

Results of the “3rd Synchronous Winter Count of the Great Bustard in Central Europe on the 14th & 15th of January 2022” within the LIFE project “Great Bustard” (extended period 14th – 19th of January 2022)

Efforts to protect the great bustard are showing success
throughout Central Europe



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"Cross-border protection of the Great Bustard in Central Europe"
Organised by the Great Bustard Project with the help of the partners

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1. Note of thanks

The “3rd Synchronous Winter Count of the Great Bustard in Central Europe on the 14th & 15th of January 2022” was organised by the LIFE Great Bustard project "Cross-border protection of the Great Bustard in Central Europe" with the help of the partners. The 3rd count has been coordinated by the team of the Technical Office for Biology Mag. Dr. Rainer Raab (TB Raab) for Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation (ÖGG) and organized by the National Coordinator of the 7 countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia) in Europe.

First, we want to thank everyone of the volunteers who participated in the 3rd Synchronous Winter Count of the Great Bustard in Central Europe. Special thanks are going to the national coordinators, who helped us to organise all the volunteers in the different countries.

National Coordinators

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2. The Great Bustard Project

Austria (AT) and Hungary (HU) have been very active in Great Bustard conservation in the last years. After two Austrian LIFE and LIFE+ projects and one LIFE project in Hungary now both EU-countries want to start together a huge cross-border protection project for Great Bustards in Central Europe. Based on the great success of the former measures the objectives of this LIFE project are to continue intensive habitat management efforts, reduce the threat of collision with power lines - for many years the no. 1 mortality factor for Great Bustards - and reduce predation. The LIFE project aims to support and maximise the effectiveness of the cross-border protection in Austria and Hungary through coordination of conservation measures and optimal communication.

The newest results of the existing Austrian LIFE project “Great Bustard” show, that there are still some kilometres of power lines which should be transferred below the soil to improve the status and the quality of the habitat. For this reason 41.5 km (16.0 km in AT - 6 km in the Westlichen Weinviertel, 4 km at the Sandboden and Praterterrasse and 6 km in the Parndorfer Platte Heideboden, and 25.5 km in HU) of medium voltage power lines will be transferred below the soil with the support of the energy supplying companies concerned and monitoring of the effectiveness. With this measure the number one threat endangering fully grown Great Bustards will be eliminated in huge areas and the presently unfavourable conditions will be improved on key Great Bustard habitats and between key-sites.

A Great Bustard visitor centre will be established in Kunszentmiklós (HU1 KKK), which will host meeting, demonstrations, education and training courses. The visitor centre will be the take-off point of a selfservice study trail with a minimum 5 viewpoint giving opportunity knowing the HUKN10001 Natura 2000 Special Protected Area.

Sustainable and effective predator management will be demonstrated on 4 hunting units of the project participant NPDs covering about 25,000 hectares. The effective methods will be introduced in LIFE15 NAT/AT/000834 - B1 additional 25,000 hectares in the surrounding hunting units by the nature conservation hunters.

In AT and HU altogether 24 Great Bustards will be equipped with GPS-based satellite transmitters to follow their movements and gather new information on habitat preference, metapopulation dynamics and use of peripheral habitats. Additional there will be a monitoring of the populations and their habitat use in all Project-Sub-Areas, GIS evaluation and habitat management in close cooperation with local farmers. In HU also monitoring of other species (game species and protected ground-breeding bird species) will be implemented within the project. This monitoring will also carry out the socio-economic impacts of the project.

To reduce disturbance and to promote the project and the involved Natura 2000 Special Protected Areas an active public information campaign will be implemented to ensure close contact and cooperation with Great Bustard conservation experts also in Germany, Serbia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, etc.

More information on www.grosstrappe.at

3. The 3rd LIFE Great Bustard Winter Count

For many years the breeding population of the great bustard in Central Europe have been recorded by the bustard specialists in winter. In 2017 it was possible for the first time to count in all 7 countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia) with potential breeding occurrences of the great bustard on the same day. 1,751 Great Bustards were recorded, whereby in the Eastern Pannonian part only 69% of the individuals could be recorded on this day, and not the otherwise usual 90 to 95% (Figure 1). In the years 2018 to 2020, despite several efforts, it was not possible to implement synchronous counts in all countries. The reason for this was the mostly mild winters and the resulting impassable dirt roads, which mostly prevented a census of the East Pannonian population.

