

### PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

#### Liben Lark *Heteromiraфра sidamoensis*



Ethiopian Wildlife and  
Natural History  
Society



An adult Liben Lark (© Paul Donald).

#### Background

Liben Lark (formerly called Sidamo Lark) was discovered only 40 years ago and was for some time known only from two specimens collected at adjacent sites near Negele in the former Sidamo province (now Guji Zone), southern Ethiopia, in May 1968 and April 1974. Since 1994 small numbers have again been seen in the Negele area. Analysis of satellite images and recent fieldwork suggests that the species is restricted to a very specific habitat (tall-grass prairie) in the calcareous plateau east and south of Negele.

Between 1973 and 2002, the area of tall-grass prairie decreased by about 30%, and in 2003 much of it was being rapidly encroached by agriculture and shrubs (including *Acacia drepanolobium*) that are probably favoured by excessive grazing pressure and the suppression of seasonal fires. Remaining grassland is being heavily degraded by overgrazing. By 2007–2008 it appeared to be restricted to a single grassland patch 30–36 km<sup>2</sup> in area, and the global population was estimated at just 90–256 mature individuals, with the effective population size perhaps even smaller owing to a potentially skewed sex ratio caused by predation of females on the nest. Without urgent and concerted intervention global extinction is likely within the next few years.

#### Actions being implemented

1. Key **stakeholder meetings** have confirmed the support of local pastoralists in restoring the grassland plain. BirdLife has also hired external experts to advise on rangeland management, and capacity is being built by training local people, including through a PhD programme.
2. Research into the species's **conservation status and ecological requirements** has continued. Results indicate that there are fewer than 100 territories left, and many of these may be held by "bachelor" males as the sex ratio remains skewed.



Left: a photograph from the consultative workshop of stakeholders; right: fieldwork on the Liben Plain

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