



African Bird Club

Working for birds and conservation in Africa



Chairman's Newsletter

August 2016



**Richard Charles
Chairman, ABC**

I should really start this first Newsletter with an apology. A club is "an association of people united by a common interest, meeting periodically for co-operation or conviviality". Does ABC provide this?

Club members should feel in touch with each other, and with what is happening at their club. Whilst some of us enjoy meeting at the Members' Day and AGM, or the British Birdwatching Fair, these events can serve only a minority of African Bird Club members. Of course, we have a fantastic website www.africanbirdclub.org – but we have otherwise not done a good job of staying in touch. We hope this Newsletter, to be sent twice yearly initially, will start to redress that omission.

Future issues will be better produced, but I decided to start simply. I hope you will enjoy hearing our news. Do contact me at chairman@africanbirdclub.org with any, hopefully constructive, suggestions for future editions!

Members' Day and AGM 2016

Held in April at the Natural History Museum, London, this very successful meeting focussed on the conservation of threatened species. Our President, Tasso Leventis, opened the meeting by describing the dire threats faced by many species of African vulture. Dr. Shiiwua Manu, Director of the AP Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI) in Nigeria summarised the remarkable history and current research programmes achieved by the Institute; Nikki Williamson and Simon Tonkin (RSPB) covered the plight of the Turtle Dove and their research in Senegal; Debbie Pain (Director of Conservation, WWT) recounted the rescue of arguably the world's rarest bird, the Madagascar Pochard; Luca Borghesio updated us on the status, still fragile, of the Taita Apalis, and the afternoon was entertainingly concluded with a colourful presentation by our Vice President, Keith Betton on the Birds of Sao Tome and Principe. Some of the presentations are now on YouTube; that of Dr. Leventis is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqzkAbGkaj4> from whence you will find the other presentations for which permission or resources were given.

Members' Day and AGM 2017

Next year's meeting is on Saturday April 1st 2017, again at the Natural History Museum, London. Do put it in your diary today and make every effort to join us for another great day.

1. of 4

ABC dues from January 2017

No increase in annual subscription is ever welcome, and our increases from January next year were debated vigorously by Council. At the Annual General Meeting our Treasurer, Chris Spooner, gave a detailed exposition of the rationale for these, the first increases in 5 years. The individual annual membership goes up by £4 to £25, the International rate is increased to reflect postal charges, and other adjustments are given on the website; follow Club>Membership. The Club has faced inevitable increases in the costs of Bulletin postage, plus essential maintenance and upgrades to the website and our unique AFBID image resource. ABC has an unparalleled record of awarding peer reviewed grants to scientists, field workers, rangers and students in Africa, a core activity of the Club which we feel sure members will wish us to sustain and expand. Over £25,000 was awarded in 2015, and £225,000 has been awarded to support 204 projects in 41 countries in Africa since 1996.

The current increase in subscriptions means that we should remain in good, long term financial health to continue and expand the conservation activities of the Club, whilst introducing new resources and services to members. The proposals were put to the vote and passed by a clear majority at the AGM. We do ask for your understanding, forbearance and, crucially, your continued support for our Club in 2017 and future years. Thank you.

Website and AFBID news

The ABC website is one of the jewels in the Club's crown. Its management, maintenance and dynamic updating are due almost exclusively to the unparalleled devotion and stamina of John Caddick, ably assisted by Chris Abrams. In order to comply with modern security standards, the website has recently had an SSL certification applied; this transiently resulted in some unexpected difficulties with the execution of online payment of subscriptions and donations. We apologise to members who have been inconvenienced. Work with our website development company SouthMedia and extensive testing assures us that the problem is now resolved. Please let us know of any continuing problems at info@africanbirdclub.org

AFBID (African Bird Image Database) is again in full operational health and security after a worrying period in which the former web host deleted most of the files and failed to cooperate in the rescue. An enormous amount of work by John Caddick and associates has both rescued and greatly enhanced AFBID – its use is an enormous pleasure and resource – do visit it through the website; follow Resources>Image Database.

Website – Tips and Tricks!

This will be a regular Newsletter feature to enhance the value and enjoyment of your visits.

Did you know that the ABC website has checklists for every country in the Africa region including mainland Africa and associated islands? You can find these at <http://africanbirdclub.org/countries/checklists/download>. In total, you will find 77 checklists, more than there are countries as checklists are available for each island in some of the island groups e.g. Mauritius and Rodrigues. You have the option to download a checklist in English or French, to use ABC or Dowsett taxonomy and to exclude vagrants, uncertain records and locally extinct species. The checklists were based originally on Dowsett, R.J. and Forbes-Watson, A.D. (1993) Checklist of Birds of the Afrotropical and Malagasy Regions. Volume 1: Species limits and distribution. They have been kept up to date with peer-reviewed records which have been published subsequently. If you are visiting a country, you can print a copy of the checklist in a handy form which will allow you to maintain a tick list of your sightings on your travels.

