



Migrant Landbird Study Group

a network of researchers studying
migratory landbird species



Dear all,

We are now entering the third year as the MLSG and we are gradually expanding our representation outside of Europe. Our strong presence at the Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC) last year gave us the opportunity to put MLSG on the map in Africa and get feedback from our African colleagues on what should be the way forward. This year we aim to increase our membership and, with your help, build an 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 edition of the newsletter covers the June 2016 to March 2017 period and provides news about upcoming activities. Highlights include the appointment of Ian Newton as President, the translation of publicity materials to French, a summary of our presence at the PAOC, and most importantly our upcoming symposium preceding the EOU in Turku this August.

Editorial: Taking stock of the MLSG

One of the key issues in conservation today is how you measure the success of any initiative, or management plan, or reserved area, or piece of legislation. Clearly we can't do conservation with the proper controls (or counterfactuals to use the buzzword) – we won't be advising setting up a network of reserves in one flyway and not another so we can demonstrate that reserve networks are an effective conservation strategy. We have to rely on "natural" variation in the application of conservation measures that vary within and between countries at all scales. However, on a flyway level, we can't even do this. Nothing that is done in one area is independent from another because the animals we seek to conserve move over continental scales. And this is made worse by the fact that our realistic capacity for success is decreasing every day. If there are 7 billion people on the planet then clearly there cannot be as many other animals, and as this human population increases so there can only be less space and energy available for other species. So we cannot ever hope to restore populations to arbitrary levels set when conservationists started properly counting a few decades



Common cuckoo with satellite tag. Photo credit: Mikkel Willemoes

ago. So, realistically, we will never truly be able to tell if anything we are doing is making a difference and even when we think we can tell, it is very unlikely to be good news. So where does this leave us? Particularly those of us involved in the most difficult conservation problem of them all – the conservation of migratory landbirds – with the absence of counterfactuals and inevitable human population related environmental degradation always occurring somewhere.

Well my answer to this might be unexpected considering the apparent negative slant of my opening. I think this actually leaves us in a good position because such obstacles prevent us from ever reaching (or trying to reach) any kind of crushing appreciation of our own insignificant contribution to solving the problems of migratory landbird conservation. We are just left with a simple premise: “the world would be worse without this research, management and legislation”. Although there are some spectacular examples of conservationists wasting their time and energy on pointless actions, we know that where we can measure it, and the proper counterfactuals exist, conservation pretty much makes the world a better place. It certainly makes us all feel better about ourselves, to try to conserve what we can.

Ultimately we know, I think, that we are heading for a world with significantly lower biodiversity and fewer migrants, yet future generations can only experience the world they grow up in – what still remains will be their world. As, for example, those that live in Western Europe now value and fight for what they have now, rather than doing nothing in despair over the lost common redstarts and corncrakes that were in every village 100 years ago. Whatever we conserve or even save will be valued in the future much more than what will be lost, so every conservation action now is worthwhile. There is no room for pessimism in the conservation of migratory landbirds: sure the graphs will always be going downwards but how steep would that decline be without conservation? How grateful are we that conservationists sorted out the whale declines 40 years ago, or are sorting out albatross declines now?

Now, where is the MLSG and its research and conservation objectives in all this? Inevitably, any initiative like the MLSG starts with enthusiasm and good will, but after a while the obvious questions arise – what is it achieving? Is it worthwhile? Is it successful? As I have been arguing, these are probably impossible questions to answer, so we are left with that simpler question: “is the world a worse place without an international network of people getting together to facilitate research to help the conservation of migratory birds?” I think we can answer that one. That said, this network does need to get large and get talking. The EOU conference in Finland this August offers a great opportunity for us to do so: we have two full days of MLSG stuff before the conference officially starts. I hope you will join us there.

Will Cresswell 28/2/17



ExCo members

- Acting 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 (Copenhagen).
- Events Officer: Mathilde Lerche-Jørgensen (University of Copenhagen).
- Communications: Lykke Pedersen (University of Copenhagen).
Samuel Temidayo Osinubi (University of Cape Town).
- Newsletter Editor: Will Cresswell (University of St. Andrews).
- Conservation Officer: Danielle Van Oijen (BirdLife Netherlands: VBN).

For a full overview of the Executive Committee please visit the [About us](#) section on our website.

