



Which is the heaviest flying bird in India? Well, friends, it's me – The Great Indian Bustard. I feel proud to be known as the 'Great Indian' Bustard. I have more than 30 different names in various Indian languages. In Marathi, I am known as 'Maldhok' or 'Hoom'. I can weigh up to 18 kilos and can stand up to four feet in height – reaching up to your shoulders or even higher! I have got a long white neck; brown wings, tall yellow legs and a black cap on my head. My wife – Mrs Bustard is smaller and slimmer than I am and her neck is not white. But I have heard humans say that we both look impressive!

I live on grasslands and deserts along with my other friends including *chinkara*, blackbuck and larks. I eat everything including snakes, lizards, small fruits and berries and all sorts of insects. That's a very healthy habit! But grasshoppers and beetles are my favourite food items.

When it starts raining, we all gather at our favourite grasslands where there are no people to disturb us. I perform a wonderful dance by gulping air in the special feathery pouch attached below my neck. This pouch helps me to produce a resonating sound similar to the one produced by the cow - 'Hoooooom'. I dance in joy with puffed out feathers and cocked up tail and dropped down wings. It helps me to impress my soul mate.

You know that we birds lay eggs and our young ones hatch out of eggs. Mother GIB lays just one egg directly on the ground. We don't believe in building nests – but

we have a special trick to protect our eggs from predators. The egg looks like a stone. Monitor lizards, foxes, dogs, pigs, snakes and eagles are enemies of my egg and chick, but my wife protects the egg from all of them. By the time our young one hatches out of the egg, rains arrive. There's plenty of grass, swarming with insects – fresh food for my family. Young ones of other birds soon fly away from the nest, but a Great Indian Bustard mother and chick stay together for nearly one year. The chick learns many good habits from the mother.

You may have heard about a great human friend of ours – Dr Salim Ali. He had even suggested that we should be given the status of the 'National Bird' of our country but the honour went to our beautiful relative – the peacock. I am happy to tell you that I am the State bird of Rajasthan. We have got ten sanctuaries for our protection but sadly, our number is still going down. We used to live in all parts of India. But slowly the growing population of man pushed us away from more than 90 percent of our home regions. We are afraid of hunters that kill us for fun. We also die due to electric power-lines that we can't see while flying. We are losing our homes. Today, only the last 200 of us are left in the world. We need your support and love in order to survive. Can you help us?

You can write letters to your leaders and make an appeal to help us. You can make my drawing and submit it to your teacher. You can discuss this with your parents. Come to see us at a sanctuary, because now you will not see us in other places. And who knows, if humans don't help us, none of us will be left on the earth. You will only see us in pictures.

- Dr Pramod Patil



- **pouch** : Here, it means a pocketlike space.
- **resonating** : producing a loud, clear and deep sound

- **predators** : animals that hunt, kill and eat other animals

POINTERS

1. Read the passage aloud.
2. You are going to meet a Great Indian Bustard very soon. Prepare at least 10 questions to interview him.
3. Play the roles of an interviewer and a Great Indian Bustard and present the interview in the classroom.
4. Write a letter to your friend about the Great Indian Bustard. You may use the following points :
 - Why we need to protect the bird.
 - What you plan to do to help the bird.
5. Form pairs and decide whether the following statements are those of a Great Indian Bustard or not.

Statements	Great Indian Bustard	Some Other Bird
(a) I am the heaviest flying bird in India.		
(b) I am known as <i>Maldhok</i> or <i>Hoom</i> in Marathi.		
(c) I live in mountainous regions.		
(d) I don't like grasshoppers or beetles.		
(e) We don't believe in building nests.		
(f) Our chick stays with the mother for a period of nearly one year.		
(g) I am the State bird of Maharashtra.		
(h) We have been pushed away from more than 90 percent of our home regions.		

6. With the help of the internet and other sources, obtain more information about the critically endangered birds and animals in India. Find the names of their sanctuaries.

Some critically endangered birds and animals in India :

‘CR’ or critically endangered birds or animals are those that are likely to become extinct in the wild. We may never see them again.

- Forest Owlet • Indian Vulture • Siberian Crane
- Deolali Minnow (fish) • Asiatic Cheetah • Himalayan Wolf
- Amboli Toad

7. Prepare a poster on the need for the conservation of the Great Indian Bustard.
8. Write a short autobiography of any bird or animal of your choice.
9. Make a list of the channels available on your TV under the following categories: News, entertainment, sports, movies, music, etc.
Which are the channels on which you can watch programmes on animals, wild life, conservation of environment, etc.?
10. Ask your parents to show you TV programmes on animals, wild life and conservation on channels like the following :
DD National, National Geographic, Discovery and Animal Planet.
11. You have won a prize to visit a wild life sanctuary or National Park in Africa or Australia. Choose a location, read about it. Imagine that you are visiting it and write a letter to your friend about it.
12. Language Study : Identify the following from the list given in the box below :
4 nouns, 4 verbs, 4 adjectives, 4 adverbs, 4 pronouns.

bird wonderful friends gather humans we I
healthy grasslands helps directly protect arrive
together away happy slowly afraid you us
