



Hello everyone,

The MLSG is now just over four years old and we are strengthening our stand as a collective of professionals and amateurs involved in research, monitoring and conservation of migratory landbirds, particularly in the African-Eurasian flyways region. To reiterate, our goal is to provide a networking platform across this flyway region, as well as regional representation expressed in our membership of individuals, academic institutions, research stations, governmental research agencies, NGOs and other social societies.

This newsletter is an update of all that we have achieved in our fourth year, from March 2017 to the beginning of June 2018. The MLSG Board or Executive Committee (ExCo) selected at the inaugural meeting in Wilhelmshaven in March 2014 has grown and changed in composition, but we have sustained efforts aimed at achieving and advancing our goals.

**Editorial: Why do we need research networks?**

One very obvious thing about understanding the population dynamics of migratory birds is the need to have good information from all stages of the migratory cycle and over a large spatial scale. There is no point having complete information from a single breeding population without any knowledge of its connectivity to other populations and knowledge of what happens to it during migration and on the non-breeding grounds. You can monitor populations anywhere on the flyway but you can't understand what drives it unless you put together all the links in the chain. We all appreciate this, yet most of us stick to our local study sites because of the logistics and costs of research, and because

working out anything even on a local scale is hard enough. There are some exceptions to this – shorebird workers, for example, have always had a better flyway approach, with some inspirational studies such as the semi-palmated sandpiper system along the West coast of North and South America, and the knot system, well, more or less, everywhere. I think the trend in migrant landbird studies is now much more in this direction - to attempt to do more complete annual cycle migrant studies.

A brilliant example of this is the recent study by Frédéric Jiguet and a team of 29 other main researchers – plus many field assistants and citizen scientists of course – from 13 European countries that put together the migratory



population dynamics of the Ortolan Bunting<sup>1</sup>. Ortolans are a classic story of declining populations, with a drop in European populations of 88% over the last 40 years. Yet, they still remain sufficiently common (nearly 5 million pairs in Europe) that traditional hunters – mainly in France – perceive that they can still be harvested, even though this is illegal. A key argument that the French hunters use is that Ortolan populations passing through France are pan-European and Russian, so that their harvesting effects are diluted across much of the global population, and so have no overall effect. We know that there are many causes of declines for migrant species and we also know that hunting can occur sustainably, and even to the benefit of species through habitat conservation, so perhaps the hunters have a point. On the other hand, from say a Swedish point of view, Ortolans are a species that is heading for extinction and it seems crazy that migrants from Sweden should be deliberately killed. Now, Ortolans are fully protected under EU law but there are exceptions (“derogations”) where protected species can be hunted if it can be demonstrated that the harvest represents less than 1% of the total annual mortality rate of the concerned population and that the population will not be detrimentally affected. This is the argument that French hunters are currently using to attempt to legalise Ortolan hunting in France and to water down the EU’s enforcement of the current protection laws.



Ortolan Bunting, photo credit: Simonas Minkevicius

So back to Frédéric Jiguet and his co-workers who, over the last five years over the whole of Europe, have worked out what is happening with Ortolan populations to test this central idea – that 30,000 Ortolans can be harvested each year in France without detriment to the European population. The study used a whole variety of methods: population dynamics estimates from targeted and also ongoing citizen science monitoring of abundance and life cycle parameters like productivity and survival along with mapping of the routes of migrant populations using geolocator tags, stable isotopes and genetic variation. They inevitably found out a lot about Ortolans in the process of such an extensive study: their migratory trajectories, phenology and behaviour, their high connectivity, their population genetics and so on. The kind of information that we, as migrant researchers, all chase and are fascinated by, because we want to know how these systems work and can be maintained with changing climate and environmental conditions. But I will concentrate on the main applied result that justified the whole study: do French hunters make a difference?