Updates from within the ExCo

- Mathilde is about to hand in her PhD thesis and has decided to seek challenges outside the scientific community. As such, she will be stepping down from her role within the MLSG ExCo. We wish her the best of luck and thank her for her contributions.
- Samantha has likewise decided to step down from the ExCo, but will remain an active member of the MLSG. We also want to thank her for her contributions and wish her the best of luck.

ExCo meetings

The MLSG ExCo recently had its 6th meeting at the University of Copenhagen on Saturday, 11th of February, 2017. Main focus was given to preparations for the upcoming MLSG symposium preceding the EOU conference in Turku this summer. Attendance at this meeting by ExCo members was self-funded.

Requests from within the MLSG community

- Vojtech Brlik and Petr Prochazka are preparing a database for a meta-analysis of the effect of geolocators on migratory songbirds and near-passerines. They kindly ask for some basic information regarding your geolocator projects or contacts with anyone involved in a geolocator project. If you can supply data or want more information, please contact vojtech.brlik@gmail.com
- Janne Ouwehand and Rien Van Wijk are aiming to establish a working group on migrant landbirds in the humid woodland savannah region of western Africa. If you are interested in becoming a part of this group, please contact janneouwehand@gmail.com



- Andrew Berdahl is working with a physicist to make a more general version of a migration timing model that makes specific predictions on group size distributions in migratory animals, especially ones that leave from common stop-over sites. He is looking for empirical data on group size distributions in migratory birds and collaborations. If you can point out literature data, or have such data available, please contact Andrew Berdahl berdahl@santafe.edu or Barbara Helm barbara.helm@glasgow.ac.uk

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. Additionally, we organised events at the Pan-African Ornithological Congress in Senegal 2016. More details on these below.

President of the MLSG

We are very grateful that in mid-September 2016, Prof. Ian Newton agreed to become President of the MLSG. Within that role he will aim to help spread the message of the MLSG by actively promoting collaborative research across flyways and participating in MLSG-related events as much as possible. Read his motivation [here](#).



MLSG at PAOC



The 14th Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC), themed global changes / threats and opportunities for birds in Africa, took place in Dakar, Senegal, between 16th and 21st October. This conference happens every four years and brings together ornithologists and bird enthusiasts from across and beyond the African continent. The PAOC provided (and provides) an unparalleled opportunity to engage with professional and amateur bird researchers in Africa, hence expanding and strengthening our network. As such, there was a strong MLSG presence at the 14th PAOC, with several MLSG ExCos and members

actively participating in the conference, as well as both the Chair and the Coordinator of the African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP; the UNEP/CMS instrument that facilitated the establishment of the MLSG). Other than the relevant symposia, talks and posters, the MLSG was also able to organise a roundtable discussion during which feedback was gathered regarding how we can best serve the course of migratory bird research and conservation. For a detailed report on MLSG activities at the 14th PAOC, please click [here](#).



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. This year, we would like to thank the VBN for financial support for the translation and printing of the [MLSG flyers](#).

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

Our ordinary membership fee is 25EUR. However, we have reduced fees for students and members from low-income 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.
- 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](#) 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.



Website

We are currently working on Phase 2 of the website development. This involves general improvements of the membership database and registration process as well as control of accessibility to different sections of the website for registered members only. These sections 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. We also aim to incorporate the suggestions given at the questionnaire last year and at several events where we received feedback in person.

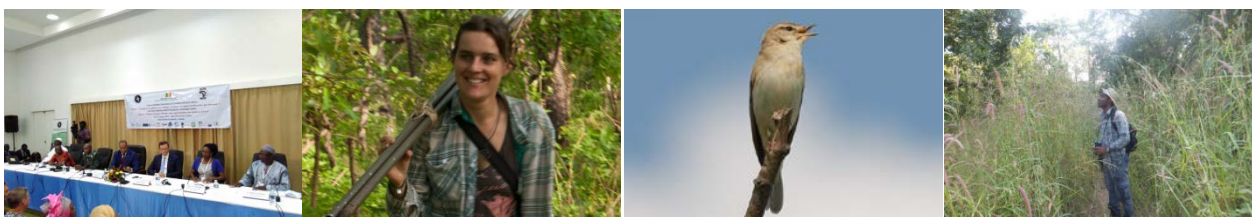


There are many good ideas out there to make the website even more attractive. To fully exploit the options, we are currently looking for a website developer to continue the work on developing the MLSG website.

