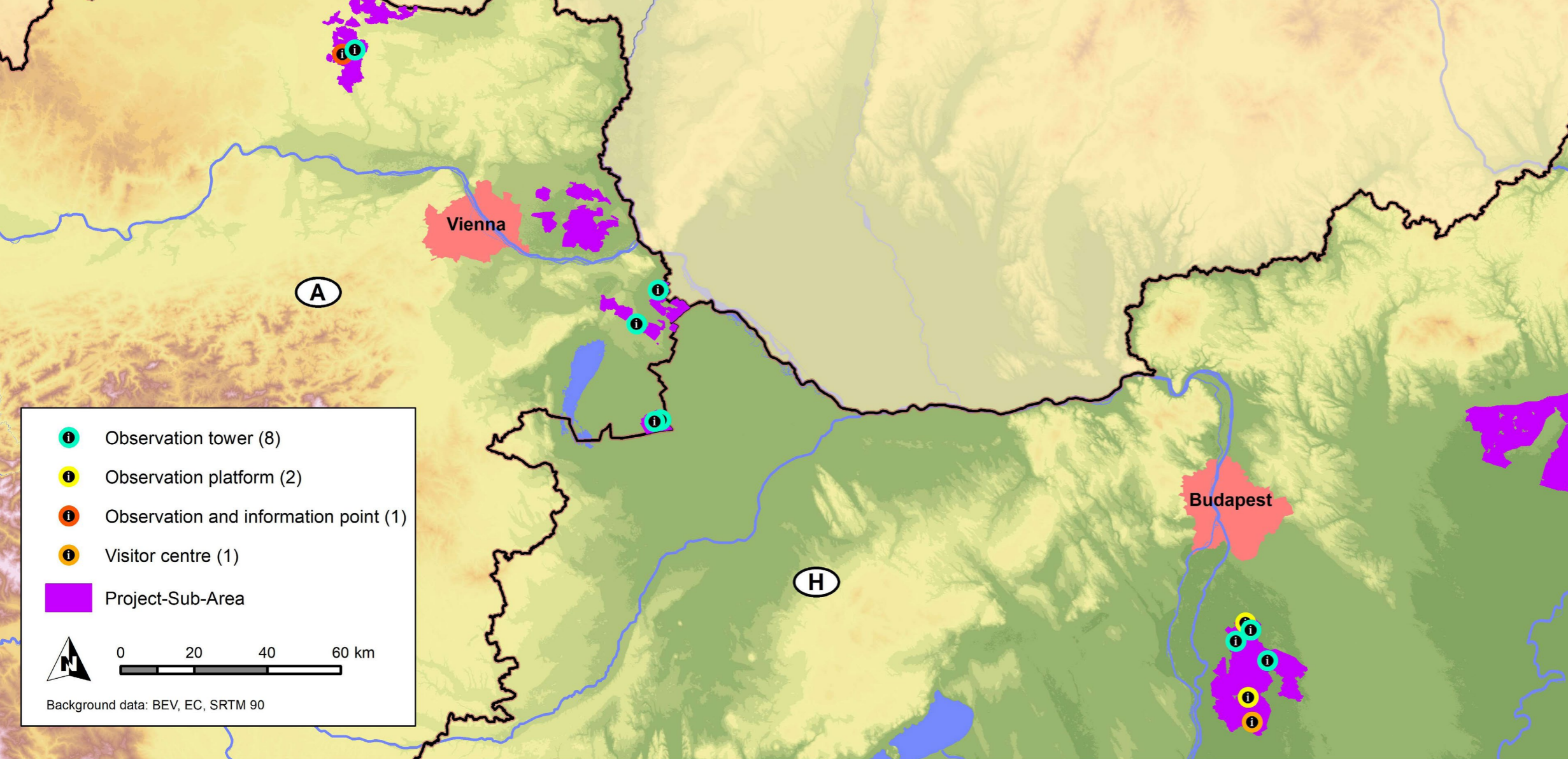
Short films demonstrating conservation-friendly agricultural techniques were produced and shared online. Guidelines for managing Natura 2000 sites were developed, and over 70 events reached more than 3,000 professionals. An international conference – supported by BirdLife, the FAO, and the Ministry of Agriculture – highlighted the importance of biodiversity conservation in agriculture. Project outcomes were widely published in professional media, including *Madártávlat*, *Nimród*, *Magyar Mezőgazdaság*, *Vadászévkönyv*, and online platforms.