In 2021, the period of the counting was therefore significantly extended in order to be able to record at least 90% of the individuals actually occurring throughout Central Europe. A total of 2,252 individuals were counted (Figure 2).

The results of the synchronous censuses in winter 2022 show that the population of the Great Bustard in Central Europe has increased by approx. 21% in the last 4 years (2017-2022). A total of 2,444 individuals were counted. The strongest relative increase was in the German population, which increased by approx. 43% (from 221 in 2017 to 315 individuals in 2022). The West Pannonian population has grown by approx. 37% (from 463 to 634 individuals) and the East Pannonian population has probably increased by approx. 16% in real terms, from an estimated 1,388 in 2017 (on the day of counting itself only 1,067 Great Bustards could be counted) to 1,495 individuals in 2022 (Figure 3).

Fortunately, the protection efforts in almost all Central European countries with great bustard occurrences are already showing short-term success. The measures to reduce collisions on power lines as part of the LIFE project “Great Bustard” are expected to lead to a further increase in the population, especially in the medium and long term. How much the three sub-populations will actually increase depends primarily on the quality of the habitat (thus primarily on agricultural measures), but of course also on the populations of the predators e.g. red fox, raccoon dog, sea eagle and imperial eagle (Figure 1 to 3).



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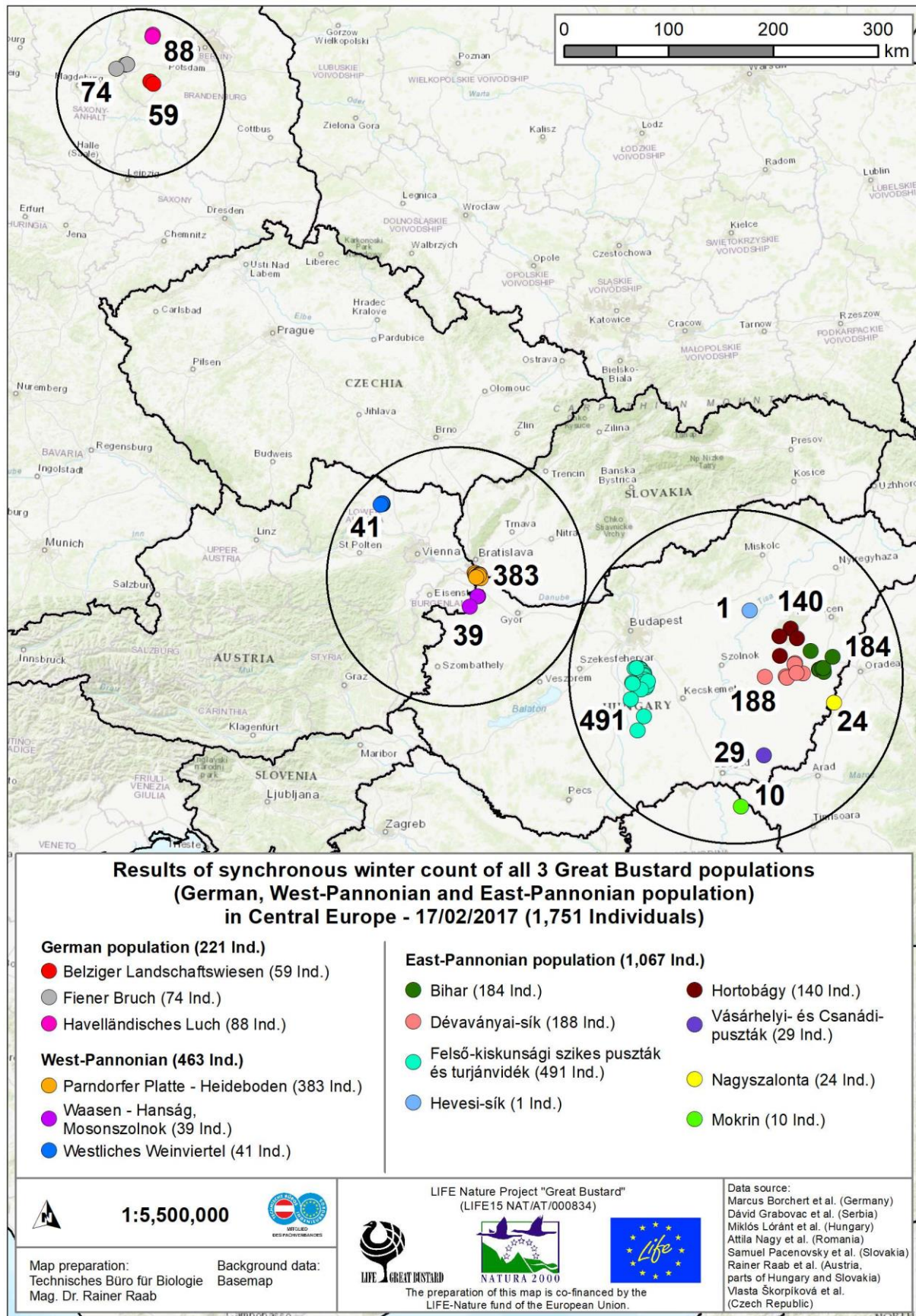


