



# African Bird Club

Working for birds and conservation in Africa



<https://www.africanbirdclub.org>

## Chairman's Newsletter

December 2017



**Richard Charles  
Chairman, ABC**

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(Photo: Creavo Medical Technologies)

Another year draws to a close with most of the UK recently cloaked in snow, and with some of the lowest temperatures recorded in recent years up and down the country - not quite a return to the Little Ice Age, but a seasonally scenic reminder, at least from where your Chairman sits, that weather is weather!

On a more sombre note, this year has seen the passing of two giants of African ornithology - Michael Irwin and David Pearson. A brief notice on each is given below, and the next issue of the Bulletin (March 2018) will carry full obituaries. We offer our condolences to their families; they will be sorely missed by many ABC members, and by all whose shared love of African birds brought them into the company of these great men.

Our Club continues to thrive, although we would always warmly welcome more new members of all ages. I make no apology for repeating my oft uttered mantra - if each of us resolved to recruit just one new member during the coming year it would greatly enhance the vitality of the Club, and our ability to expand the support we give through the Conservation Fund to African birds and their habitats. Please do what you can when you meet up with friends of like mind.

Many members have already renewed for 2018 - thank you! Membership renewal notices will be issued in January 2018, and it is an enormous help to us if they can be actioned early. As ever, if you have any difficulties paying online through the website, please let us know, with details of any problem encountered.

My sincere good wishes to every member for a peaceful, enjoyable and productive 2018, both personally and ornithologically!

### Supported Membership scheme in Africa goes from strength to strength

There has been an enthusiastic take up of the new Supported Membership scheme, underpinned by the eBulletin, with over 200 new members joining from 27 African countries. Now that the system has bedded in, we have lifted the introductory ceiling on nominations; our Country Representatives and local partners have done a great job in this regard, and are now submitting more names of fellow African birdwatchers, students, guides, rangers etc who would benefit from ABC Supported Membership.

## Farewell to Michael Irwin and David Pearson



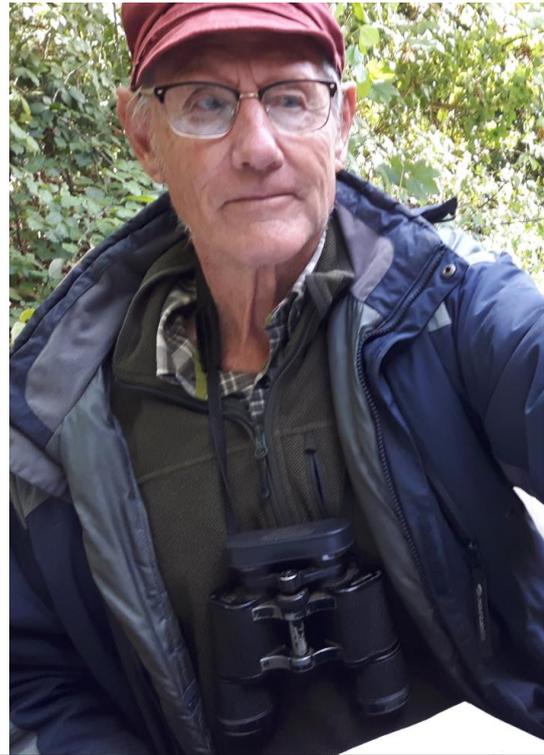
**Michael Irwin  
(1925-2017)**

Photograph: Julie Dupree  
kindly provided by Anthony Cizek

Anthony Cizek, former ABC Council member and close friend of Michael Irwin, has described the remarkable life of this classical naturalist and African ornithologist in his fascinating obituary for the forthcoming Bulletin.

From his Northern Ireland home, Michael Irwin moved to the then Southern Rhodesia, devoted his life to ornithology and became Director of the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe. Revered by generations of birdwatchers, students and ornithologists, and a prolific author, his expertise in the study of his own unique and extensive collection of African bird skins, and thence in taxonomy and speciation, remained passionately rooted in his exceptional skills as a field birdwatcher. He was instrumental in establishing the journal *Honeyguide*, still published today.

Clearly, his love of nature, the extraordinary breadth of his knowledge, his clarity of intellect, and his ability to enthuse and inspire others remained undimmed with age. In these qualities lie his legacy to African birds and their students.



**David Pearson  
(1941-2017)**

Photograph: Nick Eade

A humble man who eschewed the limelight, David Pearson was a quiet giant in East African ornithology. Whilst holding academic posts in biochemistry at Makerere University in Kampala and Nairobi University for over 20 years, he became a pioneer of ringing and migration studies of waders and passerines in the region, chairing the East African Records Committee for 14 years. He published many papers and articles, and co-authored books, notably *Birds of East Africa and Northern Tanzania* (1996) with Dale Zimmerman and Don Turner, and *Reed and Bush Warblers* (2010) with Peter Kennerley which remain standard reference sources. In the 1970s, with Graeme Backhurst, he established the unique Ngulia Palearctic migrant ringing project, which continues actively to this day.

To sit with David, studying a bird in the hand, was an educational joy and a privilege, whether in Suffolk or Africa. David's mind was clear and incisive to the last, and he will be sorely missed by all who had the good fortune to know and love him. A full obituary by Graeme Backhurst will appear in the next ABC Bulletin, in March 2018.

