

SKYLARK



The skylark is one of Britain's most common and familiar birds. They like wide, open spaces away from trees and are usually found on farmland, moorland, sand dunes and marshy land around rivers. Skylarks feed on worms, spiders, insects and seeds and green parts of plants.

The skylark is famous for its early morning flight and song. The male bird soars up on the wind, rising in stages up to 300 metres above the ground. Here he hovers singing continuously. The skylark starts cheerfully singing just before dawn breaks, whilst most other birds are still asleep. That is why if you get up early you are "up with the larks". Another phrase we commonly use is "larking about" – this comes from the days when boys and girls used to go into the meadows to catch skylarks with nests. Today catching skylarks is against the law as they are protected by national and international laws.

Despite the skylark being widespread throughout Europe with a total population between 37 and 160 million birds the skylark is in decline. In the UK alone, the skylark population halved between 1990 and 1997 to one million pairs. The decline in numbers is thought to be due to changes in farming practices that have led to more intensive farming in accessible areas and the abandonment of agricultural land in remote areas.

To help reverse the decline in skylarks the government have an action plan which seeks to maintain their present numbers by protecting their habitat, particularly during the breeding season.