



## Monotonous Lark

### Bosveldlewerik

*Mirafra passerina*

The Monotonous Lark is virtually endemic to southern Africa, inhabiting woodlands and extending marginally into Angola and Zambia (Keith *et al.* 1992). It was recorded widely in northern Namibia, throughout Botswana, at scattered localities in western and southern Zimbabwe, and in the woodlands of the Transvaal and northern Cape Province. It is a lowveld species, recorded mostly from 400–1000 m. It occurs solitarily or in pairs and is often locally common, indeed abundant, when breeding. Breeding territories typically occur densely clustered at different places each year, the role of which may be a direct social advantage in mate acquisition during fast and highly erratic settlement once a suitable spot has been identified by some birds, similar to a strategy reported in other species (e.g. Herremans 1993a).

This is a distinctive species when singing, and the atlas data can be considered comprehensive and reliable. However, the Monotonous Lark is inconspicuous and difficult to identify unless it is singing. It can be confused with the Melodious Lark *M. cheniana*, but differs in having a white eyebrow that stops short of the bill, a white belly and a different display and song. The white throat of the Monotonous Lark is conspicuous when singing. These two species occupy different habitats, so confusion is unlikely over most of their respective ranges (Keith *et al.* 1992; Maclean 1993b).

**Habitat:** It occurs in a wide variety of fairly dry and open woodlands with bare and stony patches, including open shrubby *Acacia* and Mopane woodlands, and mixed broadleaved woodlands, usually where ground cover is fairly sparse. However, after rains it can occur in arid open woodland with a fairly dense cover of such annual grasses

as *Schmidtia kalahariensis* and perennial desert grasses as *Stipagrostis* spp., so the amount of ground cover may not be the critical determinant of habitat suitability. After exceptionally good rains in 1995, large numbers occurred in open, very arid parts of westcentral Namibia (C.J. Brown pers. comm.; pers. obs.). So even tree cover is not required, but some trees or bushes from which males sing and perform display flights are certainly necessary.

**Movements:** Available data suggest that this species is nomadic (Keith *et al.* 1992). It may suddenly appear in numbers after rain, breed and disappear. The distances over which it moves to reach suitable habitat after rain are not known, but it occurs sporadically in less usual habitat at localities outside of its core distribution. Particularly near the edges of its range these irregular appearances may be several years apart. The annual fluctuations shown by the models relate mostly to the timing of breeding when it sings and is most conspicuous. It is sometimes regarded as a regular intra-African migrant (Herremans 1994d; Penry 1994), but the pattern of movements of this species is far from being understood.

**Breeding:** All breeding records were from the period January–June. Egg-laying in Zimbabwe occurs October–March, in the Transvaal November–March and in the northern Cape Province February–March (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Keith *et al.* 1992). Opportunistic breeding, probably at virtually any time of the year, is likely in areas where the rainfall is variable.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is no evidence that there has been any recent change in the abundance or distribution of the Monotonous Lark in southern Africa. It is not considered threatened by habitat transformation or destruction, except possibly in the higher-rainfall parts of its range where agriculture and the removal of trees and tall bushes makes the habitat unsuitable. It may be favoured to some extent by livestock ranching and localized overgrazing of the grass and shrub layer.

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Recorded in 618 grid cells, 13.6%  
Total number of records: 1245  
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.8%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



