

SKYLARK *ALAUDA ARVENSIS* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

The skylark is afforded priority status in the UKBAP and a UK SAP has been written³⁹. It is therefore of importance in Caerphilly county borough.

Relevant Legislation/Species Status	
priority species (P) or species of conservation concern (S)	P
EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I I / 2
Berne Convention 1982	-
Bonn Convention 1979	-
CITES 1975	-
WCA 1981	Part I Section 1
Birds of Conservation Concern List ³⁰	Red



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2. CURRENT STATUS

2.1 UK and Wales

The skylark is one of the most widespread bird species in the UK with over 2 million resident breeding pairs being joined by probably a further 25 million winter visitors from the mainland of Europe. However over the last 25 years the UK population has crashed by over 50%. A pattern mirrored on the continent. Historically the species stronghold was lowland farmland. The implementation of changes in farming methods is generally quoted as the cause of this crash, especially the planting of autumn-sown rather than spring-sown cereals making the nesting habitat unsuitable. Similarly, fertilised grass may be too tall and dense for the species.

2.2 Caerphilly County Borough

Within Caerphilly county borough, as with Wales as a whole, the skylark is generally a species of the unimproved upland grasslands. As such the population declines are far less obvious, although there is some anecdotal evidence of decreasing population densities. This relative abundance makes our skylark population of great importance. **Map 2.12** shows how this bird is distributed within the county borough.

2.3 Links with Habitats

- **Species-rich Grasslands** (lowland neutral grassland and rhos pasture, often part of the upland common land)
- *Coedcae/ffridd* (grasslands within the habitat mosaics that border the commons)
- *Common Land*
- *Post-Industrial Land* (re-seeded colliery spoil and naturally revegetated colliery spoil)

3. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES

- Intensive management of arable land leading to a reduction of insects and weed seeds.
- Intensive management of both lowland and upland grasslands.
- High stocking rates particularly of sheep.

- Reduction in winter stubble fields due to autumn sown crops.
- Early silage cutting instead of traditional hay making destroys nests during the breeding season.
- Drainage and 'improvement' of wet grasslands.
- Increased disturbance of nesting sites on commons by the general public particularly when 'off-roading' on scramblers or in cars.
- Afforestation of the uplands.

4. CURRENT ACTION

- 4.1 Continued survey work by the BTO. The BTO Breeding Bird Survey contributes to the annual monitoring and recording of skylark populations⁶. Some survey work has already been undertaken by CCBC in Caerphilly county borough.
- 4.2 The Gwent Ornithological Society and Glamorgan Bird Club gather information from members on the distribution of skylarks and both publish annual bird reports^{17, 18, 19}.
- 4.2 RSPB/Tesco partnership in funding and preparing the UK SAP.
- 4.3 Ecological studies of the species by the RSPB.
- 4.4 The Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme may be beneficial to the species, especially in less intensively grazed areas.

5. OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

5.1 UK Objectives and Targets

- 5.1.1 Maintain present breeding numbers, wintering numbers and distribution throughout the UK.
- 5.1.2 Reverse the population decline on lowland farmland and other habitats throughout the UK, where found to be declining.
- 5.1.3 Protect the skylark's habitat, especially in the breeding season.

