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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

38th meeting
Strasbourg, 27-30 November 2018

Other complaints

**Presumed risk of national extinction of
great bustards (*Otis tarda*)
in Serbia**

- REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT -

*Document prepared by
EPAR-OIPA-Serbia / Alliance for Nature Protection, the rights of animals and people*

06 February 2018.

**THIRD UPDATED REPORT
ON COMPLAINT SENT ON 19TH APRIL 2016 / No. 2016/6**

**(PRESUMED RISK OF NATIONAL EXTINCTION OF GREAT BUSTARDS (*OTIS TARDA*) IN SERBIA)
- No. 2016/6**

REGARDING CASES OF DELIBERATE AND ILLEGAL DESTRUCTION OF GREAT BUSTARD (*OTIS TARDA*) IN REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, WITHIN PASTURES OF GREAT BUSTARD SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE IN YEARS 2017 - 2018.

The reason for the third supplement of the complaint is the further disinterested behaviour and lack of activity of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Sector for the protected area and areas of the ecological network and the continuous illegal behaviour towards the Great Bustards within their only Serbian habitat, as well as the indifference of the Inspection of the Regional Secretariat for Urbanism and Environmental Protection and Regional Institute for the Protection of Nature, Novi Sad. In this manner, beside domestic law regulations, there is further breaching of Article 4 and Article 6 of the Bern Convention.

New Facts

Considering that the bad state in the Reserve of the Great Bustard continues into 2018 and that Great Bustards and other strictly protected animal species had not and still do not have any special measures of protection, as well as there are no restrictions or control of activities taking place by people within the Reserve, we have decided for the third time to amend our complaint and kindly ask the Council of Europe-Secretariat of the Bern Convention that in the realm of its authority act positively towards the Government of the Republic of Serbia and its relevant administrative bodies which are responsible for this unbearable state leading to the complete disappearance of the Great Bustard. We especially wish to emphasize that the undoubtedly irresponsible Governor of the Reserve, Hunting Association "Perjanica" which is still in this position, managing the Great Bustard population and Reserve which is among other activities also exploited as a hunting area. Our already previously expressed skepticism, unfortunately showed to be correct, since the situation described in our complaint from 19th of April 2016 was unchanged during 2017 and continuous so in 2018.

1. During the entire year of 2017. the advised measures for the protection of the Great Bustard Reserve were not respected nor applied as suggested by the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, as follows:

- Invasive mowing of the Reserve started on the 15th of June, and on numerous plots it was done even before this date without any action by the Governor of the Reserve, inspection or Regional Institute for Nature Protection. A total of 17 Conditions of nature protection for mowing were issued : No 03-992/2, 03-1163/2, 03-1083/2, 03-1044/2, 03-507/2, 03-376/2, 03-1140/2, 03-1212/2, 03-938/2, 03-1405/2, 03-1449/2, 03-1487/2, 03-1485/2, 03-1526/2, 03-1517/2, 03-1464/3, 03-1502/3. Much mowing was done without conditions of the Regional Institute for Nature Protection and was not registered. These activities were detected by accident and only one person was found to be mowing in zone A of the Reserve before the 15th of June. No other individual was caught in the activity although there were many more cases of illegal mowing.
- There was no restriction, nor control of movement of domestic livestock herds which were dispersed throughout the Reserve, together with shepherds and guard dogs, thus it remained unknown how many more bird nests which are on the ground, in grass, have been destroyed in

this way. A total of 11 conditions were issued for grazing as follows: Conditions of nature protection for grazing: No. 03-373/2, 03-685/2, 03-508/2, 03-821/2, 03-822/2, 03-836/2, 03-837/2, 03-599/2, 03-1165/2, 03-1488/2, 03-1576/3. With each herd, there were at least 3 dogs and a shepherd. Many herds of livestock was present in the Reserve during the year 2017, in the area of the village Jazovo and Sajan as well as Mokrin, not having any conditions issued by the Regional Institute for Nature Protection, neither did the Governor ie. hunting Association of the Reserve act in any way, although Reserve Governor evidently observed all these illegal activities.

- Further, we wish to indicate to the unmoderate, uncontrolled use of pesticides which is without doubt used on every plot within the Reserve. Some of these cases we reported to the inspection, but the majority we haven't, since we did not have the exact information when this happened.

Indicative is the case of the Stone-curlew (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) nest, which was unfortunately destroyed twice. As a result to our complaint on the 9th of May 2017 and request for immediate action, the lady inspector Ognjenka Nikolić on the same day informed the Reserve Governor who uses the plots and on that same day, 09.05.2017, sprayed the plots within the Reserve with pesticides, for which we have already sent you video documentation. An amendment to this complaint was submitted on 21.5.2017. as the situation in the field worsened and the inspector did not react according to the complaint submitted from 9.05.2017. The inspector acted as late as 26.05.2017. and the Reserve Governor was informed although we insisted not to be, as by this, the nest would be certainly destroyed. So it was, as the Governor as soon as he was informed of the nest existence, immediately informed the owner of the plot that conditions of protection would be issued,, so that the owner should immediately treat the plot with pesticides which he did, thus destroying the nest. The pesticide entered the porous egg shell, killing the embryo, the Stone-curlew chick was dead in the egg. The Stone-curlew pair left the nest after laying for a month without the chick. For this specific case, in the document No. 140-501-462/2/2017-06 from 15.06.2017. may be seen that the inspector Ognjenka Nikolić thought up a new „trick“, that the person who sprayed the plot in the Reserve did not apply to the Reserve Governor in writing. We point out that never before has anyone applied for activities in writing but directly or by telephone. In this way, the inspector protected the Reserve Governor and person who used the pesticide within the Reserve and destroyed the Stone-curlew nest. Conditions of the regional Institute for Nature Protection were issued but late, after pesticide spraying was already performed.

Concerning this, we submitted a complaint on the work of the inspector Ognjenka Nikolić on 15.06.2017, but this was rejected by the head of the Inspection Service of the the Regional Secretariat, Nemanja Ivanović, letter No. 140-501-462/1/2017-06 from 29.06.2017. It was stated that the inspector acted and submitted a felony breach against “AD Mokrin” DOO, Company which is actually a wrong procedure.! It has not been however stated why the inspector according to the emergency complaint that the wild fauna in the Reserve is threatened , reacted even 17 days later and why she did not file a complaint against the Reserve Governor, who did not comply to the law by protecting the Stone-curlew nest.

All this is the usual, thought up scenario in order to discredit our complaints and our critics on the work of all those whose duty is to comply to the laws. The absurd to be even greater, inspector Ognjenka Nikolić in her notes No.140-501-464/2017-06 from 20.06.2017, states that she did not detect the Stone-curlew on the locality where its nest (for which we asked for protection on 9.05.2017.), this not being strange as the pair of Stone-curlews left the nest at the beginning of June, after laying for a month, since the egg being poisoned by pesticides, no chick emerged.

The described method of the destruction of the Stone-curlew nest was also similar in the case of nests of the Great Bustards, with no action of the Reserve Governor to submit felony complaints and of course, nobody was ever punished.

2. Introducing domestic livestock herds in places inhabited by Great Bustards was also a problem in 2017 and as it now stands, this will be a problem now in 2018, as the same flock of sheep will be at the end of March let into the estate of Mancul and around the Monument to the Mokrin Freedom Fighters and this will chase the Great Bustards from their favourite swaggering location. Great Bustards will again end up outside the Reserve, while the Reserve area will be used by farmers, shepherds, hunters etc. The Reserve Governor will continue to avoid its responsibilities, as well as the

inspection and the Regional Institute for Nature Protection. All those responsible will keep on trying to protect themselves by various excuses, letters, meetings. Acting according to our complaints and advice from the Secretariat of the Bern Convention would mean that they admit they were in the wrong.

