



Habitat:

In scrub, semi-arid plateau country; short grass and stone strewn shrubby plains and hills up to 1000 m; dry cultivation.

Habit:

Pairs or small scattered flocks in preferred habitats. Flutters up in the air and sings melodious fluid songs in flight during descent with fluttering wings, mainly in the morning; but also in noon on cloudy days. Sings from a perch (stone, pole, wire, bush, etc.).



The Sykes's Lark occupies open scrub grassland habitat



The larks visit water bodies twice every day

Food:



Diverse invertebrate prey and rarely seeds are consumed by the larks and several prey items can be carried in the beak simultaneously to the nest to feed the young during the breeding period



Arthropods constitute the major food and prey is taken from the ground by rummaging among grass or from beneath small pebbles.

Insects like butterflies, moths, grasshoppers, bugs and beetles, grub, worms, ants, spiders, millipedes, grain, seeds, etc. Food is gleaned from the ground.

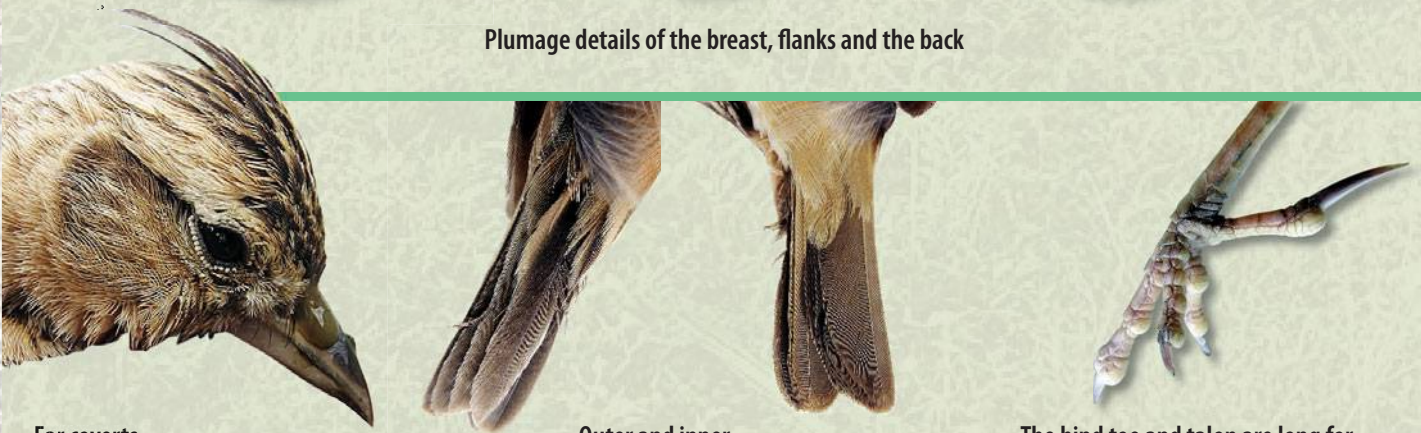


Key Features

- Sexes similar.
- Pointed upstanding crest.
- Rufous brown overall with thin sparse breast streaks.
- No white on the underside.
- Bill pale flesh coloured; culmen horny brown.
- Iris – brown-hazel.
- Legs and feet brownish flesh.
- Mouth pink-yellow.



Plumage details of the breast, flanks and the back



Ear coverts

Outer and inner views of the tail

The hind toe and talon are long for scrubbing the soil for food



The pattern on the wing feathers is shown from inside and outside

Phenology:



Pair formation and gathering twigs for making the nest



A neat and tightly woven twig nest on ground with two and three eggs; the eggs are laid after one day interval



A nidifugous hatchling with one unhatched and cracked egg in the nest. One day old chick demanding food and six days old chicks are seen in the nest



