A.P. LEVENTIS ORNITHOLOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE, CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE,
UNIVERSITY OF JOS, NIGERIA

APLORI

WEST AFRICA'S FOREMOST ORNITHOLOGICAL RESEARCH CENTRE

Newsletter

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- ***Published Research Shows*** *Nigerian Protected Areas (PA) as Vital Sanctuaries for Biodiversity Amid Intensifying Pressures*
- *Scientist from the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute describes different types of gut bacteria in Village Weavers*

Literary Works Can Best Convey Conservation Practices to the Younger Generation.

My Success Story can not be Complete without APLORI... NCF DG

APLORI Bridges The Gap Between Learning, Research and Practice

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FRONT COVER: African Grey Hornbill -*Lophoceros nasutus* (John Onah)

Director's Desk

This second edition of the Newsletter for the year is filled with activities that have transpired at our great Institution over the past quarter. It also includes excerpts from some research articles published within the quarter by our researchers. Additional columns have also been added to this edition notably is the "Bird on the Front Cover Series" this is to provide our readers with a glimpse of the bird species previously recorded within the Amurum Forest Reserve where our Institution is based. We hope that this column will continue to educate you on the interesting species found within our biodiversity rich environment.

In conclusion, I sincerely appreciate all the contributors who have provided very rich content for this edition, our Management Board and Funder Mr. A.P. Leventis for the continuous guidance and support.

Prof. Adams A. Chaskda
Director, APLORI

Editor's Note

Welcome to this edition of our newsletter, where we explore the ever-evolving world of conservation through the lens of research and personal experiences. At the heart of our discussions lies the work being done at the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institutes, (APLORI) Centre of Excellence . the institute provides spaces where science meets passion, fostering a deeper understanding of biodiversity and how its protection plays a critical role in the ecosystem.

This edition captures a dynamic blend of scientific inquiry and firsthand stories from visitors, researchers, and conservationists. This we capture through detailed field studies, groundbreaking discoveries, and personal reflections, we uncover the intricate ways protected spaces shape biodiversity, environmental health, and even cultural narratives.

Beyond data and analysis, we celebrate the human side of conservation. The thrill of spotting a rare species, the patience needed for meaningful ecological monitoring, and the profound connection between people and nature. Every story is a testament to curiosity, commitment, and the shared responsibility of preserving our natural world.

We hope these pages inspire deeper appreciation and meaningful action. Whether you are a seasoned ornithologist, an aspiring conservationist, or simply someone enchanted by birds, your engagement makes all the difference.

Enjoy the read, and let's keep the conversation using our social media handles.

Nanlep Kumle
Senior Communications Officer,
A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, Centre of Excellence.

CONTENT

Bird on front page series: Amurum Forest Reserve Bird Species 1

African Grey Hornbill
Order: Bucerotiformes
Family: Bucerotidae
Name (Scientific name): *(Lophoceros nasutus)*

The African Grey Hornbill (*Lophoceros nasutus*) is one of the common bird species in the Amurum Forest Reserve where the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, Centre of Excellence is located. One is sure to hear the call of this large bird often dueting along with it's partner even at great distances to a visitor. They are easy to identify and often fly in the open, thus, they are likely to fly over your head from any of the tall shrubs or trees within the reserve. If you enjoy hiking on the rocky outcrops of the reserve you are likely to flush a grey hornbill on it's perch. Below are interesting things to learn about this resident African species.

Plate 1: An image of African Grey Hornbill taken inside the Amurum Forest Reserve.

Field Identification
The African Grey Hornbill is a medium-sized avian species belonging to the family Bucerotidae. It is characterized by predominantly grey and brown plumage (Kemp & Boesman 2020), with lighter underparts and darker wings and tail. A distinct white streak is visible along the edge of the folded wings. One of its most notable features is its long, curved black bill, which includes a prominent casque (a bony ridge) on the upper mandible. Sexual dimorphism is evident in bill colouration: males typically possess darker bills with a pale wedge at the base, whereas females have ivory-colored upper mandibles with a reddish-purple tip (eBird, 2024).