Dangers to the Great Bustard outside the Reserve are numerous (about this we wrote previously), but they are persistently by various activities chased out of the Reserve. In this sense, beside photos we have already submitted on 23.04.2016, when outside the Reserve, on the plot sprayed with pesticides was the last adult male of the Great Bustard for which it is stated that it is a fake photo, we submit a short video document of this same event from 23.04.2016. The plot and tractor are in ownership of "AD Mokrin" DOO Company. It may be clearly seen that the Great Bustard male walked across the field, did not alight or run away, just as we described. Available on link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns9cuaS5WLC>

Such shots are impossible to plan, so it is a pure chance that someone could take a shot which is absolute proof of the originality of the photo submitted to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention.. After this poisoning of the adult bird, which we believe suffered a long time before dying, at the end of July 2016, only feather remains were found of this bird. Up to today, facts were not determined neither did any responsible authority act in this case. There is no information on the death of this Great Bustard death!

We must stress that in 2016 we immediately submitted a complaint for the disturbance of the Great Bustard on their swaggering place by the flock of sheep next to the II degree area of protection and conquered the territory of the Great Bustard, survey plot No 15616, surface of over 100 ha, this being public land and to be used as pasture. We also appealed to the Director of the Regional Institute for Nature Protection to deter the disturbance of the Great Bustards, as by the enroach of sheep flocks, the birds left the Reserve into the fields, along the main highway. Here, the birds were a target for many people who stooped their cars to approach, observe and photograph the birds, thus further disturbing the birds, additional to all unrestricted agricultural activities taking place in the vicinity and round the Great Bustards The Reserve keepers did not intervene and was absent from outside the Reserve. Then the Director of the Regional Institute for Nature Protection Mrs. Biljana Panjković wrote to us that they are monitoring the situation and the Great Bustard swaggering would be secured! This of course did not happen and even worse, she wrote to us on 22.04.2016, that our complaint was »unchecked and incorrect« and that she has different information from the Reserve Governor and that we should be »cooperative«. To such heavy accusations we responded immediately and requested proof showing our false statements (false accusation is in the Republic of Serbia a criminal act by law), ie. We asked for proof on what was stated by Mrs.Panjković. As there was no reply we forwarded our complaint to the Office of the Information Confidant of Public Importance, only these days (2018) receiving a letter lacking all requested information and on the repeated insistence for us to receive the information, the jurist of the Institute answered that they do not have anything more than already previously sent to us. Although this did not contain any proof that our complaint was incorrect. In these »proofs« two members of the Association for the Protection of the Great Bustard from Mokrin were accused (Boris Brdarić i David Grabovac) that they disturbed the Great Bustards as wellm as our colleague Joca Jančić, (this was written and thought up by the Reserve Governor), this certainly not being correct and true. As a consequence neither the Institute nor inspection did not respond to our correctly submitted complaint: the sheep flock remained in place where the Great Bustards were, the birds were chase away inhabiting fields, the last adult male was sprayed with pesticides on 23.04.2016., later disappearing ie. dying. About this we sent photos from 23.04.2016 as proof (for which it was stated that they were fake photos) but now we submit video document showing that the male Great Bustard walked along the field together with the tractor at the same time being sprayed. For this, one may directly accuse the Regional Institute for Nature Protection and its director Biljana Panjković who is guilty for threatening and disturbing the Great Bustard by sheep flocks, since conditions were issued by her enabling the enroachment of sheep where the Great Bustards were and finally the spraying and killing of the last male adult Great Bustard. The same situation repeated in 2017. Nobody reacted to activities which clearly disturbed the Great Bustards during their reproduction period, there was no lawful response by those who received submitted complaints and there are great obstacles in receiving information of public importance which by law must be

transparent, as it took us a year and a half to receive a reply without proof that our statements were »unchecked and incorrect«. Since these conditions are usual, it is not strange that the Great Bustards suffer and why we can not cooperate with all cited individuals which for years in the past only rotate their positions, authorities neglecting the survival of Great Bustards and not acting as required by law. In the coming period we expect the same state and behaviour of authorities and the breach of Articles 4 and 6 of the Bern Convention and further suffering of the Great Bustard.

We inform the Secretariat of the Bern Convention in advance in case there is tendency of accusing our complaints as incorrect in front of the Secretariat.

3. During 2017, there were several fires in the Reserve. Fires appear in the identical way and one of such great fires happened on 27.08. and 28.08.2017. It was extinguished after great exertion by people, but a large area of the Reserve burned. While the fire raged on one side of the Reserve, at the same time on the other side artificial bird calls functioned together with hunting activities, although this is against current laws of the Republic of Serbia. On 31.08.2017, after the fire, seven Great Bustards were filmed inhabiting the remaining grass between the burnt area.

View on link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oj2nBA3pIF0&t=192s>

4. Similar disturbance and chasing of Great Bustards occurred, forced flights to various locations outside the Reserve occurred at the end of 2017 and continues into 2018. Reasons for these disturbances were various ploughing and many organized hunting events mainly by the Reserve Governor hunting Association »Perjanica«. Nothing indicates that this year will be different or better, thus, we ask you to try and deter this, as this is the only way to save our Great Bustards, unique subpopulation of *Otis tarda* species, requiring special measures of protection in order to survive. Our Government does not want to do nothing else but keep the *status quo*, supporting the current incapable and irresponsible Reserve Governor ie. Hunting Association, capable of only prolonging the devastating situation and holding meetings which solve nothing.

- After the Notice on the procedure for launching the protection of the Special nature reserve "Pasture of the Great Bustard« from the 07 of April 2017. - nothing happens.
- After the announcement of the Draft of the Decree on the proclamation and study of the protection of the Special Nature Reserve "Great Bustard Pastures" from 24.08.2017.god. – nothing is happening.
- In this draft of the Decree, the same Reserve Governor is recommended although it is clear that it is incapable to care for the Great Bustards. Our authorities must show more flexibility when it is necessary to change a reserve governor and not keep those responsible for the destruction of natural heritages.

One such meeting on the subject of poisoning of wild animals was held on 11.01.2018., in the Ministry for Environmental Protection, in order to "prepare the National Report initiated by complaints from the Council of Europe No. 2014/3, 2016/3 and 2016/6, and article 2. Answer of the Bureau of Bern Convention on complaint No. 2016/6 and responsibilities related to the improved management of the Great Bustard habitat in Serbia." On the basis of the Record from the held meeting, it is clear that problems are many and that they are not solved. Only the extension of the Reserve will not bring solutions, without extending stricter protective measures and their application. In case the area of the Reserve is extended with the present manner of governing, there will only be an increase of those who use the Reserve in the same unsustainable way. Great Bustards will further be left aside without benefits for the population to be saved. Concerning the preparation of the report on the improvement according to Complaint No 2016/6 and on the basis of the report from the meeting on 11.01.2018. we impatiently wait answer from the Ministry for Environmental Protection, which we hope to receive.

5. At the end of the December 2017, new ploughing of plots began, which was terminated in December 2016. Plots in public ownership are in question which are survey meadows but haven't been tiled since 2010 and some even up to 40 years back, becoming grass habitats. For the ploughing of these surfaces-destruction of grass cover, conditions were issued by the Regional Institute for Nature Protection, No.03-2901/2 from 12.12.2016. to the name of Čeleketić Miroslav from Mokrin. In point

1 of the issued document it is stated that some plots are not to be tilled as these are pastures, but in point 2 of the same document it is permitted to plough plot KP(survey number) 15637, with an explanation that this "plot is significant as it is used by the Great Bustard during reproduction period", so it is permitted to sow only grain or alfalfa but not tall cultures, as this would be a threatening factor for the Great Bustard! It is further stated in the list of plots which are grass habitats, it is allowed to plough plot 15672 in Survey area of KO Mokrin, but the use of chemicals is not allowed, as this plot borders the plot which is the habitat of the endemic Wasp-fly (*Eumerus pannonicus*).

