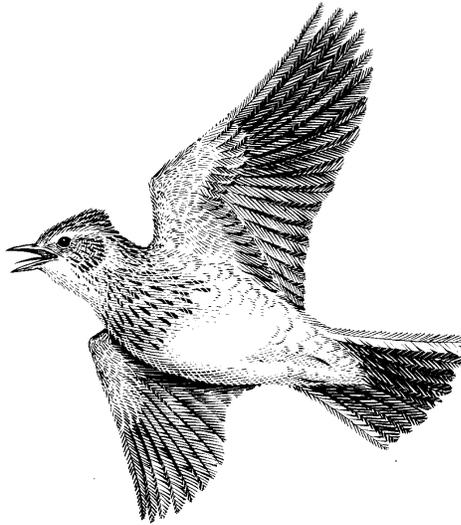


# Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

## 1 Definition

*The Skylark is a bird of open habitats such as heathland, grassland, dunes and saltmarsh, and is characteristic of arable habitats in East Anglia. Although still common, it has undergone a large decline in recent years. It feeds amongst short vegetation and nests on the ground.*



## 2 Current status

### 2.1 National

One of the most widespread birds of the British Isles, with over 2 million breeding pairs, the resident Skylark population is joined in winter by a significant proportion of the northern European population - possibly up to 25 million individuals. The UK breeding population of Skylark on lowland farmland declined by 61% between 1971 and 1995.

### 2.2 Local

The Skylark is common and widespread in Suffolk as a breeding and wintering bird throughout the open countryside. However, numbers have declined rapidly in central Suffolk, the main cereal-growing areas and the population is has declined throughout the county since the 1980s.

### 2.3 Natural Areas

All

## 3 Current factors affecting the Skylark in Suffolk

- Winter cereals grow too dense to allow Skylarks to raise more than a single brood. This is insufficient to sustain the population.
- Intensive management of arable fields has reduced broad-leaved weed seeds and insect prey through the use of agro-chemicals.
- Intensive management of grasslands and high stocking rates.
- Silage fields are often cut too frequently which destroys nests and exposes Skylarks to predators.
- Decline in area of weedy stubbles may reduce over-winter survival.

## **4 Current action**

### **4.1 Legal Status**

The Skylark is protected under the EC Birds Directive and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

### **4.2 Management, research and guidance**

- The Sustainable Arable Farming for an Improved Environment (SAFFIE) Project is researching novel ways of making winter cereal fields more attractive to skylarks.
- A national Species Action Plan has been prepared and agreed by RSPB and the country agencies.
- Skylark plots have been included as an option in the pilot Entry Level Scheme, due to be rolled out nationally in 2005.
- Provision of cereal field margins in the Suffolk River Valleys ESA scheme has benefitted Skylark numbers recently.

## **5 Action plan objectives and targets**

- 1 *Maintain the Breeding Bird Survey population index for Skylarks at or above the 1995 level.*
- 2 *Maintain the current range of Skylark in Suffolk as measured in the 1993 Provisional Atlas of Breeding Birds in Suffolk.*
- 3 *Create and manage suitable Skylark habitat on farmland through uptake of Agri-environment schemes.*

## 6 Skylark: Proposed action with lead agencies

Action	Date	Partners
<b>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</b>		
Ensure Entry Level and Higher Tier agri-environment schemes contain suitable prescriptions to benefit Skylark on arable land.	2004	Defra, RSPB, FWAG, EN
Promote uptake of agri-environment scheme prescriptions that are likely to benefit Skylark.	2007	FWAG, Defra, RSPB
Ensure compliance with annex III/I of EC Birds Directive and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 through provision of advice to landowners.	2007	FWAG, Defra, RSPB,
<b>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</b>		
Collate all Skylark records annually and pass records on to SBRC.	2004 2005 2006 2007	SBRC, FWAG, SWT, Landowners, RSPB, SOG
Undertake survey on farmland, encouraging landowner participation to establish Skylark numbers in Suffolk.	2005	SBRC, GCT, FWAG, SWT, Landowners, RSPB, Defra
<b>ADVISORY</b>		
Continue to provide conservation advice to land managers on field margins, set-aside management, etc to benefit Skylark.	2007	FWAG, Defra, RSPB, SOG, SWT
<b>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</b>		
Use the Skylark as example of farmland bird in decline and also 3 seek positive stories about management for Skylark in farming and local press.	2007	FWAG, SWT, Defra