

Press Release

Satellite Telemetry of Lesser Florican in Saurashtra

Gujarat is home to three species of bustards- Great Indian Bustard, Lesser Florican, locally known as '*Khadmor*' and Macqueen's Bustard locally known as '*Houbara*'. Of these, Lesser Florican is the smallest bustard species and endemic to the Indian subcontinent and listed as Endangered as per IUCN. Its population is declining rapidly in its native range with the global population estimated to be less than 700 individuals. The major population during the breeding season (monsoon) is found in the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are the other range states of the species. Their habitats during the non-breeding season are yet unknown but believed to be in the south and south-east India. Their sightings in India other than the breeding season have become rare and no prudent information regarding their migration is available till now. The highest population density of Lesser Florican during the breeding season is found in and around Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar followed by Kutch in Gujarat. Every year, the Gujarat Forest Department regularly monitors the population in Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar during the monsoon season.

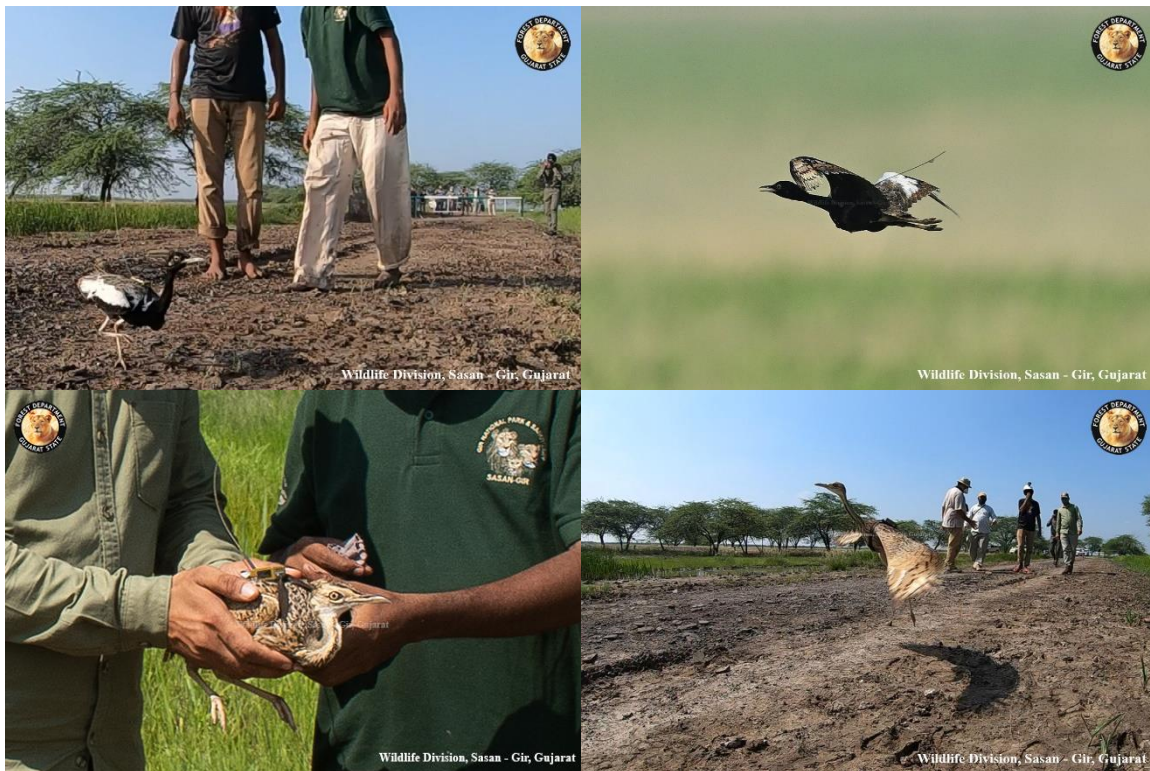
Looking at the rapid decline in the population and to plan the future conservation strategies, it was important to understand the movement and habitat use of Lesser Floricans in the breeding and non-breeding seasons. Therefore, a project was developed by Wildlife Division Sasan-Gir and submitted to the central government by Gujarat Forest Department to tag Lesser Floricans. The project was subsequently approved, and consultations and discussions with international and national bustard experts were held. Consequently, two Solar PTTs (Platform Transmitter Terminals) suitable for the species were procured by Gujarat Forest Department.

The exercise for tagging Lesser Floricans was carried out between 01/09/2020 to 05/09/2020 at Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar, wherein thorough field survey and observations were carried out and one male and one female Lesser Floricans were tagged with PTTs following safety protocols and proper procedure with the help of skilled and experienced trappers. This is the first time Gujarat Forest Department has deployed PTTs on birds. It is also important to note that it is the first time that a female Lesser Florican has been tagged in the world, which will provide vital information on their movement and help in developing insights in the breeding ecology of the species. The tagging will help in obtaining data regarding the movement, habitat preference and ranging patterns of the species and allow monitoring of the individuals on a regular basis. This information is very crucial in devising conservation strategies for the species in its breeding and non-breeding habitats.

The entire exercise was carried out under the direction and guidance of Shri Shyamal Tikadar, IFS, PCCF (Wildlife) & CWLW, Gujarat State, Gandhinagar, Shri

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D.T. Vasavada, IFS, CCF Wildlife Circle, Junagadh and supervision of Dr. Mohan Ram, IFS, DCF Wildlife Division, Sasan-Gir. The bustard experts involved included Shri Devesh Gadhvi, Shri Kedar Gore from The Corbett Foundation and Dr. Indra Gadhvi, Honorary Wildlife Warden of Bhavnagar District. Shri Mahesh Trivedi, ACF and forest staff of Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar assisted and supported the exercise. The scientific documentation and necessary facilitation during the exercise were carried out by Dr. Dhawal Mehta and Shri Karshan Vala who are associated for the research work with the Wildlife Division, Sasan-Gir.



PTT Tagged Lesser Florican Male (above) and Female (below) at the time of release.

Deputy Conservator of Forests,
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