

Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella cinerea*). 16th to 20th October, 1972.

At 17.20 hrs. on 16th October I flushed a group of a dozen or so Skylarks from short grass pasture on the Airfield. My attention was taken by a sparrow-like call uttered by one of them. I watched the flock pitch down amongst a large mixed flock of Chaffinches, Linnets, Bramblings and Meadow Pipits. Scanning through the flock I saw a small greyish bird that was clearly none of the other five species, and I thought it was a Short-toed Lark. During the next quarter of an hour I got within about twenty yards of the bird, most of the flock including the stranger repeatedly flying a few yards along the field. The following notes jotted down during this period confirmed my initial identification.

Smaller than adjacent Skylarks. Distinctly pale primaries and greater coverts. Upperparts general greyish-brown, greyer on head. Throat paler than face and neck, breast smudged greyish-buff. Slight dark marks visible at sides of breast when feathers ruffled by wind. Rest of underparts pale dirty whitish. Bill stumpy, yellowish. Call-note, thin trill, higher pitched than Skylark, also sparrow-like 'chup' and 'tr-trup'.

Eventually all the larks flew off in the direction of Millcombe. I relocated them in St. Helen's Field, only for them to instantly return in the direction of the Airfield, and following them I managed to approach under cover of a wall, and watch them with my telescope from about forty yards. For some while the Short-toed Lark was feeding amongst five Skylarks, affording an excellent comparison.

The full field description written on my return to the Old Light, and corroborated on following days, follows:

Size: about threequarters that of adjacent Skylarks.

Shape and attitude: Similar to Skylarks, but tending to crouch rather more when feeding. Could usually be picked out immediately by size alone.

Plumage: Upperparts: Generally greyish-brown, not noticeably streaked.

Head and neck rather greyer than mantle.

Ill-defined supercilium paler than sides of head.

Crown finely streaked darker.

Wings at rest showed pale edgings to primaries and greater coverts.

Tail dark brown, outermost feathers whitish.

Underparts: Generally pale, off-white on lower breast and belly.

Throat markedly paler than face and sides of neck when viewed from in front.

Upper breast with a greyish-buff band across.

Small dark mark at side of breast, just in front of bend of wing, visible when feathers ruffled by wind.

Bare parts: Bill short and stumpy, yellowish.

Eye dark.

Legs not well seen.

Call-notes: First note heard was a sparrow-like 'chup'. Subsequently uttered this note several times and another interpreted as 'tr-trup'. Usual first note when flushed was a short trill, of Skylark type, but higher pitched and less strident.

On the 17th I managed to catch the bird in a single-shelf mist-net; and the following description was taken in the hand:

Upperparts: Crown—pale brown with dark centres to feathers, forehead more closely streaked.

Nape—pale grey-brown, little or no streaks.

Sides of neck—as nape.

Mantle—dark brown centres to feathers, broadly fringed buff.

Rump—grey-brown, dark centres to feathers.

Upper tail-coverts—grey-brown, unstreaked, very long reaching to 14 mm. short of tip of tail.

Tail—dark brown, penultimate pair with narrow outer fringe of buff, richer towards tip. Outer pair with broad buff fringe on outer web and buff on distal half of inner part of inner web.

Lores—greyish.

Supercilium—off-white over and behind eye, buffer and broader towards nape. Pale creamy area in front of eye.

Malar region and ear-coverts—grey-brown, darkest next to supercilium, with very fine spots on malar region.

Primaries and secondaries—grey-brown, primaries with very narrow buff fringes and secondaries with broader buff fringes.

Tertials—dark grey-brown centres with very broad buff fringes, almost orange.

Scapulars—as mantle.

Lesser, median and greater coverts—dark brown, all very broadly tipped orange-buff.

Primary coverts and bastard-wing—dark grey-brown, thin buff fringes.

Underparts: Chin—off-white, greyer towards throat.

Upper breast—pinkish-buff band right across. Very slight dark mark high on sides of breast (very close look needed to see this). Upper breast feathers with very fine dark central streak.

Lower breast—off-white paling to whitish belly and under tail-coverts.

Flanks—suffused buffish.

Axillaries—silvery white, greyer in parts.

Underwing coverts—whitish.

Bare parts: Bill—stout but small lark-shaped. Upper mandible yellowish-horn with dark brown culmen to tip. Lower mandible very pale pinkish, greyer to tip.

Eye—black.

Legs—pink, yellowish on rear edge.

Feet—pinkish-grey.

Measurements: Wing—96 mm.

Bill (from skull)—14 mm.

Tarsus—22 mm.

Tail—59 mm.

Hind claw—8.5 mm.

Weight: 22.3 gms. at 13.00 hrs.

Wing formula: 1st prim. = p.c. — 9.5 mm.

2nd = 3rd } Longest

3rd = 2nd }

4th = — 2 mm.

5th = — 13 mm.

6th = — 18 mm.

7th = — 23 mm.

8th = — 27 mm.

9th = — 30 mm.

10th = — 33 mm.

1st primary minute, but sharply pointed, dark grey-brown with extremely slight pale outer edge.

Age: Plumage fresh throughout, but as adults and juveniles complete their moult in early autumn, this individual could only be aged as full-grown.

After examination it was shown to Mr. F. W. Gade and Mr. and Mrs. J. Ogilvie, and then released where it had been captured. It was seen frequently in the same place until the morning of the 20th.

This is the first occurrence of Short-toed Lark on Lundy and only the ninth to be ringed in Britain and Ireland. The record has been accepted by the Rarities Committee who consider the bird to belong to one of the eastern races rather than the south-west European race.

J. N. DYMOND