

# Community Involvement in Bustard Conservation

**A Report on  
Community Meeting and Workshop  
held at Bustard Sanctuary, Maharashtra (IBA)**



**Compiled by**  
Dr. Pramod Patil



**GIB** GRASSLANDS  
INDIANS  
BUSTARDS

**GIB Foundation**

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**Coverpage Photo: Vinit Bajpai**

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## INTRODUCTION

Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigricaps*) is highly dependent on traditional farming and traditional practices of grassland management. Habitat loss and habitat alterations are major threats identified for its decline and maintenance of its mosaic habitat is crucial for long term survival of the species. Local community plays a key role in maintaining bustard's habitat. In an order to initiate the dialogues and to understand the issues related with community involvement in bustard conservation, Pune wildlife division and GIB Foundation (Pune) organized two events at Bustard sanctuary Maharashtra. Local people and other stakeholders expressed their views on various aspects related to community and bustard conservation. During group discussion various solutions were suggested. This report summarizes and interprets the issues and topics expressed during these events. Proposed recommendations and derived conclusions are issue specific and are restricted to the bustard sanctuary, Maharashtra.

### First event

A community level meeting was organized on 21 st March 2011, which included villagers from Nannaj, Mardi, Akolekati, Karamba which surrounds core areas where bustards are still seen.

### Second event

A one day workshop on ecology and conservation of Great Indian Bustard was organized on 22nd March 2011 in an order to update knowledge in forest department staff and to involve people related to acquisition of 434 ha land and those living around core areas.

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**F**irst event on 21st March was a huge gathering attended by almost 600 villagers and village heads. Villagers and their representatives expressed views with respect to hardships caused because of Bustard sanctuary and involvement of community in Bustard conservation.

All the staff of bustard sanctuary, Villagers living around core areas, agriculture officer from Solapur participated in one day workshop 22nd March 2011. Four topics were allotted for group discussion. All participants were involved in group discussions for topics on prevention of grassland fire, impact of grazing and prevention of overgrazing, organic farming, community benefits and traditional farming.

## **Organizers, experts, government and non-government institutions, organizations and stakeholders participated in both events:**

1. Villagers from Nannaj, Akolekati, Karamba and Mardi
2. Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Pune
3. Assistant conservator of forests, Bustard sanctuary, Pune
4. Mr Jagdish Patil (Collector Solapur)
5. Dr Pramod Patil (GIB Foundation)
6. Prant officer, Solapur
7. Tahsildar, North Solapur
8. Dr Shamita Kumar ( BVIEER, Pune)
9. Mr Sujit Narawade (BNHS, Mumbai)
10. RFO bustard sanctuary, Nannaj ( Solapur)
11. RFO bustard sanctuary, Karmala (Solapur)
12. RFO Blackbuck Sanctuary, Rehkuri (Ahmednagar)
13. Village head ( Sarpanch) Nannaj village
14. Village head ( Sarpanch) Akolekati village
15. Village head (Sarpanch) Karamba village
16. Village head ( Sarpanch) Mardi village
17. Agricultural officer, North Solapur
18. Representatives of shepherd community

## Issues and Problems expressed by local people:

### A) Bustard conservation

1. People are aware that bustard is threatened bird and they are still proud of Great Indian Bustard and are ready to come forward for its conservation.
2. Great Indian bustard is directly no harm to anyone.
3. Old people still remember interactions with late Dr Salim Ali and people have always supported bustard conservation.
4. Villagers from Mardi wants that name of Mardi should also come in light as they are equally involved in bustard conservation along with village Nannaj.
5. There is need for community development project around bustard sanctuary.
6. School children are unaware of Bustards and there is need of awareness on bustards at school level.
7. Bustard awareness can be achieved through documentary film which is a strong communication medium.
8. Local village support groups can help in preventing fire before it occurs and they can help in mitigation measures.
9. There is no enough water for bustards and other wildlife inside protected area.

### B) Shirapur canal issue

There is misinterpretation that forest department have blocked the canal work deliberately to trouble local people.

There is no employment in the region and because of lack of water, agriculture is not so productive. Canal will bring a rare opportunity for development of farmers in the region.

There is growing oppose to sanctuary and bustard conservation because of canal issue.

### C) Rationalization of bustard sanctuary and hardship to locals

1. People are suffering for more than 20 years and it is because of irrational size of sanctuary.
2. There are many rumors with respect to land acquisition and translocation and displacement of villages.
3. People cannot invest into land and it is the only asset they are having.
4. As far as habitat is concerned many areas have been irreversibly changed and needs immediate denotification from sanctuary.
5. There is immediate need of rationalization of bustard sanctuary.

### D) Damage to livestock and crop

1. Wolves are causing loss of livestock and are considered as enemy.
2. Blackbucks are causing damage to crops.
3. Compensation procedures for crop damage are very lengthy and painful and it needs involvement of many officers of various line depts. at a time.

4. There is need for permanent solution to crop raiding by blackbuck.
5. Blackbucks and erratic rains are causing trouble to farmers and irrigation canal is vital issue for survival of farmers.
6. Crop protection zone needs to be experimented in an order to protect crop from damage by blackbuck.
7. Alternate fodder plots can be tried to restrict the blackbucks from going into private farms.

## **E) Land acquisition**

1. Many among the owners of proposed 434ha land are ready to give their lands for forming core breeding area
2. People want that land acquisition should take place as early as possible and rate paid should be equal to that paid during land acquisition for Solapur airport.

# Recommendations for further actions

Based on issues and problems expressed by people and discussions with experts involved in the process, following recommendations for further action are extremely necessary.

