Promotion of a national strategy for the conservation of the DuPont’s lark

Ecologists of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) have received valuable support from the Fundación Biodiversidad of the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food, and the Environment to work on conserving the DuPont’s lark, a threatened species that inhabits Spain’s steppe expanses.

DuPont’s lark, with ringed markings, is ready to be released again into its habitat. Scientific tagging is key in these projects. Physical or visual recapture allows survival rates, habitat use, etc. to be determined. / Adrián Barrero – UAM
DuPont's lark, *Chersophilus duponti*, is a small bird that belongs to the Alaudidae family. Ornithologists know it as the “ghost of the moors”, making it difficult to observe, as well as because of its ability to blend into the vegetation where it lives, mainly in open spaces populated with shrubs or dwarf shrubs.

In Europe, DuPont's lark can be found only in Spain. This, together with an annual 4% decline in population over the last 10 years at least, has made it worthy of priority care.

This situation has motivated the Fundación Biodiversidad of the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food, and the Environment to support the elaboration of the scientific criteria necessary to properly manage and conserve the Spanish population of the DuPont's lark.

Throughout 2018, a team of the Terrestrial Ecosystem Ecology of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (TEG-UAM), under the leadership of Professor Juan Traba, will be in charge of formulating the technical and scientific knowledge bases needed to draft and implement a National Conservation Strategy.

**Threatened species**

DuPont's lark is currently catalogued as an “endangered species” in the Red List of Birds in Spain, and as “vulnerable” in the Spanish Catalogue of Endangered Species. Its decline appears to be due, in part, to the abandonment of traditional agricultural and livestock farming, particularly extensive grazing of sheep, but also as a result of its habitat being occupied for other uses: reforesting, intensive agriculture, ploughing for crops, and wind farms.

Together with basic information about the current status of knowledge regarding the species’ biology and ecology, the new project will undertake an in-depth analysis of the status of the Spanish population (size, trends, habitat status, distribution, current and extinct populations, etc.). Furthermore, the limiting factors and threats or conservation issues the DuPont's lark faces both now and in the coming years will be identified.

“We also intend to determine important areas for the species in Spain and each Autonomous Community, as well as an analysis to ascertain how efficient the current network of protected spaces is”, the project director explains.

“Together with a diagnosis of the state of conservation — they add [sic] — the necessary management and conservation measures will be posed to invert the
decline of the species, ranging from purely regulatory to measures that have to do with managing the habitat, \textit{ex-situ} conservation if pertinent, and follow-up and scientific monitoring".

The project contemplates the participation of managers, government technicians, scientists, and conservationists in drawing up these technical bases, by exchanging information and at working meetings to be held throughout the year 2018.

This project joins the LIFE Ricotí Project (funded by the European Commission), the BBVA-Dron Ricotí project (funded by the Fundación BBVA), and various consensus projects funded by Autonomous Communities, joining forces to conserve this threatened bird.

“Thanks to the determined support of the public administrations, the Ministry, and Autonomous Communities, we are still in time to reverse this species’ dramatic situation and guarantee that it will continue to amaze us with its unique call in the frigid dawn on the Iberian moors”, the researchers conclude.

\textbf{Contact information:}
Juan Traba Díaz, Profesor Titular
Grupo de Ecología Terrestre (TEG-UAM)
Departamento de Ecología
Universidad Autónoma
Mail: juan.traba@uam.es
Tlf.: 914976327