Habitat, Range and Status
The African Grey Hornbill is commonly found across sub-Saharan Africa and extends into parts of the Arabian Peninsula, where it is a widespread and resident species throughout much of its range (Kemp & Boesman 2020; eBird, 2024). It typically inhabits dense forest edges, open woodlands, and savannah grasslands (IUCN Hornbill Specialist Group, 2022), often showing partial migratory behaviour. Observations from the Nigeria Bird Atlas Project (NiBAP) indicate that the species occurs across all ecological zones in Nigeria, highlighting its adaptability to a wide range of habitats (Figure 1). Its extensive distribution and stable population trends have led to its classification as a species of Least Concern by the IUCN Red List (BirdLife International, 2024). This status reflects its resilience and widespread occurrence, although continued monitoring is important to ensure local threats do not affect their populations.

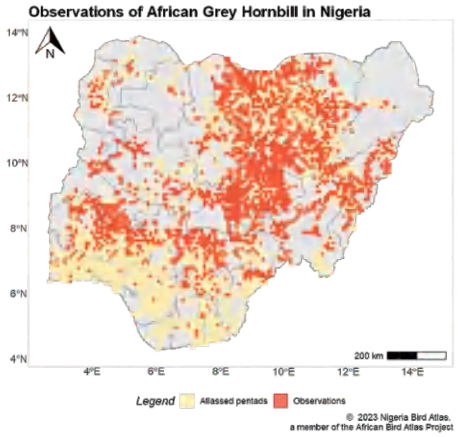

Figure 1: Distribution of the African grey Hornbill in Nigeria from NiBAP database

Feeding Behaviour and Breeding Biology of the African Grey Hornbill
The African Grey Hornbill is an omnivorous bird with a varied diet. They feed on fruits, particularly figs and other wild berries, which make up a significant portion of their diet. In addition to fruit, it also consumes insects and sometimes small animals (del Hoyo et al., 2001; (IUCN Hornbill Specialist Group, 2022). The African Grey Hornbill's territorial call is characterized by a series of plaintive, high-pitched "piu-piu-piu" notes, typically delivered with the bill pointed upwards and accompanied by flicking wing movements, often ending with a series of rolling whistles (eBird, 2024).

They are cavity nesters, often seen nesting in tree cavities. One of the most remarkable aspects of Hornbills breeding biology is the female's self-incarceration within the nest cavity during incubation, After selecting a suitable cavity, the pair seals the entrance using a mixture of mud and plant parts, leaving only a narrow slit through which the male passes food to the female and, later, the chicks (Moreau, E1937; Lum et., al. 2005). The female lays up to 2 to 5 eggs and remains sealed inside this cavity throughout the incubation period, which averages 24-26 days (Moreau, 1937; Lum et., al. 2005; Kemp & Boesman, 2020).

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John Onah
Prof. Adams Chaskda

1

APLORI Shaped Me for Today's Responsibility as the Director General of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF),

Excerpts from an interview with Dr. Joseph Onoja

My journey into the conservation industry; began long time ago, during an " Introduction to Ecology " lecture delivered by the then Dr. Georgina Mwansat (now Professor). I never truly intended to study zoology; I even completed my JAMB with thoughts of opting out once I could. Yet fate had a different plan, and I found myself immersed in zoology, a twist that prepared me well for this moment.

My path led me to the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI), Centre of Excellence where I first started as an intern and later continued as a student. The hands-on experience and mentoring I received there laid the foundation for my future at the NCF. I recalled how my time at APLORI equipped me to handle any assignment at NCF. In 2015, I assumed the role of Director, Technical Programme at the NCF, a position I held until August 1, 2022, when I humbly took the helm of affairs as the Director General.

Under my leadership, the NCF, Nigeria's premier non-governmental organization for nature conservation is actively engaged in critical areas such as The Green Recovery Nigeria, climate change mitigation, species survival, and the forging of impact full partnerships. These initiatives are all part of our 2012–2025 Strategic Action Plan. One of our core objectives has been to strengthen our collaboration with institutions like APLORI, a recognized Centre of Excellence in research and capacity building fo r the conservation landscape.

