

REHABILITATION OF GREAT INDIAN BUSTARDS AT ROLLAPADU :
KURNOOL DISTRICT : ANDHRA PRADESH

INTRODUCTION:

In the absence of reliable reports, the rare bird, Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigricaps, vigor*) was considered to be almost extinct in the State of Andhra Pradesh. In prompt response to an information, after patient search by the Nagarjunasagar-Srisaillam Wildlife Sanctuary Division, Srisaillam, the rare bird was resighted at ROLLAPADU in Kurnool District on 24th August 1982. Nilshikaris, the notorious community of Nandikotkur used to traditionally catch these rare birds and sell them for Rs.50/- to 100/- each. By the end of 1982 twelve birds were located in ROLLAPADU, ALA GANUR, SUNKESULA, JALAKANUR, CHERUKUCHERIA, VIPINA GANDLA, THAN GEDENCHA and LAKSHMIPURAM Village fields of Nandikotkur Taluk. Immediately two daily wage watchers from the Nilshikaries and two more from Rollapadu village were employed to watch these birds and thus steps were laid for the conservation of GREAT INDIAN BUSTARDS in Andhra Pradesh.

HABITAT AT ROLLAPADU:

The barren savannah type grass lands called 'BARAKALU' interspersed with dry cereal crops, cotton, castor, and coriander with bushes of cassia auriculata, Disaspyros melanoxylon, Acacia spp. Morinda angustifolia and phoehix humilis, here and there provide an ideal habitat and perhaps one of the best habitats in our country for these birds. These grass lands are rich with locusts,

grass hoppers, centipeds, millipeds and lizards. Further the dry crops are infested with many insect pests. These provide ample food for the bustards, which also feed on groundnut when the fields are harvested. A few dry streams drain the grass lands, along which there is an evergreen growth of bushes. These bushes provide day time resting cover for the birds.

GEOLOGY, ROCK AND SOIL:

The rocks belong to Kurnool Cuddapah formations. The Kurnool sediments were laid-down upon the upturned and denuded edges of the Archaens. The Kurnool formations consist of shales, lime stone, napa and quartzites. The upper most strata are a series of altered shales and lime stones.

The soils are gravelly with heavy clay content at places and with low permeability. Black cotton soils also occur in the surrounding areas.

LOCALITY FACTORS:

Rainfall is very minimum in these areas and most of it is due to south west monsoons. The average rainfall is 600 mm. The areas are generally hot and dry. Temperature rises above 40°C during summer and mild winter season prevails from November to January. In peak summer the nearby streams dry up and water is scarcely available.

POPULATION AND BREEDING SUCCESS:

At the first sight during August 1982, three birds (2 adults and a young one) were found in Rollapadu

barakalu. On verification at other places around Rollapadu a total of 12 birds were seen. Two nests were located by the end of 1982. By the end of 1983, the number multiplied to 18 birds, and five nests were located. During July 1984, a team of scientists from Bombay Natural History Society and Forest Officials counted 35 bustards at Rollapadu. A few days later the number was confirmed to be 38 birds. This was supposed to be the largest congregation of Bustards seen anywhere in the country in recent years.

The correct breeding season is not yet established. As per the observations made over the past three years, breeding start in August/September and eggs were noticed upto January. Interestingly one or two nests have been located inbetween March to May, which indicates a mini breeding season during summer. Eleven (11) nests were located during the 1985 season of which two nests failed and nine chicks were brought successfully. During 1986, breeding season (10) nests were located and (6) chicks hatched-out successfully. Another nest was located during May 1987.

DISTRIBUTION OF BUSTARDS IN ANDHRA PRADESH:

Now the existance of Bustards is reliably known at BANAGANAPALLY (3 to 10 birds) Nellibanda (2-5 birds) Sirivella (Stray population in Kurnool District and in Anantapur, Cuddapah Districts, besides at Rollapadu. On rough approximation, we may say about 100 birds exist in the State. Birds are normally found in large numbers at

Rollapadu areas during the rainy season. After the rains only prospecting breeding females and dominant males reside at Rollapadu. Other bustards might locally to other adjoining taluks for food. However, by all means, the vast grass lands of Rollapadu is favoured spot for the bustards.

MANAGEMENT:

Right from 1982, the Wildlife Sanctuary (now the tiger reserve) Division, Srisailam has to look after the Bustard Management, for a distance of about 200 kms. One Forester and one Forest Guard along with five daily wage watchers are posted for the Management of Bustard and are controlled from Srisailam with much difficulty.

Enough efforts were made to educate the local people about the importance of the bird and wide publicity is made through wall posters and sign boards. The concerned village and taluk administrations whether these birds are seen were enlightened about the bird and their co-operation is sought in implementing the scheme for conservation of GREAT INDIAN BUSTARDS. The Collector, Kurnool who initiated a Rural Colonisation Scheme at Rollapadu during 1983-84 could be successfully persuaded to restrict the activities, detrimental to bustard propagation. Moreover, funds could be drawn from the District Administration for soil and moisture conservation and protection works in Bustard areas.

The vast stretch 1045 acres of Govt. land which fall in these grass lands are got alienated for the

protection of Bustards and to provide them safe breeding grounds. Steps are also taken to acquire about 150 acres of Patta Lands, which are sand-witched in between the Government lands, which otherwise will be a source of disturbance to the ecology of Bustards and their successful breeding.

At present the watchers and the staff are engaged in (1) Protecting the acquired grass lands from grazing, grass collection and from fires. (2) Keeping a record of the birds movement, occurrence and habits. (3) Watching the eggs from theft and human trampling. (4) Assisting the B.N.H.S. Scientists in their research activity. (5) Maintaining good relations with the local villagers and propagating the principles of Bustard conservation.

FINANCIAL OUTLAY:

During 1982-1983, the expenditure was solely on the daily wages for watchers. In the later years, equipment was purchased, sign boards and other publicity material was prepared and amounts were deposited for the acquisition of private lands, laying inside the alienated Government lands. During 1985-86 one Twin watchers quarters and one Information-cum-Laboratory was constructed. The year-wise expenditure is as follows:

YEAR	Amount Sanctioned (Plan)	Amount spent
1982 - 1983	-	4,440.00
1983 - 1984	20,000.00	15,702.00
1984 - 1985	4,17,000.00	2,94,506.00
1985 - 1986	2,13,500.00	1,26,437.00
1986 - 1987	1,80,000.00	1,66,776.00

For the Financial Year 1987-1988 the scheme is sanctioned for Rs.2.4 lakhs for continuing the conservation of Bustards at Rollapadu.

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