

Farmers love larks

Project “1 000 fields for skylarks”

Between 2009 and 2011 and on more than 1 244 fields all over Germany, 5 100 so-called lark windows were established. Deutscher Bauernverband (DBV, German Farmers Union) and the Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU, German Society for Nature Conservation) had appealed for a joint project “1 000 fields for skylarks”. Such lark windows are areas of about 20 square metres within fields where no crops are sown. These areas without vegetative cover are used by skylarks and other birds for foraging and as “landing lanes”. Nationwide, more than 500 farmers participated in this joint project and briefly lifted their equipment off the ground during sowing.

The skylark is a typical bird of the open landscape. The updated “Red List” of breeding birds in Germany categorised the skylark as endangered species in 2007 for the first time, a diminishing breeding success, due to changes in arable farming towards more compact crop stands which follow each other in rapid succession, being seen as one reason. Later in the breeding season, and due to the dense crops, there is often a lack of suitable sites for further feeding or breeding. The scientific evaluation of the project “1 000 fields for skylarks” revealed the positive effects of lark windows in winter cereals with regard to the usability of these areas during the breeding phase; on these spaces which were left open for the larks, a marked increase of bird numbers could be observed. Beyond the strong willingness of farmers to participate, this increase also clearly proves the success of the project.

Farmers who took part in the project have done so on a voluntary basis and without financial aid, hence delivering a clear contribution to protect biological diversity in the agricultural landscape. The results of the project demonstrate that successes with regard to nature and species protection can already be achieved with simple measures.

When taking care of hedges, margins or flowering strips as part of their work, farmers support nature protection and the conservation of the landscape. One particularly positive effect of this project is the fact that participating farmers were able to gather experiences with particular conservation practices, which can be integrated in future activities. As an “add-on”, the project contributed to reducing the reciprocal prejudices between agriculture and nature conservation.



photo: Mathias Schäf



photo: Alf Pille