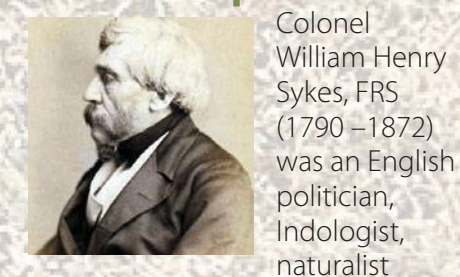
The growth of chicks is rapid. Three and two chicks in two different nests

A chick is walking out of the nest

Amazing Facts:

The open habitats in semi-arid country are vibrant with melodious songs of several Sykes's Larks in the early hours of the morning, particularly during the breeding season. This is a mesmerizing experience.

Cultural Aspects:



Colonel William Henry Sykes, FRS (1790–1872) was an English politician, Indologist, naturalist

and ornithologist who served with the British military in India. He described this lark from the *Dukhun* (Deccan), near Poona, in 1832. He was also the founder of the Royal Statistical Society, and later became a director of the East India Company.

Etymology:

Galeritus (L), the Crested Lark; *deva* (L), latinized form of Marathi *deva*, a god, a good spirit. (Pande, Satish 2009).

Parental Care:



Parents cautiously approach the ground nest with chicks to feed the young. Sometimes, the nestlings take food from the open mouth of the parents



Fecal sacs of the nestlings are collected by the parents in their beaks and are thrown away from the nest as a part of nest toilet to prevent the attention of predators



A chick with leg deformity

Abnormality:

Sometimes chicks hatch with abnormal body parts. Such chicks are not fed by the parents. A chick with abnormal leg is seen here. It eventually died. Only the fittest survive.

Sykes's Lark or Tawny Lark *Galerida deva* (Sykes, 1832)

Type locality: *Dukhun* (=Deccan); *Hospet*, Madras. TSN 560130 (Avibase).

Dakkhani Chandol (Marathi); *Chandul* (Hindi); *Chinna Chandul* (Tamil).

- **Size:** 13 cm.
- **Weight:** 18-22 g.
- **Male/Female: Wing:** 84-92 mm/ 78-86 mm.
- **Tail:** 46-54 mm/ 43-50 mm.
- **Tarsus:** 20-21 mm.
- **Bill:** 13-15 mm.
- **Breeding season:** March –September.
- **Clutch:** 2-4 eggs. One clutch / year.
- **Eggs:** Oval; creamy, finely stippled with pale to dark brown.
- **Egg Size:** 19.9 mm x 14.6 mm (Baker).
- **Incubation:** 12-13 d; by both parents.
- **Nuptial displays:** Both sexes – Aerial displays with singing and exchange of food.
- **Song:** Sing melodiously in flight or from perch; also indulge in mimicry. It can mimic the calls of several birds.
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Sykes's Lark

