

SKY LARK

Alauda arvensis

Other: Eurasian Skylark (<1995),
Common Skylark

A.a. arvensis/japonica? (naturalized)
A.a. pekinensis (vagrant)

naturalized (non-native) resident, long established; non-breeding visitor, vagrant

The Sky Lark is native to Eurasia, where it currently breeds in temperate latitudes from W Europe and N Africa to Siberia and Japan, withdrawing S in winter to Africa, India, and Burma (Dement'ev and Gladkov 1954b, Ali and Ripley 1987, Cramp and Simmons 1988, Campbell et al. 1997, AOU 1998). It may have expanded its range eastward across these continents during the past millennia, aided by increased habitat afforded by human agricultural practices (Long 1981). It has been successfully introduced to Vancouver I, Australia, New Zealand, and a few other Pacific islands (Long 1981, Lever 1987, Campbell et al. 1997, Higgins et al. 2006). Sky Larks from sedentary European or Asian populations (see below) were introduced to the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* in 1865-1870, and they continue to thrive on most islands, but since have disappeared or become scarce on Kaua'i and O'ahu, perhaps in part due to the conversion of ranch lands to agricultural fields (Munro 1944). They were introduced primarily for aesthetic purposes but there was some concern about their consuming newly planted crop seeds (Fisher 1948c; *E* 17:58, 17:81, 35:73; see Long 1981). In addition, Sky Larks from migratory ne. Asian populations have occurred and bred once in Alaska (AOU 1998), with single vagrants each reaching California (CBRC 2007), Johnston Atoll (reported Nov 1963; Amerson and Shelton 1976) and the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*.

Ten Sky Larks were reportedly first introduced to *O'ahu* in 1865 (Caum 1933), but details are sketchy. In 1870 a better-documented introduction for agricultural interests by HBAF occurred, with releases of birds brought from New Zealand (where they had been introduced from England in 1864) to Leilehua and Moili'ili on O'ahu (Henshaw 1902a, Caum 1933, Swedberg 1967a), and perhaps that same year to Ni'ihau and/or Kaua'i (Swedberg 1967a, Lever 1987). Forty-eight were also brought in from Australia (at a price of \$24) and released on the Royal Hawaiian Hotel grounds by a hunter in about 1871, but he never cared to shoot them (*PoP* 14[7]:18). They were reported as rapidly becoming abundant in suitable habitats on O'ahu in the late 1890-1900s (Slivers 1892:7-78, Henshaw 1900b, Bryan 1905b), and by the 1930s-1960s were observed from widespread localities including Kahuku, Wahiawa, Eva Beach, Honolulu, Kailua, and Haunama Bay (e.g., Norwood 1940, HAS 1959-1967). However, since the 1970s they had become restricted primarily to the Waipi'o Peninsula and Pearl Harbor areas (Berger 1981, HAS 1989-2005; *E* 37:9), where [Christmas Bird Count](#) data show an increase in populations through 1990 that subsequently diminished ([Graph](#)). Through the 2000s they continued to be reported in small numbers from this area and rarely other locations such as the Ki'i Unit of JCNWR, Kailua, and the Honolulu Airport.

The history of Sky Larks on *Kaua'i* is an enigma. The species reportedly introduced in 1898-1914 was Mongolian Lark (see [Non-established List](#)) and it became well established by the 1930s (Caum 1933), but the identification of these birds was never confirmed. The distinctive Japanese subspecies of Sky Lark (*japonicus*; see below) was also reportedly introduced to Kaua'i in 1934 (Caum 1936; Munro 1944; Bryan 1958; AOU 1983, 1998; as supported by seven specimens of this taxon at BPBM collected off ships in 1934-1936) but it did not become established by the 1940-1960s (Munro 1944,

Richardson and Bowles 1964). In the 2000s Sky Larks began to be observed again on Kaua'i, from Poipu and Kukui'ula, including sky-larking males suggests isolated breeding; subspecies of these has not been determined but it presumably represents the same form of other islands, having dispersed to Kaua'i, rather than *japonicus*. On *Ni'ihau* Sky Larks had reached Lehua Islet in the 1930-1940s (Caum 1936, E 23:44) and were widespread on the main island in 1947 (Fisher 1951) but their subsequent status there is unknown.

The establishment on O'ahu was considered "a great success" (Henshaw 1902a) and individuals from this population were reportedly transferred to *Maui* in 1886, *Hawai'i I* in 1902 and 1913, and *Moloka'i* and *Lana'i* in 1917 (Henshaw 1902a, Fisher 1951, Swedberg 1967a, Lever 1987). It is also likely that they had dispersed naturally among these islands prior to these releases; e.g., to Moloka'i, where Bryan (1908) found them commonly in 1907, and to Lana'i, where it seems they were already established and common by 1911 when Munro (2007) arrived there. At any rate, by the 1930s, Sky Larks were thriving on most or all of these islands (Caum 1933, Munro 1944, Peterson 1961, Berger 1975a). Pekelo (1964) and Munro (*in* Gregory 1926) reported them commonly in suitable habitat on Moloka'i and Lana'i, respectively, and they continued to be reported abundantly on these islands through the 2000s. Biological surveys to *Kaho'olawe* in 1981-2009 (e.g., Conant 1983a, Gon et al. 1992, Morin et al. 1998) consistently noted them in good numbers and singing here as well. By the 2000s Sky Larks remained common throughout upland elevations (up to 3000 m) of Maui and Hawai'i I, especially on the slopes of Haleakala and all three major mountains of Hawai'i (Berger 1981, Scott et al. 1986, Pratt 2002a; *E* 27:22). Volcano [Christmas Bird Count](#) data, however, indicate declining populations in that region of Hawai'i I ([Graph](#)).

Sky Larks introduced to Hawaii have long been reported as the nominate subspecies *A.a. arvensis* (AOU 1957; Berger 1972, 1981) but specimens of birds collected on O'ahu (PP examination, BPBM, USNM) are small compared with specimens from Europe (cf. [HRBP](#) 5488), possibly indicating influence from *japonica* (see above), or of introductions that included other Asian subspecies. Molecular genetic analysis of Hawaii populations would be of interest.

At least one Sky Lark has also occurred naturally as a vagrant to the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*: a first-cycle (PP examination) female of the distinctive *A.a. pekinensis* was collected on *Kure* 7 Oct 1963 (USNM 493504; Clapp and Woodward 1968, Woodward 1972; [HRBP](#) 5484-5485, 5488-5491) and was reportedly accompanied by another individual the previous week. This subspecies breeds in Siberia and ne. Russia and migrates to Japan and n. China. Fisher (1965) believed that Sky Larks he reported from Midway 6 Dec 1961 and 30 Nov 1963 were of *A.a. arvensis* but we consider the species identification unsubstantiated. A Sky Lark on Tern I., *French Frigate*, 6-28 Oct 1991 is described well enough to substantiate it to species and most probably of the taxon from the Southeastern Islands.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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