



# The Indian bustard: Several threats

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## **The Indian bustard: on its last legs?-Several threats — including power lines — are sealing the fate of these charismatic birds**

- We've read those stories of recent extinctions — Sudan, the last male northern white rhino and Brazil's Spix's macaws — with much consternation.
- But closer home, a tale of extinction may be unfolding before our very eyes: the great Indian bustard, that narrowly missed being christened India's national bird, is now teetering on its last legs.
- Several threats — including power lines — are decimating bustard populations.
- India, effectively the only home of the bustards, now harbours less than 150 individuals in five States.

### **Game bird**

- While hunting was probably one of the first factors (the bird was a popular game bird and still is in some pockets, despite being listed in Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act), bustard habitats have undergone tremendous change over the last decades.
- The untamed, arid grasslands that bustards thrive in are categorised as 'wastelands', like most grassland habitats in India.
- The push to make these areas more 'productive' has seen an increase in water availability in these parts, resulting in the spillover of agricultural land into bustard habitats.
- More recent but unpublished data also suggests that the wide-ranging birds disperse to agricultural landscapes near Gujarat's Kachchh during the non-breeding season.
- Yet, intensification of agriculture — including more pesticides, barbed-wire fences and new crops — could endanger the birds' survival in this landscape.
- More recently, what remains of their grassland homes are now sites for renewable power projects.

- With new wind turbines, come more power lines to take the 'green' energy to grids and homes.

### **Breeding centre**

- A landscape-level approach that will incentivise people to take up less intensive agriculture is required.
- Talks for a bustard conservation breeding centre in Rajasthan are ongoing, and land will soon be allotted.

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