Continuing our momentum, my management team and I are now drafting the Strategic Action Plan for 2025–2030. This next phase is designed to consolidate and build on the achievements of the 2021–2025 plan, particularly, our successful on the ground conservation efforts.

The NCF hallmark of impact we want to create going further is offering a platform for young APLORI interns to acquire first-hand skills in conservation practices. this we will do by exposing them to our areas of intervention while they bring in their expertise in research to consolidate our efforts. This initiative not only enriches their experience but also addresses the pressing need for skilled manpower within our industry.

I have also passionately advocated for Nigeria to be an active signatory to international policies such as the National Determined Contribution, the National Council on Climate Change Secretariat-NBSAP, and the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Framework. I firmly believe that when companies and organizations in the private sector recognize the imperative of funding conservation actions, it's not just their businesses that prosper but also the communities they serve. After all, the ecosystem services that nature provides, like clean air and water, are invaluable, and any artificial substitute comes at a high cost.

At the NCF, we are also collaborating with policymakers to ensure that environmental regulations are not only upheld but also reformed to meet today's realities. I often say,"A healthy environment provides a thriving economy and workforce."In this sense, our nation's most critical unit of production is a healthy environment, one that sustains both human prosperity and the natural world.

From my beginnings as an intern at APLORI to now steering the NCF, every step of this journey has been a lesson in perseverance, collaboration, and the unwavering commitment to protecting Nigeria's natural heritage. This is the story of how APLORI shaped me— a story of destiny, responsibility, and a deep, abiding love for conservation.

2 *The Nigerian Conservation Foundation and the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, Centre of Excellence, Chart a New Course for Conservation Efforts in Nigeria.*

In a world increasingly challenged by the effects of climate change, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) and the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, (APLORI), a renowned Centre of Excellence, are mapping out innovative strategies to strengthen conservation efforts. Their partnership was the highlight of a two-day brainstorming session held at the A.P. Leventis Onithological Research Institute in Jos, a gathering aimed at creating actionable plans at the nexus of research, capacity building, and on-the-ground conservation.

This partnership is a powerful statement about the future of conservation in Nigeria. The collaboration between the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) and the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI) illustrates how combining technical expertise, research, and community involvement can produce strategies that are not only innovative but also deeply rooted in local realities. Both organizations are leveraging their unique strengths; APLORI's rich research environment and teaching infrastructure alongside NCF's technical expertise and experience in the conservation Industry.

Welcoming the NCF team to Jos, Professor Adams Chaskda, Director APLORI, highligted that the Memorandum of Understanding which gave birth to the institute includes the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, University of Jos, the Laminga community and the Leventis Foundation Nigeria. Among these, the NCF's role as a technical partner is very critical, thus, its regular evaluations and engagements with the institute will spur it to greater success and more impacts across the conservation landscape.

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Dr. Joseph Daniel Onoja, Director-General of NCF, along with his management team, underscored the importance of APLORI's consistent research output. He explained that the institute's findings have long served as a reliable compass, guiding efforts on effective conservation actions. Dr. Onoja expressed optimism that the current visit would not only refine existing strategies but also make conservation practices more holistic, impact driven and believable.

Throughout the intensive two-day sessions, participants focused on exploring research opportunities, implementation strategies, and avenues for publishing key findings. They also delved into securing research funding and developing the necessary manpower to boost the conservation industry further.

A standout element in this initiative is the greenhouse agricultural practice showcased during the visit. More than just an educational facility, it serves as a hands-on teaching tool, nurturing climate-smart ambassadors among students and community members. This approach reinforces the idea that effective conservation is not solely about preserving biodiversity but also about empowering communities with the knowledge and skills needed to implement sustainable practices.

This partnership not only promises to enhance conservation practice but also positions both organizations as pioneering forces in the fight against climate change a battle that demands urgency, innovation, and collective action.

Looking ahead, the experts tend to explore how integrated partnerships can serve as a model for other regions facing similar environmental challenges across the world.