In short – yes. The study identified a clear migratory divide with populations breeding east of Belarus to the Balkans migrating east around the Mediterranean and wintering in the highlands of Ethiopia, and a much smaller westerly

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<sup>1</sup> *The Ortolan findings are in the “Migration strategy of the ortolan bunting final report of the scientific committee Dec 2016” (Frédéric Jiguet, France, CESCO, Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle), and in a paper to be published this year*



population which breeds in Germany, Poland and Scandinavia then migrating through Western Europe to winter in upland areas of West Africa. An estimated 81,000 pairs of Ortolans form this population, and after breeding, about 300,000 individuals should pass through France. 30% of these individuals belong not only to the Western population, but to the severely endangered smaller and genetically isolated Scandinavian population. You don't really need a complicated model to do the maths (the study, of course, has one). 30,000 Ortolans hunted out of 300,000 exceeds 1% quite a bit. And the breeding populations of the birds passing through France are declining at annual rates of 2-5% (worst in Scandinavia). The model the study produced shows that 30,000 birds taken each year is enough to be pushing the Scandinavian populations to extinction. The conclusions are clear – no relaxing of the hunting ban should be made and in fact, greater effort should be focused on the illegal hunting that some in the French establishment condone. Traditional it may be, but their grandchildren will have no option to see an Ortolan, let alone eat one.

So, the Ortolan study is a brilliant example of the large-scale science that needs to be done to

understand and so conserve migrant land birds. Fundamental to the research was an extensive network of pre-existing researchers that could unite their existing local work into a single European-wide project and initiate a coordinated program of tagging and sampling. The sum was so much greater than its constituent parts. Another example – ongoing at the moment – is the European Turtle Dove Working Group. With many national populations of Turtle Doves in Western Europe heading for extinction, the Ortolan approach is needed, although saving Turtle Doves is perhaps a much larger problem, with the overall productivity of our agricultural landscape for everything other than our crops in freefall.

And so to the MLSG, which exists to facilitate such research networks and project co-ordination all along the flyway. Working together and in a coordinated way is the only way to tackle the problem of declining migrant land birds because of the spatial scale over which they operate. It is the same Ortolan singing for a Swedish dog walker, flying over a French restaurant, or hopping about in a harvested maize field on the Jos Plateau in Nigeria.

*Will Cresswell 07/06/2018*



## Updates from within the ExCo

- We begin with congratulating both Dr. Mathilde Lerche-Jørgensen and Dr. Lykke Pedersen on successfully defending their doctoral dissertations at the University of Copenhagen.
- It is however with sadness that we say farewell to Samantha Franks, Mathilde Lerche-Jørgensen and Danielle van Oijen as they step down from their roles on the ExCo as our Vice-Chair, Events Officer and Conservation Officer, respectively. They will remain valued members of the MLSG family. We are thankful for their service and wish them the best in all their endeavours.
- We would also like to welcome both Samuel Ivande (from the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute) and Wieland Heim (from the University of Münster) to the ExCo. They are both strongly involved in academic research and bring a wealth of experience and contacts to the MLSG ExCo.

## **ExCo members**

- Chair: Carles Carboneras (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; RSPB)
- Vice-chair: Position to be filled
- Secretary: Wouter Vansteelant (Independent Researcher)
- Treasurer: Rien van Wijk (Independent Researcher)
- Events Officer: Position to be filled
- Communications: Lykke Pedersen (University of Copenhagen)  
Samuel Temidayo Osinubi (University of Cape Town)
- Editorial: Will Cresswell (University of St. Andrews)
- Website: Position to be filled
- Conservation: Samuel Ivande (A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute; APLORI)  
Wieland Heim (University of Münster)

For a full overview of the ExCo please visit the 'About Section' at our website: <http://migrantlandbirds.org/>.  
If you would like to join the ExCo, please [contact us](#).

## **ExCo meetings**

The MLSG ExCo met during the 11<sup>th</sup> European Ornithologists' Union conference that took place in Turku, Finland, between 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2017. Here, we could welcome Sam and Wieland on board and we discussed the potential for a joint EOU-MLSG pre-congress symposium at the upcoming International Ornithological Congress (IOC) in Vancouver 2018 (read more below). Recently, the ExCo met again to review our COST proposal at St. Andrews University, Scotland, 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2018 (read more below). Attendance at meetings by ExCo members is usually self-funded. However, we received £600 in funding from University of St. Andrews for covering travel expenses of our most recent meeting.



