



# Migrant Landbird Study Group

Hello birdwatchers, bird lovers, bird listers, fair-weather birders, all-weather birders, researchers, and everyone who shares our interest in migrant landbirds.

It has been another eventful year and the MLSG now celebrates its second year of existence. Growth has been measured, with a lot of attention on sustained growth. At the time of preparing this newsletter, we are 32 registered members strong. We aim to increase our membership with your help, building this active network and information platform for professionals and amateurs in academic institutions, research stations, governmental research agencies, NGOs, private businesses and other social entities.

This newsletter covers the March 2015 to June 2016 period and provides news about upcoming activities. Highlights include increasing our online presence, the production of publicity materials, a report of our presence at the EOU, and most importantly our being granted charitable status, as well as the financial implications.

## **Editorial: What can the MLSG do for you?**

What can the MLSG do for you? Well let me tell you what it has done for me this year, as an example. One of the highlights of my research year was the EOU conference last August – not just because of a fantastic day's birding in Extremadura – but because of the enthusiasm I encountered from other researchers working on migrants birds.

I study migrant birds because I can't help it. That there are species that breed in my Scottish garden that come from the heart of Africa has always made me want to know more about them. Even if they weren't declining with some species disappearing from my local patch in my lifetime I would still want to follow them. Northern wheatears from the frozen Arctic where I was dodging polar bears to the baked edge of the Sahara where bad-tempered camels are the hazard. European bee-eaters exchanging cows in Spain for wildebeest and zebras in the Ngorogoro Crater. What is there not to like or be fascinated by?



But each year we find out more of the extent of their problems: intensification of agriculture literally cutting down whinchats in their prime; legal slaughter of turtle doves in France and illegal but untouched trapping of songbirds in Cyprus; loss of habitat in the Sahel; shifting rainfall patterns across the whole of Africa that lie at the heart of the origin of migratory flexibility that may now lead to their undoing. It's hard to stay cheerful and focussed with each piece of new research that inevitably concentrates on and highlights the problem.

Hence the joy of talking to others involved in migratory research at the EOU. I was reminded that we are all doing our bit, if only a little bit, and amongst the doom and gloom there are still the fascinating stories of what these incredibly flight capable, globe-trotting birds can do and even the occasional account of how things are getting better or could get better when we get the message out there. I sat through the MLSG symposium and then in the EOU itself listening to researchers from all over Europe detail their hard won research findings, my head then buzzing with new ideas to link together what makes migrants particularly prone to population variability. I met a PhD student with similar ideas and we started a collaboration that has led to some of the most productive and satisfying research I have done in my life so far. All thanks to the MLSG – it facilitated my research by getting me out there talking and meeting other researchers.

It is hard to quantify the success of ventures like the MLSG. We have no control group (or “counterfactual” to use the current conservation impact jargon): what would the world be like if we didn't get together and try to make things a bit better? But I think we can safely assume that such collaborations do make a difference – particularly when the solution to conserving migrants must involve all of us on the flyways working together. So, please use the MLSG to make contact with at least one new researcher somewhere else on the flyway this year, start a new collaboration and establish new links. The success of migrants in the face of climate change is a product of their flexibility in establishing new routes and links in the migratory chain: our effectiveness in research, conservation, formulating policy or spreading the word also depends on our links.

MLSG Newsletter Editor

*Will Cresswell*



## **ExCo members**

- Chair: Carles Carboneras (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; RSPB).
- Vice-chair: Samantha Franks (British Trust for Ornithology; BTO).
- Secretary: Wouter Vansteelant (University of Amsterdam).
- Treasurer: Rien van Wijk (Swiss Ornithological Institute).
- Events Officer: Mathilde Lerche-Jørgensen (University of Copenhagen).
- Communications: Lykke Pedersen (University of Copenhagen).  
Samuel Temidayo Osinubi (University of Cape Town).
- Editorial: Will Cresswell (University of St. Andrews).
- Conservation: Danielle Van Oijen (BirdLife Netherlands: VBN).

