

# Results of the “4<sup>th</sup> Synchronous Winter Count of the Great Bustard in Central Europe on the 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2024” within the LIFE project “Great Bustard” (extended period 10<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2024)

Efforts to protect the great bustard are showing success  
throughout Central Europe



**"Cross-border protection of the Great Bustard in Central Europe"**  
**Organised by the Great Bustard Project with the help of the partners**

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### **Citation**

LIFE Great Bustard (2024): Results of the “4<sup>th</sup> Synchronous Winter Count of the Great Bustard in Central Europe on the 13th & 14th of January 2024” within the LIFE project “Great Bustard” (extended period 10th – 17th of January 2024). Efforts to protect the great bustard are showing success throughout Central Europe. "Cross-border protection of the Great Bustard in Central Europe" (LIFE15 NAT/AT/000834).

## 1. Note of thanks

The “4<sup>th</sup> Synchronous Winter Count of the Great Bustard in Central Europe on the 13th & 14th of January 2024” was organised by the LIFE Great Bustard project "Cross-border protection of the Great Bustard in Central Europe" with the help of the partners. The 4<sup>th</sup> count has been coordinated by the team of the Technical Office for Biology Raab (TB Raab GmbH) for Austrian Society for Great Bustard Conservation (ÖGG) and organized by the National Coordinator of the 7 countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia) in Europe.

First, we want to thank everyone of the volunteers who participated in the 4<sup>th</sup> Synchronous Winter Count of the Great Bustard in Central Europe. Special thanks are going to the national coordinators, who helped us to organise all the volunteers in the different countries.

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## 2. The Great Bustard Project

Austria (AT) and Hungary (HU) have been very active in Great Bustard conservation in the last years. After two Austrian LIFE and LIFE+ projects and one LIFE project in Hungary now both EU-countries started together a huge cross-border protection project for Great Bustards in Central Europe. Based on the great success of the former measures the objectives of this LIFE project are to continue intensive habitat management efforts, reduce the threat of collision with power lines - for many years the no. 1 mortality factor for Great Bustards - and reduce predation. The LIFE project aims to support and maximise the effectiveness of the cross-border protection in Austria and Hungary through coordination of conservation measures and optimal communication.

More information on [www.grosstrappe.at](http://www.grosstrappe.at)



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### 3. The 4<sup>th</sup> LIFE Great Bustard Winter Count

For many years the breeding population of the great bustard in Central Europe have been recorded by the bustard specialists in winter. In 2017 it was possible for the first time to count in all 7 countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia) with potential breeding occurrences of the great bustard on the same day. 1,751 Great Bustards were recorded, whereby in the Eastern Pannonian part only 69% of the individuals could be recorded on this day, and not the otherwise usual 90 to 95% (Table 2, Figure 1). In the years 2018 to 2020, despite several efforts, it was not possible to implement synchronous counts in all countries. The reason for this was the mostly mild winters and the resulting impassable dirt roads, which mostly prevented a census of the East Pannonian population.

In 2021, the period of the counting was therefore significantly extended in order to be able to record at least 90% of the individuals actually occurring throughout Central Europe. A total of 2,252 individuals were counted (Table 3, Figure 2).

The results of the synchronous censuses in winter 2022 showed that the population of the Great Bustard in Central Europe has increased by approx. 21% in the last 4 years (2017-2022). A total of 2,444 individuals were counted. The strongest relative increase was in the German population, which increased by approx. 43% (from 221 in 2017 to 315 individuals in 2022). The West Pannonian population has grown by approx. 37% (from 463 to 634 individuals) and the East Pannonian population has probably increased by approx. 16% in real terms, from an estimated 1,388 in 2017 (on the day of counting itself only 1,067 Great Bustards could be counted) to 1,495 individuals in 2022 (Table 1, Figure 4).

In 2023 only in some countries were counted. The results in 2024 show again a slightly increase in the Central European Population. In total 2,723 individuals were counted, which means a growth by approx. 11% (2022-2024). The strongest relative increase was in the East-Pannonian population, which increased by approx. 16% (2022-2024). The West-Pannonian population has grown by approx. 7% (2022-2024) and the German population slightly decreased by approx. 4%. This means that there is an increase in the Central European population by approx. 56% from the year 2017 to 2024 (Table 1, Figure 5).