## **Progress report**

While maintaining our focus on strengthening our online and social media presence, building on the success at the 14<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Ornithological Congress in Dakar, Senegal, in 2016, we have made pre-conference symposia an essential part of our strategy. In 2017, the 11<sup>th</sup> European Ornithologists' Union (EOU) conference provided us an ideal platform for a two-day MLSG meeting.

### **Satellite symposium at 11<sup>th</sup> EOU conference**



*MLSG networking workshop at EOU 2017, group discussions,  
Photo Credit: Rien van Wijk*

We organised a two-day satellite symposium just before the official EOU conference in August 2018. More than 70 researchers and migratory bird enthusiasts officially attended the event to share their research findings and actively engage in discussions on MLSG priorities. 39 attendees gave 5 minute speed presentations on their research topics, and we enjoyed listening to key note talks from Almut Schlaich, Les Underhill, Janne Ouwehand and Sam Ivande. Finally, the symposium offered three workshop sessions on Data visualization, Networking and Best practices for tracking as well as a Whinchat Working Group meeting. Read the full summary of the event [here](#).

### **MLSG opinion paper**

At the pre-conference satellite symposium at EOU, we also announced that we are currently working on an opinion piece, highlighting the need for collaborative research across the Flyway. Preliminary analyses have shown that the majority of the ever-increasing amount of studies on migratory landbirds are conducted in the Northern hemisphere, and we argue that studies involving collaboration and knowledge exchange across the Flyway is needed for the effective conservation of migratory birds. If you would like to hear more or be actively involved in the study, please [contact us](#).





## COST proposal

The key of the MLSG is to connect people working on migrant landbirds, mainly through meetings and collaborative research projects. To strengthen this goal, and to facilitate equal participation across the Eurasian-African flyway, we are currently working on drafting a [COST proposal](#) and are reaching out to our network to see who could be interested to be on board. COST is EU funding that enables researchers to organize and convene meetings, covering costs such as traveling and short research stays. Will Cresswell has taken the lead to ensure that we meet the deadline 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2018. If you want to know more, or would like to get involved, [get in touch](#).



MLSG ExCo meeting in St Andrews, Scotland, drafting the outline for our COST proposal. Photo credit: Lykke Pedersen

## International Species Action Plan for European Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)

An International Species Action Plan for the Turtle-dove was adopted by the European Commission's Expert Group on the Birds & Habitats Directive (NADEG) on 23 May 2018. The Plan has been developed by RSPB (BirdLife in UK) through a wide consultation process involving 300+ experts, stakeholders and representatives of the competent authorities. The final draft is available on the [SAP Tracking Tool online platform](#).

The Plan's framework for action contains multiple measures aimed at making a difference for turtle-doves, e.g.:

- Emergency feeding schemes
- National Conservation Strategies to be developed in each Member State
- Identification & designation of *Priority Intervention Areas*
- Ensuring relevant measures are financed under the new Common Agricultural Policy framework
- Ensuring no measures that are detrimental to the turtle-dove, such as conversion of extensive grassland management, promotion of intensive land-use practices, are financed under the new CAP
- Maintenance of turtle-dove friendly management in High Nature Value farming systems within the turtle-dove's current or recent range
- Adaptive Harvest Management in place in 2019 (including '0 take' as an option)
- Temporary moratorium on hunting in 2018



The Plan defines over 100 measures that need to be put in place to save this declining species. Despite the fact that public attention in relation to turtle-doves often focuses on hunting and the proposal of a temporary moratorium, it is the measures on habitat that will deliver more turtle-doves in the long term; the temporary suspension of hunting is only an emergency (and reversible) measure that will ensure there are enough turtle-doves in all countries for the population to recover. The measure has been agreed in order to provide the species with enough breathing space before the habitat management measures start to have an effect.



Turtle dove, photo credit: Valentijn van Bergen

### Website development

Our web developer Chris Dee is working on updating our website. Currently it is rather cumbersome to keep the website up to date and several templates are used throughout, giving the website a messy appearance. Also, the website is not yet fully accessible, as it is difficult for members to create a profile and the forum is not intuitive. Finally, the website does not show well on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. To address these issues, there will soon be a major update on the website's layout and functionality. Keep an eye out for updates on <http://migrantlandbirds.org/> and if you have any wishes, ideas or comments to add, please do [let us know](#).