Moreover, the high-level engagement demonstrated by leaders like Professor Adams Chaskda and Dr. Joseph Daniel Onoja underscores the collective commitment to ensuring that these initiatives have tangible, meaningful impacts. The inclusion of diverse experts in the discussion ranges from the Director of Technical Programmes, Senior Conservation Managers; Species programs and the Green Recovery Nigeria program at the NCF, Deputy Director APLORI and Research Associates at APLORI. These personnel added layers of insight, ensuring that implementation strategies are both innovative and practical.

3 *Effectiveness of Protected Areas in Conserving Avian Communities Amid Human Impact in Nigeria*

Key highlights:

1. Global efforts are underway to meet the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's "30x30" target of protecting 30% of the world's land and oceans by 2030. But how effective is Nigeria's current Protected Area (PA) network in achieving this goal?

2. A new paper in Conservation Biology,"Effectiveness of Protected Areas in Conserving Avian Communities Amid Human Impact in Nigeria," shows that PAs support higher avian taxonomic and functional richness and diversity than unprotected areas (UPAs), highlighting their vital role as refuges for birds and biodiversity.

3. While moderate levels of human disturbance can enhance bird diversity, excessive human pressures lead to decline—emphasizing the need for disturbance management and improved protected area maintenance.

4. Protected areas tend to have lower Human Footprint Index (HFI) values as compared with UPAs, although human impacts within them remain high and variable.

5. The study calls for improved PA management, expansion of the protected area network, and the implementation of strategies to mitigate human impacts in order to preserve biodiversity and enhance ecosystem resilience

As the world races to protect 30% of its land and oceans by 2030, questions are mounting over how well existing protected areas are holding the line against biodiversity loss. Nigeria and most of Africa PAs face mounting threats from habitat degradation, illegal resource extraction, and escalating human-wildlife conflict. Many PAs suffer from limited enforcement and exist only in name leaving wildlife vulnerable even within designated boundaries. Without strengthened management and robust monitoring systems, the global '30x30' pledge under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework — which Nigeria has committed to as a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity— risks falling short of its promise to safeguard ecosystems and species.

A recent paper published in Conservation Biology, "Effectiveness of Protected Areas in Conserving Avian Communities amid Human Impact in Nigeria," draws on nearly a decade of data from the Nigerian Bird Atlas Project (2015–2024) and human impact metrics from NASA's Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (SEDAC). Using Bayesian hierarchical models, the study shows that Nigerian PAs are vital sanctuaries for birds and biodiversity amid intensifying human pressures.

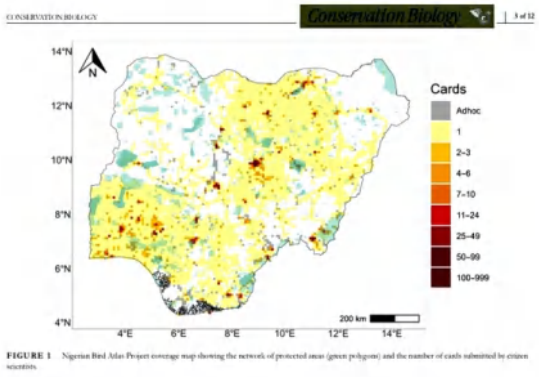

FIGURE 1 Nigerian Bird Atlas Project coverage map showing the network of protected areas (green polygons) and the number of cards submitted by citizen scientists.

Although PAs experience lower overall disturbance than UPAs, the study reveals considerable variation in human impact even within PA boundaries, rendering many as isolated "islands" amid human impact. This highlights the need for urgent and improved management to

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buffer against external pressures and maintain ecological integrity.

Interestingly, while PAs support greater taxonomic and functional richness and diversity, UPAs showed higher abundance-weighted functional diversity—a result of the dominance of disturbance-tolerant generalist species. However, the lower functional richness in UPAs signals a loss of ecological roles and niches, raising concerns for long-term ecosystem stability.