Fortunately, the protection efforts in almost all Central European countries with great bustard occurrences are already showing short-term success. The measures to reduce collisions on power lines as part of the LIFE project “Great Bustard” are expected to lead to a further increase in the population, especially in the medium and long term. How much the three sub-populations will actually increase depends primarily on the quality of the habitat (thus primarily on agricultural measures), but of course also on the populations of the predators e.g. red fox, raccoon dog, sea eagle and imperial eagle (Figure 2 to 5).

Table 1: Results of the synchronous winter count of all 3 Great Bustard populations in Central Europe in 2017, 2021, 2022 and 2024.

Region /Year	2017	2021	2022	2024
German population (Germany)	221	352	315	303
West-Pannonian population (Border Region Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary & Slovakia)	463	620	634	681
East-Pannonian population (Hungary, Serbia & Romania)	1,067 (1,388)	1,553	1,495	1,739
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,751 (2,072)</b>	<b>2,525</b>	<b>2,444</b>	<b>2,723</b>



Figure 1: The Great Bustard, one of the heaviest flying birds in the world © Franz Josef Kovacs.

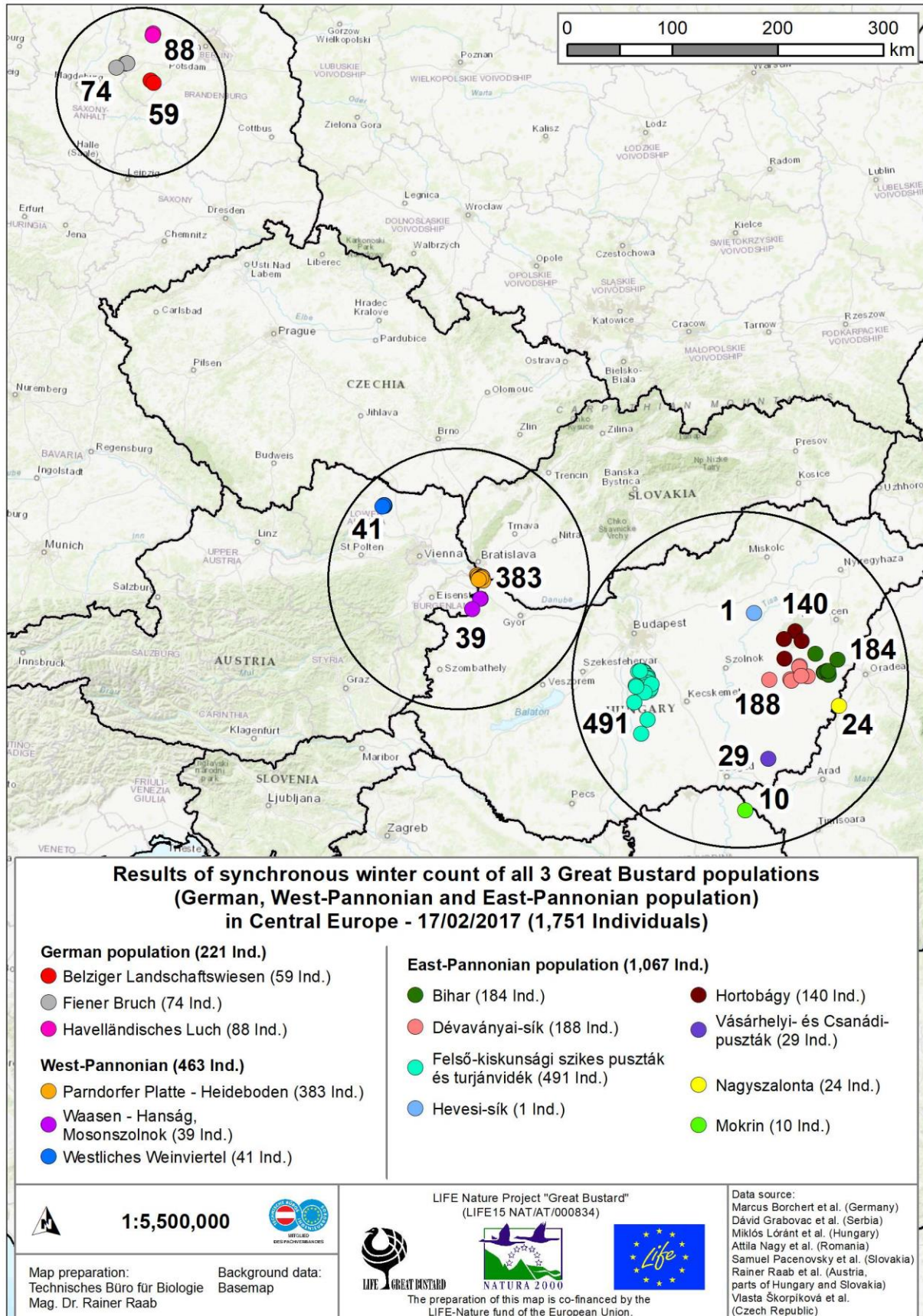


Figure 2: Results of the synchronous winter count of all 3 Great Bustard populations in Central Europe in 2017. (East Pannonian population estimated 1,388 in 2017. On the day of counting itself only 1,067 Great Bustards could be counted).

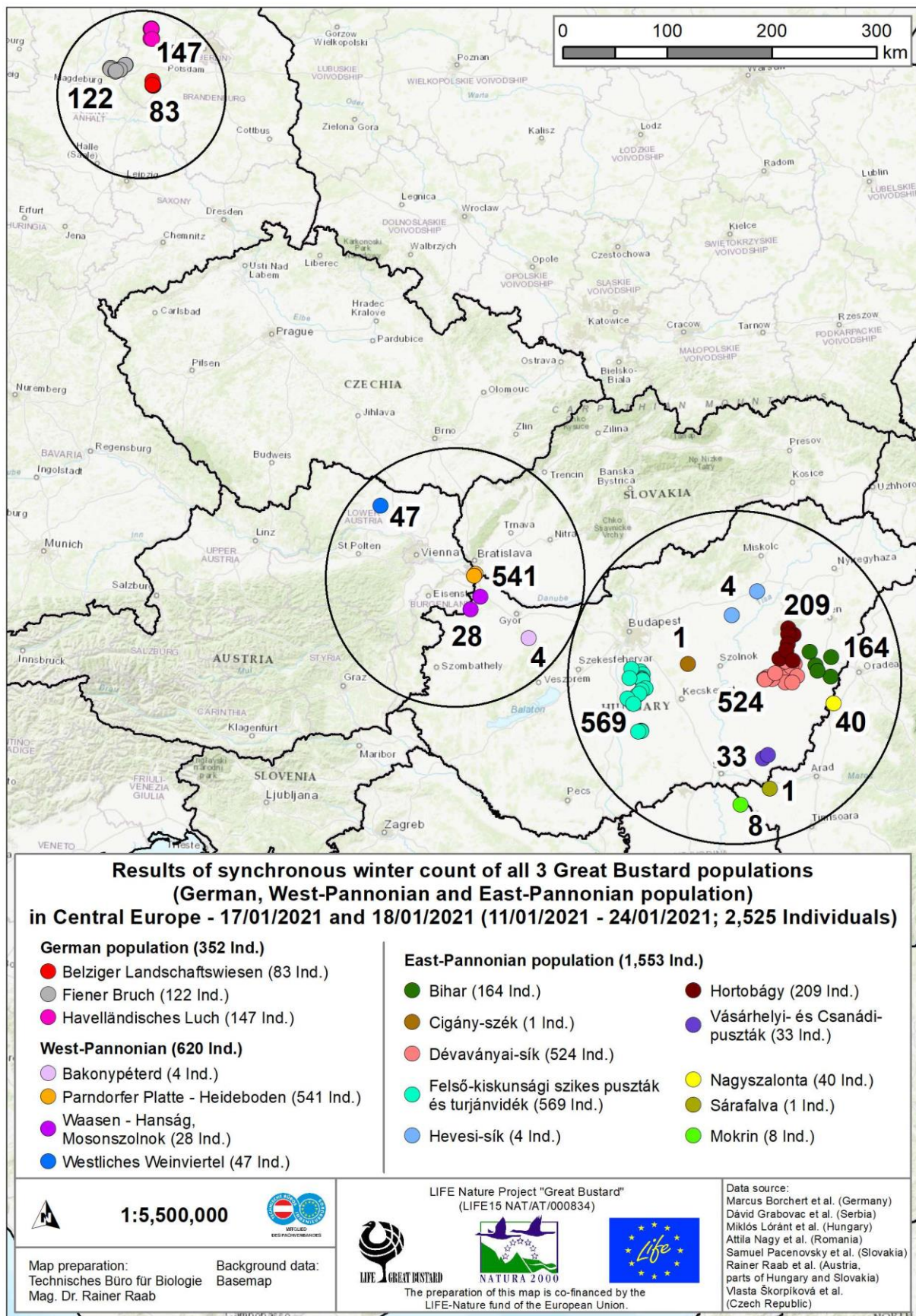


Figure 3: Results of the synchronous winter count off all 3 Great Bustard populations in Central Europe in 2021.