For a full overview of the Executive Committee please visit the 'About Section' at our website: <http://www.migrantlandbirds.org>

## **Updates from within the ExCo**

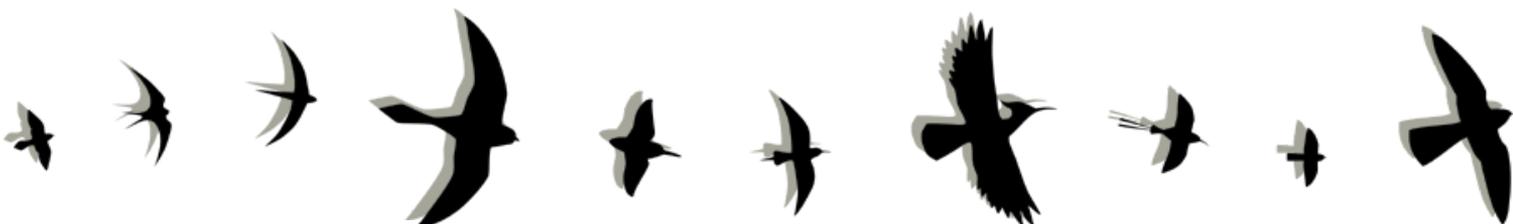
- Bernd de Bruijn (VBN) and Danae Sheehan (RSPB) have had to step down from the ExCo, but Danielle Van Oijen (VBN) and Carles Carboneras (RSPB) have joined the ExCo in their place. Both Bernd and Danae remain members of MLSG and continue to support our efforts.
- We officially welcome Carles Carboneras as the Chair of the ExCo. He heads the Migrants Team in the International Division of the RSPB and brings a wealth of experience to the ExCo.
- We congratulate both Dr. Wouter and Dr. Rien for successfully defending their doctoral dissertations at the University of Amsterdam and the University of Zurich, respectively.
- Dayo has taken up a postdoctoral fellowship position at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town, stepping down from his previous position with BirdLife International.

## **ExCo meetings**

The ExCo has met three times:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> ExCo meeting took place at the VBN office, Zeist, Netherlands, from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2015
- 4<sup>th</sup> ExCo meeting took place mainly via Skype (though two ExCo members were able to join from the University of Copenhagen) from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.
- 5<sup>th</sup> ExCo meeting took place via Skype on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2016.

Attendance at these meetings by ExCo members was self-funded.





ExCo members at the 4<sup>th</sup>MLSG ExCo meeting.

