

PHOTOSPOT

Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans*

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The Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans* is distributed in East Africa, southern Arabia and the Indian sub-continent, *M. c. simplex* occurs in Arabia. In western Yemen the Singing Bush Lark is present throughout the year on the Tihama plain (Castell 2010). However, nowhere is it more common than on the grasslands of Dhofar in southern Oman. Singing birds can be heard from mid January and by April the song of this lark rings out over the farmlands. Hundreds of birds may be seen and heard with 1000 estimated on Sahnawt farm in Salalah city on 29 April 2004 (Eriksen & Victor 2013). Singing Bush Larks are also

found on the grassy hills above Salalah up to 1000 m asl.

Singing Bush Larks in Dhofar (Plates 1–7) can be found throughout the year though it is not clear whether some migrate and leave late autumn. No real migration has been noted and it is possible that the birds simply disperse over the vast hillsides in the nonbreeding season. When not singing Singing Bush Larks are much less conspicuous and can easily be overlooked. They creep around the rocky grasslands like mice and will only take to the wing when disturbed too closely. A total population for Yemen has been



Plate I. The Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans* is home on the grassy hills with rocks, Dhofar mountains, Oman (10 January 2012). © Hanne & Jens Eriksen



Plate 2. Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans* song may less frequently be delivered from a perch, Salalah, Oman (21 August 2014). © Hanne & Jens Eriksen



Plate 3. A perched Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans* may reveal a rufous wing panel formed from rufous leading edges to primaries, Salalah, Oman (21 August 2014). © Hanne & Jens Eriksen



Plate 4. Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans*: notice the rufous leading edges to inner primaries when the bird is wing-stretching, Dhofar mountains, Oman (23 September 2011). © Hanne & Jens Eriksen



Plate 5. Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans*: in flight, the broad wings are conspicuous, Salalah, Oman (2 May 2013). © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

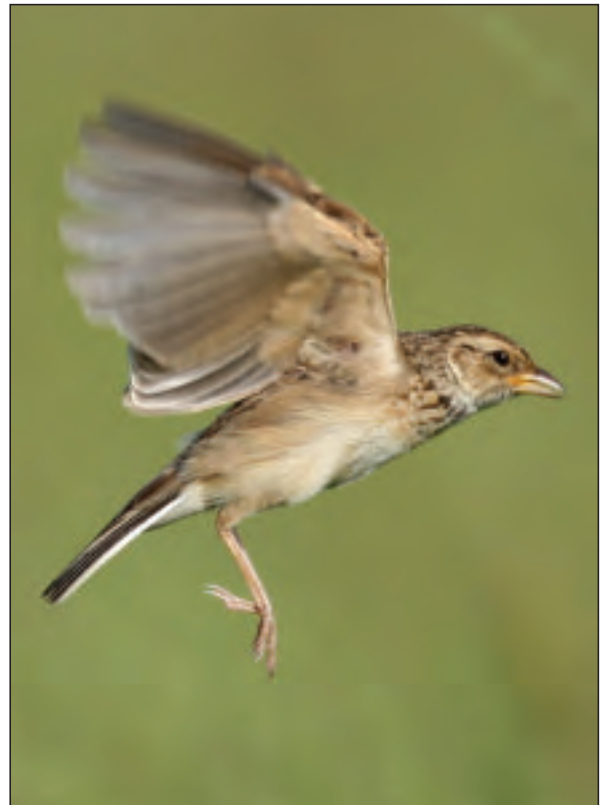


Plate 6. A Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans* returning to the grass after a songflight, Salalah, Oman (3 May 2013). Notice the white outer tail feathers. © Hanne & Jens Eriksen



Plate 7. Though the Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans* does not usually have a crest, the crown feathers can be raised when the bird is agitated, Salalah, Oman (29 May 1997). © Hanne & Jens Eriksen

estimated at 1000 pairs, a few hundred birds in Saudi Arabia and 3000 pairs in Oman (Castell 2010). We believe this is an underestimate as far as Oman is concerned and the true number could be considerably higher.

The Singing Bush Lark is a small lark with broad wings and a short tail. Upperparts are dark brown with darker streaks whereas underparts are light buff with some streaks on the upper breast. Some primaries appear to have rufous leading edges giving the wings a rufous tone on flying birds. The song is usually given in flight with birds circling over the territory. The song flight may last up to 10 min followed by the birds dropping back into the grass. Less frequently, the song may be given from a post or from the ground.

Visiting birdwatchers to Oman have Singing Bush Lark high on their list due to its limited distribution and difficulties in travelling in other parts of Arabia where this species is found. The bird can be tricky to find during the autumn months when silent. A hike on the hillsides above Salalah should produce at least some sightings. In late winter and spring when birds are singing, it would be hard to miss.

LITERATURE CITED

- Castell, P. 2010. Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans*. In: Jennings, MC. Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia. *Fauna of Arabia* 25: 504–505.
- Eriksen, J & R Victor. 2013. *Oman Bird List*. 7th edn. Center for Environmental Studies and Research, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat.

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