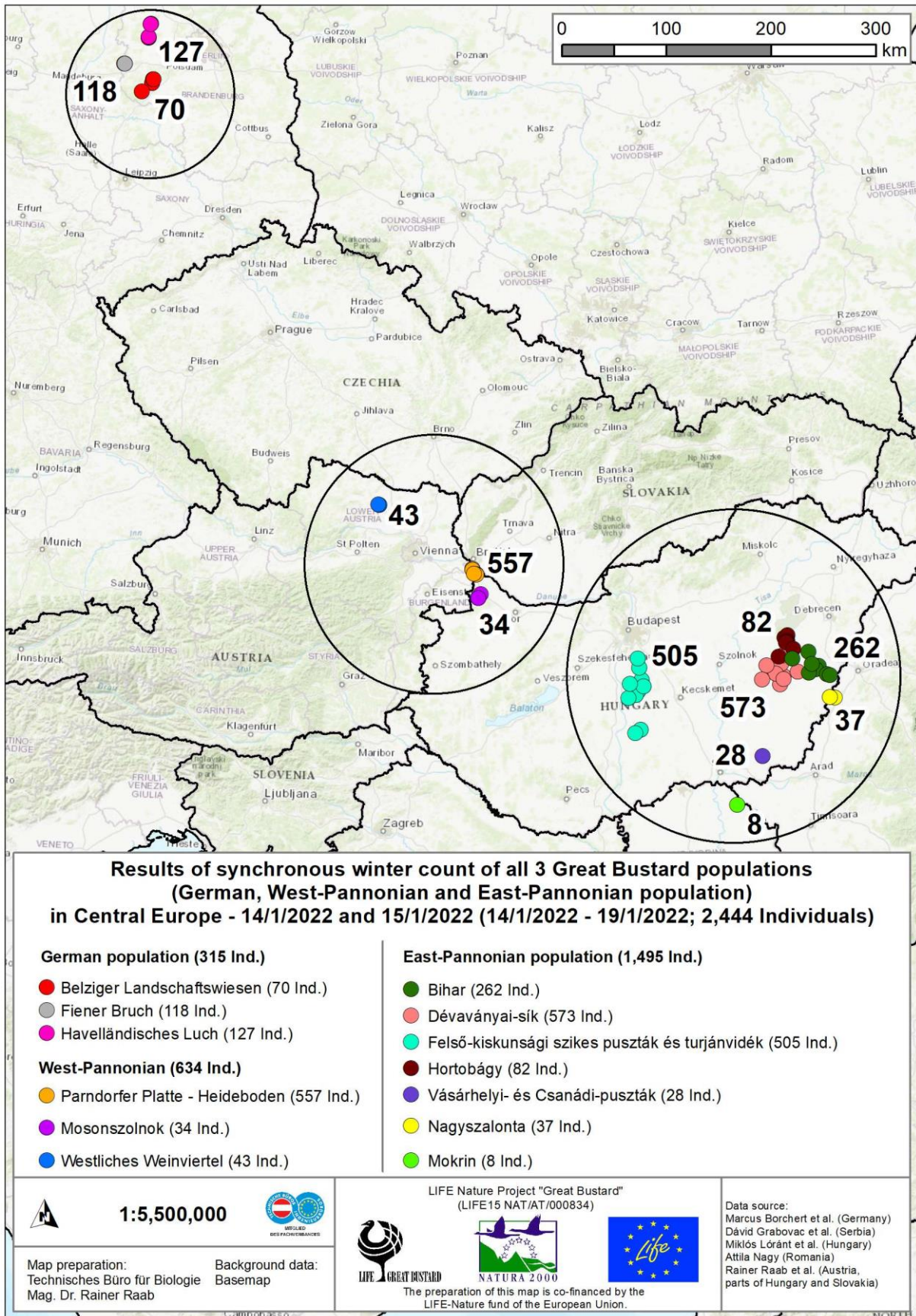


Figure 4: Results of the synchronous winter count off all 3 Great Bustard populations in Central Europe in 2022.

