

# SKYLARK

*Alauda arvensis*



**SIZE:** Around 18cm in length; wingspan around 33cm

**HABITAT:** Farmland, grassland, saltmarshes and moorland

**FOOD:** Seeds and insects

## FAST FACTS

- Skylarks are streaky brown birds with a crest. Their song has inspired many musical and literary works.
- Male skylarks can be spotted rising almost vertically from the ground before hovering effortlessly and singing at great height. Their song flights can last for up to an hour and the birds can reach 300m before descending.
- Despite their aerial activities, skylarks nest on the ground, laying 3 to 4 eggs. The nest is a hollow lined with leaves, grasses and hair. The eggs are incubated for 11 days. The parents feed the chicks on insects for their first week, then gradually introduce small quantities of shoots and seeds for a mixed diet. Chicks become independent after only 2 weeks, but skylarks need to 2 to 3 broods of young each year in order to maintain populations.

## ENDANGERED IN WANSTEAD

Skylarks are on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern. In the UK, the population halved during the 1990s, and is still declining. They are a victim of modern intensive farming. Cereals are now sown in autumn, not spring, which has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of chicks raised each year. Skylark numbers are also thought to have been affected by increased use of insecticides and weedkillers (contributing to insect declines), intensification of grazing on grasslands, and the switch from hay to silage, which results in many nests being destroyed by cutting machinery. In their preferred habitat of farmland, numbers crashed by 75% between 1972 and 1996. This makes the survival of the skylarks on Wanstead Flats - the only breeding population in inner London - even more important. In the absence of arable fields locally, skylarks construct their nests on the ground in areas of unmown grass; they also feed on areas of mown grass, such as football pitches.

## HELP PREVENT THEIR EXTINCTION

- Stick to the paths and keep dogs on a lead in the marked areas on Wanstead Flats between March and the end of August to stop ground nests being disturbed.
- Oppose plans that would create increased disturbance on Wanstead Flats, and support stricter controls on people and pets in the main breeding areas.



**More information:** [www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/skylark/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/skylark/)

Help scientists track skylark populations. Report sightings at [www.gigl.org.uk/submit-a-record/](http://www.gigl.org.uk/submit-a-record/)