Consequences of such issued conditions, is the repeated ploughing of plots which became pastures together with the remaining plots mentioned on this list. That plot 15637 is really important for the life, feeding and rest of Great Bustards, as a contribution we forward a report and photos flocks from 05.01.2018 beside the mentioned ploughed plot. Great Bustards fed and rested on this spot, now being forced to move as their place was ploughed. Video document from 05.01.2018:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I65HN_zRxso&t=20s

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVQzYE6_mwM

6. At the end of 2017 (November and December) and in January 2018, hunting chases continued within the Reserve on which we already wrote. Numerous motor vehicles enter the Reserve, including hunters, chase dogs, making big noise, without anyone beforehand checking where the Great Bustards are. More times hunting parties chased the Great Bustards forcing them to fly to location Vajlerka. It is certain that the birds did not voluntarily leave the Reserve, but were chased out by hunting parties. Motor vehicles move all about the Reserve, outside the existing official inter-plot areas, their tracks seen everywhere.

Due to such hunting practises within the Reserve we submitted a complaint to the inspection on the 22.01.2018, but up to now there are no signs the inspection acted accordingly as all these illegal activities continue.

We forward video documents from 01.01.2018. and photos of what was possible to shoot and film from a larger distance. It is evident that nobody cares about the Great Bustards, as the interests of the Reserve Governor-Hunting Association are to promote hunting and not to protect the endangered species.

Links for video reports:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6rPUuqs06g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEa1BECaKSE>

<https://youtu.be/GWvVCpUpxfS>

- On the 04.01.2018, Great Bustards further inhabited the Reserve, close to the estate Joca Jančić, they fed, rested and enjoyed the sun, during this quiet day in the Reserve. On the movie which last about 30 minutes, it is clear that the birds are at ease, not disturbed by anything and do not notice being filmed. This we state as the inspector Ognjenka Nikolić in collaboration with the Reserve Governor wants to forbid Jančić photographing and movement through the Reserve although he lives here in the Reserve since in this way the public has a view on the bad state of the Reserve, which they want to hide.

Video documents from 04.01.2018.

<https://youtu.be/7IGBhdT3zfQ>

<https://youtu.be/OPNEp2DeuJ0>

<https://youtu.be/Wkc6pFsM0FQ>

<https://youtu.be/ewalg-BjiE4>

https://youtu.be/sOM_BKq4y9o

- On the 06.01.2018. about 11:35 h into the Reserve entered about 10 vehicles, numerous hunters and dogs, and due to disturbance, the flock of 6 individuals take flight at about 11:50 h. That day they alighted on the known location by the Monument to the Mokrin Freedom Fighters being there photographed at about 12:15 h.
- On the 07.01.2018. again hunting with chase was organized in the Reserve as previously.

- On the 08.01.2018. Great Bustards are further in the Reserve at Mancul estate, always on their favorite spot but nobody cares about this.
- During summer, August and September of last year, in the Reserve as in every previous year, electronic fake bird calls were set on for hunting quail which is illegal!

For all mentioned, it is evident that there is no intention to process protective measures for Great Bustards and their habitat.

In this way, we tried to demonstrate the state in the Reserve during the winter months day by day accompanied by photos and videos, clearly illustrating that the situation in the Reserve is unchanged, with the hope that you will understand and help us in the survival of the Great Bustard. For this, it is only necessary to implement order in the Reserve, securing peace for the Great Bustard which are very sensitive to disturbance. This is also required by the laws of the Republic of Serbia harmonized with the Bern Convention. During the entire period of winter 2017-2018, which is exceptionally mild and warm, it is evident that the Great Bustards like the most to be inside the Reserve and only when disturbed, forcefully move out of the Reserve and this is the fact very important in restricting their winter disturbance.

Restricting the Spring and Autumn disturbances of Great Bustards is already in the Recommendations of the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, which unfortunately have not been implemented and respected.

Please excuse us for the poor quality of the video films and photos as purely amateur equipment is in question and every time we take exceptional care as not to disturb the birds in any way. Our collaborator who lives in the Reserve on his estate, thanks to him we get the photos and video documents on how and what is happening in the Reserve. Great Bustards are known to him for his entire life, living close to them, and respects them exceptionally.

With great appreciation what the Secretariat of the Bern Convention does for the protection of our Nature and Natural Heritage in Serbia, we greet You sincerely.

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Contributions:

1. Photos from 23. and 24.09. 2017 Electric artificial bird calls within Reserve.



2. Links as video documentations – hunting on 01.01.2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6rPUuqs06g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEa1BECAKSE>

<https://youtu.be/GWvVCpUpxf>

Photos from 01.01.2018. – hunting.





3. Great Bustard on 20.12.2017. within Reserve.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwnXI6wb2PI>



4 Great Bustards, 04.01.2018. at estate of Jančić Joca

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wkc6pFsM0FQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPNEp2DeuJ0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wkc6pFsM0FQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewalg-BjiE4&t=31s>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOM_BKq4y9o&t=3s





5. *Great Bustards, 05.01.2018.next to ploughed plot No15637*



6. *Hunters and Great Bustards, 06.01.2018.*

Arrival of the hunters 11.35h: 6 individuals of Great Bustard disturbed by hunters taking flight 11.59h



Flock of Great Bustards landing at Monument to Mokrin Freedom Fighters 12.17 h



7. *Great Bustards within Resrve at Mancul estate 08.01.2018.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_nOW4158qWU

Document prepared by
EPAR-OIPA-Serbia / Alliance for Nature Protection, the rights of animals and people

08 January 2018.

**PRESUMED RISK OF NATIONAL EXTINCTION OF GREAT BUSTARDS (*OTIS TARDA*)
IN SERBIA) - No. 2016/6**

Subject: Reply to the letter from the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, No. 37-00-9/2017-17 from 04.04.2017. (now Ministry of Environmental Protection)

Link: Presumed risk of national extinction of Great Bustards (*Otis tarda*) in Serbia) - No. 2016/6

Concerning the data stated in the letter of the Ministry (No. 37-00-9/2017-17 from 04.04.2017.), as an answer to our complaint No. 2016/6, we wish to deliver our answer and inform You of the following:

With the generally known data on the Special Nature Reserve (SNR) "Pastures of the Great Bustard", cited under items 1th to 4th, which we have also cited in the Complaint, we agree with the significance of this Reserve and level of protection it deserves. We wish to, however, stress that none of the relevant government offices have adequately reacted to the unacceptable state and numerous complaints, in accordance with the current rules, consequently this being the reason for the drastic fall in the number of Great Bustards! Descriptions of threatening factors, which were also currently actual during the year 2017, we already mentioned in the amendment to our Complaint, which we will elaborate in our following text supported by specific examples.

Legal regulations of the Republic of Serbia concerning the protection of endangered species and their habitats: Law of Nature Protection ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 36/2009, 88/2010, 91/2010 and 14/2016), Rulebook on Designation and Protection of Strictly Protected and Protected Species of Plants, Animals and Fungi ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 5/2010, 47/2011, 32/2016), Regulation on establishment of Special Nature Reserve "Pasture of Great Bustard" ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 37/97), Regulation on the Ecological Network ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 102/2010) and other regulations which arrange this field, contrary to the statements of the Ministry, in the SNR "Pastures of the Great Bustard", regulations are not respected, even by the executive governors, responsible for their application. In this case, we mean the specific persons employed at the Regional Secretariat for Urbanism and Environmental Protection and the Institute for Nature Conservation of Vojvodina Province. Their names we have in our second amendment to our Complaint delivered to You on the 2nd of June 2017.

Consequences of this negligence, absence of processing specific measures for the proactive protection of the Great Bustard and its habitat, resulted in the state of its population to be on the verge of extinction, this being also confirmed by the letter from the Ministry. The absence of a specific and effective plan where, when and in which way anthropogenic activities may be performed inside the Reserve, not to endanger the reproduction and survival of the Great Bustard is still the crucial problem!

The following problem would be the execution of this plan. For this, the most responsible are the Director of the regional Institute for Nature Protection, dr.Biljana Panjković and mentor of the Great Bustard Reserve Mr Nikola Stojnić who do not have a plan. The prescribed conditions brought by the Regional Institute for Nature Protection for mowing, grazing and ploughing, related to human activities and benefit obtained from this Reserve, do not represent specific protective measures, as these activities are to a greater extent in collision with the preservation of endangered species inhabiting such a habitat, including the Great Bustard.