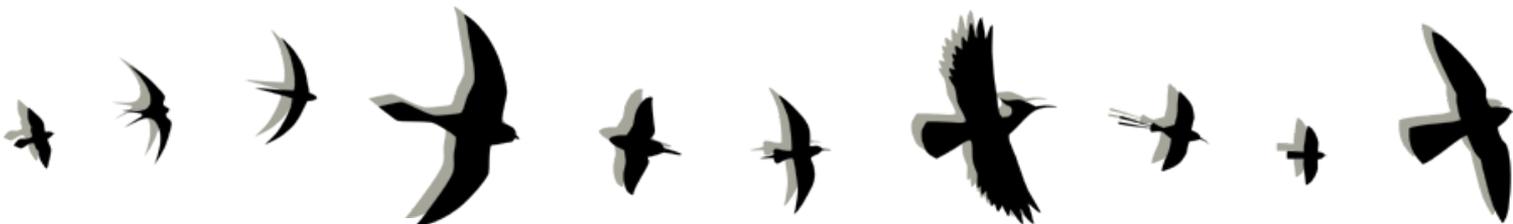
### **Progress report**

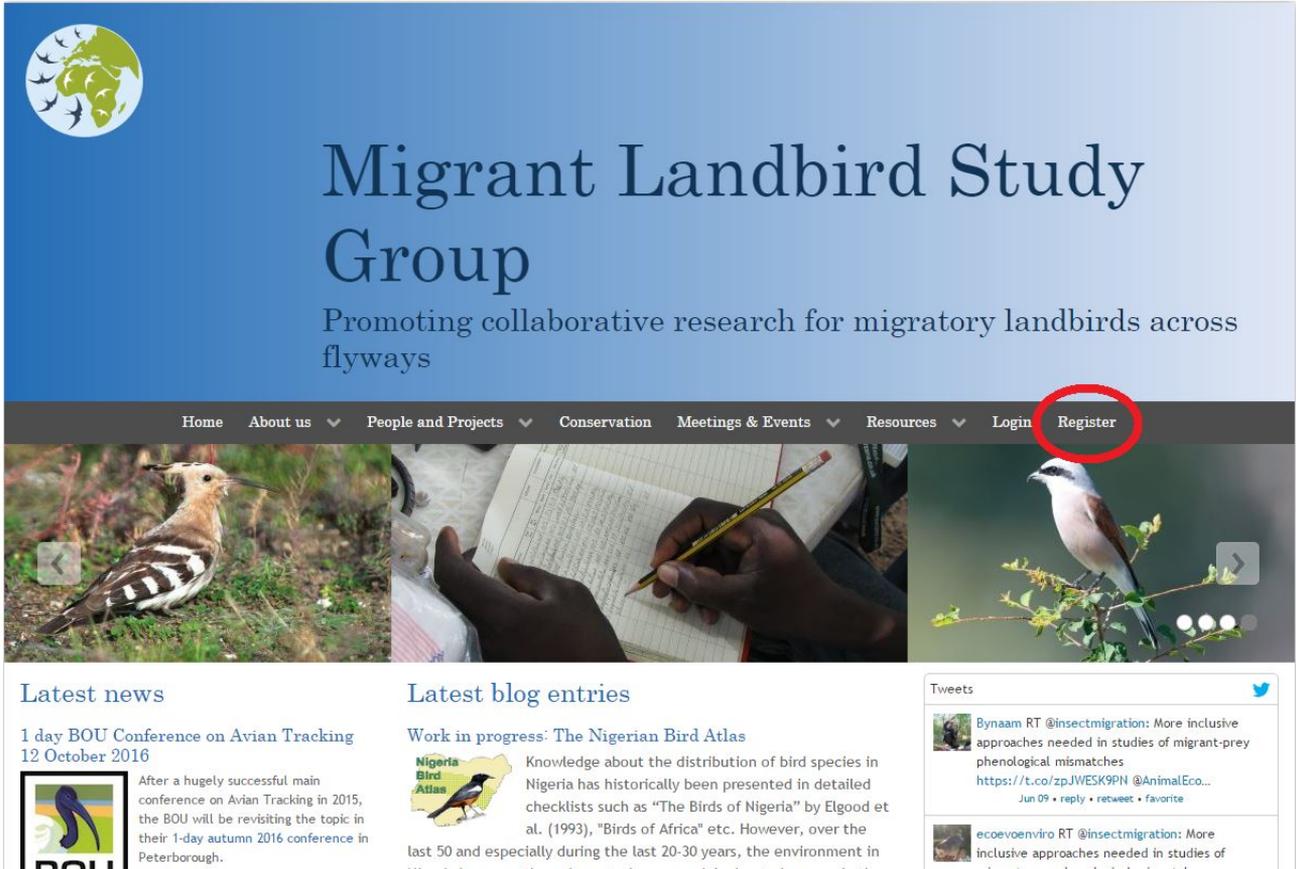
Our focus has been on improving the functionality of our website, while at the same time increasing our online presence through social media. As such, the thrust of our membership drive has mainly been online. We organised events at the 10<sup>th</sup> conference of the European Ornithologists' Union (EOU). More details on this and more below.

### **Website**

The official MLSG website was launched in June 2015 and presented for the community at the MLSG satellite symposium at EOU. The layout is user-friendly; with drop-down tabs, public-access and member-access tools, a live Twitter feed and a prominent button that makes becoming a member easy. The task of developing the website was commissioned to an external organisation, under the supervision of Samantha.