## 1) Acquisition of proposed 434 ha land

Acquisition of proposed 434 ha land for developing core breeding area for bustards needs to be done immediately. After the spread of irrigation facilities it will become impossible to acquire land in near future or there will be demand of more money for the same land.

As suggested by collector Solapur Mr. Jagdish Patil there is availability of land under Ujani project in the same tahsil i.e. North Solapur; and so compensation of land for acquired land is another option available that needs to be evaluated for acquisition of 434 ha land, provided that equal amount land is compensated for acquired land.

Till the process of land acquisition is started or completed, 434 ha land (and adjoining areas) can be protected from movement of people and grazing pressure on rental basis i.e. by paying some rent for restriction of grazing from July to November for minimum five consecutive years. This has been done successfully by GIB Foundation and Pune wildlife division for private land patch adjoining Mardi 100 ha plot over last few years.

Before going for this option on large scale, substitute for grazing (such as some other grazing land or supporting stall feeding) for existing livestock of land owners needs to be established and implemented on the experimental basis in the initial stage.

## 2) Shirapur canal

Command area of Shirapur canal for grasslands and farmlands of Nannaj and adjoining villages needs to be studied and its impact on bustards future survival with respect to change in land use practices and spread of cash crop needs to be evaluated.

Obliterating Shirapur canal could turn detrimental for bustard conservation so its clearance needs to be supported at every possible level.

To bring down protest and oppose against forest department and bustard conservation and to spread awareness regarding legal procedures and role of Central Empowered Committee in clearance of Shirapur canal immediate village level meetings and discussions needs to be conducted.

In an order to look for the option of restriction to non-permeable, non-desired crops such as sugar cane meetings with irrigation department need to be conducted as early as possible.

Methodology of crop restriction needs to be evaluated not only at the policy making level but also at the implementation level and there is need to define the responsibility on the concerned authority.

### **3) Awareness**

District level awareness program for bustard conservation needs to be started in an order to reduce the rumors related to relocation of villages.

There is immense need of awareness films for bustard conservation in Marathi. These can be screened in every village especially during Gramsabha (Village meet) or weekly bazaar days.

Special bustard awareness campaign for School children needs to be run in whole Solapur district with active involvement of educational system.

### **4) Protected area and conservation issues**

Waterholes need to be maintained at least for summer and winter season inside the protected areas.

Need of constructing few more waterholes inside protected area.

Regular patrolling especially during night could be effective against grassland fires and poaching. Staffing is poor and more lower cadre staff need to be posted in the sanctuary

Local people support groups can be found to prevent illegal burning of grasslands and to keep track of poachers.

Local farmers can be allowed to take the grass from the protected area after January once the breeding season is over.

To prevent massive scale damage in grassland burning the width of fire line can be increased and criss-cross fire lines could be a better solution.

Trace passing and illegal grazing can be effectively managed by TCM and there is need of more and complete TCM for all boundaries of core area.

(Trench cum Mound). TCM needs to be strengthened by planting Agave (Ghaypat) on the top of mound.

Display boards for “No Grazing area” could certainly repel people from entering protected areas.

### **5) Crop raiding and compensation issues**

Maintenance of grasslands is important to prevent crop raiding by blackbuck.

Creation of crop protection zone by using certain grass species such as “Yashwant grass” (etc.) needs to be tried.

Current protocol of crop damage reporting involves many officers together on the spot of damage and is always not possible. It is also a time consuming procedure it forces the people to stay away from compensation procedure. There is immediate need to change the protocol to make it more flexible and less time consuming.

There is need of maintaining more waterholes inside protected area in order to prevent the movement of blackbucks in search of water outside the protected area.



## 6) Community benefits, Traditional and organic farming

Community development projects need to be implemented at certain villages at least around core areas.

A small scale project needs to be funded to interested persons to take initiative for bio-pesticides production and utilization.

Exotic plants such as Glyricidia till the time they are removed can be used as green manure.

Organic farming is in a boom and there is need of linking up market with the farmers in an order to promote organic farming.

Solapur is famous for grapes. Organic grapes is a new trend where they could get double benefit as it will also support bustard conservation.

Awareness regarding certifying the agricultural products as organic farm product needs to be done so that more and more farmers can be involved into it.

Need of building up bridge between traditional farming expert and farmers can be fulfilled by conducting regular workshops for farmers on various topics related to traditional and organic farming. There should be active involvement of agricultural department in this.

Grass from the protected areas can be allowed to cut and can be distributed to poor families in the village, it will serve the purpose of habitat management too.

Crow (both Common Crow and Large-billed Crow) is growing threat to bustard's egg and egg predation by crow has been reported before. All the villages around core areas form constant source of crows into the core breeding areas. These villages specially Nannaj and Mardi are as good as dump grounds. Village cleanup programs with support from district administration could serve community health as well as bustard conservation.

## Conclusion

Irrational distribution and size of the Bustard sanctuary is the major culprit for the suffering of both community and wildlife. It has created anti-bustard environment in the region. Despite of hardship and suffering, local community is still ready to give hand of support in bustard conservation. There is still hope to involve community in the long term conservation picture. Unless and until community benefits are secured bustard conservation cannot be ensured in long run. Hunger for land is showing its impact on land acquisition process and under the pressure of land mafia it will be highly impossible to secure bustard habitat in future. Formation of core breeding areas in other parts of sanctuary, rationalization of sanctuary, scientific habitat management practices, community development project, regular conversations and discussions with local people, less painful and fast compensation procedures, strengthening of lower cadre staff, effective measures of habitat protection during breeding season, population monitoring and satellite tracking for bustards along with intensive ground surveys and district level awareness program are some of the immediate actions necessary. **Demand driven incentive based community involved conservation** is the effective strategy for bustards and grassland ecosystem in the region.