Before we addressed the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, on the 19th of April 2016, concerning the problem of Great Bustard disappearance and all unlawful activities which are the reason for this, we tried to influence in a positive manner on the condition in the Reserve, together with relevant government institutions but in vain! During the period from the year 2010 up to now, we also contacted the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, Sector for Environmental Protection, which for all these years remained numb, not responding and transferring all responsibility to the Regional administration.

With this letter to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, we wish to denounce some of the statements from the letter of the Ministry (No. 37-00-9/2017-17 from 04.04.2017.), because the activities of the relevant authorities and state in which is the Reserve are described non-objectively and tendentiously. There are numerous examples which clearly unveil the responsibility and neglect of the responsible parties when the interest of this protected area and endangered species are in question. We act with facts for which there is definite proof.

In item 2 from the letter of the Ministry, there is a short account on how this protected natural heritage appeared and mentions only the first Decree on the protection of the Special Nature Reserve "Pastures of the Great Bustard", brought by the Government of RS in 1997 ("Official Gazette RS", No 37/97). At the time, the area encompassed 979.43,94 ha, of which in government and public lands were 963.30,02 ha, in private ownership only 16.13,98 ha. This available on following link: http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2008_09/t09_0017.htm

After this, in the year 2009, the Government of RS brought the "Announcement on activating the action for expanding the Special Nature Reserve "Pastures of the Great Bustard" ("Official Gazette RS", No 44/2009); based on the Study composed by the Institute for Nature Protection of the Republic of Serbia. By this, according to the Law of Nature Protection, already in the year 2009, this protected area was expanded to 6.775 ha and with the spatial complex area „Jaroške livade“, two new complexes were added, „Siget“ and „Kočovat“. In this expanded Reserve, in the year 2009, the same restrictions were in force according to the 1997 Decree and although minimal, these restrictions were not respected. Available on link: http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2009_06/t06_0195.htm

Eight years later, the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection announced on its site on 07.04.2017 "Announcement on the act of activating the protection of the Special Nature Reserve, "Pastures of the Great Bustard " as if it were a completely new area? The suggested area encompasses 6.799,77 ha, of which government and other means of ownership belongs 73%, in private ownership 27% of the total designated area. In this announcement on the site of the Ministry, among else it is written "Action for activities for the protection was activated on 17.04.2015., when the Regional Institute for Nature Protection, delivered a new Study on the protection to this Ministry as the responsible authority.“ So, the Ministry behaves as the "Announcement on activating the action for expanding the Special Nature Reserve "Pastures of the Great Bustard" from the year 2009 does not exist and that the procedure for activating the event of expanding the area happens in 2015 which is completely incorrect.

Available on link from 07.04.2017. : <http://www.ekologija.gov.rs/obavestenje-o-postupku-pokretanja-zastite-specijalnog-rezervata-prirode-pasnjaci-velike-droplje/>

On 24.08.2017. at the site of the Ministry for Environmental Protection, a new draft was brought ie. Decree for the Special Nature Reserve "Pastures of the Great Bustard" in which the Regional Institute for Nature Protection again suggests the same Reserve governor Hunting Association „Perjanica“ from Mokrin, which evidently does not have the capacity nor interest to work on the protection of endangered species. The new draft of the Decree is general and lacking specific and effective measures for active protection, regardless of the total disaster in the preservation of the Great Bustard. In this draft of the Decree have not been included articles on Regulation on the Ecological Network ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 102/2010), which lacking this is detrimental for the preservation of the habitat. Available on link from 24.08.2017:

<http://www.ekologija.gov.rs/javni-vid-u-nacrt-uredbe-o-proglasenju-i-studiji-zastite-specijalnog-rezervata-priode-pasnjaci-velike-droplje/?lang=lat>

This would be the complete picture on the origins of the Reserve. It is an advantage that the Reserve was expanded but unfortunately, without specific measures of protection this will be without much value.

Articles 3. and 5. of the letter mention the Manager of the protected area, a problem which we would like to especially emphasize. During the previous period, years 2013-2014, we requested control monitoring on the work of the manager of the Special Nature Reserve Hunting Association „Perjanica“ from Mokrin. Only on 31st of October 2016, monitoring was executed by the authorities, when it was concluded that the Manager has no act on work activities which is absolutely required. Numerous articles were not controlled which regulate the work of all Managers of protected areas, concomitant with article 68 from the Law on Nature Protection nor was the activity, professional standards and responsibilities of the ranger service controlled. During the monitoring, it was concluded that the Hunting Association „Perjanica“ does not have the required documents mentioned, the duty of the relevant Ministry was to deprive the Manager which did not happen. Surprisingly, however, on the site of the Ministry for Environmental Protection on 24.08.2017. the draft for the new Decree on 24.08.2017 was placed concerning the Special Reserve "Pastures of the Great Bustard" in which the Regional Institute for Nature Protection again suggests the same Manager - Hunting Association „Perjanica“ which is outrageous.

To illustrate the quality of work of the relevant inspection, the Regional Institute for Nature Protection and other government authorities, which is not possible to conclude from the letter from the Ministry, we will mention the following cases on the negligence of government institutions:

Case 1:

On 12.06.2017. we submitted an emergency complaint for the SNR "Pastures of the Great Bustard" due to many activities which with continuous intensity appear from April of year 2017 by which were threatened strictly protected bird species during the sensitive period of reproduction. Nests were destroyed, eggs, even the Great Bustards were chased out of the Reserve which then stayed on the fields where no protection is offered from agricultural activities. We submitted to the relevant inspection in 6 points a complaint with proofs on the bad situation in the reserve and imminent mowing to start on the 15th of June. As a response to our complaint, the inspector of the Regional Secretariat Ognjenka Nikolić acted late, on the 20.06.2017., when it was not anymore possible to determine which plots were mowed grass before 15.06.2017.. This is an outrageous practice in order to avoid determining the true state of facts.

The Regional Institute for Nature Protection allotted conditions for the use of the Reserve to all who requested them. Moreover, in cases when a person was discovered to perform activities in the Reserve without the conditions issued by the Institute, the authorities instructed him to ask for the conditions retroactively.

Case 2:

During the mentioned inspection survey on the 20.06.2017, inspector Ognjenka Nikolić found an illegally ploughed surface on plot KP 2467/2, KO Jazovo Survey Municipality on which were sowed sunflower and instead of acting according to the law, she wrote in her record book note No. 140-501-464/2017-06 from 20.06.2017. that “Fekete Lajoš retroactively ask conditions from the Institute“.

Citation from the record:

Потребно је провести процедуру прибављања услова заштите природе од
Завод за парцеле које су обрађене без услова заштите природе.

Translation: “It is necessary to comply to the procedure to obtain conditions of protection from the Institute for plots which have been tiled without having obtained the conditions”.

Case 3:

Surfaces on plots KP 2468/3 and KP 2469, KO Jazovo were ploughed and sunflower planted in 2017, this having been done by Atila Lajko from Jazovo, for this activity he did not get conditions from the Institute. Neither was this enough for the inspector to act according to law but instructed him to get retroactive conditions. This was a second unlawful act in the same record book from 20.06.2017.

