

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Since the beginning of 2019, OSME Council has undertaken a significant amount of work that will have a significant positive impact on ornithology and bird conservation across the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. We have introduced two new small grants that will complement our existing Conservation Fund. At the end of last year Peter Cowan informed OSME Council that he would be stepping down as the Editor of *Sandgrouse*, and we have been fortunate enough to appoint Dr Paul Donald as his replacement. After extensive trials, we are producing a digital version of *Sandgrouse* that will be available to members who would like to receive their journal electronically. Further details of all these exciting new developments are given below.

Youth Development Fund and the Bird Camp initiative

OSME will launch the *Youth Development Fund*, designed to support and sponsor young naturalists across the OSME region, at the British Birdwatching Fair in August 2019. This

is the next step in the progress of involving and strengthening young bird conservationists and the interest in birds and nature. OSME has supported projects with young naturalists across the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia regularly over the years. Several of them are now Supported Members of OSME and have also had published articles in *Sandgrouse*. In a blog series called *I love nature* on the OSME website, these enthusiasts give their views about life as a young naturalist in their native country.

2016 saw the first Bird Camp arranged at Besh Barmag in Azerbaijan, followed by further Bird Camps in 2017 and 2018, where young birdwatchers and naturalists from different countries get together to learn and exchange experiences (Plates 1-4). These camps have been initiated and led by Tomas Axén Haraldsson, who joined the OSME Council in 2016 and became its first Youth Development Officer in 2018. Bird Camps have now also been arranged in Lebanon 2018 and 2019 and plans for 2020 and beyond are brewing.



Plates 1-4. Scenes from the Besh Barmag Bird Camp, where young people are taught about migration and bird ringing. © Tomas Haraldsson

OSME believes that the younger generation is crucial for the safeguarding and spread of nature conservation in a region like the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Thus, OSME is happy to announce the new *Youth Development Fund* which is designed to support and sponsor young naturalists across the OSME region.

Reports from the Bird Camps with photos and itineraries can be seen under the Trip Report section of the OSME web, www.osme.org. You can also enjoy a short documentary about Bird Camp Besh Barnag here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZf6-mPuXD&t=4s>.

Trevor Poyser Species Conservation Fund

Many of you will know the name of the late Trevor Poyser (Plate 5) as the joint founder of the renowned publishers T & AD Poyser, famous for their ground-breaking books, particularly the series of species monographs. Trevor was also a great supporter of OSME projects as well as publishing books that have been of great value to our region, including the *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa* and the first edition of *Birds of the Middle East*. Sadly Trevor died in his nineties in 2018 but he has left us a legacy to spend on research and conservation. We are delighted to call this the Trevor Poyser Species Conservation Fund in his memory.

We will be making an annual award of £5000 to go to a research project focusing on the conservation or better understanding of a key species of conservation concern in our area. The closing date for this year's award is 1 December 2019 and further details can be found on our website.



Plate 5. The late Trevor Poyser, whose legacy will fund work on rare species in the OSME region.



Plate 6. Peter Cowan (centre) receives a framed picture of his favourite *Sandgrouse* front cover, presented by OSME Chairman Rob Sheldon (right) and the new *Sandgrouse* Editor Paul Donald (left) at the 2019 OSME Summer Meeting in Thetford.

Sandgrouse: Thanks to Peter Cowan and welcome to Paul Donald

After more than ten years as Editor of *Sandgrouse*, Peter Cowan recently informed Council of his decision to step down after the publication of volume 41 (1). Peter started as Editor in 2008 and has overseen the production of 22 issues of *Sandgrouse* and three supplements, including the outstanding 50th anniversary issue. During his tenure *Sandgrouse* has enhanced its reputation as one of the leading journals for publishing papers and short notes on the ornithology of the OSME region. Council would like to thank Peter for all his hard work and the significant contribution that he has made to OSME over the last 10 years. During the 2019 Summer Meeting at the BTO in Thetford, Peter was presented with a photograph of his favourite *Sandgrouse* front cover (Plate 6). Many thanks to Amir Ben Dov for granting his permission to use his excellent image of Cream Coloured Coursers, taken in Judea plains east of Beit Kama, Israel in September 2013.

