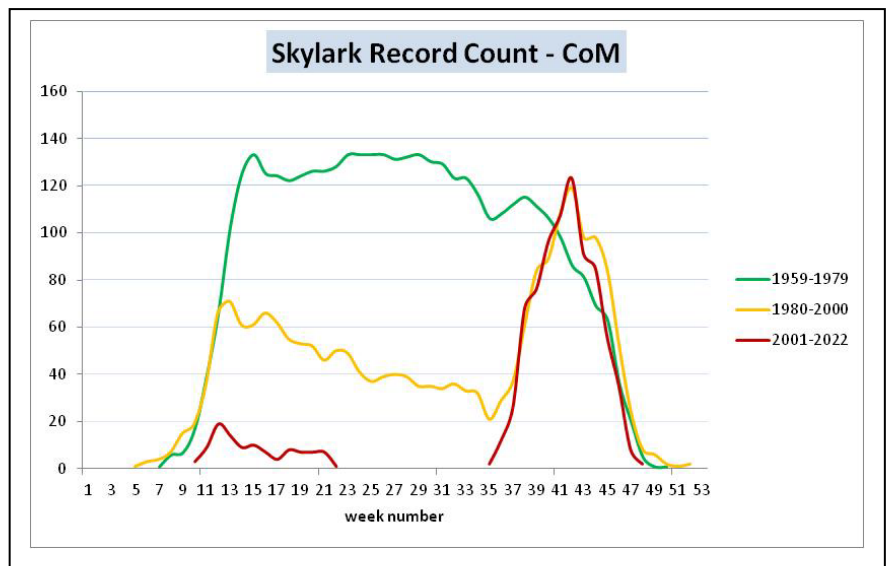
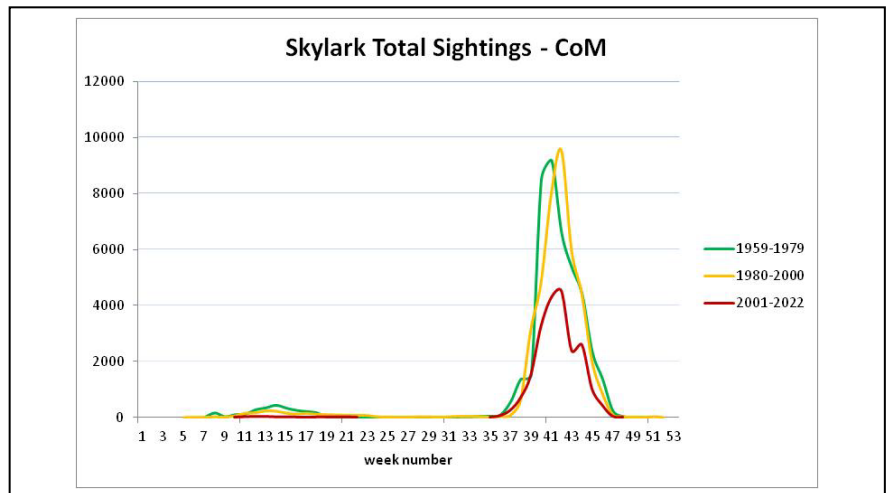


Common Name:	Skylark
Scientific Name:	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Manx Name:	Ushag happagh
BoCC IoM 21 classification:	RED
IUCN 3.1 classification:	Least Concern
MBRC:	A
Legal classification:	Schedule 1

The Eurasian Skylark was once a regular breeder on the Calf, with up to 15 pairs recorded annually between 1959 and 1985. Today, it is primarily a bird of passage, observed infrequently in spring and more commonly during autumn migration. The local Manx name for the Skylark translates to "Crested bird."

The melodious song of the Skylark high above the heath and grasslands of the Calf is now a distant memory. Historical accounts from Ralfe describe the Skylark as "common on our open pastures and sandy wastes and even high on the mountain land," while Cullen & Jennings (1986) noted that "there is no evidence of any change in the status of the Skylark during the last 100 years." They reported that since the opening of the Observatory in 1959, between 2 and 15 pairs had nested on the Calf, with a stable population of 9-10 pairs from 1977 onward. However, by 1983, the population had declined rapidly, with only five pairs recorded in 1984 and no successful breeding after 1985. During the summer of 1995, two singing males were present, but no mates appeared (Bishop, 1995).