## A brief request... and a reminder

- Will Creswell, Professor of Biology, University of St. Andrews writes: *'The **Nigerian Bird Atlas** is underway and well into its second successful year. There are many expats that spent the 60s and 70s in Nigeria that are now retired back in the UK. Many will have been birders and will have records from those days lying in old notebooks. We need to get these records into the Atlas and secure this historical archive: changes in Africa are profound on a decadal basis, as you know, and understanding these historical changes will help us manage the future changes. If anyone in the ABC and its wider network has any records we will organise collecting them, ideally with a home visit by a Nigerian ornithologist who will be visiting the UK for this purpose in April next year. There is still a great opportunity to get this knowledge recorded and for birders of that generation to relive some of their past birding glory by passing on their records and recollections to the new generation of Nigerian birders and ornithologists'*. If you can help, please contact Will at [wrlc@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:wrlc@st-andrews.ac.uk). Thank you.
- The *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* is one of the jewels in the crown of the Club, and is widely read, respected and referenced in the African ornithological literature. The Editorial Committee encourages the submission of articles for consideration for publication in the Bulletin, notably from recipients of ABC Conservation grants who should consider taking their project reports to the higher level of a manuscript for formal publication. For advice and submissions contact [editor@africanbirdclub.org](mailto:editor@africanbirdclub.org)

## ABC Members' Day and AGM: Saturday 21st April, 2018

Council is now well ahead with booking an eclectic programme of lectures from excellent speakers to provide a stimulating and attractive programme, suiting all interests and inclinations. I am already excited by the content, and we look forward to welcoming as many members and guests as possible to this annual highlight in the Club's calendar, to be held once again in the Flett Lecture Theatre at the Natural History Museum, London. The final programme, which aims to balance the interests of conservation, science, field trips/bird ID and beautifully illustrated presentations of general birding interest will be circulated early in 2018. **Please book Saturday 21st April 2018 in your diary today!**

## ABC at the British Birdwatching Fair, August 17th - 19th 2018, Rutland Water Nature Reserve

We are delighted that, following successful and well attended ABC Lectures by Paul Buckley, our Vice Chairman, in 2016 and 2017 we now have an assigned firm slot in the programme for the **ABC Lecture**. Our thanks to Paul for establishing this important showcase for the Club.

Every year, I meet the chairmen of our sister regional clubs - OSME, NBC and OBC. This is a valuable forum at which to share mutual challenges, opportunities and perhaps a few solutions. This year, an excellent idea for a joint event emerged - a '**Best Days with International Birds**' competition. Each Club will put up a contestant who will give a brief, inspirational talk on this subject followed by an audience vote to determine the winner. The event has been accepted by the organisers, and will definitely take place. As our representative to launch the event I immediately invited Keith Betton, ABC Vice President and former Chairman, who graciously accepted the challenge. Keith's presentational prowess will be known to many, and he will be a hard act to beat. Do keep an eye open for this event in the programme, and come along to support Keith and our Club!

### Website 'Tip and Tricks' from John Caddick, ABC Webmaster

Perhaps not all the newer members of ABC will know that the Club manages a database of birds photographed in the African region. You will find the website at <https://africanbirdclub.org/afbid/> which today has nearly 25,000 images representing 2,237 species. The original idea for such a site was proposed more than twelve years ago by members Kevin Vang and Wojciech Dabrowka who funded the original development project. ABC has subsequently operated and maintained the site including funding a complete rebuild a few years ago using more modern technology.

In recent years, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of photographs and we have undertaken a process to cull some of the older and less good images. We are also working to include recent splits and introduce more modern taxonomy. The site has a number of useful features including the capability to view the latest and random images, browse by bird families, see missing species, view images of photographers and search for species.

If you have photographs and have not registered on the site, please do so and add your photos. The site administrators will be happy to help if you have any problems. One of the highlights recently was the first post on the site of the rarely seen and photographed Shelley's Crimsonwing by a new ABC member.

Make sure that you are a regular visitor to the site in order to see all the latest updates.

### ABC on Social Media



Don't forget to keep in touch with the Club's news and views in real time!

Moderated by our General Secretary, Phil Hyde, ABC can be found on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AfricanBirdClub/>, Twitter <https://twitter.com/africanbirdclub> 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

- **ABC Members' Day and AGM 2018**
  - Saturday April 21st 2018: Natural History Museum, London
  - Programme will be circulated early in 2018
  
- **British Bird Watching Fair ([birdfair.org.uk](http://birdfair.org.uk)): August 17th - 19th 2018, Rutland Water Nature Reserve.** Keep an eye on the programme for the
  - **ABC Lecture**
  - support our contestant for **Birdbrain**, and the
  - '**Best Days with International Birds**' competition.

## Thanks to our generous donors

As always, we are enormously indebted to our sponsors and donors; they are the engine behind the effectiveness of our Conservation efforts. So our thanks, as ever, to our Corporate Sponsors, our loyal private donors, large and small, and to our Preferred Book and Media Seller, WildSounds, who make a donation to the Conservation Fund from each sale made through the ABC website.

## CORPORATE SPONSORS



## ABC Conservation tour by BirdQuest



**BirdQuest Tours** ([www.birdquest-tours.com](http://www.birdquest-tours.com)) are running the ABC Conservation Tour to Sao Tome and Principe, with a full complement of guests, during January of 2018. A donation from the tour will go to the Conservation Fund, and we thank Mark Beaman, Managing Director and Owner, and his team for their generosity and collaboration. We look forward to the trip report and photographs from this unique destination.

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