I'm delighted that Peter's successor is Dr Paul Donald. Paul has a huge wealth of editorial experience, having previously been Editor-in-Chief of the prestigious journal *Ibis* for almost a decade. He also has plenty of experience of the OSME region, particularly in Central Asia where he has worked on Sociable Lapwings and on his favourite group of birds, the larks. He has also spent time birding in Turkey, Israel and Egypt

and in many areas just outside the OSME region, particularly India and east Africa.

Sandgrouse Digital Edition

We are delighted that after a period of significant trials we are now launching a digital edition of *Sandgrouse* free to all our members, starting with this issue. We have worked with the leading company in the field, PageSuite, to produce a high quality, web-based edition with a link delivered by email to enable access via phone, tablet or computer. It is fully searchable and users can download selected pages or the whole edition as PDF files using some very simple tools (Plates 7 and 8). To make it even more attractive, we have included an archive of all editions since 2017.

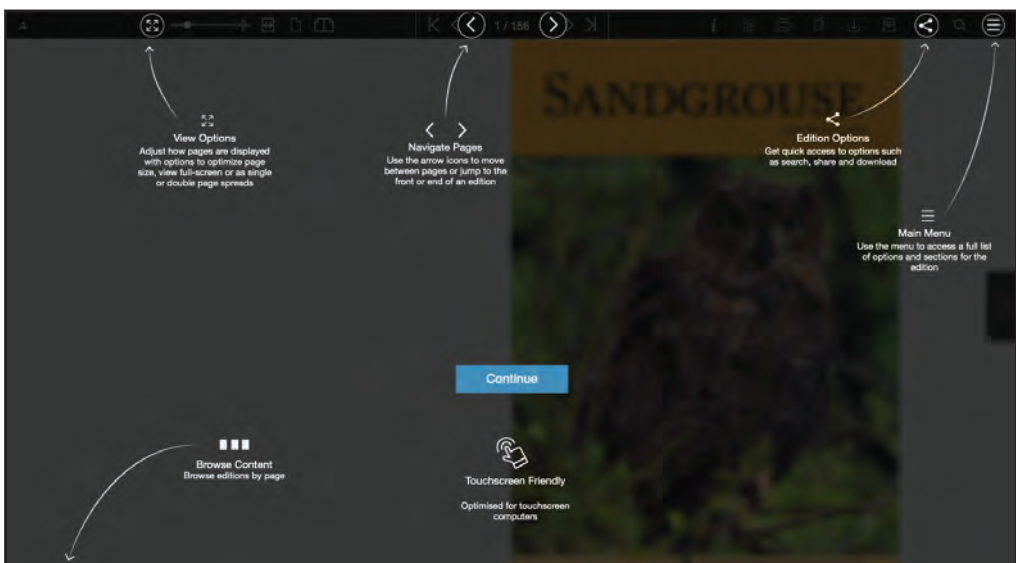
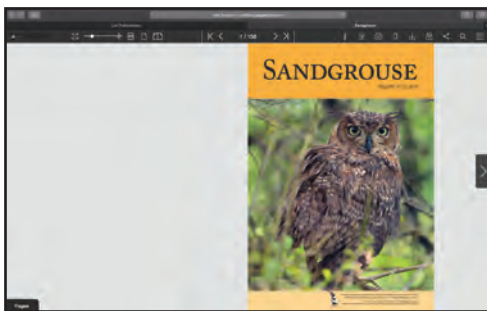
Some members have been asking for this in response to the green agenda, wishing to take the journal without the associated

paper, printing and distribution costs. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to reach some of our members in the region, with several countries having disrupted and therefore unreliable postal services. This was the original thinking behind the project but we have also realised that there is a growing expectation that all publications should now be digitally accessible.

This service is being offered free to all members, which depending on demand could lead us to reduce subscriptions in the future, particularly for younger members in the region and those in full-time education. Some members have indicated they would wish to take only the digital edition, a decision we would encourage because of the significant saving in printing and postage costs this will entail, allowing more of our funds to be channelled into research and conservation work.

To access digital *Sandgrouse*, please email Sandgrouse.digital@osme.org and state whether you would like this in addition to the printed journal, or whether you would prefer to receive only the digital edition. We will then ensure you get your first digital edition on publication in the middle of August to coincide with the Birdfair at Rutland Water.

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Plates 7 and 8. Screenshots of the new digital edition of *Sandgrouse*, showing the help and search facilities it offers.