With the Phase 1 plan for the website development completed, we are now commencing Phase 2, involving general improvements of the membership database and registration process and control of accessibility to different parts of the website for registered members only. These parts include the ability to add your research project to the projects database, access to the MLSG forum, information on funding opportunities as well as access to various environmental and analysis datasets.





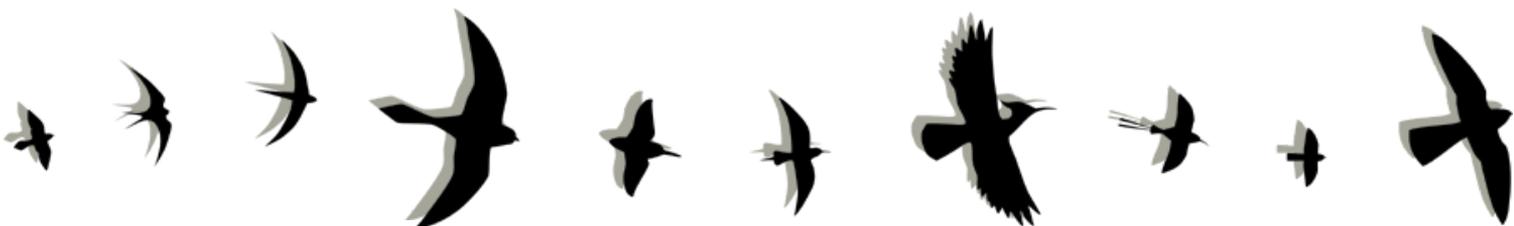
Screenshot of the MLSG website.

### Website blog

We have already had some extraordinary contributions to our website blog. These include Ulf Ottoson spreading the word on the Nigerian Bird Atlas project, Mikkel Willemoes releasing Danish cuckoos in Spain, Lisenka de Vries modelling threats to Turtle Dove populations, and the findings of Leo Zwarts and colleagues on why so many migratory birds choose to stay in the Sahelian Savannah rather than moving to lush areas further south. Read more on our [blog](#).



Collection of images from the website blog.



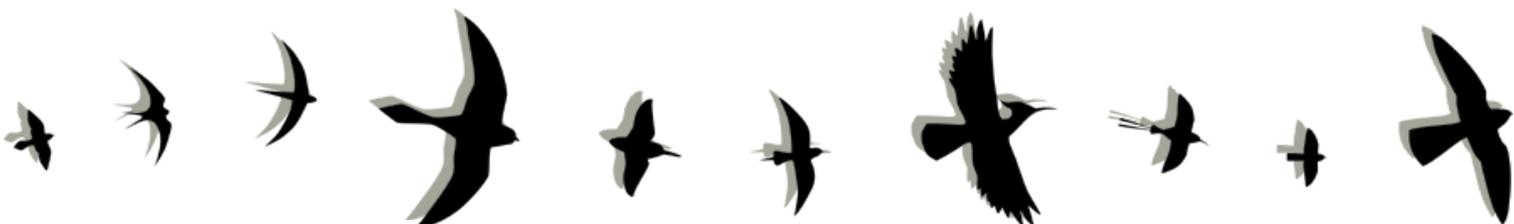
We would love to hear your stories about your research, field work, workshops, conferences or opinion about a topical issue. Please send us ([info@migrantlandbird.org](mailto:info@migrantlandbird.org)) a 500-word draft in any version of MS Word and kindly include relevant image files.

### Roll-up banner

A roll-up banner has been designed and produced for the purpose of publicising MLSG presence at conferences. Look out for this banner at the next ornithological conference you attend, and come over to talk with us. Better yet, you can check with us before the conference to find out if we will be present. If no member has yet indicated their participation in a particular conference, you can take the lead as the MLSG representative at that conference.



Roll-up banner.



## MLSG-branded t-shirts

In addition to the MLSG-branded heat-sensitive mug (such a wonderful idea), we have designed and produced MLSG-branded short-sleeved t-shirts. These snappy-looking t-shirts come in male and female small, medium and large sizes. Currently, blue is the only colour available, but this colour is agreeably most versatile. These t-shirts are ideal for publicising the MLSG at a conference, during fieldwork or just wearing them at the office!

