

# Woodlark

## *Lullula arborea*

### Status

Red listed: BD, BL, SPEC 2 (V)  
Schedule 1 of WCA 1981  
Annex 1 of EC Wild Birds Directive

### National monitoring

National breeding surveys, 1986 (BTO/JNCC) and 1997 (RSPB/BTO/EN/JNCC); to be repeated at 10-year intervals.  
Rare Breeding Birds Panel.

### Population and distribution

Although the woodlark is still relatively rare in Britain, its population grew rapidly between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s: an estimated population of 250 pairs in 1986 (Sitters et al 1996) had grown to more than 1,500 pairs in 1997 (S Wotton pers comm). Its range, however, is still restricted, and since the 1970s it has been largely confined to the south-west, the New Forest, the Hampshire/Surrey border, Breckland and part of the Suffolk coast, with outlying populations in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. The population is more or less evenly split between heaths and young conifer plantations. Numbers at any site can be very variable from year to year, and the population is expanding into new areas and habitats.

### Ecology

The habitats most frequently occupied are burnt or heavily grazed heather or grass heaths, restocked conifer plantations, tree nurseries, cleared woodland, derelict farmland, areas of disturbed ground and set-aside on acidic, sandy soils (S Wotton pers comm). A clutch of 3–4 eggs is laid between March and early August, with replacement nesting after failure at the egg or chick stage; second broods are frequent (*Red Data Birds*).

### Breeding season survey – population

The method documented here is the same as that used in the 1997 national woodlark survey (Wotton 1997).

#### Information required

- number of territories.

#### Number and timing of visits

Three visits between mid-February and the end of May.

Visit 1: 15 February to 21 March

Visit 3: 26 April to 1 June

Visit 2: 22 March to 25 April

#### Time of day

Before midday.

**Weather constraints**

Visit on clear, dry days with little wind.

**Sites/areas to visit**

Heather and grass heaths which are mown, grazed or burnt, and conifer plantations recently cleared and replanted (up to eight years ago). Other well-drained generally acidic sites on sand, gravel or chalk, with areas of short vegetation (less than 10 cm high) and/or patches of bare ground.

**Equipment**

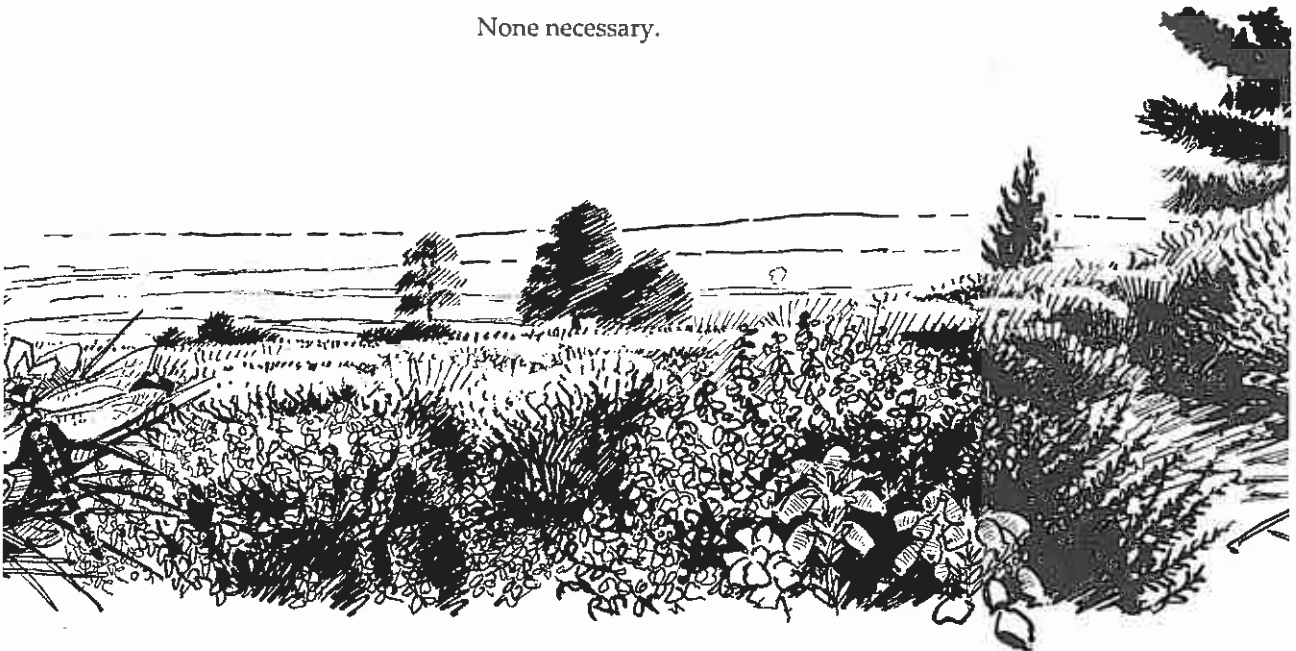
- Schedule 1 licence
- 1:10,000 OS map.

**Safety reminders**

Nothing specific. See general health and safety guidelines in the *Introduction*.

**Disturbance**

None necessary.



**Methods**

Mark the boundary of the survey area clearly on a map. Walk to within 100 m of every point within the survey area. On each visit, mark on the map the positions of all singing males (birds which sing are assumed to be male), flying birds, feeding pairs (any pairs observed assumed to be one male and one female), possible nests and adults feeding chicks. It will be easier to position records on the map correctly if landmarks such as isolated trees are also marked. Use BTO (CBC) symbols (see Appendix 1) for all registrations. Record bird movements; indicating flight directions will help to establish territory limits and possible nest locations. Woodlarks will fly quite long distances (up to 200–400 m) between, for example, a foraging area and a song perch. The position of singing birds can be difficult to establish as males sing from the air, from a perch or from the ground. Woodlarks often sit tight until the last possible minute and might even be flushed behind the observer.

Field notes should be checked on the same day as the visit and transcribed if necessary.

After the third visit estimate the number of territories. A singing male constitutes a territory. Strictly, neighbouring birds can only be separated with certainty if they are heard simultaneously. However, singing males can be considered as separate individuals if they are heard at points more than 200 m apart. Although this distance could depend on the quality of the habitat, where birds occur at higher densities they will be more likely to be recorded singing simultaneously anyway. Most territories are likely to be detected through the presence of a singing male but sometimes evidence of territories (eg a bird feeding young) may be obtained even though a singing bird was never recorded. Please take these observations into account when estimating the total number of territories on the site.

Report the estimated number of territories on the site. Also provide a map showing the boundary of the site, a summary map of registrations and a brief description of the habitat of the site (eg grass heath, conifer plantation replanted three years ago, etc).

### **References**

- Sitters, H P, Fuller, R J, Hoblyn, R A, Wright, M T, Cowie, N and Bowden, C G R (1996) The woodlark *Lullula arborea* in Britain: population trends, distribution and habitat occupancy. *Bird Study* 43: 172–187.
- Wotton, S 1997 (1997) *National Woodlark Survey: Survey Instructions*. RSPB/BTO/EN/JNCC.