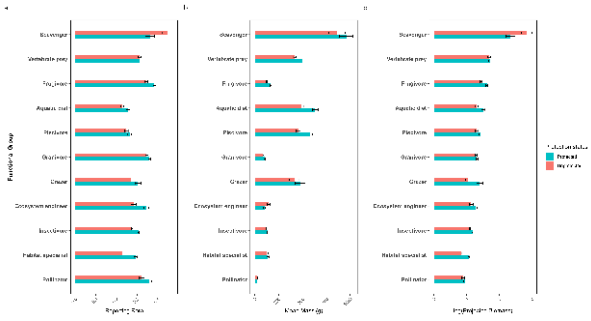

Figure 2: *Functional Group Comparison between Protected and Unprotected Pentads in Nigeria*

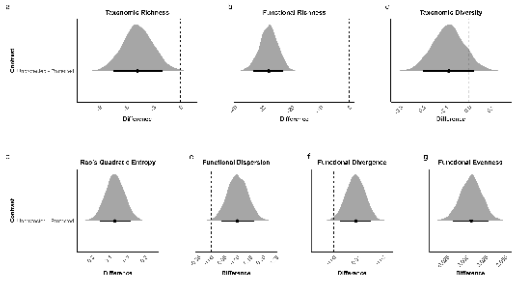

Figure 3: *Predicted Bird Diversity Metrics in Protected vs Unprotected Pentads in Nigeria*

Taxonomic and functional richness increased with moderate human impact, consistent with the intermediate disturbance hypothesis, but declined under higher levels of disturbance, suggesting a point beyond which species cannot adapt or persist. These findings support the critical role of PAs in conserving avian species and highlight the effects of human impact on species survival.

To ensure the long-term survival of Nigeria's avifauna and broader biodiversity, the authors urge immediate action to enhance the effectiveness of protected areas through improved governance, expanding and connecting PA networks, particularly in alignment with the global 30×30 target. Strengthening ecological networks among PAs is equally critical to ensure functional connectivity and protect species.

Read the abstract of the article/subscribe on Wiley to access the full paper. https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.70069

Alternatively, contact the corresponding author at bello.danmallam@aplori.org, IUCN SSC Centre For Species Survival Nigeria-APLORI.

4 Understanding How Village Birds Can Spread Diseases Between People and Animals

Introduction:

Some wild birds live very close to people in our villages, towns, and cities. These birds can carry tiny germs (called microorganisms) that cause diseases. However, humans also spread diseases to birds through contaminated environments as a result of unhygienic behaviors.

Focus of This Study:

The study focuses on a bird species called the Village Weaver(*Placeus cucullatus*) which is common in many parts of Africa, including Nigeria. These birds are yellow and black, often building their nests in trees around homes, markets, schools, and other places where people live and work.

What the Study Found:

A group of scientists from the A. P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, led by Dr Taiwo Cross by Omoto riogun, studied the gut bacteria of these birds in both the northern and southern populations of the species in Nigeria. They found different kinds of bacteria that have health implications, many of them coming from contaminated food or water. Some of these germs include E. coli and Salmonella, which are well-known for causing serious health problems.

Some of these germs can lead to:

- Stomach problems like diarrhoea and food poisoning
- Infections in the urine or wounds
- Serious sickness in newborn babies and the elderly
- Diseases that can become very bad for people with weak immune systems (like those living with HIV)

In the Northern populations, more harmful bacteria were found, whereas a particular bacterium, Mycoplasma, was found only in the Southern populations of the species.

What This Means for Us:

This study shows that wild birds living near us can carry germs that may be dangerous to people. To reduce the risk of getting sick, we must:

- Keep our environment clean
- Avoid open defecation
- Wash our hands and food properly
- Handle birds carefully, especially in villages
- Drink clean water and eat well-cooked food

Also, scientists need to continue studying these germs more to understand their biology.

Final Message:

Let us take care of our hygiene and be more aware of how close contact with birds can affect our health and that of the birds themselves.

You can read more about these findings here: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11756-025-01958-9

Olorunlaye Henry Ayodeji

5 AfricaBP and APLORI Trains more Molecular Ecologists at the APLORI Molecular Ecology Lab.

The combination of molecular ecology and bio-informatics is revolutionizing conservation biology, allowing researchers to analyze genetic diversity with precision and make informed decisions for biodiversity management. this is critical to understanding conservation both as a concept and a practice.