These plots from case 3 are of special significance as they are the plots which were tiled on the dates of 16.05.2011. and 22.05.2011 by Milan Trifunović from the village Turija, with a surface of 30ha and just at that time were in these places two nests of the Great Bustard, which were then destroyed. The proof of this was the reaction of the inspector Gordana Pavkov who forbid all activities on the mentioned plots, but only when the nests of the Great Bustards were already destroyed. She ordered Milan Trifunović to flat out the plots which he never did, the plots becoming overgrown. Despite the destroyed grass habitat, in the year 2013, on the same locality, two nests of the Great Bustard were recorded. Then on the plots from KP 2468 to KP 2479, four herds of cows were brought, daily disturbing the Bustard nests, until the Bustards left their nests. Despite the fact that the official keeper of the Reserve Željko Reljin (who died in November 2017) reported that the cows are disturbing the Bustards on their nests, for which we also submitted a complaint, none of the authorities reacted until it was too late, the Bustards having left their nests. Initiated by this case, the destruction of two Bustard nests, we submitted a complaint on 20.05.2013. to all relevant authorities, without response. Passing of time, the ground revived by itself to become a grassland habitat until 2017, when it was again ploughed over to be sowed with sunflower by Atila Lajko and not alfalfa as stated by the Regional Institute for Nature Protection. Sunflower is an undesirable high culture for this type of reserve. This area was only tiled by overturning the earth (overturned mound of earth with grass in between was recorded, no traces of alfalfa), sunflower was sown. This not to be a unique case, we will mention our complaint submitted on 29.04.2013 when we reported that by ploughing two potential nests on plots KP 15705 and 15698/2 in KO Mokrin would be destroyed, this all happening in the area of III degree of protection, between the so called "Visitor Center" and Jančić estate by the "bunker", at a distance up to 100 meters from the area under II degree of protection. Only in the year 2013, at least two nests of Great Bustards were destroyed, while on another location, for which conditions for protection were prescribed for one nest, this Great Bustard bred one young.

Case 4:

On the date of 16.04.2013 we submitted a complaint for the disturbance of a Great Bustard male during swaggering by the Mokrin and Jazovo hunters who due to the start of spring roe deer hunting season, toured the Reserve with lorries and jeeps. Even today the spring hunt for roe deer has not been forbidden, although this is an extremely strong threatening factor, since it is not in the interest of Hunter's Association.

Case 5:

During the same year, there was various spraying of cultures with chemicals on large areas of the Reserve, up to 60 ha being daily sprayed, only to be continued for days by others, everything live was poisoned on the sprayed plots and non of the relevant authorities we contacted have done nothing to curb this, in order to offer some peace for the Bustards during the sensitive swaggering and nesting period. We give only some examples from 2013, although such cases occurred every year, resulting in that Bustards were the victims. This is nowhere mentioned in the response of the Ministry.

Case 6:

In the decision of the conditions prescribed by the Institute No. 03-2393/2 from 02.11.2016. handed to Ištvan Žarkov, it is stated that it is forbidden to him to tile some ground as it is "covered with grass vegetation", this being the same as in the case of Atila Lajko, but he was allowed to plough the plots under grass vegetation?! Atila Lajko sowed sunflower which has nothing to do with the protection of the Reserve!

Due to numerous activities in the Survey Municipality (KO) of Jazovo, we requested from the relevant inspections that the mentioned area of the Reserve belonging to KO Jazovo, at the Vaštag's

Farm, to be toured and the facts determined, who is the owner of the land, who mowed it, whose sunflower it is and who is responsible for these activities? Why is sunflower present on the border of the area under strict protection-location Milina Bara? We have not received the answer. All these activities among others, were to be monitored by the Manager, but has not done it then and never at other times. Keepers do not tour the entire area of the Reserve, except the area KO Mokrin.

Case 7:

During the weekend of 26-27.08.2017., a large fire started in the Reserve. Considering that this happens every year several times in a similar manner, there is good basis for suspicion that humans are responsible for the fires and that someone ignites the area on purpose, although lighting of fires in the open is forbidden and sanctioned by at least four national laws and despite complaints, not one person has been processed as responsible!

Case 8:

Only in one complaint from 08.04.2016 and amendment from 15.04.2016. we encompassed ten persons who tilled the land without conditions obtained from the Institute. In the same complaint, we added also 16 plots-pastures in public ownership ploughed by unknown persons as well as another four persons who were ploughing public land-pastures, all of them lacking conditions issued by the Institute (non of these persons belong to socially deprived categories of people). The Governor did not react to these activities nor did the relevant inspections, as up to now, although requested more times on what has been done about this, no response was received. This complaint was submitted during the time PhD Slobodan Puzović was the Regional Secretary, now Deputy Director of the Regional Institute for Nature Protection, this, however, not being mentioned in the answer of the Ministry. All this was the duty of the Manager who did nothing and never will.

Unfortunately, this is not all. According to the record of the inspection survey on 20.06.2017, we have:

Case 9:

In item 4 of the record No. 140-501-464/2017-06 from 20.06.2017, it is concluded that Terkelj Janoš mowed and mowed down surfaces inside the strictly protected area, on the date of 25.05.2017, when it is forbidden. This is not the first time. Terkelj Janoš from the village of Sajan, mowed the same plots every year, but also ploughed pastures in government ownership, without issued conditions from the Institute. For these activities, we submitted complaints every time. Inspector Gordana Pavkov filled an offence No. 130-501-396/2012-04 from 21.02.2012. to the Offence Court in Senta against Terkelj Janoš for ploughing pastures and mowing when not allowed, until today no answer. Terkelj Janoš was not the owner or tenant of the land and had no lawful right to use it. In item 4 of the record under No 140-501-464/2017-06 from 20.06.2017 mowing was determined in the area of strict protection, location Milina Bara, the responsible person being Atila Lajko. Again no response. It is tendentiously stated that the keeper monitors activities, in practice this is never the case. As the arrival of the inspection was announced beforehand, the keeper was in company of the inspector and did what he should be doing, but does not. If such large scale ploughing of pastures was missed by the keeper every year including 2016, it is clear that he hasn't been doing his job.

Case 10:

We separate item 10 from the Record No 140-501-464/2017-06 from 20.06.2017 in which the inspector, aiming at demonstrating "good work" of the manager showing that he keeps track on strictly protected species and photo-documentation. How this is done shows an example from the year 2014. when the nest of the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) destroyed by the same flock of sheep which every year is present and also chases of Great Bustards at the Mancul estate. Then the President of the manager was Petar Bugarčić (now Vice President of the HA „Perjanica“). After having submitted a criminal offence complaint for the destruction of the nest (eggs and chicks) of the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) by the sheep, the manager claimed in front of the Attorney in Kikinda, claim No. KTP 697/14 od 28.01.2015, that the "Short-eared Owl does not exist in the Reserve, and he does not know this species of bird and that the photos are from some other locality, not from the Reserve". From the described examples concerning the work of the Manager who does not even know which

bird species exist in the Reserve, it is not difficult to conclude how the manager works and how many bird species were victims in the reserve during the past period.

Case 11:

For all that has happened in our complaint from 12.06.2017 we submitted photos as proof. To be even more absurd, inspector Ognjenka Nikolić in her report states that on 20.06.2017 she has not encountered a Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedicanus*) at the location where its nest was, for which we requested protection on 09.05.2017, this not being surprising as a pair of Stone Curlews left the nest at the beginning of June, after having laid for a month since no chick left the egg on the 09 of May 2017. since the egg was sprayed with pesticides on the same day when we requested its protection. In this way, the inspector discredits our complaint on the destroyed nest, although a pair of Stone Curlews were seen lying on the nest and the prescribed measures for protection were too late.

Case 12:

During an earlier period of the year 2013, inspector Gordana Pavlov submitted an offence against the President of the Reserve manager No. 130-501-318/2013-06 from 14.02.2013, after we have submitted the complaint concerning numerous alterations in the part of the Reserve under the strict regime of protection, as the manager never responded. In the description of the offence complaint beside describing all the activities-alterations, it is mentioned that the complaint is being submitted to the Court because "the President of the Hunting Association »Perjanica« does not Govern the protected region in the way as prescribed by article 68 of the Law of Nature Protection". No response up to now. In the offence complaint one could see that the governor does not possess the Act of Activities, which was in the end partially confirmed only in 31.10.2016. just under monitoring by authorities as noted in the answer of the Ministry.

Facts 2: Work of the Regional Institute for Nature Protection:

To be even more bizarre, the work of the inspection is followed by the report of the professional monitoring by the Regional Institute for Nature Protection No. 03-1674/2 from 20.06.2017, signed by PhD Slobodan Puzović, which is completely in harmony with that of the inspector's report, although there were many faults. The Regional Institute for Nature Protection with its professional monitoring hasn't confirmed the existence of anything that would be in collision with protective measures and which could disturb the strictly protected species?!