In the UK and much of Europe, Skylark breeding numbers have notably decreased in recent decades. The British breeding population of Skylarks fell by 50% between the 1970s and 1990s, and over 50% of European countries report declines in Skylark populations (Hagemeijer et al, 1997). A significant reduction in range and likely loss of breeding numbers across the Isle of Man was observed between the 1977-81 BTO Atlas survey and the MBA Atlas conducted between 1998-2002. This decline was exacerbated by increased silage production on the island and a broader decrease in British Isles populations (Sharpe, 2003). Skylarks feed on cereal grains and leaves (Green, 1978), and research by



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O'Connor and Shrub (1986) showed that Skylark population fluctuations between 1975 and 1983 were correlated with the percentage of grassland in England and Wales that was ley grass under five years old. The decline of Skylarks as a breeding species on the Calf is closely linked to wider population declines across the Isle of Man, the British Isles, and Europe. The cessation of low-intensity farming practices in the 1950s and the subsequent lack of appropriate conservation-focused grazing regimes have contributed to the loss of this BoCCIoM21 red-listed species.

Although Skylarks have been recorded throughout the year, winter sightings are typically scarce. This scarcity is likely a reflection of the level of coverage, as the island is normally uninhabited from mid-November to early March. Most winter records occurred during the periods 1979-1981 and 1992-1995, when wardens were present on the island during the winter months. In 1979, wardens made an early return to the Calf in mid-February and observed movements of 11 Skylarks on the 21st, 20 on the 23rd, and 60 on both the 22nd and 24th. During the winters of 1991-1993, wardens Norman and Monica McCanch spent much of the winter on the Calf, which likely accounts for the records from December and January during these years. This data suggests that significant passage of Skylarks can occur before the start of each season, largely going undetected. Cold weather movements of Skylarks can be significant in some UK winters (Cramp, 1988), and associated with foggy or wet weather, Skylarks may be grounded or attracted to lighthouses. Cullen & Jennings (1986) recorded casualties from Chicken Rock, and a few birds were caught when attracted to the 1968 Lighthouse, including one on September 28, 1970, five in October 1972, one in March 1978, and another in October 1980.

The total sightings graph indicates a decline in records during both spring and autumn passage. This decline is evident when comparing the periods 1959-1979, 1980-2000, and 2001-2022. The difference in the gaps between trend lines would have been more pronounced if not for the use of "present – no count" for 51% of records between 1959 and 1985. The presence of resident breeding birds during the first 25 years of the Observatory likely made the detection of spring migrants more difficult. The annual record count graph shows a clearer picture of the greater presence of Skylarks during spring and summer (weeks 5-35) in the earlier vicennial. Peak spring counts during each vicennial have declined from 150 on March 31, 1979, to 55 on March 9, 1981, and just seven on March 13, 2016. The number of March records also reflects this decline, with an average of 15 records per annum between 1959 and 1979, compared to only 10 between 1980 and 2000, and just two records between 2001 and 2022. Similarly, the species was recorded almost daily during June, July, and August up to 1984 but became scarce from 1985 to 2000 (48 records over 10 years) and was absent in 18 years between 2001 and 2022, with only four records in the remaining four years.

Accumulative monthly total of records (1959 – 2022):

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2	39	549	857	843	781	769	687	963	1300	412	12

Autumn passage begins in September and builds through October before tapering off in November (weeks 36-48). It is believed that many autumn passage Skylarks are from the continent, although the extent to which British, Irish, and Manx birds migrate is unknown (Wernham et al, 2002). Counts of 1-10 birds account for 32% of records, while totals of 11-300 birds make up an additional 1,220 (17%) records. Day counts of 314-800 occur in most years, with only five dates exceeding 800 birds. Notable high counts include 819 on September 30, 2019, 835 on October 4, 1976, 1,000 on October 25, 1977, 1,400 on October 27, 1978, and 1,500 flying southwest over a three-hour period on September 28, 1965.

A total of 62 Skylark have been ringed on the Calf between 1959 – 2022 without any subsequent reports.

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