Paintings by Martin Woodcock

Martin Woodcock, ABC Vice President and internationally renowned wildlife artist, has over the past two years generously painted and donated to ABC three specially commissioned works, supporting the Club's projects and Conservation Fund. The originals of the Madagascar Pochard *Aythya innotata* and the Taita Apalis *Apalis fuscigularis* were auctioned at BBWF 2015, helping to raise over £1500 towards the WWT Appeal for the former, and over £1,000 for ABC's Taita Apalis Land Lease.

For 2016 Martin has donated a new work depicting the Grey-necked Picathartes *P. oreas* for auction at the Bird Fair, and limited edition prints of all three works will be available for sale at the ABC stand. These are superb works which will grace the wall of any African bird lover's home; do visit the Stand (Marquee 2), view and bid or buy! Here are tasters:



Madagascar Pochard



Taita Apalis



Grey-necked Picathartes

ABC links with Next Generation Birders (NGB) and Youth Birding Africa (YBA)

The long term viability of our Club depends on recruiting new members - I never lose the opportunity to encourage every current member to find just one extra new member – and young members are of vital importance for the future. At the 2016 AGM we were delighted to welcome Josie Hewitt as NGB representative on Council. John Kinghorn, who is doing great things with YBA, joins us as Country Representative for South Africa, replacing Chris Lotz who is expanding Birding Ecotours in the USA, and will assist us there in future. Meet Josie and John at the ABC Stand at BBWF, where they are generously volunteering help.

3 of 4

ABC eBulletin – an innovation for sponsored members in Africa

A key plank of the ABC Strategy to 2020 [see Bull ABC Vol 23 No1 (2016) 3-4] is to ensure much greater access to the Club within Africa. There are many passionate birders, fieldworkers, rangers and students who would wish to benefit from membership of the Club, crucially with access to the Bulletin, but for whom the cost of a subscription – at almost any price – may be prohibitive.

Council therefore proposes to work with our partners in Africa to identify and recruit such potential members by offering free, but signed up, membership allied to receipt of an electronic version of the Bulletin compatible with all platforms – PC, tablet, or smartphone. Working with the digital publisher PageSuite we are about to road test a fully functional digital version of the upcoming September Bulletin, Vol 23.2. A panel of assessors, including Council, the Bulletin Editors, our website team and, vitally, our Country Representatives in Africa will receive and critique the product. It is intended to launch the project for new, sponsored members from the 2017 membership year. We will keep you fully updated with progress.

ABC on Social Media



Love them or loathe them, social media are the channels for communication, debate – and much more – today! Moderated by our General Secretary, Phil Hyde, ABC can be found on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AfricanBirdClub/>, Twitter <https://twitter.com/africabirdclub> and the Yahoo Africa Birding Group – sign up via our website and follow Club>African Birding Group. As above, we aim to upload the AGM lectures to YouTube after each meeting.

Upcoming Events for your Diary

- **British Birdwatching Fair: 19-21 August 2016:**
 - **ABC Stand Marquee 2:** meet friends and Council; collect Bulletins; pay Subs
 - **Painting auction:** a superb original of Grey-necked Picathartes by Martin Woodcock; sale of limited edition prints, also by Martin, of Madagascar Pochard, Taita Apalis, and Grey-necked Picathartes, in aid of the Conservation Fund
 - **ABC Lecture** by Paul Buckley, ABC Vice Chairman, '*Vleis & Vultures – a Future for Africa's Threatened Birds*'. (Lecture Marquee 2, Sunday, 10.30 – 10.50am)
 - **Bird Brain of Britain** – John Kinghorn represents ABC on *Flufftails of the World* (Events Marquee, Saturday 3.00pm)
- **PAOC 2016: Senegal 16th – 21st October 2016**
 - **ABC Plenary Lecture** '*Every little helps: How small projects contribute to African bird conservation*' by Chris Magin, ABC Conservation Officer
- **AGM and Members' Day:** Saturday April 1st 2017. Natural History Museum, London. Programme to follow.
- **Sao Tome & Principe – ABC Conservation Tour: January 14th – 21st 2018**



For details visit <http://www.birdquest-tours.com>
A proportion of the profits will generously be donated to the ABC Conservation Fund!