

160 Great Bustard

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GREAT BUSTARD (*Otis tarda*)

IDENTIFICATION

98-102 cm. A very big species with grey head and neck; upperparts marked with black and cinnamon bars; white underparts; wing with white coverts and black and white flight feathers. Only **males** have in **breeding** plumage a rufous band on breast and elongated moustachial feathers at sides of chin.

SIMILAR SPECIES

This species is unmistakable.

SEXING

In **breeding** plumage, **male** with head and neck blue grey; large chestnut band on breast; long moustachial feathers at both sides of chin; tertials white with black margin along tips, the innermost with black and cinnamon bars. In **non breeding** plumage similar to **female**, without moustachial feathers and lacking the chestnut pectoral band (but with chestnut patches on both sides of breast), but tertials are whiter and upperparts with deeper cinnamon colour. **Female** with head and neck ash grey; without pectoral band or with only pale cinnamon traces; inner tertials with black and cinnamon bars less wide than **male**; without moustachial feathers at both sides of chin.

Size is a very useful character for sexing: in **adult** birds, **male** with wing longer than 59 cm; **female** with wing shorter than 49 cm. **CAUTION:** young birds have always smaller sizes.

AGEING

3 types of age in **females** and 4 in **males** can be recognized:

Juvenile with dark crown; upperparts and lesser and median wing coverts with cinnamon bars, narrower and closer than **adult**; narrow and yellow buff tail feathers, with two black bars; flight feathers narrow and with duller black than **adult**; primaries with larger white patch on bases and pale buff tips; secondaries with white tips; alula with similar colour than primaries.

1st year autumn/2nd year spring with retained juvenile outer primaries and a variable number of secondaries; body feathers, alula, wing coverts, tertials and most of the tail coverts can be also retained; **males** can have in **spring** a short moustache.

2nd year autumn/3rd year spring in **males** still retaining the outermost juvenile primaries, which will be very eroded.

Adult with grey crown; upperparts and lesser and median wing coverts with cinnamon bars wither and deeper than **juvenile**; wide and white (except the cinnamon central pair) tail feathers, with only one black bar; flight feathers wider and with deep black than **juvenile**; primaries with smaller white patch on bases and grey tips; secondaries without white tips; alula grey or white.

CAUTION: during some years (**subadult** birds) **females** have very grey head and breast and, in **males**, the length of moustachial feathers and amount and intensity of cinnamon on chest in **breeding** plumage increase with age, but it is not possible to give an exact age using these characters due to the variation in the period needed to acquire the typical **adult** plumage.

PHENOLOGY

| I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII | VIII | IX | X | XI | XII |
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MOULT

Complete **postbreeding** moult, changing body feathers each year and spending two years in change flight feathers; moult period is between July and October. Duration of **postjuvenile** moult is 2 years in **females** and 3 years in **males**; body feathers, some wing coverts, inner primaries and tertials and the central pair of tail feathers are moulted in **1st year**; the other juvenile feathers are changed in **2nd year** but **males** can still retain the outer primaries till **3rd year**. On late winter this species has a **prebreeding** moult acquiring males the **breeding** plumage.

STATUS IN ARAGON

Resident, with breeding pairs in the Ebro Basin and open plains of Sistema Iberico.