



Mendip Hills
National
Landscape



Champion Species Fact Sheet

Skylark

Alauda arvensis



mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/nature-recovery-plan

Why a Champion Species?

- On the Red List – UK numbers have declined by over 60% in the last 50 years with localised extinctions, but Mendip is still a stronghold.
- UK and European Protected Species and S41 Threatened Species.
- Indicators of less intensive and conservation-minded agricultural practices (such as hay meadows), which promote greater biodiversity and less disturbance during the breeding period.

Preferred habitat

- Less intensive arable and pasture farmland.
- Grasslands and meadows.



Best time to see

- Skylarks are residents all year round, but they are sometimes hard to distinguish from other little brown birds.
- The best time to see is during the spring and summer when they engage in a very distinctive display flight and song high up in the sky. Nests are hard to spot and located on the ground.

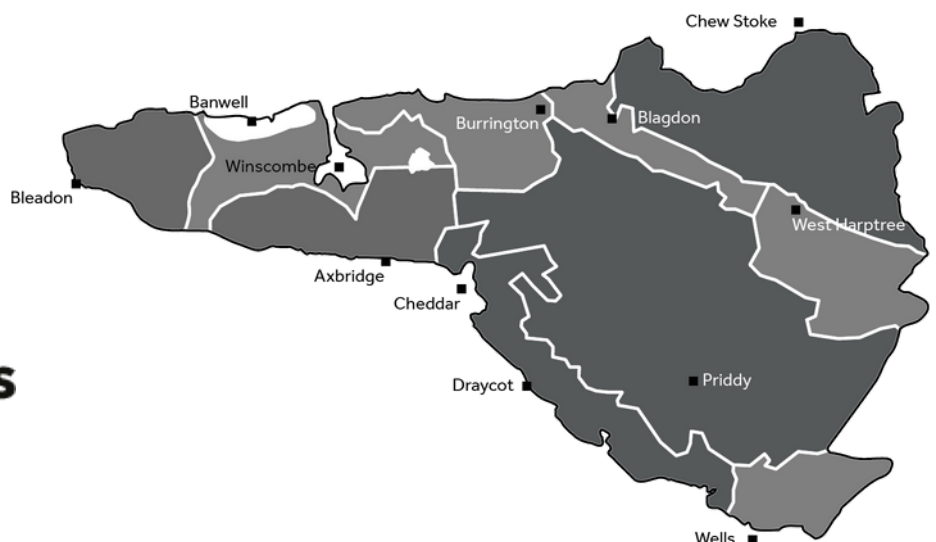
Points of interest

- The amazing song and display flight, which have inspired poets and songwriters throughout history. Their song is incredibly complex, composed of 'syllables' (a series of notes) which are not repeated, and last 2-3 minutes on average but have been recorded as up to an hour long. The song is sung as the bird makes a fluttering ascending flight and ends when the bird 'parachutes' back to the ground.
- The skylark makes its nest on the ground, in a small delve that it lines with grass, feathers and fur. Due to the high mortality rate of chicks and eggs with this breeding strategy, skylarks may have as many as 4 broods a year to ensure population survival.

Key threats

- Changes in agricultural practices have contributed to the catastrophic decline in numbers, which already has a high mortality rate because of their nesting behaviour. Changes from spring-sown arable crops to autumn-sown has resulted in the loss of breeding sites and switching from hay making, where the grass is cut only twice per year, to silaging, where the grass can be harvested as often as every 4 weeks, has both reduced foraging and nesting opportunities.
- In areas managed for wildlife there are still high levels of nest disturbance from dogs off the lead.

Where to find them



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