- **Order:** Passeriformes • **Family:** Alaudidae
- **Status:** Endemic

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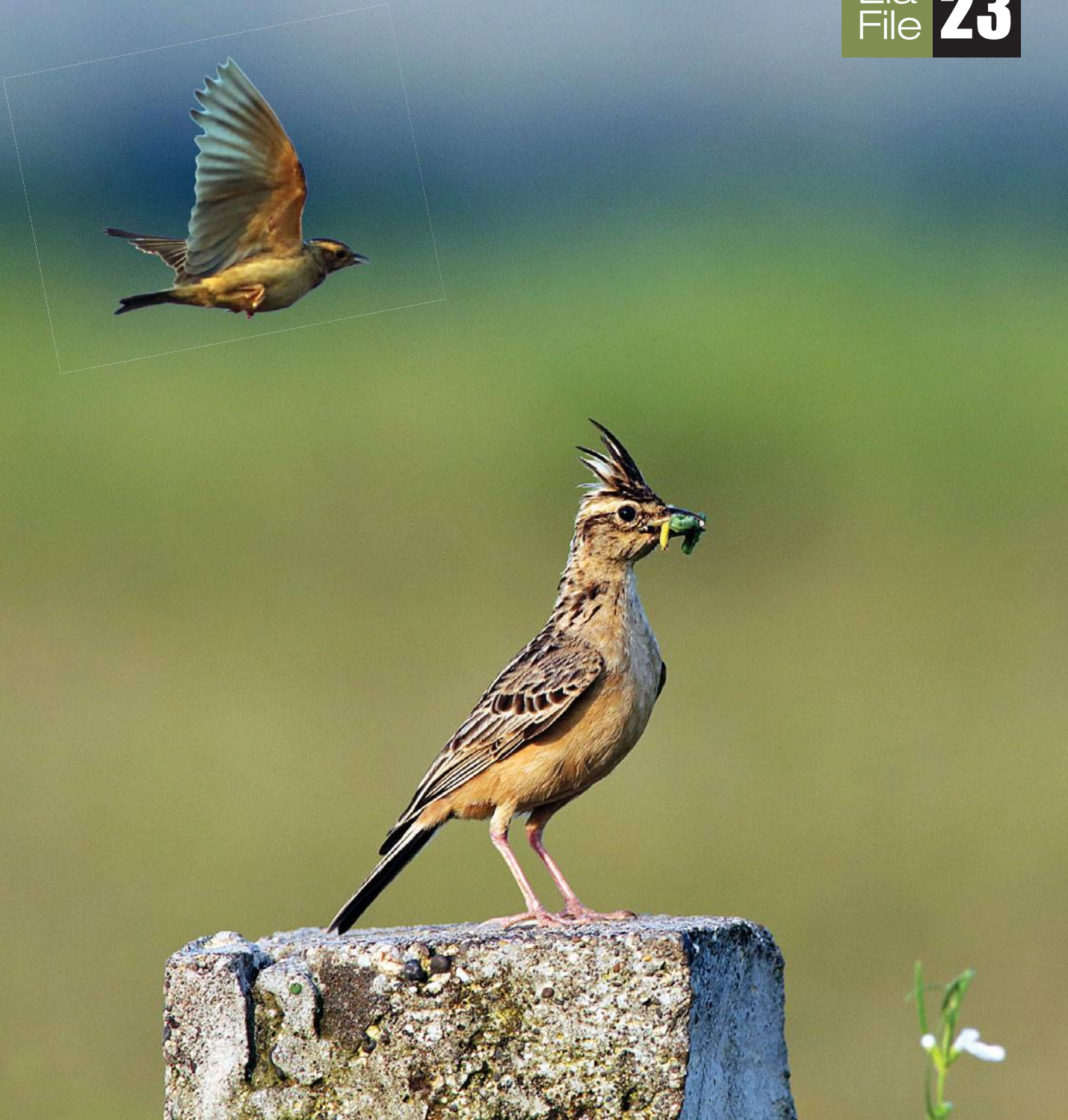
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Nest:



The nest is a shallow well woven cup placed on the ground, made of grass, twigs and rootlets and lined with grass inflorescence; often near a tussock or near a stone.



Threats:

Nests may be trampled by grazing livestock (cattle, sheep and goats). We have recorded loss of eggs and nestlings in ground nests due to fires and predation by birds and ground predators (reptiles and mammals). Leg anomalies in chicks are recorded and such chicks are subsequently neglected by parents and die.

Conservation:

Protected under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Research and 'Rural Outreach Programs' undertaken by Ela Foundation, stressing conservation of habitats, are proving promising for conservation.



A helpless chick hurriedly hops to find a safe place when a herd of grazing sheep approaches the nest site



Broken egg after trampling by goats



Grassland fires can be hazardous to ground nests

Related Species:



Red-winged Bush Lark
Mirafr erythroptera



Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark
(Male) *Eremopterix griseus*

Rufous-tailed Lark *Ammomanes phoenicura*;
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*.

Behaviour:



Thremo-regulation by panting during the hot noon



Preening to keep the feathers clean

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