As it may be noticed by the names which are repeatedly present, these people continuously brought wrong decisions concerning the Reserve and Great Bustard and these persons continue with their activities towards the Reserve and Great Bustards sustain the existing bad manager who is definitely unworthy of the position.

It is true that the Ministry and Secretariat invested much public money into this protected area, cover the salary of the keepers, as well as equipping them with all necessary for their work. The results of their work, however, are unsatisfactory and there is a definitely clear collision of interests, Manager of Reserve - Hunter's Association. The Hunting Association is at the same time employer who pays the keepers with public funds. The Manager of the protected area in which the critically threatened species Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) must be protected, this must not be the named Hunting Association.

One should, however, say that the unprofessional keepers of the Reserve are the last in the series of irresponsible ones who contributed to the disappearance of the Great Bustards. The first one in the series is the Regional Institute for Nature Protection, which does not respect and applies the above mentioned rules which forbid habitat destruction and any disturbance of Great Bustards, especially during the period of reproduction, where ever they are, by issuing conditions for places where Great Bustards reside during reproduction, allowing the presence of sheep flocks, dogs and construction of shepherd shelters etc. The inspection also does not react and does not apply relevant laws, referring to the conditions issued by the Regional Institute for Nature Protection and so this goes on. Nothing has changed.

There are ample proofs on the work of the Regional Institute for Nature Protection.

Case 1:

Report on the monitoring from 21.04.2017. No. 03-1049/2017. in which Nikola Stojnić writes that he has seen six individuals of the Great Bustard on the disputable location at the Mancul estate (we see that the Short-eared Owl are present on this locality) and after four days, he allows a large herd of sheep to be brought in with the construction of a shelter for the shepherd's and he does not see anything disputable in this.

Citation:

Природне вредности, врсте од значаја

На потезу између прве дужи Мокрина, Јанчићевог и Манцуловог салаша, констатовано је 6 јединки велике дропље (*Otis tarda*), највероватније женки. Северно од Јанчићевог салаша уочене су територијалне јединке еје ливадарке (*Circus pygargus*) и ритске сове (*Asio flammeus*).

Translation: "Natural values, species of significance:

On the move between the first straight line Mokrin, Jančić and Mancul estates, six individuals of the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) most probably female were detected. North of the Jančić estate, territorial Montagu's Harriers (*Circus pygargus*) and Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*) were noticed."

Case 2:

Next proof is the professional monitoring from 28.04.2017. No 03-1011/2017. in which Nikola Stojnić says that in the field one sees a flock of sheep and in the background a herd of cows belonging to Joca Jančić and just at the locality where on the 21.04.2017. he saw six Great Bustards. On this area were also seen herds belonging to Duško Đomparin, Radovan Gavrilov i Ivica Miladinov, altogether five large herds on a small space, this being the habitat of the Great Bustard and he says:

Citation :

Закључак: Није уочено да предметна стада оваца и крава, чобани, пси или објекти угрожавају велике дропље (*Otis tarda*), нити друге природне вредности Резервата. Усклађена испаша, поготово мешовита, представља најбољи начин одржавања и очувања станишта велике дропље.

Translation: „Conclusion: It has not been noticed that the mentioned herds of sheep and cows, shepherd's dogs and shelters threaten the Great Bustards (*Otis tarda*), neither the other natural values within the Reserve. Harmonized grazing, especially mixed, represents the best means of sustaining and preserving the habitats of the Great Bustard..“

He further says, citation :

Природне вредности, врсте од значаја

На ширем потезу између Јанчићевог и Манцуловог салаша према Чичином брегу, парцел број 15657 к.о. Мокрин и Пилчкином брегу, парцела број 15660 к.о. Мокрин, констатоване су три јединке велике дропље (*Otis tarda*). Међу њима, две су женке, док је једна јединка полно незрели мужјак који је изводио шепурење, односно покушаје шепурења.

Translation: „Natural values, species of significance.

On the wider move between the Jančić and Mancul estates towards Čičin Hill, plot 15657 ko Mokrin and Pilčikin Hill, plot No 15660 ko Mokrin, three Great Bustard individuals were noted (*Otis tarda*).

Among them, two were females while one was an immature male performing a swaggering, ie. tried to swagger.“

So, in the wider area between Jančić and Mancul estates towards Čičin Hill, on plots KP 15657 and KP 15660, are present three individuals of the Great Bustard of which one is an immature male, which is a distance of mostly 1 km. And here all events are taking place for which to him is not disputable, but it is one more reason showing why and how the Great Bustards were victims.

Case 3:

One more example of unconscientious work is also:

Citation:

На парцели 15612 к.о. Мокрин, која се помиње у Пријави као спорни простор на којем је дошло до узнемиравања великих дропљи од стране оваца, констатовано је стадо крава, за које се основано претпоставља да припадају Јоци Јанчићу (Слика бр. 2). Испаша крава спроводи се у складу са условима заштите природе бр. 03-508/2 од 30.3.2017. године.

Translation: „On plot 15612 k.o. Mokrin, which is mentioned in the Complaint as a disputable area where the Great Bustards were disturbed by the sheep, a herd of cows was detected, for which there is basis for suspicion that it belongs to Joca Jančić (photo 2). The grazing of cows is realized according to conditions of nature protection No 03-508/2 from 30.3.2017.“

KP 15612 is the property of Company AD Mokrin DOO, ie. space planted and allotted for the feeding of the Great Bustard with an area of 32 ha, so there should be no herds here. It is not clear how it was possible to issue conditions for this. Beside this, in our complaint, plot 15612 was not mentioned, but KP 15616, public land, pasture, onto which sheep were brought, which confirms on the total unconscientious work of all relevant authorities. There are, however, activities to which the authorities are very "dedicated."

Case 4:

Further is the example of the work of the Regional Institute for Nature Protection is the issued condition for ploughing of some plots in public ownership, these being stake plots but haven't been ploughed for the last 10 to 40 years, conditions issued to the name of Čeleketić Miroslav from Mokrin where in the point 1 of the issue- it is forbidden to tile some of the plots as they are pastures but in point 2 of the issue it is allowed to plough plot KP 15637, as it is explained, these plots are important since they are used by the Great Bustard during the period of reproduction, so it is allowed to sow only grains and alfalfa while tall cultures are not allowed as these may threaten the Great Bustard. Further it is stated that in the list of plots which are all grassland habitats, it is allowed to plough plot 15672 in KO Mokrin, but the use of chemicals is not allowed as these plot border with plots which are habitats of endemic species the Wasp-like Fly (*Eumerus pannonicus*).

We remind that issuing such conditions, now again plots are ploughed under all other mentioned conditions.

There are numerous examples and we can't list all of them, while all of this nothing has been stated in the reply of the Ministry.

Case 5:

We will mention the case of double standards in issuing conditions. Regional Institute for Nature Protection issued conditions for mowing to Atila Lajko (No. 03-1405/2 from 07.06.2017.) in KO Jazovo, plots No. 3500 to 3613 and plots No. 3243 to 3415 and even that mowing may start already on 15.06.2017. although the listed plots are in zone A of the reserve, location Milina Bara and the period of nesting did not yet end! Atila Lajko from Jazovo completely mowed the Jazovo part of the Reserve.

Mowing was performed even during the night, hay pulled out, without reaction from the Reserve Manager.

After period of nesting of the year 2017, Joca Jančić asked for conditions to graze cows in this area, the Institute rejected this with decision No 03-2310/2 from 21.09.2017., although the season of nesting ended and all fledglings left. The question is, how is it possible to allow mowing in the season at the height of the nesting period of endangered species, while grazing of cows, outside the season is forbidden?

Great Bustards and their survival is a "hot" theme. Not one organization of the civilian sector, even the Association for the Protection of the Great Bustard (established in year 2013), was not involved with Great Bustards as stated in the letter. With the intention of exposing facts, proofs, videos and photos, on events in the Great Bustard Reserve, under great pressure is our colleague Joca Jančić, who is the only person continuously inhabiting the Reserve in his own estate. Thanks to him, we received numerous photos from the field, which have been forwarded to you. Not one is forged or constructed, as stories here circulate. This is the reason why Jančić is threatened and intend to forbid him movement and photography.

