

Skylark *Alauda arvensis* Action Plan

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The skylark is one of the most widespread birds of the British Isles inhabiting open treeless environments such as grasslands and cultivated land. Skylarks feed and nest in short vegetation preferring lightly grazed grassland. According to the Lowland Grassland Management Handbook sward heights ranging from bare ground to longer grass of up to 250 mm is ideal to meet the skylark's feeding and nesting requirements. The skylark's principal foods include seeds and invertebrates.
- 1.2 Although skylarks are present in the UK all year round their numbers are swelled in winter with birds from northern Europe giving an internationally important over-wintering population of up to 25 million individuals.

2. Current Status

- 2.1 The population of skylarks in Britain is approximately 2 million breeding pairs. Despite the skylark being a widespread species, a national decline from 1969 to 1991 of about 54% has been recorded on farmland by the British Trust for Ornithology.
- 2.2 Factors causing the skylark's decline are poorly understood but include:
 - Reduced habitat diversity, particularly intensive management of grasslands.
 - Reduced nesting opportunities through regular grassland cutting, which destroys nests and exposes skylarks to predators.
 - Reduced invertebrate and seed sources through the use of chemicals.
- 2.3 The skylark is protected under the under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the EC Birds Directive. It is an offence to intentionally injure or kill the bird, or take, damage or destroy their nests whilst in use or being built.
- 2.4 The skylark is included on English Nature's Species Recovery Programme. In addition, a Species Action Plan on the UK BAP has been prepared by Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The plan aims to stabilise the UK skylark population and to prevent further declines.

3. Key Sites

- 3.1 The skylark has been recorded at Himley Wood landfill site in the West Midlands and Welford landfill site in Northamptonshire.

4. Objectives & Targets

No	Objective	Target
4.1	Increase knowledge of the status and distribution of skylarks on all Biffa Waste Services sites and ensure information is recorded appropriately.	Action to be in place by 2005.
4.2	Ensure appropriate conservation and enhancement measures are implemented on sites where skylarks have been recorded and protect existing sites from damage and destruction.	Ongoing.
4.3	Ensure knowledge of the status and distribution of skylarks on Biffa Waste Services sites, and the implementation of the skylark SAP, is kept up-to-date and revised as appropriate.	Action to be in place by 2007.
4.4	Increase awareness of the skylark and its conservation on Biffa sites.	Ongoing.

5. Action Plan

There are generic actions for Data Collection & Information Management, Site Management, Monitoring & Audit and Biodiversity Awareness that apply to all Species Action Plans. These are located in a separate 'Generic Action Plans' section that should be read in conjunction with this document.

Please note that the partners identified in the Skylark Action Plan are not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcome and needed.

Action	Potential Partners	Year						Meets Objective No.
		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2013	
5.1 Data Collection & Information Management								
5.1.1 Survey and record skylark activity at all Biffa sites through an ecological survey programme.	WT	•	•	•				4.1
5.1.2 Develop a procedure to record and manage skylark data (as part of a wider BAP information management system).	WT, JNCC	•						4.1
5.1.3 Implement data management system, recording skylark data & keep up-to-date as appropriate.	WT		•	•	•	•	•	4.1
5.1.4 Support research into urban skylarks particularly in relevant areas highlighted in the UK BAP.	WT, UNI, EN, RSPB	•	•	•	•	•	•	4.1
5.2 Site Management								
5.2.1 Based on the results of the ecological survey, protect existing skylark populations.	WT	•	•	•	•			4.2
5.2.2 Determine use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers on sites where skylarks are recorded and seek uptake of a more cautious and targeted use.	WT	•						4.2
5.2.3 Review site ecological surveys and select sites where appropriate habitat creation and enhancement measures could be implemented to increase skylark population sizes.	WT, EN	•	•	•				4.2
5.2.4 Implement appropriate habitat creation and enhancement techniques for the skylark at selected sites.	EN, WT, UNI		•	•	•	•	•	4.2

Action	Potential Partners	Year						Meets Objective No.
		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2013	
5.2.5 Develop generic management prescriptions to improve sites for skylarks.	WT, EN, RSPB, BTO	•						4.2
5.2.6 Ensure that skylark management prescriptions are included in Biodiversity Management Modules for sites where the species occurs.	WT	•	•	•				4.2
5.3 Monitoring & Audit								
5.3.1 Develop a monitoring protocol for skylarks on Biffa sites.	WT, EN, LA, RSPB, BTO	•						4.3
5.3.2 Implement a monitoring protocol for skylarks on Biffa sites.	WT		•	•	•	•	•	4.3
5.3.3 Contribute to the UK Breeding Bird Survey through annual monitoring of breeding skylarks at Biffa sites.	BTO, WT JNCC, RSPB,	•	•	•	•	•	•	4.3
5.3.4 Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring to JNCC so that it can be incorporated into a national database.	WT, JNCC	•	•	•	•	•	•	4.3
5.3.5 Develop an auditing procedure for the skylark species action plan.	WT, EN, LA, RSPB, BTO	•						4.3
5.3.6 Implement an auditing procedure for the skylark species action plan.	WT		•	•	•	•	•	4.3
5.3.7 Ensure the skylark species action plan is reviewed and updated.	WT					•	•	4.3
5.4 Awareness								
5.4.1 Inform relevant site managers of their responsibilities for conserving the skylark and provide management advice.	WT	•	•	•				4.4
5.4.2 Produce education and interpretive material for relevant Biffa Waste Services stakeholders on the skylark and its action plan.	LA, WT	•	•	•	•	•	•	4.4
5.4.3 Publish results of the skylark SAP.	-	•	•	•	•	•	•	4.4

6. Partners

BTO	-	British Trust for Ornithology
EN	-	English Nature
JNCC	-	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
LA	-	Local Authority
RSPB	-	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
UNI	-	Universities
WT	-	Wildlife Trust