



FROM THE RARITIES COMMITTEE'S FILES



With the removal from the British & Irish List by the BOU Records Committee of three records of White-winged Lark *Melanocorypha leucoptera*, all from the period before the formation of the British Birds Rarities Committee in 1958 (1917, 1933 and 1955), just two records now remain fully accepted. Details of the first, in East Sussex in 1869, were published recently (*Brit. Birds* 88: 367-368, plate 101). The second, on the basis of which the species is included in Category A, was documented in the county report (Lines 1987), but—since, at the time, it was regarded only as the fifth British record—details were not published in *British Birds*. To rectify that, the descriptions and drawings submitted to the BBRC are now reproduced here (with only minimal subediting).

White-winged Lark in Norfolk

SPECIES White-winged Lark.

DATES AND TIMES OF OBSERVATION 22.10.81 (JL) and 24.10.81 (JAWM).

PLACE King's Lynn Sugar Beet Factory, Norfolk.

OBSERVERS Dr John Lines and John A. W. Moyes. First found and first identified by JL.

OPTICAL AIDS 12×50 Pentax.

DISTANCE FROM BIRD 20-30 yards.

SPECIES PRESENT FOR COMPARISON ALONGSIDE Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OF THE SPECIES Nil.

WEATHER NOTES 22.10.81: wind northerly, force blustery; light conditions good; visibility good; cloud cover light.

The bird was first noticed in flight at 13.55 GMT on 22nd October, when flushed off open rough ground with Sky Larks, the general pallor of the bird and striking white wing-bars immediately noticed. Subsequently seen on the ground on three occasions at a range of 20-30 yards for several minutes at a time, and again in flight on three occasions before finally being lost to view.

When seen on the ground, the heavier, stouter bill was very noticeable. No crest present. There was a prominent white superciliary eye-stripe and dark eye. The crown was a rich rufous brown, slightly less rich on the neck and back; however, the wing-coverts were a similar rich tone. The scapular feathers were light brown, having dark shafts and dark subterminal patches. [Letter subsequently noted that 'Wing-coverts brown; primary coverts rich rufous brown similar in quality to the crown, the other coverts less rich.']

There was slight rufous streaking on the sides of the breast and flanks which were otherwise white. The overall length of the bird appeared to be the same as a Sky Lark (i.e. c. 7 inches [c. 18 cm]), but the tail was relatively short, the outer feathers being white. In flight, the white secondary feathers were very striking, as were the white underwing-coverts, and the outer web of the second primary was noticeably white.

The bird was observed on the ground with the Sky Larks, and seemed more timid than they. Also it did not seem readily tolerated by the [other] larks, who appeared not to like it feeding too close.

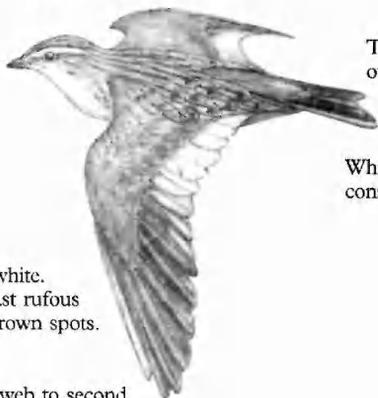
The bird was first seen on 22nd by JL, who informed JAWM, who subsequently saw the bird on 24th. On both occasions, only one observer was present.

The following notes were supplied by JAWM:

'White-winged Lark, King's Lynn Sugar-Beet Factory on 24th October 1982.

'About the size of Sky Lark, but with shorter tail. Looked pale in comparison with Sky Lark. Jizz, and general behaviour much as Calandra Lark *M. calandra* (a species with which I am familiar). Bill intermediate in size, between Sky Lark and Calandra. Crown, nape and hind neck light rufous brown, back pale brown, the dark brown shafts and distal tips to individual mantle feathers noticeable at 15 yards distance. All wing-coverts tinged rufous, being strongest on the primary coverts and palest on the secondary coverts. The lesser and median coverts intermediate in hue between the two extremes, thus creating a reddish patch on the folded wing. The white bar on the secondary flight feathers was partly visible when the bird was on the ground feeding, becoming much more noticeable when in flight. The white outer web to the second primary was also visible on the flying bird at a range of 10-15 yards. The white underwing linings from the axillaries to the wrist (carpal joint) was separated from the dull white area on the underside of the secondaries by a band of brown which extended to and merged with a slightly lighter shade of brown on the underside of the primaries, thus forming a unique underwing pattern visible when the bird flew overhead. Sides of neck and breast light reddish-buff becoming paler towards the flanks, with sides of the breast indistinctly streaked brown. Throat, central breast and belly white. Sky Larks displayed an aggressive tendency towards the White-winged Lark, not tolerating a close presence even when in flight.

Bill thick, as Calandra. Well defined superciliary eye-stripe.



Underparts white.
Sides of breast rufous
with a few brown spots.

White outer web to second
primary conspicuous when in flight.

[Drawing shows *inner* web of
outermost primary white.]

Tail shorter than Sky Lark,
outer feathers white.

White patches on secondaries
conspicuous in flight.



Underwing
showing
distinctive
white coverts.

One of the field sketches (best)

Fig. 1. White-winged Lark *Melanocorypha leucoptera*, Norfolk, 24th October 1981 (J. A. W. Moyes, from field sketches)

'The bird was under observation by me for about 30 minutes in good light and at a closest range of 10 yards using 10×40B Dialyt binoculars.'

EDITORIAL COMMENT The above accounts constitute the documentary evidence assessed by the two committees.

Although this bird, which stayed for at least three days, was seen only by two observers, it was accepted (by a vote of 9:1) by the BBRC in 1986 (*Brit. Birds* 79: 561). Earlier circulations to the Committee, in 1982 and 1984, had been inconclusive since, at those times, only one member of the Committee had had any field experience of White-winged Lark (by 1986, three members were thoroughly familiar with the species). When reviewed by the BOURC in 1992, it was accepted unanimously (*Ibis* 135: 496; *Brit. Birds* 88: 365-371).

The detailed description of some plumage features compared with the absence of observation of some others created discussion within both committees. For example, although Steve Madge commented 'I found the white outermost primary very difficult to see in the field [in the USSR in June 1992], but perhaps June birds are very worn, making this less evident', and Iain Robertson commented 'The white outer web to the 2nd (outermost) primary was not seen at all in the field [in Kazakhstan in June 1983] and does not show up on any of the slides', Peter Colston had advised the BBRC (*in litt.*, March 1982) that 'The white 2nd primary is often quite conspicuous and would show in the folded wing at rest and probably also in flight.'

Reference

LINES, J. 1987. White-winged Lark: a bird new to Norfolk. *Norfolk Bird & Mammal Rep.* 1986: 416-417.
