

### Rudd's Lark

Drakensberglerik

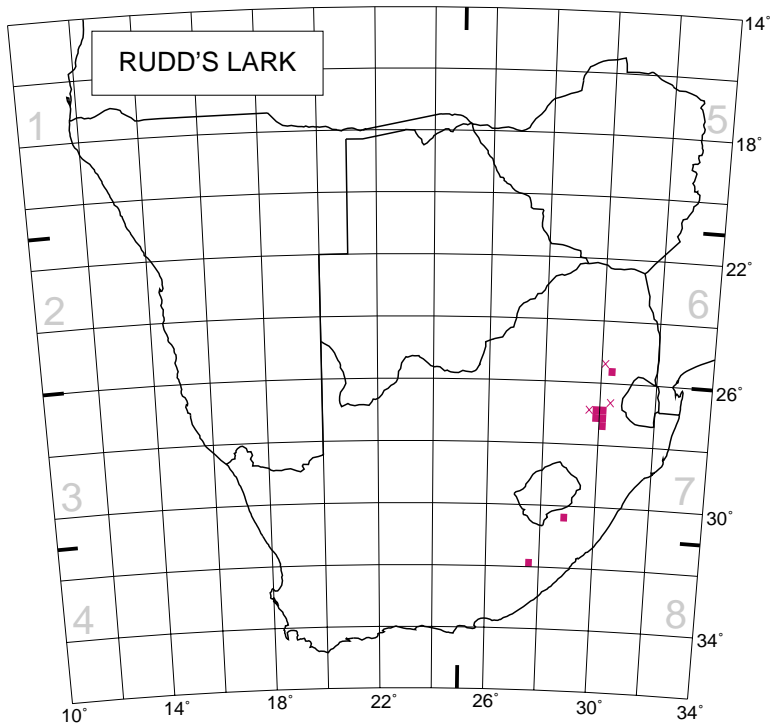
*Heteromirafra ruddi*

Rudd's Lark is endemic to South Africa; the single record from Lesotho (Jacot-Guillarmod 1961) is unsubstantiated (Hockey *et al.* 1988a) and the statement in Clancey (1980b) that it may occur in western Swaziland can be disregarded (Parker 1994). The major part of its range is centred on the region comprising adjacent parts of the southeastern Transvaal, extreme northwestern KwaZulu-Natal and extreme northeastern Free State (Hockey *et al.* 1988a). There is a small isolated population at Matatiele (3028BD), about 300 km to the south of the main range, and during the atlas period an additional locality was discovered a further 200 km to the south near Ncora Dam (3127DC) in southern Transkei (Hockey 1992). In January 1996 two small populations, about 6 km apart, were found near Molteno (3126B) in the eastern Cape Province (S. Stretton pers. comm.). Other records from elsewhere in South Africa have been shown to be unreliable (Hockey *et al.* 1988a). Even within its main range, this species is highly localized. The highest density of birds recorded was at Matatiele (15 singing males in about 4 km<sup>2</sup>; Hockey *et al.* 1988a). Siegfried (1992) estimated the total population at 1501–5000 individuals.

This species forms a super-species with two other similar larks found in northeastern Africa, Archer's *H. archeri* and Sidamo *H. sidamoensis* Larks. Rudd's Lark is usually encountered singly or in pairs. It is a distinctive species, both in appearance and vocalizations (Keith *et al.* 1992), but is easily overlooked unless aerially displaying and calling.

It prefers open, moderately to heavily grazed grassland, without forb invasion, in high-rainfall, sour grassland regions (Hockey *et al.* 1988a). It is thought to be resident (e.g. Keith *et al.* 1987) and the summer increase in reporting rates can be attributed to increased conspicuousness, owing to the breeding display flights and calls by males. Breeding was recorded October–February and egg-laying in the Transvaal spanned January–February (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

It is certain that the range of Rudd's Lark has become highly fragmented as a result of agriculture and the manage-



Recorded in 11 grid cells, 0.2%  
 Total number of records: 108  
 Mean reporting rate for range: 10.5%

ment of pastures, and the species is considered to be threatened (Brooke 1984b; Collar & Stuart 1985; Hockey *et al.* 1988a). Indeed, the latest global list of threatened birds (Collar *et al.* 1994) rates it as 'critical', a higher category of threat than achieved by any other southern African bird and rendering it the most endangered lark species in the world. Siegfried (1992) estimated that fewer than 100 individuals occur in nature reserves, and the species inhabits the least protected and most threatened biome in southern Africa (Siegfried 1989). Commercial afforestation is likely to become another major threat in the immediate future.

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