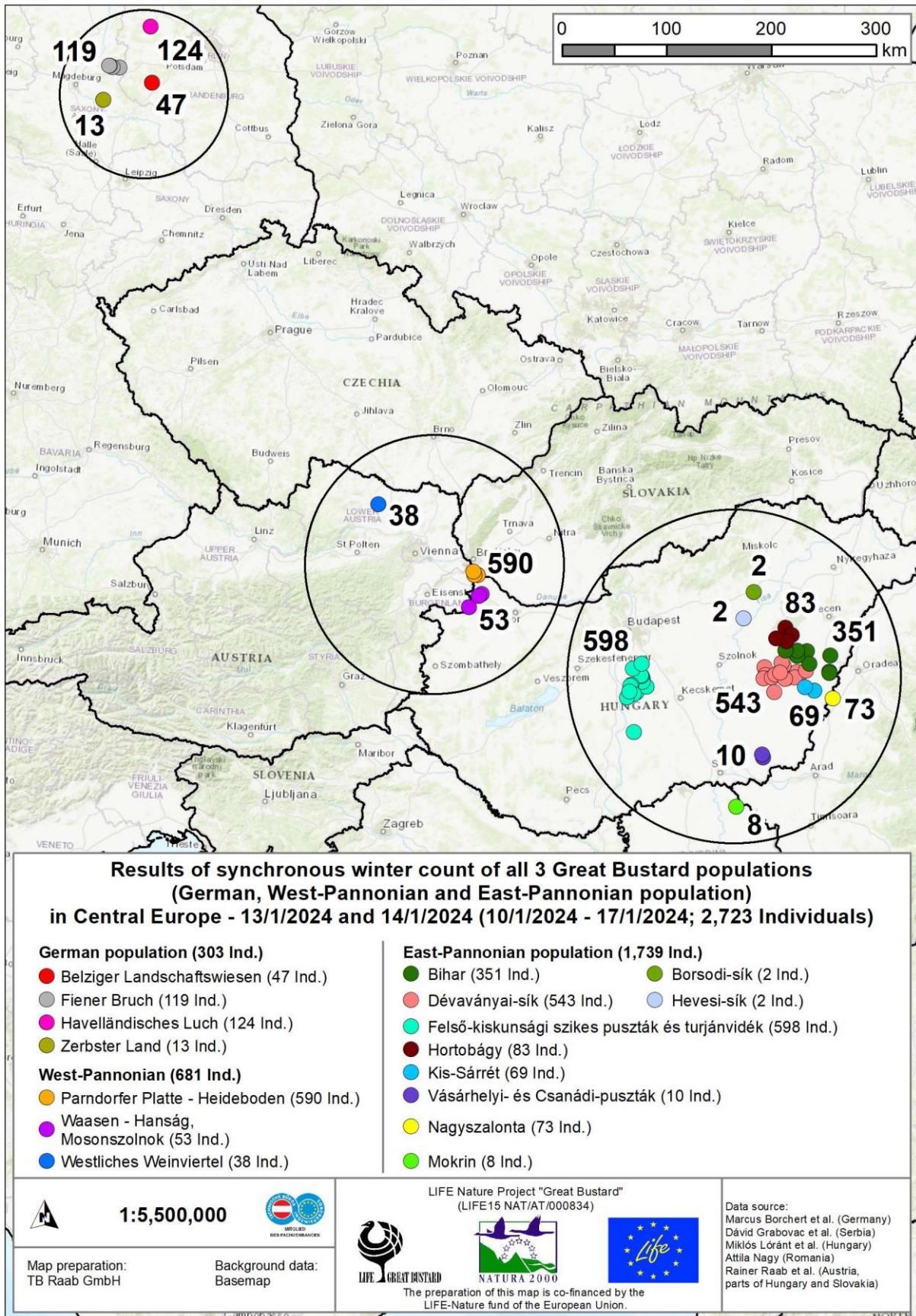


Figure 5: Results of the synchronous winter count off all 3 Great Bustard populations in Central Europe in 2024.