Figure 1: Results of the synchronous winter count of all 3 Great Bustard populations in Central Europe in 2017.

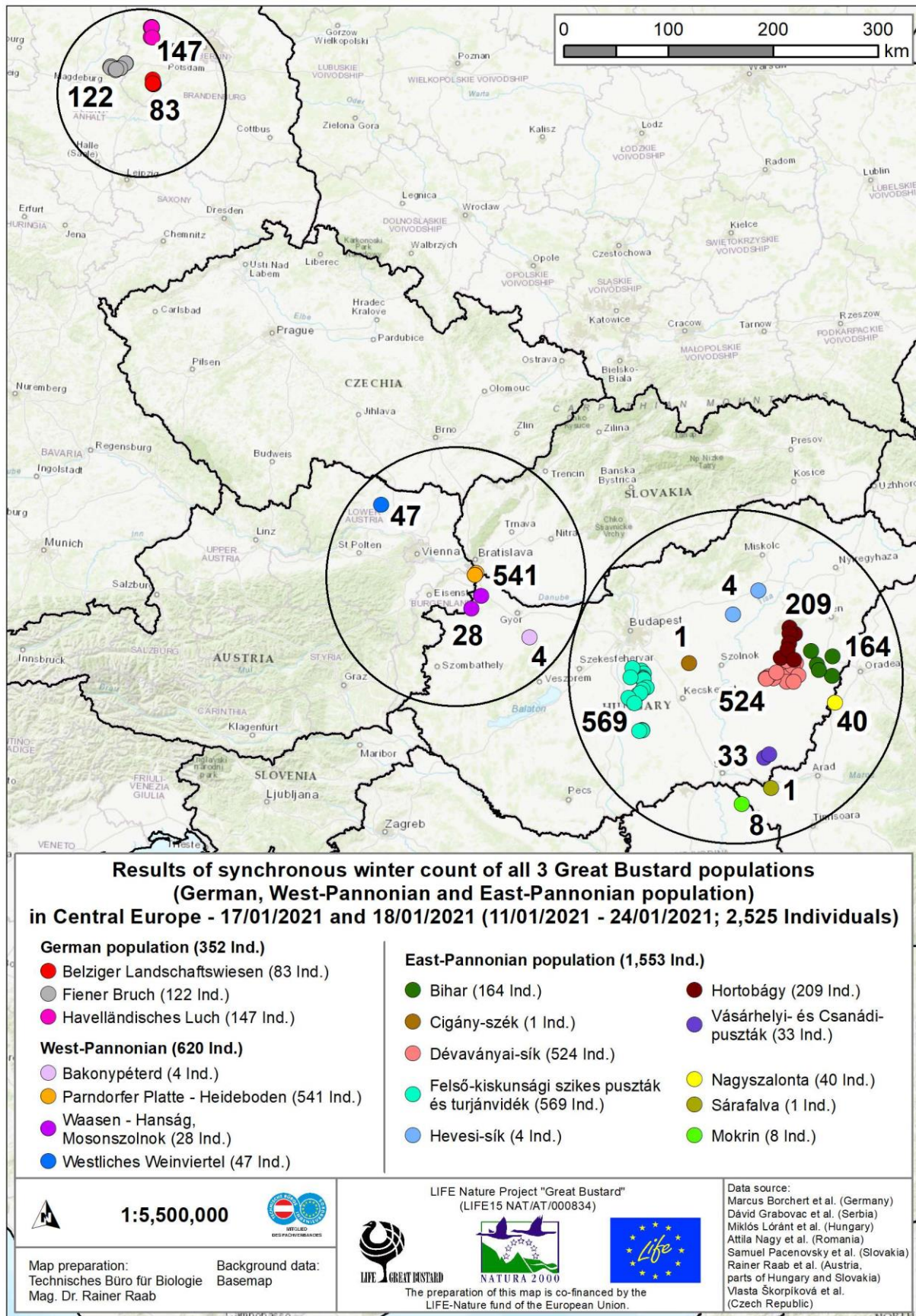


Figure 2: Results of the synchronous winter count off all 3 Great Bustard populations in Central Europe in 2021.

