

# Great Bustard *Otis tarda* in Turkey: adult female with three chicks at forest edge in Kars province

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The Great Bustard *Otis tarda* prefers natural and semi-steppe grassland, pastures, undisturbed cultivated areas and open countryside. The species avoids forests and steep or rocky terrains. Places with a good view of the surrounding area appear essential. Breeding areas can be found from sea level up to 3000 m asl. Afforestation restricts breeding areas and causes loss of habitat (Kollar 1996). In eastern Anatolia the species nests mainly in agricultural landscapes with a high diversity of crops (Gürkan *et al* 2003). It avoids areas with high levels of annual rainfall and very dry areas. However, habitat requirements of the species in Turkey are not precisely known (Özbağdatlı *et al* 2004).

The most recent estimate of the global population of the Great Bustard is 43 500–51 200 individuals (Palacin & Alonso 2008). The Turkish population was estimated at 764–1250 individuals (Kılıç & Eken 2004), representing 2–3% of the global population (Palacin & Alonso 2008). There appear to be two Turkish subpopulations—one centred in central Anatolia and the other in east and southeast Anatolia. A more recent assessment (Karakas & Akarsu 2009) estimated the Turkish breeding population as 200–300 pairs at most. The



**Plate I.** Adult female Great Bustard *Otis tarda*, forest edge, Kars province, Turkey. © Ufuk Özbeke



**Plate 2.** Adult female Great Bustard *Otis tarda* and one chick, forest edge, Kars province, Turkey. © Ufuk Özbek



**Plate 3.** Two Great Bustard *Otis tarda* chicks, forest edge, Kars province, Turkey. © Ufuk Özbek

Great Bustard is considered Vulnerable (VU) both in Turkey and globally according to IUCN criteria (www.birdlife.org).

The majority of the breeding population of the Great Bustard in Turkey is found in eastern Anatolia, principally Ağrı (Patnos plain), Ardahan (southwest of Ardahan), Bitlis (Korkut, Güroymak, Ahlat, Nazik/Ovakişla, Yarımada village), Muş (Bulanık, Sultanlı village, Malazgirt plain, Kotanlı village, TİGEM farm), Erzurum (Karasu plain) and Van (Göldüzü: Arin lake) (Karakas & Akarsu 2009). The highest density is located in Muş, Bitlis and north of lake Van.

The Great Bustard was recorded in Kars province, eastern Anatolia, for the first time 15 June 2011 when an adult male was observed and photographed by Emrah Çoban. In our study in Kars province, we carried out a survey 9 July 2011 when one adult female Great Bustard with three chicks was observed and photographed at a forest edge by MUÖ (Plates 1–3). The dominant vegetation in the area where the birds were seen is open Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* forest at an altitude of c2300–2350 m asl. Other plant species identified there were *Cruciata taurica*, *Alyssum* sp, *Lotus corniculatus*, *Papaver triniifolium*, *Trifolium pretense*, *Pilosella piloselloides*, *Anthemis triumfettii*, *Helichrysum aranarium*, *Cardaria draba* and *Hieracium* sp.

The presence of an adult Great Bustard apparently using the edge of a Scots Pine forest as a feeding area for its chicks seems a remarkable observation. Presumably the adult had bred in surrounding grassland/agricultural areas. A comprehensive investigation is required to assess the status and ecology of Great Bustards in this province.

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