As an example, inspector Ognjenka Nikolić threatens him not to move through the Reserve, neither to take photos, or she will file a complaint against him. Since the submission of the complaint to the Secretariat of the Ben Convention, the general state worsened, the keepers follow more Jančić, than to follow the Great Bustards which are disappearing. The Governor filed a complaint against Joca Jančić on 27.06.2017, that he is responsible for the disappearance of the Great Bustards, which is especially absurd.

Hunters are annoyed by the electric wire sheperd belongin to Jančić, requesting its removal, although caring for flocks and herds in this way is a good solution and is not a threat to wild animals in the Reserve and there is no need for the presence of humans (shepherds) and dogs who are a threatening factor. Hunters have already twice destroyed parts of this electric shepherd. During the hunt on 19.11.2017.they destroyed over 1200 meters of the shepherd wire, which Jančić repaired, but on the datei 14.12.2017. they again destroyed and cut over 600 meters of the shepherd wire and removed-stole about 50 posts. The electric shepherd is a better solution instead of the uncontrolled movements of herds within the Reserve with all shepherds and dogs.

Hunting Association also put pressure on Joca Jančić in all possible ways and threaten not only to chase him out of the Reserve but also out of the village Mokrin.

This clearly demonstrates that the relevant authorities have no intention to change anything in the Reserve for the benefit of the Great Bustard and its habitat. All mentioned clearly demonstrates why the Great Bustards suffered and how their habitat was destroyed. Now the situation is the same. Now the surfaces are ploughed which became pastures and nobody reacts, until we submit a complaint and when we do, the answer will be identical, all is in order!

As a conclusion, we will view at some of the statements in the report of the Regional Institute for Nature Protection (point 7 from document No 37-00-9/2017-17 from 04.04.2017.):

7.1 In our view the report was written by persons who are most responsible for the unfavourable status of the Great Bustard population, Nikola Stojnić and Slobodan Puzović. Mentioning the „phenomenon of male disappearance“, really does not befit professionals like Puzović and i Stojnić. There is not "phenomenon " this is our known species, which lives in these areas for a long time. And the hypothesis of "tendency for individuals to group towards the central flock" is only a way to find an excuse for poor work. If such an event really existed, all Great Bustards would leave the Reserve. The last adult male lived in the Reserve from 2010 to 2016, when he disappeared and we are convinced that he was poisoned. We consider that all survived individuals are still here on the locality and those absent are dead, having been killed or poisoned.

Since 2016 the Great Bustards were even chased out of the Reserve and the whole year spend the time in the surrounding fields. They remained without one adult male who was on the field sprayed with pesticides by the company „AD Mokrin“ DOO. For some time the male was sighted after this, consequently disappearing and did not reappear for the swagging in 2017. We believe the other males fell victims in the same way.

There is a possibility that some of them were killed for hunting trophies. One such trophy is present in an apartment of a hunter in Zrenjanin (address known), one is in Belgrade (address unknown). Therefore, there is no "phenomenon of male disappearance", as things are quite clear. The unfavourable status of the Great Bustard population is a consequence of human factors, negligence from institutions and consistently keeping the unprofessional manager of the Reserve, the Hunting Association.

7.2 Pasture

On the item related to "Pasture" from the report of the Regional Institute for the Protection of Nature will be answered shortly: answers from the list of questions from the request for information of public interest, we asked the Regional Institute for Nature Protection from 19.07.2017.to submit to us :

- Copies of all decisions – conditions for nature protection, for mowing and grazing, issued in 2017.
- Copies of conditions issued and what the Institute as a professional body undertook in the case of the Stone Curlew nest (*Burhinus oedicanus*), for which we wrote a request (09.05.2017.) for it to be protected on time which did not happen. The nest of the Stone Curlew was destroyed twice!
- Information on how many domestic animals are now in the Reserve, of what species, how many dogs and shepherd's are with them and on which localities they are- the Institute does not have this information!
- Copy of conditional for the HA "Perjanica" to organize a hunter's party - bacchanalia 08.07.2017 in the Reserve in the premises and around the Visitor Center (this not being the purpose of use) lighting fires in the open, under great heat and with uncontrolled shooting, noting that on the 27.06.2017 in the Reserve there was a fire, the third of that year and the cause-human factor, ie. People who mowed in the municipality of Jazovo - Ostojićevo. The Institute did not issue conditions, while the Manager uses contrary to the purpose, objects and funds which it receives from the government for protecting the Great Bustard! The inspection does not react.
- Plan for the activities of the Visitor Center in accordance with the official purpose of this object, as it is evidently used for hunter's parties - there is no plan!
- Copies of conditions issued for the protection of Great Bustard nests in the year 2017 and their locations – they do not have this information!
- Information on where is the last Great Bustard adult male – they do not have the information!
- Information on where are the Great Bustards during the period from 15th of June to 19th of July 2017, when invasive grass mowing took place-they have no information!

So, the Regional Institute for Nature Protection issues conditions for many activities in the Reserve, while at the same time they lack data which are crucial in order to issue the conditions (written account No. 03-1858/2 from 21.07.2017. signed by the now deputy Director of the regional Institute for Nature Protection PhD Slobodan Puzović). In this way, the Regional Institute for Nature Protection had for the year 2017, without any knowledge (according to its own confession) on where the Bustards are, issued 11 permits for grazing and 17 permits for mowing which again started on the 15th of June, thus as follows:

1. Conditions of nature protection for mowing : No 03-992/2, 03-1163/2, 03-1083/2, 03-1044/2, 03-507/2, 03-376/2, 03-1140/2, 03-1212/2, 03-938/2, 03-1405/2, 03-1449/2, 03-1487/2, 03-1485/2, 03-1526/2, 03-1517/2, 03-1464/3, 03-1502/3.

2. Conditions of nature protection for grazing : No 03-373/2, 03-685/2, 03-508/2, 03-821/2, 03-822/2, 03-836/2, 03-837/2, 03-599/2, 03-1165/2, 03-1488/2, 03-1576/3.

This repeats every year and this is the basis of the problem for the Great Bustards and when you ask them something more specific, then they transfer the responsibility to the Reserve Governor and so in roundabouts. If the Institute states that mowing must take place since the "tall" steppe grass disturbs the Great Bustards and does not enable to detect predators on time, arise the question what about sunflower and maize? After the start of disturbance during the reproduction period in Spring by sheep and many herds, Great Bustards spend most of their their time during the year outside the Reserve on the locality Valjerka where they are offered no protection from agricultural activities and where exist an unknown number of predatory species.

7.3 Hunting

Hunting and the presence of hunters, for which we have previously submitted photos to demonstrate how this really looks, is surely a significant threatening factor. Undoubtedly, the Great Bustards with increased hunting activities leave the Reserve and move to the locality Valjerka. Although the population of Bustards is dying out, hunting was not stopped in any year, at least to test if the Bustards would then not leave the Reserve. It is indicative that when intensive hunting takes place, it is the time Bustards leave the Reserve. Who can then state and on what basis that hunting activities do not effect great Bustards?! The question simply arises, why have the Great Bustards during this period expelled outside the Reserve on the locality Valjerka!?

7.4 Agriculture

All agricultural activities have great influence on the Reserve. We mention many of them and gave examples of these negative effects like ploughing, sowing of tall cultures and the too easy issuing of conditions for activities, even retroactively issuing conditions, without the knowledge of the current state in the Reserve only as to satisfy the form . As it is evident "professionals" think that forbidding the ploughing of fields is "is ecologically not warranted it only should have its control and harmonization». We have seen what all this looks like and as a consequence we have the population of Great Bustards on a critical level. Forbidding land ploughing is truly an ecologically warranted since with land tiling, grass cover is opened, thus being infected with weed plants and beside, artificial fertilizers and pesticides are introduced.

