

Proposed Observational Guidelines for the Critically Endangered Botha's Lark

Recent studies have shown a drastic decline in Botha's Lark (*Spizocorys fringillaris*) populations, with an estimated global population of approximately 340 individuals (2024). The species now faces the very real risk of extinction. To address the species' precarious position and the estimated 90% decline in numbers over the past 10 years, BirdLife South Africa has increased its presence in the core range of the species and is in the process of initiating a number of research, conservation, and awareness initiatives in the greater Wakkerstroom area. This includes recruiting three qualified people who will be based at the BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Grasslands Conservation Centre (previously known as the Wakkerstroom Tourism and Education Centre), with their responsibilities being research and monitoring,



landowner and community engagement and, in addition to helping facilitate the establishment of the Hoëveld Protected Environment. Botha's Lark is in the process of being uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

In addition to BirdLife South Africa's Birders Code of Ethics, please consider the following whilst birding in known locations of the Critically Endangered Botha's Lark.

1. Visitation to regularly occupied and known breeding localities during the documented breeding season (September – November) is strongly discouraged. The welfare of both the species and their habitat remains the highest priority.
2. Driving vehicles off-road and/or straying off known footpaths and/or trails while not birding from a vehicle is strongly discouraged, given the species' tendency to nest in open patches of grassland.
3. Birders are to be respectful of private property at all times and should in no manner, shape, or form take it upon themselves to infringe upon the rights of others and/or their private property.
4. Should you locate a Botha's Lark while birding:
 - Maintain a safe observational distance of no less than 10 (ten) meters from the birds.
 - If possible, please verify your sighting with a photograph and do not disturb the bird(s), adhering to the recommended observational distance.

- Retreat immediately once you have taken a photograph, and do not spend more time than necessary at the sighting.
 - Please submit a copy of any photograph(s) directly to Matthew Orolowitz, BirdLife South Africa employee and Birding Ecotours Fellow of Grasslands Conservation, by emailing matthew.orolowitz@birdlife.org.za as soon as possible.
 - Kindly ensure to include the following important details: GPS location, habitat description, date and time, behaviour (e.g., breeding, feeding, etc.), number of birds, and your contact details.
 - Ensure that you log your sighting(s) on the BirdLasser App and join the BirdLife South Africa Threatened Species Cause under the “causes” tab.
 - If you use an alternative application to log your bird sightings, such as eBird, iGoTerra, Bindo, Birda, etc., please ensure that you share the data submitted to these platforms with Matthew Orolowitz directly using the above email address.
5. Refrain from using any form of callback, laser pointers, flush lines, and/or rope dragging.
 6. Nest approaching is strongly discouraged, given the catastrophic consequences such conduct may have on the nest’s success.
 7. These recommended observational guidelines serve as a strong recommendation to all birders and bird guides, and are binding on all BirdLife South Africa-trained birding guides, who will not entertain requests to breach them. Please respect and adhere to their instructions.



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Please consider contributing to BirdLife South Africa’s Botha’s Lark Conservation Project. All funds are used to ensure the preservation of this important species and the conservation of its habitat. Click on the QR codes below for additional information.

These recommended observation guidelines have been jointly drafted and considered by some of the industry’s most respected ornithologists, specialist bird guides, and conservationists. Thank you to the following individuals for their valued and insightful input and their passion for conserving this species: Dr Chris Lotz, Dr David Ehlers Smith, Ernst Retief, Etienne Marais, Faansie Peacock, Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, John Kinghorn, Justin Nicolau, Keith Barnes, Kristi Garland, Matthew Orolowitz, Nandi Thobela, Rick Nuttall, and Trevor Hardaker.



Online Donation Form



Botha's Lark Webpage



BLSA's Birders Code
of Ethics