

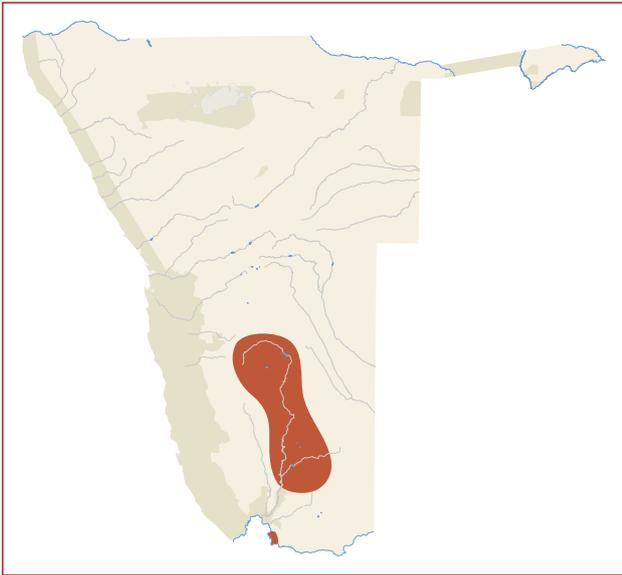
SCLATER'S LARK | *Spizocorys sclateri*

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Conservation Status:	Near Threatened
Southern African Range:	Namibia, South Africa
Area of Occupancy:	5,100 km ²
Population Estimate:	About 5,000 birds
Population Trend:	Unknown
Habitat:	Arid Nama Karoo, gravelly plains with short grass or sparse dwarf shrubs on shale and clay soils
Threats:	Climate change, particularly reduced and less predictable rainfall



arid Nama Karoo (Dean & Hockey 1989). These habitats may include grazed areas since this species avoids long grasses and treed areas. It is dependent on water, particularly when breeding in the dry season (Lloyd 2005). It breeds from April to November, with a peak from August to November in South Africa (Lloyd 2005). A single egg is laid; breeding success is generally low (Steyn & Myburgh 1989). There are four nest records from Namibia with a single egg laid in March (2), April (1) and July (1) (Brown *et al.* 2015).

The Sclater's Lark feeds on the ground, mainly on fallen grass seeds or those stripped off lower stems of standing grasses, as well as on seeds from shrubs and forbs (Lloyd 2005). It occasionally hunts for insects such as beetles, harvester ants and grasshoppers, by moving small stones (Steyn & Myburgh 1989).



DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

This small, unobtrusive lark is endemic to southern Africa with a highly restricted range. It is confined to some of the most arid sections of the Nama Karoo in the Northern Cape Province of south Africa and southern Namibia (Dean 1997c). The area of occupancy in southern Africa is about 68,600 km² (Barnes 2000d), of which Namibia has a mere 5,100 km² (Jarvis *et al.* 2001). While this represents less than 10% of the total area in southern Africa, it is likely that the apparently fragmented distribution in Namibia is an artifact of incomplete sampling and the overlooking of this cryptic species. For example, two birds were reported far north of their range, 20 km north of Brandberg West in a dry year, and three birds occurred near Mirabib in the central Namib Desert (C Boix-Hinzen pers. obs.). In addition, birds were recorded among flocks of sparrow-larks after good rains in dry gravelly regions within 10 km of the Orange River at Haibmond, where they were not reported during the SABAP1 atlas period (Dean 1997c).

It occurs alongside other nomadic larks, such as the widespread Stark's Lark *S. starki*, but it is generally darker in plumage. It flocks where rains have produced fast-seeding grasses, and can thus become locally common (Dean 1997c). However, it is also highly sedentary in other areas, breeding in the same location at the same time of year in the core of its South African range (Lloyd 1999, 2005). Population size is unknown, but may number as many as 70,000 individuals (WRJ Dean pers. comm.), of which about 5,000 are thought to occur in Namibia.



ECOLOGY

The Sclater's Lark prefers short grass and gravelly plains on shales or sparse dwarf shrubs on clay soils within the



THREATS

Grazing by small livestock is unlikely to influence this species because it prefers the open short-grass plains of the Nama Karoo. Fragmentation of populations might also be less problematic than suggested, if it responds by moving nomadically to follow the rains in Namibia. A less predictable or lowered rainfall under climate change scenarios may, however, reduce the long-term ability of small larks tied to particular soil types to move south and eastwards (Simmons *et al.* 2004).



CONSERVATION STATUS

This species is classified as *Near Threatened* because of its small and apparently fragmented population in Namibia. Climate change may force it out of its preferred habitat in years to come and this is the main reason it is given Red Data status here. It is also considered *Near Threatened* globally (IUCN 2012a) and in South Africa (Taylor *et al.* in press) because of the small fragmented population and the possibility of extreme fluctuations in population size. The Sclater's Lark should be given *Specially Protected* status under any revised or future Namibian Parks and Wildlife legislation.



ACTIONS

Assessments of population sizes and breeding biology in southern Namibia are required to understand if it breeds regularly in Namibia and if it is mainly nomadic in the areas in which it occurs. Its northern range is poorly known and monitoring of birds in areas where rains bring in nomadic species should be a priority. As a poorly known southern African endemic with a limited range this may become more important as climate change effects become apparent.