

Skylark



Scientific Name:
Alauda arvensis

Current factors causing loss or decline

The causes of decline are poorly understood because population trends in habitats other than farmland are largely unknown. It is thought that autumn-sown cereals may make unsuitable nesting habitat compared with spring-sown, and dense fertilised grass is also unsuitable. Populations on upland grassland habitats are therefore less likely to be directly affected by changes in agricultural practices. A widespread switch from hay to silage production, which accelerated in Scotland during the 1980's, is thought to have adversely affected breeding productivity, due to the grass being heavily fertilised and cropped for silage in late May or early June just as Skylark chicks are about to fledge.

Local Status

Within the Greater Glasgow (Clyde) area there has been a noticeable recent decline in breeding Skylarks, especially in lowland areas. Skylarks occur within the City of Glasgow in a range of grassland habitats, including cereal crops. Their population is difficult to estimate other than through extrapolation from known local densities; it is thought to be somewhere in the region of 100-150 breeding pairs, but survey work is required to establish a more accurate figure. The traditional winter habitat of stubble fields has declined with the recent increase in autumn ploughing, and a corresponding decrease in wintering Skylarks seems to have occurred.

Current status

The **Skylark** is one of the commonest and most widespread birds in the British Isles, with a population of over two million breeding pairs. The resident population is joined in winter by a substantial number of the northern European population, although both can make onward southerly movements during spells of cold weather, particularly if there is heavy snowfall. Such hard weather movements are more usual in northern Britain. However breeding birds begin to return to territories by late February.

Conservation concern is due to the fact that the UK breeding population declined by 54% between 1969 and 1991 (UK Skylark Action Plan), and by at least another 8% between 1994 and 2000 (BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey).

Current Action

At a national scale the impact of changing farming practices on the Skylark has to be addressed at agricultural policy level, and in order to inform decision-making, various bodies are carrying out research to identify the causes of the decline. A Species Action Plan has been prepared and agreed by the RSPB and the country natural heritage agencies.

Within the City of Glasgow there have already been several local initiatives which help protect the Skylark's breeding habitat by stopping maintenance of some areas of grassland within Glasgow City Council ownership, e.g. at Hogganfield and Robroyston Parks. These sites are each supporting up to 5-6 breeding pairs. Other locally important populations are at Cathkin Braes and Windlaw Farm.



Main Locations of Skylark in Glasgow



The suitability of these and other sites will rely on appropriate management in future. There are signs that the grassland at Hogganfield Park LNR is becoming less suitable for Skylarks in areas where coarser grass species are dominating, and future management aims to provide a patchwork of short and long swards by establishing a rotational mowing regime.

Objectives and targets

The overall aim is to halt and hopefully reverse the decline of the Skylark in the City of Glasgow, with no negative impact on other UK priority species or habitats of conservation concern. The plan will aim to achieve the following key objectives:

Objective 1: To minimise loss of Skylark breeding habitat within the green belt.

Objective 2: To reverse the decline on farmland and other Skylark habitats.

Objective 3: To maximise existing or establish new populations at key sites.

Proposed Action with Lead Authorities

Action	Lead	Delivery	Objective
Policy and Legislation			
To take into account Skylark breeding status within potential development or greenbelt release sites.	RSPB	GCC-DRS	1
Site Safeguard and Management			
Negotiate/liase with farmers to encourage preservation of hay meadows, semi-improved grasslands and the use of spring-sown cereals, using appropriate agri-environment grant schemes where possible.	RSPB	FWAG, GCC-LS, GfC	1
Promote management of grasslands at key sites within Glasgow City Council ownership as suitable areas for breeding Skylarks.	RSPB	GCC-LS, GfC	1, 2, 3
Advisory			
Promote advice to farmers/landowners on management for Skylarks and update advice in the light of new research findings.	RSPB	FWAG, RSPB, GCC-LS	1, 2
Future Research and Monitoring			
Conduct surveys and censuses of breeding Skylarks on farmland and other suitable habitats within the City of Glasgow during 2002-2006.	RSPB	GCC-LS, SOC, RSPB	2, 3
Establish annual breeding Skylark monitoring programme at key sites.	RSPB	GCC-LS, SOC, RSPB	2, 3
Ensure all monitoring is co-ordinated by Clyde SOC Bird Recorder, and methodology standardised.	RSPB	GCC-LS, SOC, RSPB	2, 3
Ensure annual monitoring is undertaken at all key sites by 2005.	RSPB	GCC-LS, SOC, RSPB	2, 3
Investigate winter populations of Skylarks by surveying suitable habitat during 2002-2006.	RSPB	GCC-LS, SOC, RSPB	2, 3
Communication and Publicity			
Use the Skylark as an example when highlighting the issue of declining farmland birds.	RSPB	RSPB, GCC	1
Recruit volunteer assistance to aid with monitoring programme.	RSPB	SOC, RSPB, GCC-LS	2, 3
Liaise with Lead Agency for National Species Action Plan.	RSPB	GCC-LS, RSPB, SOC	2, 3
Review progress of plan and actions by 2006.	RSPB	GCC-LS	2, 3
Links with other action Action Plans			
It is likely that implementation of this action plan will also benefit the following priority bird species of conservation concern: Grey Partridge, Tree Sparrow, Linnets and Reed Bunting.	-	-	-
The plan should be considered in conjunction with those for Neutral and Acid Grasslands.	-	-	-

RSPB, Unit 3.1, West of Scotland Science Park, Kelvin Campus, GLASGOW G20 0SP Tel: 0141-576 2616 Fax: 0141-576 4200 email: Simon.Zisman@rspb.org.uk

Glasgow City Council: Development and Regeneration Services(GCC-DRS), Glasgow City Council: Land Services(Conservation Group) (GCC-LS(CG),

Glasgow City Council: Culture and Leisure Services (GCC-CLS), Glasgow City Council: Education Services (GCC-ES), Glasgow City Council: Land Services Countryside Ranger Service (GCC-LS(CRS),

Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC), Greenspace for Communities(GfC), British Waterways (BW), Forestry Commission (FC), Farming Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), The WISE Group (TWISE)

Glasgow Natural History Society (GNHS), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT).

Clyde Amphibian and Reptile Group (CARG), Butterfly Conservation (BC), Concern for Swifts (CFS)