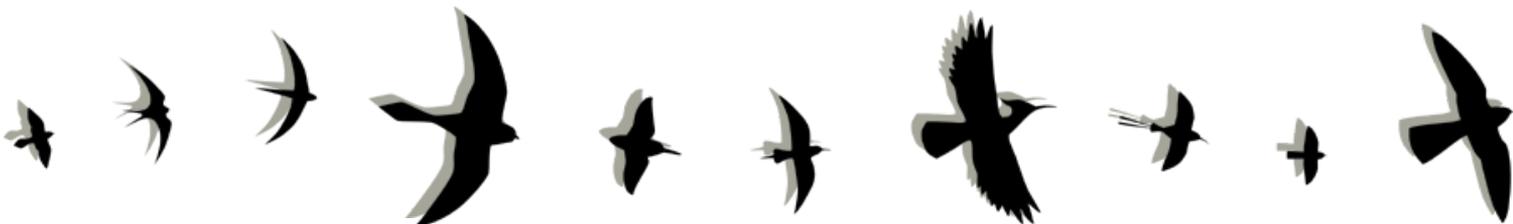
We are yet to set up our merchandise unit, so until then, the best place to get these t-shirts is at MLSG events or at conferences where the MLSG will have a very strong presence.



MLSG-branded t-shirts.

## MLSG at the EOU

At the 10th Conference of the EOU in Badajoz, Spain we managed to put together a MLSG Satellite Symposium on the day preceding the conference. The Symposium was a great success with over 90 people from the MLSG community attending. The aim was to connect researchers across the Flyway to identify the major challenges and how MLSG could help resolve these.



A [summary](#) of the talks and discussions at the symposium is provided on our website. Furthermore, the MLSG hosted a roundtable discussion led by Danae and Wouter on capacity building across the Flyway. This event was attended by at least 30 people at the conference and resulted in fruitful discussions on how to overcome challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, time and resource issues. The overall conclusion was that we need more extensive collaborative research across the flyways and that MLSG could provide an excellent platform to facilitate contacts. Read more about the round-table in our latest [blog entry](#).

## Social Media

During the countdown to last Christmas, we launched a Twitter and Facebook #joinMLSG campaign. This comprised an academic review of 12 papers that have had a profound impact on migrant bird research. One paper was tweeted on each of the 12 days leading up to Christmas. On a lighter note, members were encouraged to get into the Christmas mood by 'PhotoShopping' a Christmas hat on to an image of their field species or favourite bird, and tweet this image. This did get us a few hilarious images, but more importantly, it got us communicating more with each other.

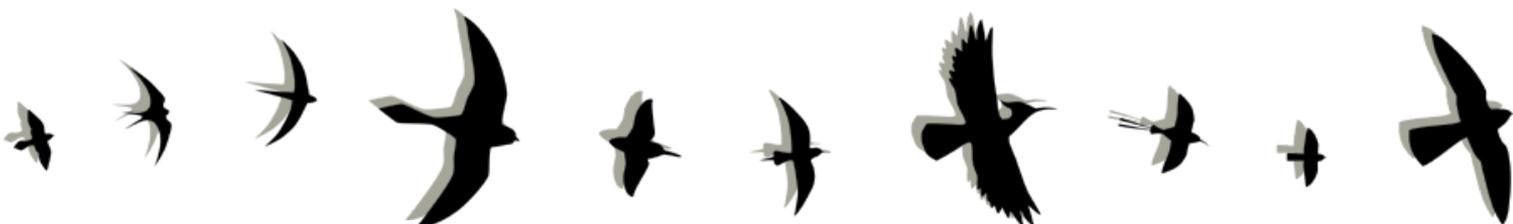
Furthermore, we are happy to announce that we have established a small Twitter group. This will ensure that our Twitter account stays burning hot with information on newly published papers, conferences, positions *et cetera*. We thank Tom Finch (@tomfinch89) and Tom Evans (@ThomasEvans) for contributing. Follow @MigrantLandbird on Twitter and join our Facebook group (Migrant Landbird Study Group) to keep updated on upcoming social media campaigns.

