

NEWS

Skylark numbers in vertical take-off at Jersey Airport

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•The skylark is on the UK red list

JERSEY Airport has recorded 99 skylarks during this year's annual bird survey – the third-highest total since monitoring began in 2006.

The count was carried out in June and was organised by the ornithological section of the Société Jersiaise and the Jersey Birds on the Edge Project – with support from the Airport Rescue and Fire Fighting Service.

The Airport is now the Island's main breeding ground for the species, which is on the UK red list due to population declines linked to habitat loss, disturbance and changes in farming.

Larger birds are kept away from the airfield for safety reasons, but skylarks are allowed to nest and feed on the grassland as they are small, do not flock and pose no risk to aircraft.

Airport firefighter Neil Harvey said: “The airfield grassland has become a favourite spot for skylarks to nest and roost in recent years. It’s now Jersey’s primary habitat for these birds. We’re thrilled to continue our role in surveying and conserving skylarks in Jersey.”

Tony Paintin, from the Société Jersiaise’s ornithology section, said: “Although skylarks are common autumn migrants and winter visitors, they’re a rare breeding species in Jersey. Their main stronghold is at Jersey Airport, where the long-grass policy and lack of disturbance create the perfect environment for them.”

Birds on the Edge also supports conservation work for skylarks through the Winter Bird Crop scheme and protective measures in St Ouen’s Bay, which is the other breeding site for the species in Jersey.

Numbers there have been as low as one pair, but now stand at an estimated five to seven pairs after two fenced protection areas were introduced to prevent disturbance by people and dogs during the breeding season.

The brown bird is larger than a sparrow but smaller than a starling, and is known for its vertical display flight and distinctive song, which can be heard throughout the year.