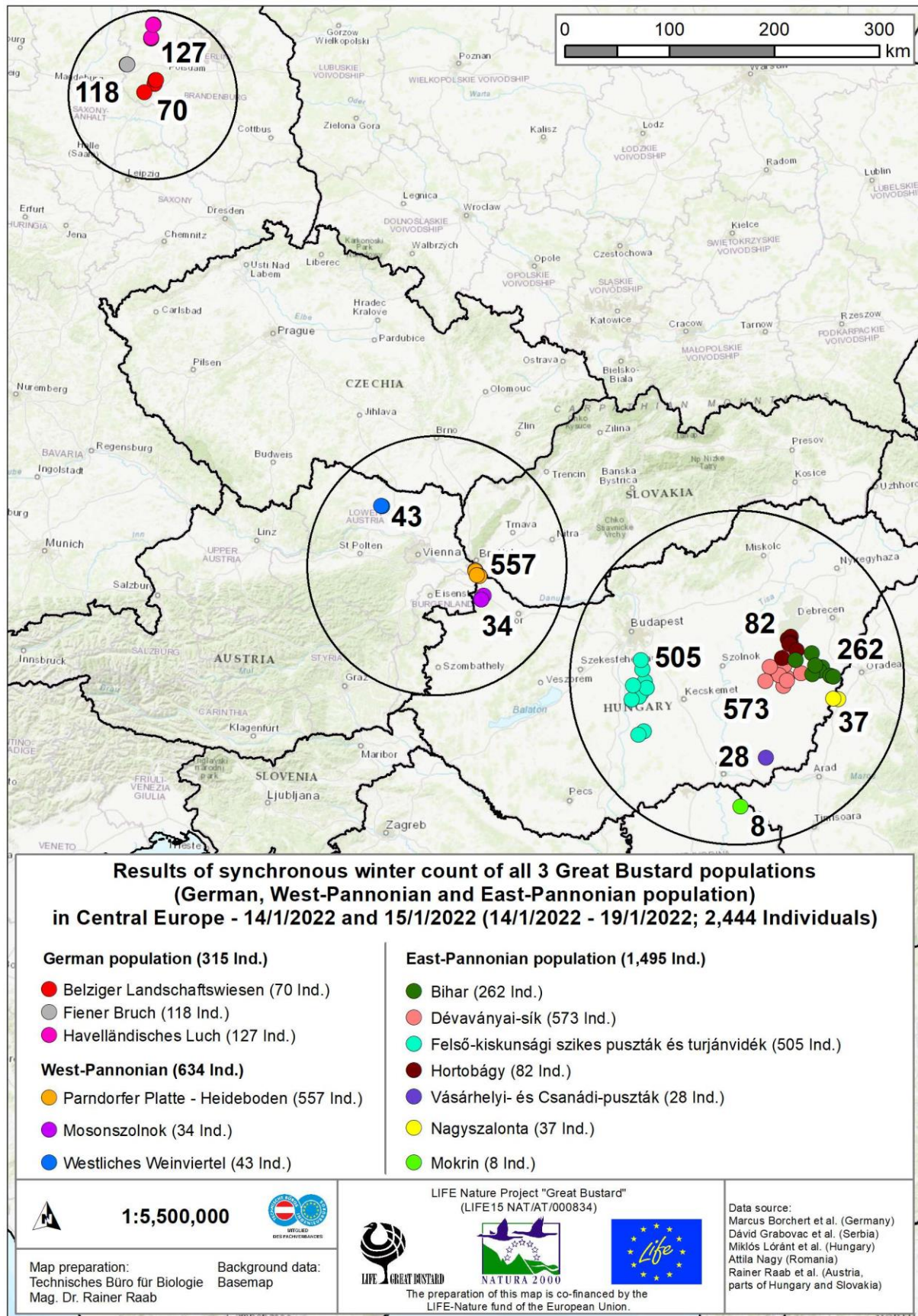


Figure 3: Results of the synchronous winter count off all 3 Great Bustard populations in Central Europe in 2022.