## Charitable Status

MLSG has now officially received Charitable Status and is recognised as a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) in the Netherlands as of February 2015. This has important implications for running our organisation as any funding received is now tax deductible. For further information, take a look at the [official documents](#).

## Donations

The development of the MLSG website could not have been accomplished without the crucial support we have had from some of the major conservation organisations across Europe. We would like to thank the RSPB and VBN for financial support towards the development of our website and the BTO for supporting MLSG with the provision of staff time.



A reminder of the MLSG bank account details:

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

### Membership fee

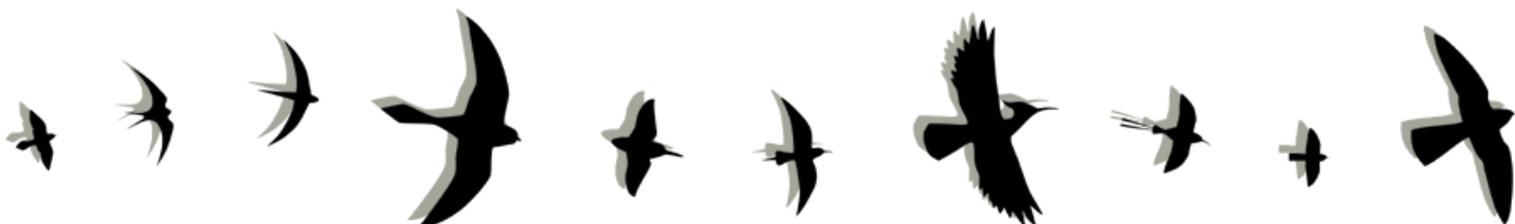
As announced at the EOU2015, we have decided to implement an annual membership fee. Our ordinary membership fee is 25EUR. However, we have reduced fees for students and members from developing countries (15EUR). You can also choose to become a supporting member (40EUR) or a founding member of MLSG (75EUR). 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.

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](#) as soon as possible and sign up as a member of the MLSG.

When registering, do not forget to provide information about you or your organisation for our '[People and Research](#)' page. This is arguably the most important part of the website - where those crucial migratory links can be established.



### **Looking ahead:**

As we now have the foundation for our website ready, setting up the general maintenance of the website is now a key issue we aim to address. There are still improvements to be made and we welcome any suggestions or ideas that you may have for this.

We are pleased to announce that we will have our first stand-alone MLSG meeting in spring 2017. Specific dates and venue are still to be decided upon, but we will keep you updated.

Finally, we hope you will take a few minutes to participate in our [questionnaire](#) to evaluate our progress so far and guide us in the right direction towards achieving the goals that are important to you.

### **Upcoming meetings and events**

1. [14<sup>th</sup> Pan-African Ornithological Congress](#) in Dakar, Senegal, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 2016

The MLSG will be hosting a roundtable discussion group and meeting during the conference to further disseminate the aims of the MLSG in Africa. We will also be helping to run (in association with the AP Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, Jos, Nigeria) some pre-conference training workshops aimed at students and early career researchers. These will run on the day before the PAOC starts on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October. If you want to attend any of them the important thing to remember is just to be there for the Sunday.

One of the pre-conference sessions will be MLSG based:

**Building networks (across flyways): how to get to know the right people** - Rien van Wijk & Chris Rostron

This workshop will be about networking, finding the right people for your questions and how to approach them. The workshop will be held in both French and English in association with MLSG and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

2. [BOU Conference on Advances in avian tracking and remote sensing](#) in Peterborough, UK, 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2016

If you have questions or would like to know more, please do not hesitate to contact us at [info@migrantlandbirds.org](mailto:info@migrantlandbirds.org)

Thank you.

Greetings from the MLSG Executive Committee.