If interested, please contact us on info@migrantlandbirds.org

Website blog

We are continuously receiving contributions to our website blog. Our latest contributions include "Tracking changes in Pied flycatchers, a prospect beyond the breeding grounds" by Janne Ouweland and a blog about the "Non-breeding distribution ecology of Palearctic migrants in Africa" by Sam Ivande. Read more about them and other blog entries [here](#).



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 email us at info@migrantlandbird.org with a 500-word draft in any version of MS Word and kindly include relevant image files.



Survey

Last year we asked for your feedback on all the activities the MLSG ExCo had pursued so far and how this related to the services that MLSG could provide to you. A total of 24 members responded to this request and here is what we found:

Overall, the respondents were satisfied with the achievements of MLSG so far. Comments were made for the ExCo to spend more efforts on outreach to further create awareness and engage people in the community.

According to the respondents, the top five MLSG services were:

1. Networking events.
2. Information about workshops, conferences *et cetera*.
3. Discussion forum about research experiences.
4. Skill development workshops.
5. Information about new publications.

Also, building bridges between researchers and actors beyond science was also deemed as important.

The survey highlights the relevance and importance of having an initiative such as the MLSG to facilitate meetings and provide a platform for information sharing and discussion. This year we have pursued these recommendations by organising another MLSG symposium (see below), sharing conference announcements on social media, giving a workshop on networking at the PAOC and by populating the 'new publications' section on our website.

We would like to thank everybody who participated in the survey and hope to implement more of your suggestions in the coming year!

Outreach Material

In order to facilitate the publicity of the MLSG, the MLSG flyer was translated into French (thanks to Morag Gillings) and the general layout and content was updated. Please find the latest version [here](#), you can print those to promote the MLSG within your own community or bring them to a conference you are attending. 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.



MLSG-branded t-shirts

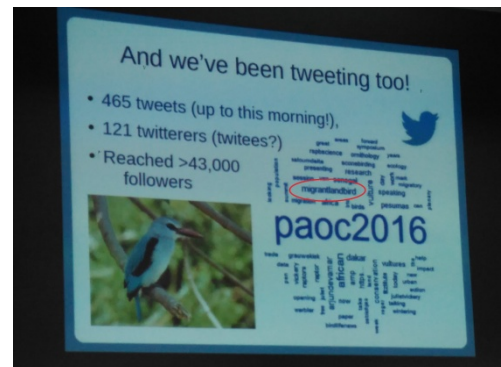
Our famous t-shirts are produced in 100% organically-grown cotton and come in male and female small, medium, large and extra large sizes. The t-shirts are ideal for publicising the MLSG at conferences or meetings and comfortable to wear. We also have a membership deal on t-shirts; registering in a particular membership category allows a discount on a t-shirt. Please see [here](#) for details.

The best place to get hold of a t-shirts is at MLSG events or at conferences where the MLSG will have a strong presence.



Social Media

Follow @MigrantLandbird on Twitter and join our Facebook group (Migrant Landbird Study Group) to keep updated on upcoming social media campaigns. As something new you can also link to the project “Migrant Landbird Study Group - MLSG” at [ResearchGate](#) to follow updates.



Looking ahead:

Upcoming meetings and events

MLSG Symposium

We are happy to announce that the MLSG will be hosting another exciting [symposium](#) on migrant landbirds preceding the EOU conference in Turku this summer from the 17th to the 18th of August 2017. We would like to welcome you all to this event. At the symposium you will have the chance to meet fellow researchers studying migrating landbirds and engage in a dynamic program of workshops and group discussions. Please, register at the official [conference website](#).

We are pleased to be able to offer 5 travel grants for attendance at the MLSG Symposium at the EOU conference this summer. The deadline for applying for the MLSG travel grant is 15th March. See [here](#) for further details.

[*Gordon Research Conference - Movement Ecology of Animals*](#)
in California, USA, from the 19th to the 24th of March 2017

[*BOU Conference - From Avian Tracking to Population Processes*](#)
in Warwick, UK, 28th to the 30th of March 2017

[*11th EOU Conference*](#)
in Turku, Finland, 18th to 22nd of August 2017

[*6th International Bio-Logging Science Symposium*](#)
in Konstanz, 25th to 29th of September 2017

[*1st North African Congress of Ornithology*](#)
in Béjaïa, Algeria, 24th to 26th of October 2017

If you have questions or would like to know more, please do not hesitate to contact us at info@migrantlandbirds.org

Thank you.

Greetings from the MLSG Executive Committee.

