



WWF-Pakistan's Position Statement on hunting of the Asian Houbara Bustard, *Chlamydotis macqueenii*

1.1. Conservation status of Asian houbara bustard

Chlamydotis macqueenii, commonly known as the Asian houbara bustard (hereafter 'houbara'), is listed as *vulnerable* in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of threatened species. It is also listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), pertaining to species that are vulnerable to hunting and poaching. Appendix I of CITES lists those wildlife species that are threatened with extinction and prohibits their international trade in any form. CITES allows limited non-commercial trade of Appendix I listed species under exceptional circumstances such as for scientific research. In these exceptional cases, trade may take place provided it is authorized by the granting of both import and export permits. Appendix II of the CMS lists those migratory species that have an unfavourable conservation status and that require international agreements to ensure their conservation and management. Pakistan is a signatory/party to both aforementioned international conventions.

The contemporary range of houbara extends from Egypt east of the Nile through Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, U.A.E., Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia to China, with unconfirmed reports from Azerbaijan and Turkey. Disjointed and highly fragmented resident populations exist across the Middle East into Pakistan, most notably in Iran, Egypt and Israel. Northern populations are migratory and winter in southern areas. Those from western Kazakhstan mainly winter around the Iraq-Iran border, while those from central and eastern Kazakhstan winter in Afghanistan, Balochistan in Pakistan, and a few reaching Thar Desert and southern Iran as well. Wintering grounds for Chinese houbara bustard populations are on the eastern edge of Karakum Desert in Turkmenistan and in Cholistan¹.

1.2 Global population and trend: The global population of houbara has been estimated to be between 78,960 and 97,000 individuals in 2014. It must be emphasized, however, that accurately establishing the global population is extremely challenging, and this figure should be treated as a tentative 'best estimate'. The population is therefore expected to fall within the population band for 50,000 - 99,999 individuals, which is assumed to equate to ca. 33,000 - 67,000 mature individuals. The population is estimated and projected to be declining by 30-49% over a three-generation (20-year) window, stretching from the past into the future. Overexploitation remains the foremost threat to the species, primarily as a result of unsustainable levels of hunting and poaching².

¹. BirdLife International. 2014. *Chlamydotis macqueenii*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2014: e.T22733562A40859158. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2014-2.RLTS.T22733562A40859158.en>. Downloaded on 29 November 2016.

². BirdLife International (2016) Species factsheet: *Chlamydotis macqueenii*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 29/11/2016.

Resident and wintering population in Pakistan: Wintering birds reach Pakistan via Afghanistan, arriving from the second half of September through to the end of the year, with a peak from mid-October to mid-November. The wintering range extends across most of Balochistan, Sindh and southern and western Punjab. The individuals wintering in western Balochistan typically originate from central Kazakhstan, whilst those wintering further east in Punjab's Cholistan Desert tend to come from the Mongolian Plateau. The wintering population in Punjab has been estimated at 4,854–6,270 individuals, and it is possible that the total population in Pakistan exceeds 25,000. Return migration begins in early February, and by the second week of March the majority of migrants have departed the country. A small and declining resident population persists in western Baluchistan, chiefly in the Chagai and Kharan districts. This population is believed to have declined significantly since the 1980s and fewer than 100 individuals may remain³.

2 WWF-Pakistan's position statement: WWF-Pakistan does not support the hunting of houbara under the current scenario and remains steadfastly supportive of strictly implementing all provincial/territorial wildlife legislation, national and international policies, and obligations following a scientific approach to maintaining its population in Pakistan.

3 Recommendations

Keeping in view the vulnerable IUCN Red List status of the houbara and threats faced by the species in its entire range in general and in Pakistan in particular, WWF-Pakistan proposes the following steps to maintain the population:

- 3.1 Population surveys following standard census protocols must be conducted on an annual basis with the involvement of relevant stakeholders to determine the population status and trends of the species in the country. The survey results should be published in peer-reviewed journals to establish the reliability of the data.
- 3.2 Controlled hunting of the houbara should only be allowed and a bag limit should only be determined once the information is available as mentioned in section 3.1.
- 3.3 The Foreign Office (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) should seek guidance from the Ministry of Climate Change (national CITES management authority) before issuing hunting permits to foreign dignitaries to ensure compliance with the Pakistan Trade Control of Wild Fauna and Flora Act 2012 and provincial wildlife legislation.
- 3.4 Strict measures should be taken to control poaching, hunting and destruction of the houbara habitat with the involvement of communities.
- 3.5 The breeding populations of houbaras in Pakistan should be efficiently protected.
- 3.6 Training and capacity building of relevant stakeholders and awareness campaigns about the conservation of the houbara should be carried out.

WWF-Pakistan urges the Government of Pakistan to incorporate the aforementioned recommendations into the recently established 'migratory birds endowment fund'.

³. BirdLife International (2014) Review of the global conservation status of the Asian Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*. Report to the Convention on Migratory Species Office–Abu Dhabi. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.