



Karoo Lark and Barlow's Lark

Karoo- en Barlowse Lewerike

Certhilauda albescens and *C. barlowi*

The Karoo Lark is a South African endemic restricted to the western and central Cape Province. It is fairly common in the southern and western Karoo as well as in west coast strandveld, and is sparsely distributed in the cold, high-elevation shrublands of the central Karoo plateau. It is usually solitary or found in pairs, and is occasional to common over most of its range.

It is one of a number of similar-looking species, including the newly recognized Barlow's Lark *C. barlowi*. Previously thought to be a form of Karoo Lark, Barlow's Lark is a highly variable species more closely related to the Dune Lark *C. erythrochlamys*. Barlow's Lark occurs from Aus (2616CB) south to Port Nolloth (2916BB). The distribution map is for both species as they were not distinguished during the atlas period.

The Karoo Lark is characterized by heavily streaked flanks and belly compared to other species in the group, and is not known to occur outside South Africa (atlas records from the Fish River area in southern Namibia require confirmation). Separation from Barlow's Lark is difficult in the area between Port Nolloth and the Orange River, where the two species occur adjacent to each other. Plain flanks and a longer song in Barlow's Lark can be used to separate the two species. Confusion between Barlow's and Dune Lark is possible, but they are not known to overlap in range, with Dune Lark only occurring south to the Koichab River (2615B). The Karoo Lark also can be confused with Red Lark *C. burra*, particularly around Brandvlei (3020AD) where many Red Larks are streaked above, and are browner than elsewhere in their range. However, the Red Lark has a heavy bill and un-streaked flanks.

Among both Karoo and Barlow's Larks, the colour of the back varies from pale grey-brown on coastal sands to

rich red-brown in the interior. The change between the two morphs often occurs within a few kilometres, but both morphs sing the same songs and apparently interbreed freely. Karoo Larks in the eastern Karoo are darker chocolate brown above.

Habitat: The Karoo Lark occurs in karroid dwarf-shrubland, strandveld, coastal dunes and sparse perennial grasslands on sands. It occurs on fallow fields that are being recolonized by *Renosterbos* *Elytropappus rhinocerotis* and in sparsely vegetated fallow fields, but avoids land being actively farmed (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Barlow's Larks occur in more arid areas than Karoo Larks, including sparse Succulent Karoo and fore-desert areas with scattered *Euphorbia* clumps as well as vegetated dunes.

Movements: The models show an increase in reporting rates in late winter–spring, but this is almost certainly due to an increase in calling and display.

Breeding: The Karoo Lark has an extended breeding season, August–March (Maclean 1993b), breeding seasonally in the south-western Karoo (August–December) and opportunistically in the southern and central Karoo

(W.R.J.D. pers. obs).

Interspecific relationships: Overlap in habitat with several other lark species occurs, but no specific interactions have been reported.

Historical distribution and conservation: The range of the Karoo Lark has contracted locally in the south-western Cape Province owing to agriculture; the transformation of renosterveld to wheatlands has undoubtedly removed much of its habitat. It formerly occurred in the immediate vicinity of Cape Town; it was collected on Signal Hill (3318CD) by Sir Andrew Smith (Roberts 1936). It may have increased in the northeast, owing to heavy grazing of rangelands and local increases in shrubs. The Karoo Lark is not considered to be threatened. It is not adequately protected in existing nature reserves (Siegfried 1992) and should be a candidate for conservation attention.

Barlow's Lark has a very small range, none of which falls within protected areas, although more than 80% of the range is within restricted-access mining areas. Populations on grazing lands around Aus have apparently disappeared, possibly as a result of overgrazing.

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Recorded in 269 grid cells, 5.9%
Total number of records: 1384
Mean reporting rate for range: 12.3%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