Field presentation for farmers
© LIFE Great Bustard



Workshop focusing on grassland management
© LIFE Great Bustard



LIFE Great Bustard observation tower in Hungary based on old power line pylons © TB Raab GmbH

Raising public awareness plays a vital role in conserving endangered species like the Great Bustard. As part of the LIFE project, *several information and observation points* were built in recent years. These sites attract thousands of visitors annually, offering the chance to observe Great Bustard flocks – visible evidence of successful conservation efforts. LIFE projects make the difference.



LIFE Great Bustard observation tower in Austria © LIFE Great Bustard

Explore the beauty of Great Bustards *yourself.*



A part of painting with the most typical steppic habitats, as focus of the nature conservation measures of the Upper-Kiskunság.
© LIFE Great Bustard

The complex also serves as the *headquarters* for the Upper Kiskunság unit of the *Kiskunság National Park*, coordinating conservation work focused on the Great Bustard and steppe habitats in the region.



Educational centre in Hungary
© LIFE Great Bustard

An education center called the “Steppe House” was established in Kunszentmiklós (HU). It hosts *workshops*, *field visits*, and *regular meetings* with key stakeholders and focus groups.



Signing of the Declaration by representatives of Austria (Mr. Peter Iwaniewicz), Slovakia (Mrs. Katarína Butkovská) and Hungary (Mr. Bertalan Balczó)
© TB Raab GmbH

Bustards Without Borders is a consortium of individuals, organizations, government institutions and other stakeholders with established expertise and commitment to sustainable bustard conservation. Members work together to share best practices, coordinate and advance the conservation of all bustard species across their ranges on four continents - Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe.

The first major step will be developing a comprehensive Multi-species Action Plan for Bustards to guide collaborative efforts in the years ahead.

Conservation efforts *will continue* at both European and global levels.

The Great Bustard Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a daughter agreement of the Convention on Migratory Species since 2001, has been supported by project partners and the MoU meeting was most recently held in Bratislava in 2023.

As part of the MOU, the Declaration on the long-term conservation of the Great Bustard in the tri-border region of Hungary, Austria and Slovakia and its surroundings was signed in September 2023 by the representatives of these three countries.

By this act they committed together to protect and improve natural conditions of the Great Bustard habitats and to continue monitoring and research for the benefit of the population, and last but not least, to cooperate with each other by sharing information on the current support provided to farmers under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

Furthermore, the goal is to implement the Europe-wide project "LIFE EUROBUSTARD" for the conservation of the Great Bustard and Little Bustard.



Bustards Without Borders

www.bustards-without-borders.org



First idea to create the BWB was at the COP14 in Uzbekistan after the side event.
© TB Raab GmbH

Male and female of the Great Bustard
© Béla Motkó



Coordinating beneficiary



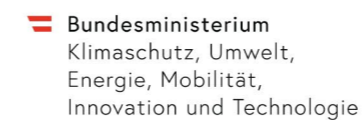
The TB Raab GmbH was commissioned to implement the LIFE Great Bustard project.



Project partners (Associated beneficiaries)



Co-financiers and cooperation partner



This project is co-financed by the *LIFE Nature Programme* of the European Union.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.





Impressum

Publisher:

Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation (ÖGG)

LIFE Great Bustard (LIFE15 NAT/AT/000834)

www.grosstrappe.at

www.tuzok.hu

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Edition:

October 2024, 1,500 copies



Great Bustards

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