

Nature Notes

Junior Ranger



BUSTARDS

Once, this large and unusual bird could be found almost anywhere there was open country. Now it is only common on the Barkly Tableland, the Gulf Country, Cape York and the Kimberley. However, you occasionally see it on the fringes of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

The **Australian Bustard** is also known as the Kori Bustard or the Bush or Plains Turkey.

Tall, long-necked Bustards might be spotted walking stately with heads held high, along the ground in grassy areas of the north. They're nomadic birds that travel large distances around the country like Emus. But unlike the Emu, they can fly very well. They chase the rain because they know there will be plenty of food afterwards.

They breed during all months in the Top End. The mating display of the male is spectacular. He inflates a large neck pouch which touches the ground. He then walks around booming and roaring to attract females. He may mate with more than one. There is no nest, eggs are just laid on bare ground and the female takes care of them and the chicks all by herself.

Australian Bustard
Ardeotis australis



WORK OUT ITS NAME

During the hot part of the day, Bustards shelter under shrubs. One shrub they like in the Top End has beautiful pink flowers in the dry season.

Work out its common name by tracing the Bustard's track to the shrub and writing down each letter you come across.

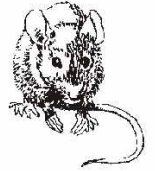


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Grasshopper

Bustards are birds of grassland areas including pastoral lands and airfields. They eat grasses, seeds and fruits, as well as large numbers of crickets, grasshoppers and other insects, small mammals like mice and small reptiles like skinks and dragons.



House mouse

Bustards are now very rare in the southern half of Australia. The introduction of sheep, cattle and rabbits and wheat farming changed the habitat where they used to live. Larger flocks are more likely to be seen across the Top End where there has been less development to date. However, you are still more likely to see them alone or in small groups, usually all of the same sex.

But we must be careful; if we want to save our wildlife then we must save the bush!

The European Fox has also preyed on Bustards and other native animals since it was brought to Australia in the 1840's. People also still continue to illegally shoot and kill this bird today.

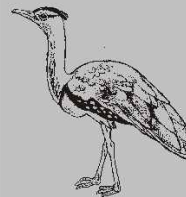


European Fox

POOR BUSTARDS!

Use this number code to work out what else has helped wipe out the poor Bustard.

1=A	5=E	9=I	13=M	17=Q	21=U	25=Y
2=B	6=F	10=J	14=N	18=R	22=V	26=Z
3=C	7=G	11=K	15=O	19=S	23=W	
4=D	8=H	12=L	16=P	20=T	24=X	



13 1 14 25 5 14 4 5 4 21 16 15 14 16 5 15 16 12 5 ' 19

4 9 14 14 5 18 20 1 2 12 5 19 1 2 15 18 9 7 9 14 1 12

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16 5 15 16 12 5 19 20 9 12 12 19 8 15 15 20 1 12 15 20

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Want to learn more about birds?

Check out the affordable field guides *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by either *Simpson & Day* or the one by *Pizzey & Knight*. Another good book is the *Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*.

