



Pinkbilled Lark

Pienkbeklewerik

Spizocorys conirostris

The Pinkbilled Lark is a near-endemic to southern Africa. It also occurs in western Zambia, where it is common but localized. In southern Africa, it is a resident and local nomad, distributed mainly in the grasslands of the central plateau of South Africa in southcentral Transvaal, Free State, northwestern KwaZulu-Natal and eastern and north-eastern Cape Province. The paucity of records from Namibia and Botswana is surprising, but there are concentrations of records, possibly of isolated populations, in the Etosha Pan region in northern Namibia and Makgadikgadi Pans region of northeastern Botswana. The absence of records of the species from the southern Kalahari in Botswana is particularly odd, as there are numerous records from adjacent parts of South Africa with similar habitat. Penry (1994) included many more records from Botswana than the present data-set, but still did not report it from the southwestern Kalahari. The Pinkbilled Lark is usually seen in pairs when breeding, or otherwise in small groups of 5–20 birds (Keith *et al.* 1992; Maclean 1993b).

This is not a highly distinctive species and is shy and difficult to view. Confusion is possible between the Pinkbilled Lark and Botha's Lark *S. fringillaris*, which occur in the same habitat in the southeastern Transvaal. The plain conical pink bill and pinkish or pale rufous underparts separate it from Botha's Lark. Stark's Lark *Eremalauda starki*, which also overlaps in habitat in certain areas, differs in being generally paler, with whitish underparts, whitish bill and a crest. The Pinkbilled Lark overlaps marginally in distribution with Sclater's Lark *S. sclateri* which

differs in having a more heavily marked face, with a dark teardrop mark below the eye. These two species do not overlap in habitat, however, so confusion is unlikely.

Habitat: The Pinkbilled Lark is present in open grassland in both semi-arid and fairly high-rainfall regions where it can also be found in fallow fields, croplands and short-grass pastures. It occurs in both burnt and heavily grazed grassland. It can also be common in tall grass in dune troughs in the Kalahari, as well as in patches dominated by such annual plants as *Tribulus terrestris* and *Schmidtia kalahariensis* on sandy soils. Maclean (1970c) reported that the Pinkbilled Lark occurs in patches in the Kalahari where the grass cover is fairly high, or where the cover is low, but with clumps of tall grasses. It also occasionally wanders into open areas in woodlands adjacent to its normal habitat. The vegetation analysis reveals the association with grassland, especially drier grassland, and Kalahari vegetation types.

Movements: It is a nomad (Maclean 1993b) and numbers in the more arid parts of its range fluctuate according to rainfall (e.g. Maclean 1970c). The models show a reduction in reporting rates for the winter in most Zones, suggesting reduced conspicuousness rather than seasonal movements.

Breeding: Atlas data show breeding October–May. It is considered to be an opportunistic breeding species, nesting at any time of the year in the arid parts of its range, and nesting seasonally in the more mesic eastern parts (Maclean 1993b).

Interspecific relationships: The Pinkbilled Lark overlaps in habitat with several other lark species. In the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (2520), Maclean (1970c) found that Clapper Larks *Mirafrapa apiata* and Pinkbilled Larks occurred together, but were separated by small differences in the amount of grass cover. It is not known to join mixed species flocks.

Historical distribution and conservation: There is no evidence that the distribution of the Pinkbilled Lark has changed in southern Africa. It is not threatened by changes in land-use practices (Brooke 1984b). It inhabits farmlands and rangelands and may even be favoured to some extent by heavy grazing of grasslands.

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Recorded in 399 grid cells, 8.8%
Total number of records: 1640
Mean reporting rate for range: 5.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



