



**SECOND MEETING OF THE AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY LANDBIRDS
WORKING GROUP**

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The Migrant Landbird Study Group (MLSG) – an update on activities

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On behalf of the Executive Committee of the MLSG

About MLSG

The foundation of the Migrant Landbird Study Group (MLSG) was conceived under the Africa-Eurasia Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). The Action Plan identified a strong need for a collaborative force to connect researchers and amateurs throughout the Palearctic working on migrating landbirds, a gap the MLSG aims to fill.

The objective of the MLSG is to serve as an independent study group to streamline research efforts that will inform conservation action for migrant landbirds within a global conservation context, but with a focus on the Africa-Eurasia flyways.

The MLSG will promote and encourage co-operation between researchers, both amateurs and professionals, and enthuse a broader public through an online information-sharing and knowledge-exchange platform, and by the organisation of meetings, e-newsletters, co-operative projects, and any other legal means.

Governance and membership

The business of the MLSG is conducted by an Executive Committee consisting of a Chair (Dr Danaë Sheehan), General Secretary (Dr Wouter Vansteelant), Treasurer (Dr Rien van Wijk) and not less than three, but not more than seven Ordinary Members (currently Lykke Pedersen, Dr Dayo Osinubi, Dr Will Cresswell, Danielle van Oijen and Tara Proud). The Executive Committee meets twice a year.

The funds of the MLSG consist of annual Member dues, donations, gifts and other income. Members pay an annual subscription, though subscriptions for members who have difficulty in paying may be reduced or waived at the discretion of the Executive Committee. Membership benefits include early notification of upcoming MLSG news & events, access to the forum and discussion with fellow researchers on field methodologies & tools, analysis & datasets, funding & job opportunities, information on data & analytical resources and the ability to add project(s) to the Project Hotspots database and make information about your research more easily accessible to the MLSG & wider conservation community.

The Executive Committee aspires to develop a Conservation Fund with monies raised from membership and other sources. The Conservation Fund may provide support to individuals from developing countries to attend MLSG-supported networking events.

Website, online resources and social media

The MLSG website (<http://migrantlandbirds.org/index.php>), now entering its second developmental phase, aims to become the primary portal by which researchers studying migrant landbirds can network and collaborate with other researchers and discover information that will help them to achieve their research objectives. The Executive Committee envisage an information resource about research, people, and the species and ecological topics they study, a place where young and senior researchers can network with each other and the birding community at large to advance collaborative projects. The website will become an online platform where researchers can engage in discussion on best practices and methodologies, share preliminary results before they are published, and share data and research resources with the migratory bird research community.

Some of the key objectives of the MLSG website are:

- to create a searchable database of researchers and their projects linking information on their institutions, countries in which they conduct field work, their research themes, and their study species
- to create an administrative membership database
- to disseminate news relevant to MLSG researchers (e.g. new articles, datasets, results)
- to disseminate the MLSG e-newsletter
- to provide a discussion forum on best practices and new methodologies
- to build a compendium of relevant research resources (e.g. links to open access environmental data, lab resources, multidisciplinary resources)
- to provide an educational outreach tool by which the public can find information on migrant landbird research and engage with researchers
- to provide a tool by which policy-makers can view a map of measurable conservation outcomes achieved by MLSG researchers or search for policy-relevant research
- to provide event management services for MLSG meetings and workshops

The MLSG also has an active Twitter account (@MigrantLandbird) which currently has nearly 500 followers.

Meetings

August 2013, Norwich, UK

The Migrant Landbird Study Group concept was initiated at a round table discussion at the 9th Conference of the European Ornithologists' Union (EOU) in Norwich, United Kingdom in August 2013. This open discussion was attended by 50 people and chaired by EOU president Thomas Wesołowski.

March 2014, Wilhelmshaven, Germany

The inaugural meeting of the MLSG was hosted by the Institut für Vogelforschung "Vogelwarte Helgoland" (IfV) and brought together researchers representing different research institutes and backgrounds (research, conservation, policy) to discuss the current status of research on migratory landbirds in the Africa-Eurasia flyway.

August 2015, Badajoz, Spain

Organised as a satellite symposium of the 10th Conference of the European Ornithologists Union and attended by more than 90 researchers with interest in migratory landbirds, with the aim of connecting

research to conservation. The symposium also hosted the inaugural meeting of the Turtle Dove Study Group – a new species-focussed network of researchers undertaking work on this now globally threatened species.

Break out groups established priorities and identified knowledge gaps, barriers and areas for possible future collaborations across the flyway. Relatively novel issues identified were the need to understand adaptation to climate and anthropogenic change; the need to conserve over large spatial scales with land sharing (sustainable) solutions rather than site-based approaches; how methods of data collection and sharing, and collaborations established with respect to other declining taxa and by social scientists in Africa need to be used by migrant landbird workers; the urgent need for capacity building in Africa; and how long time series of data, and over the whole flyway are really needed to understand what we can do about long term declines. Specific key points are summarised here:

- Research methods:
 - There is so much variation in tag design that it is very difficult to measure tag effects repeatedly
 - Training schemes for tagging are needed (perhaps as part of national ringing schemes)
 - All details of tagging methods and tag effects need to be reported (this was then further discussed as a possible function of the MLSG newsletter)
 - The need for a data depository for methods information
- Ecology:
 - We are missing so much basic natural history knowledge from the wintering grounds
 - The coverage is very much biased towards the Western flyway
 - Adaptation to climate and habitat change needs to be considered more fully
 - We have many descriptive studies – we need more hypothesis led studies to test processes that can then feed into management recommendations
 - Common sampling methods need to be adopted across flyways
 - There is a need for mentoring and capacity building for ecologists in Africa (this was then further discussed as an action point for the MLSG to become involved in training workshops at the PAOC (Pan-African Ornithological Conference) in 2016).
- Conservation:
 - We are only at the stage that we can act on the breeding grounds
 - Hunting is an important issue for some species
 - We need to identify migratory bottlenecks (sites and species affected)
 - Focus needs to be on the non-breeding areas
 - Collaboration is important for all workers and need to identify seed funds that encourage collaboration
 - Data pooling along the model of the BirdLife Seabird database is needed
 - Capacity building is needed
 - There are a lot of social science data and interdisciplinary avenues that can be explored to really end up with solutions that can be enacted on a sufficiently large enough scale
- Turtle dove species focus:
 - The main problem is habitat change but many other factors may be contributing
 - Turtle doves are a classic chain-link migrant where a failure in any link in the annual life cycle will reduce survival
 - Gaps and innovations required:
 - Wintering grounds and connectivity
 - The Eastern flyway

- Possible effects of competition
- Diet analysis
- Data sharing across the flyway

October 2016, Dakar, Senegal

The Exec Co is currently planning the next MLSG symposium, which will take place at the 14th Pan African Ornithological Congress to be held in Dakar, Senegal 17-21st October, 2016.