Here we will address the activity of intensive mowing in the Reserve, as a "measure of active protection". Mowing of grass, as it is done, has not shown to be useful for the Great Bustard, but on the contrary, intensive mowing in the Reserve from the 15th of June, when many of the nests are still active, birds have eggs ore young, showed to be deleterious for this species. Mowers which in one passage cover large surfaces destroy numerous bird nests which nest on the ground, but also wounded or kill mammals and other species, whose young hide in the grass. The theory of "habitat protection" by mowing might have sense if it was performed during the period when all young flew out of the nests and even then it should not be drastic, gradually from edges towards the center.

Beside this, it is indicative that the Reserve in certain localities in grows with invasive, woody, weed plants like hawthorn, blackthorn, acacia, dog-rose etc. and nobody northers with this. On the other hand, the Institute is mostly interested in herd grazing and mowing for the simple reason that these activities are of use especially on spaces which are under steppe short grass, especially important for Bustards. Just here flocks of sheep and cow herds are let in as to "sustain habitats ".

In the center of the Reserve in protected zone A, hunting woods already grew used for hunting Turtle Doves (*Streptopelia turtur*) and nobody cares for this. And this afforestation of the Reserve we filed. Nobody responded and the woods have already grown.

Verbal statement of Mr. Lorant Miklos was mentioned who is the International coordinator for the protection of the Great Bustard , that in the "central part of the Reserve there is not enough of mowing". We would not go into explaining anyones statements, someone who arrives for an hour into the Reserve can not view the entire Reserve and its state during the whole year. We do not know on which locality he exactly was, but how much mowing takes place, we will show on an example from the year 2015 when we submitted a complaint to the agricultural inspection which determined that the

HA „Perjanica“ mowed 896,39.36ha but many others peoples also mowed. Of course, the Menager mowed the most in the central part of the Reserve which has an area of about 1000ha. It is not difficult to evaluate how much was mowed during the unfavourable period for the Bustards and such a state repeated every year. According to the report of the republican agricultural inspector No. 270-320-00355/2015-04 from 24.07.2015 and official note No. 270-320-00355/2015-04 from 10.8.2015, **Hunting Association ‘PERJANICA’** from Mokrin, have in the economic period for years 2014/2015i, without lawful basis, used agricultural land in government possession in the Municipality of Kikinda, Survey plots at KO Mokrin with an area of **896,39.36 ha**.

The amount of compensation for the use of agricultural land in government ownership, which is the object of the stated fact, for the economic year 2014/2015 the Serbian dinar counter value is 378.697,03 EUR (letter from Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, Sector for agricultural land, Belgrade, No. III-01-320-165/2015). Of course, the Hunting Association Perjanica has still not paid this and has no intention in doing so.

7.5 Dead individuals, findings

It is know to us that authorities do not have relevant data on the found dead Great Bustard individuals, which were not killed by foxes, but were poisoned and the corpses were consequently pulled around by foxes. We know for certain that from one corps of a Great Bustard appeared a black mass which is detected after poisoning with carbofuran. This Bustard was later withdrawn by a fox, which itself then died for which data and photos forwarded the now deceased keeper of the Reserve Željko Reljin.

7.6 Applied measures for preserving the Great Bustard and Reserve

Applied measures for preserving the Great Bustard and Reserve do not exist. There are only issued conditions for activities that harm the Great Bustards, which bring benefits ascertain individuals.

7.8 It is true, various factors of threat are present in the Reserve, some of them we have listed, but they have not been eliminated but are sustained, although it was more than clear that they have a harmful effect on the Great Bustards. Not one of the mentioned government institutions does not do its job and there are no circumstances which could improve the state in the Reserve. Securing adequate conditions for the increase of the Great Bustard population on the territory of the Republic of Serbia - do not exist.

On the basis of everything layed out, huge documentation and photos which we have already submitted but also new ones in 2017 which will be submitted, we conclude that the recommendations No. 157 (2011) on the status of the candidate for Emerald area and directives on criteria for their naming, in this case are not applied, as well as the letter from the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection No. 37-00-9/2017-17 from 04.04.2017 (now Ministry for Environmental Protection) is not based on facts, is not correct.

We disagree with the explanations of the Institute which for everything blames the "predator species", since all these predator species and Great Bustards lived since forever together and shared the same space, much before there existed an Institute for Nature Protection, with proof that hunting of the Great Bustards was the greatest threatening factor, the tiling of earth and converting pastures into fields and the introduction of pesticides and their harmful effects there is no need to discuss.

Under conditions when the appearance of the terrain continuously changes, as is the case in the Reserve of the Great Bustard, nests are possible anywhere but there is nobody to monitor and react before their destruction and when they have been destroyed, this is hidden. So, there is no unexpected place for nests, especially in alfalfa, which is mowed already from May, thus nests in alfalfa being destroyed. An alarm should had been raised when it was noticed that the number of birds has fallen and that there are no young, but they have not, even now the "professionals" of the Institute write untruths and do not admit what is evident. Much information has been numbed and nothing was written on their negligence. Consequently, not admitting of problems and personal mistakes, it is not possible to implement measures of protection.

To be absolutely clear, there is no "phenomena", other than logical consequences of destructive acts of human factors and first through the persons of Biljana Panjković, Nikola Stojnić, Slobodan Puzović, Gordana Pavkov, now Vladimir Galić and Ognjenka Nikolić, and the Manager the Hunting Association "Perjanica". The only way to stop this "phenomena", is to remove these persons from the Special Nature Reserve "Pasture of the Great Bustard" onto which none of them should not have any influence and to be sanctioned according to laws of the Republic of Serbia.

Great Bustards have no benefit from untruths and covering the true state in the Reserve, on the contrary. The entire year of 2017 despite recommendations from the Bern Convention Secretariat, passed identically as all previous years.

Conclusion:

1. It is not enough to only expand the area of the Reserve without sharpening measures of protection, these measures must be declared by a new Decree and they must be implemented by the new Manager (we recommended on the 19th of April 2017, this to be the Association for the Protection of the Great Bustard from Mokrin, up to now no answer). The Ministry must be more active in the protection of the Reserve. It is understandable that these activities must be monitored by new professionals from the Regional Institute for Nature Protection and regional Secretariat for Urbanism and Environmental Protection, who should be willing to cooperate with professionals in protecting the Great Bustard and its habitat from Europe who would transfer their knowledge and experience.
2. The state in the Reserve throughout the year 2017 was bad and uncharged compared to previous periods, as a consequence of all we have written to the Secretariat of the Bern Convention, there was no improvement in the Reserve contrary to our aims, only to be utilized as pressure and mistreatment of our colleague from within the Reserve Joca Jančića which is unacceptable. It is evident that the letter of the Ministry, as well as the activities of the relevant authorities do not tend to improve the population status of the great Bustard, their only purpose being search for alibies for poor work, seeking benefits for individuals utilizing public property, as well as putting pressure and humiliating our colleague within the Reserve, Joca Jančić.
3. Nobody from outside will not help our Great Bustards if there does not exist willingness to do this and if our government authorities continue to neglect the true state of facts and reject to undertake true measures of protection.

We would like to ask You to within Your authority influence the authorities in the Republic of Serbia in order to improve the current state in the Special Nature Reserve "Pastures of the great Bustard", bring everything in order and in this way give a chance for the recovery of the Great Bustard population in Serbia to recover.

Respectful Miss Iva Obretenova, we are grateful to You for the time taken and help. This updated report to the Bureau is unfortunately long, but there is so much material that it is impossible to illustrate the state in the field more concise. Thank you in advance.

Kind Regards,

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Save the nature!

Links:

1. Video of 10 adult Great Bustards in the Reserve on date 04.09.2017.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73ruOj4vE9c>
2. Video of 3 adult Great Bustards in the Reserve on date 22.09.2017.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etSYRtVTYBU>
3. Video of a pair of Stone Curlews (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) within electric fenced livestock pen belonging to Jančić, 08.06.2017.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LW9Ot-yQzQU&t=19s>