



Rufous-naped Lark

Rooineklewerik

Mirafra africana

The Rufous-naped Lark is a locally common resident species, widely, though discontinuously distributed in Africa south of the Sahara. It has a markedly northeastern range in southern Africa, and almost completely avoids the southwestern arid areas. During the atlas period it was most often recorded in the central Free State, KwaZulu-Natal midlands, central Transvaal, Swaziland, the central plateau of Zimbabwe and in Botswana. The distribution of the species in Namibia is patchy, with a concentration of records in the grassy plains associated with the Cuvelai drainage system entering the Etosha Pan in the north. There is an obvious region of low reporting rates in the high-lying southeastern Transvaal and adjacent north-eastern Free State high-rainfall sour grasslands, compared with the lower-lying and drier grasslands to the east and west. It is usually solitary or found in pairs, and is a common and conspicuous species in grasslands and open savanna woodlands in the summer.

One of the largest of the southern African lark species, the Rufous-naped Lark is heavy-billed and stocky, with a short crest. The rufous nape is distinctive but is not a good field character since it is only visible at close range. There is a large rufous patch on the wing that is conspicuous in flight, and the song and behaviour while singing are distinctive. In general the atlas data can be considered reliable and comprehensive.

Habitat: It occurs in a variety of habitats but all have bare patches, sparse grass cover and suitable perches in common. Optimal habitats include open grassland with

termitaria or scattered bushes and bare patches, open savanna woodland with sparse grass cover between trees, and bare patches in fallow fields and cultivated lands. The vegetation analysis shows reporting rates were highest in Miombo and Sweet Grasslands, but also high in a wide range of vegetation types, at a wide range of altitudes.

Movements: The models show a decrease in reporting rates for the winter months, probably as a result of the birds singing less and becoming less conspicuous during this period; thus there is no convincing evidence of regular seasonal movements.

Breeding: The data show spring and summer breeding, mainly September–March. This accords with general statements on breeding in this species (Keith *et al.* 1992; Maclean 1993b). In Zimbabwe, egg-laying spans July–April, mainly October–February, and in the Transvaal October–February, mainly October–November (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Interspecific relationships: The Rufous-naped Lark overlaps in habitat with several other grassland and savanna lark species, but there are no reports of associations or competitive interactions. It is not closely related to any other lark species in southern Africa; it forms a superspecies with the Redwinged Lark *M. hypermetra*, an endemic resident species in East Africa (Keith *et al.* 1992).

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence of any range contraction or reduction in abundance. The Rufous-naped Lark is not considered to be threatened by habitat destruction, but the transformation of parts of the grasslands to croplands must have had deleterious effects on population sizes in those areas. Like the Monotonous Lark *M. passerina*, it may be favoured to some extent by livestock ranching in grasslands and savannas, since grazing of the grass and shrub layer will tend to open up savanna habitats and lead to the creation of bare patches.

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Recorded in 1864 grid cells, 41.1%
Total number of records: 19 848
Mean reporting rate for range: 20.8%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