5.2 Caerphilly County Borough

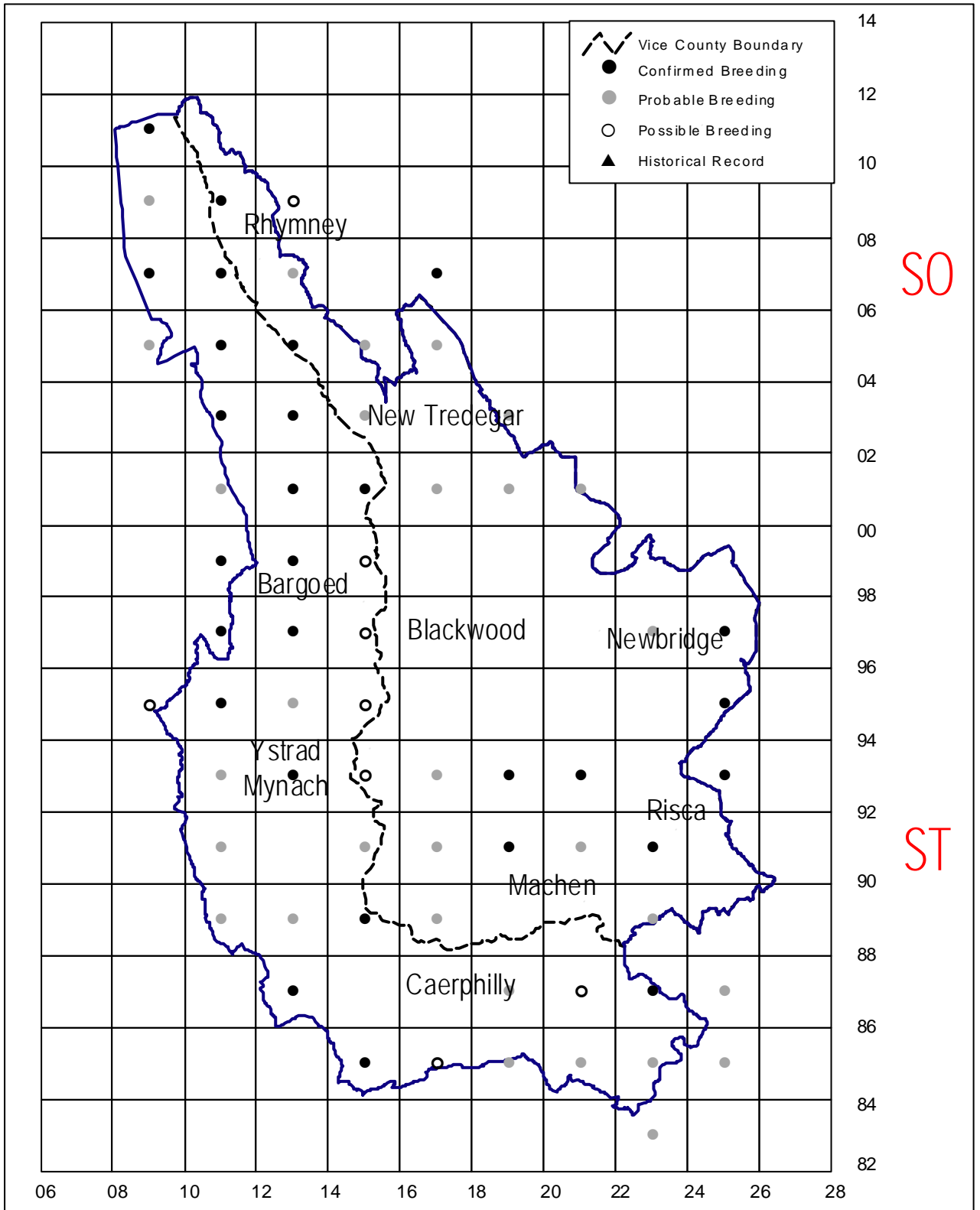
- 5.2.1 Maintain the breeding population in the remaining strongholds of the county borough (Target: ongoing).
- 5.2.2 Reverse the population decline in the county borough and investigate the possible decline in upland grasslands (Target: 2010).
- 5.2.3 Protect habitats which are important to the species (Target: ongoing).

6. ACTION AND KEY PARTNERS

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by:								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
6.1 Policy and Legislation											
6.1.1 Promote farming practices that will benefit the species, for example through the Tir Gofal Scheme.	CCW	NAWAD NFU FUW RSPB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.2 Site Safeguard and Management											
6.2.1 Adopt sympathetic management of all CCBC land with breeding skylark.	CCBC	-	✓	✓	✓						
6.3 Species Management and Protection											
6.3.1 Continue to implement wildlife legislation.	Gwent Police	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.4 Advisory											
6.4.1 Educate and inform the local population as to the relative importance of our skylark population.	CBP	RSPB Schools Youth Forum	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.5 Future Research and Monitoring											
6.5.1 Survey and monitor skylark populations within the county borough.	GBC GOS	BTO CCW	✘								
6.6 Communications and Publicity											
6.6.1 Produce a leaflet regarding the importance of the skylark for biodiversity, to be available at Countryside Parks and other CCBC properties.	CBP	-		✓							

✘ Survey year to be determined.

MAP 2.12 – SKYLARK



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