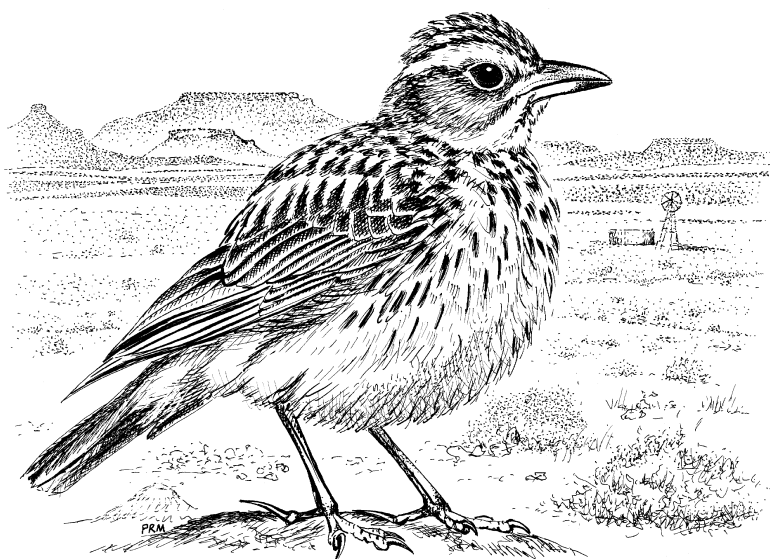




Thickbilled Lark

Dikbeklewerik

Galerida magnirostris

The Thickbilled Lark, virtually endemic to South Africa and Lesotho, is a locally common resident. Its distribution is centred on the Cape Province, western Free State, and the highlands of Lesotho. It also occurs in the extreme south of Namibia, along the Orange River. The lack of records from southwestern Namibia is surprising, since there is suitable habitat north of the Orange River and west of Rosh Pinah (2716DD) where succulent Karoo vegetation extends along the western edge of the Huns Mountains. The population size of the Thickbilled Lark is not known, but is estimated to be more than 100 000 individuals (Siegfried 1992). It is seen singly or, more often, in pairs.

It is a large, stocky bird with a heavy, yellow-based bill. It is easily confused with the 'thick-billed' race of the Sabota Lark *Mirafra sabota*, which also inhabits Karoo-veld. The crest in the Thickbilled Lark is usually held flat, but may be raised in alarm or when the bird is singing. In display, the male rises up and circles in fluttering flight. It is conspicuous, owing to its stereotyped and distinctive song, which differs markedly from that of the Sabota Lark. The atlas data can be considered generally reliable for this species.

Habitat: This species is abundant in the Succulent Karoo where it occurs on quartz plains with low mat-forming succulent plants. In the Grassy and Nama Karoos it is common but more localized to patches of succulent dwarf shrubland, usually along watercourses. It is also common

in the Alpine Grasslands on the Lesotho highlands, and in planted pastures and cereal crop-fields in the southwestern Cape Province in the fynbos biome.

Movements: The models show small dips in reporting rates in both midsummer and mid-winter in Zones 3 and 4, and a suggestion of the same trend in Zones 7 and 8. This is unlikely to be due to movements and probably reflects variability in conspicuousness because of breeding displays and calls, and perhaps vegetation height. It is certainly resident in the southern Karoo (pers. obs).

Breeding: The model for Zone 4 shows a spring and summer breeding season with an September–November peak. The general pattern for the other Zones is similar. A breeding period of August–December is given by Maclean (1993b). In the western Cape Province egg-laying spans August–November, mainly August–October (Winterbottom 1968a).

Interspecific relationships: The Thickbilled Lark overlaps in habitat with several other lark species, such as Longbilled *C. curvirostris* and Karoo *M. albescens* Larks.

Historical distribution and conservation: The Thickbilled Lark has probably increased in abundance as a result of agriculture in the southwestern Cape Province (Hockey *et al.* 1989), but there is no evidence that there have been changes in the remainder of its distribution. It is not considered threatened and Siegfried (1992) has shown that, while the species is not abundant in nature reserves, it does occur in at least 14 protected areas.

W.R.J. Dean

Recorded in 692 grid cells, 15.3%
Total number of records: 5977
Mean reporting rate for range: 20.0%

Reporting rates for vegetation types