### Website blog

We have had a number of interesting blog posts contributed by MLSG members during the last year. Our most recent contribution is from Dayo Osinubi, presenting the Intra-African Bird Migration Project. Others include researching bird migration in Turkey by Hakan Karaardıç, European Nightjar migration by Ruben Evens and developing ornithological research capacity in West Africa by Samuel Ivande. Find these and other interesting stories on migrant landbirds [here](#).



We are interested in hearing your stories about your research, field work experiences *et cetera*. Do [get in touch](#) if you have a story to tell.



## Social media

We would like to highlight our social media platforms that are there for your convenience. Make sure to use our [Facebook group](#) to post news about published papers, events or other activities and feel free to ask questions or start discussions relevant to the MLSG community. We have now reached 1000 followers on our [Twitter](#) account! Followers are from across the Globe, so do remember to tag @MigrantLandbird in your tweets to ensure a wide distribution of your posts. Remember that you can also link to the project “Migrant Landbird Study Group - MLSG” at [ResearchGate](#) to follow updates. We encourage active participation from the community on all of our social media platforms.

## Membership fee

MLSG membership is based on an annual subscription via PayPal on the anniversary of last year’s payment. Membership categories are:

- Student or early-career (three years post degree) member for EUR 15
- Developing countries member for EUR 15
- Ordinary member for EUR 25
- Supporting member for EUR 40
- Founding member for EUR 75

Some of the benefits of becoming a paying member of the MLSG include:

- Early notification of upcoming MLSG news and events.
- Access to the forum and discussion with fellow researchers on field methodologies and tools, analysis and datasets, funding and job opportunities, information on data and analytical resources.
- Ability to add your project(s) to the [Project Hotspots database](#) and make information about your research more easily accessible to the MLSG and wider conservation community.
- Discount on purchase of the MLSG branded t-shirt.

A portion of all memberships will go towards supporting current MLSG overheads. Additional profits will go towards supporting the participation of members in developing countries and the organisation of MLSG activities open to all members.

If you have not done so already, please visit our registration site: <http://migrantlandbirds.org/index.php/register> as soon as possible and sign up as a member of the MLSG.

While registering, do not forget to provide information about you or your institution for our ‘People and Research’ [page](#).





## **Looking ahead**

### **Upcoming meetings**

We are sorry to inform you that the planned EOU-MLSG satellite symposium "Landbird Migration in Different Worlds" at the IOC congress in Vancouver has been cancelled. The cancellation is due to an unexpected shift in timeslot as well as an overlap with a conflicting workshop on geolocator analyses. Instead we encourage everyone interested, to sign up for the geolocator workshop organized by Eli Bridge, Simeon Lisovski and Eldar Rakhimberdiev. Sign up [here](#). The MLSG ExCo will still be present at the IOC to raise our profile.

On a more positive note, we are excited to let you know that we, in collaboration with the Poland-South African collaboration project, will organize a joint meeting on the topic of bird migration and climate change - [Migrant Birds as Indicators of Climate Change](#) - in Gdańsk, Poland, 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> December 2018. The meeting will include presentations, working group discussions and workshops. Read more and register [here](#).

#### [27<sup>th</sup> International Ornithological Congress](#)

*in Vancouver, Canada, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018*

#### [3<sup>rd</sup> Congress on Bird Migration and Global Change](#)

*in Tarifa, Spain, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018*

#### [1<sup>st</sup> International BioMove Symposium](#)

*in Potsdam, Germany, 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September 2018*

#### [AFRING Bird Migration & Climate Change in Africa](#)

*in Dakhla, Western Sahara, 21<sup>st</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018*

## **Banking details**

A reminder of the MLSG bank account details:

- Name: StichtingPalearctischTrekvogelonderzoek– MLSG
- Account: NL61 TRIO 0198 1009 73
- Swift: TRIONL2U
- ANBI: 8549.39.003
- Address: Dijkgraaf 35, 6721 NJ, Bennekom, Netherlands.

If you have questions or would like to know more, please do not hesitate to [get in touch](#).

*Thank you!*

Greetings from the  
MLSG Executive Committee.