The collaboration between t he A . P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, Centre of Excellence (APLORI) and the African Bio-genome Project (AfricaBP) is particularly exciting as it demonstrates how interdisciplinary efforts can drive innovation in ecological research.

For Dr. Jacinta Abalaka and Monday Opanachi who served as resource persons during a three day training are of the opinion that Mastering techniques like DNA quantification, PCR setup, sequence alignment, and phylogenetics equips researchers with the skills necessary to tackle real-world conservation challenges. Beyond technical expertise, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation ensures that genetic insights are effectively applied to ecological decision-making.

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This practical approach to molecular ecology not only strengthens scientific inquiry but also has tangible benefits fo r conservation and environmental policy.

For the researchers drawn from APLORI, Sa'adu Zungar University Bauchi ,Bauchi State and Federal University Dutse, Jigawa state, the training was worthwhile as it will impact their journey in research. They are of the opinion that the APLORI Molecular Ecology Laboratory has so much to offer , while encouraging others to also tap into the potential which will in turn impact the field positively. Some of the learning activities and exercises carried out during the training include but not limited; to mist net setup, bird trapping, and sample collection in which the participants learned proper field techniques for capturing, identifying, and ethically sampling avian species for genomic analysis.

Participants conducted hands-on DNA extraction from avian blood samples using Zymo DNA Mini-Prep kits, comparing different extraction protocols to understand genomic extraction principles for both DNA and RNA. The quantification of extracted genomic materials using the Qubit 4 fluorometer was equally conducted.

Then came a focus on PCR amplification and gel electrophoresis, where the participants engaged in PCR amplification of the mitochondrial control region of passerine birds, learning about primer design, DNA replication, mastermix preparation, and troubleshooting PCR reactions.

The climax of the training was on bioinformatics in genomic research which covered sequence data handling, including file formats, quality control, and processing Sanger sequencing data. Sequence alignment and phylogenetics using open-source tools like MEGA, BioEdit, Expasy translate tool, CAP3, and EMBOSS Merger to align sequences, construct basic phylogenetic trees and make scientific inferences on phylogenetic trees were the last aspect of practical sessions.

6

APLORI's 2024/2025 Cohort Shares Conservation Knowledge with Pupils of L.E.A Primary School Laminga, Jos

At APLORI, the passion for environmental advocacy is at the heart of every lesson. This year, the 2024/2025 MSc. Conservation Biology cohort took their classroom learning beyond the walls of the institute by visiting the Local Education Area Primary School in Laminga, Jos-East Local Government Area. In a powerful demonstration of "charity beginning at home," these dedicated students sought to empower the next generation by sharing practical conservation knowledge and fostering peaceful coexistence within their host community.

During the visit, the cohort designed and implemented an engaging environmental education programme, thoughtfully tagged "A Clean and Healthy Laminga Begins with Me." The initiative was carefully crafted to inspire the pupils to take personal responsibility for their immediate environment. Through interactive sessions that combined classroom theory with real-life applications, the students explained the critical importance of sustainable practices and the role that every individual no matter how young, can play in nature conservation.

This impactful project was made possible by a generous donation from Prof. Chris Kwaja, the Plateau State Governor's Special Envoy on Peace and Security. Prof. Kwaja's visit to the institute in April 2025 and his supportive contribution provided the impetus needed to turn this community-focused vision into reality.

By stepping out of their classroom environment, the APLORI cohort not only enriched the learning experience of the primary school pupils but also

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demonstrated the transformative power of environmental advocacy. Their hands-on approach reinforces APLORI's commitment to building capacityand nurturing conservation champions, both within their ranks and in the communities they serve.

This initiative is a testament to how well-designed conservation education can stimulate meaningful change at the grassroots level, forging a future where environmental stewardship is a shared community value. The success of this project is likely to spur further collaborations and inspire additional programs in the future.

7 *APLORI Graduates Join IUCN SSC Young Professionals Taskforce*

Benhildah Antonio
zimbabwe

Barnabas Sani Bello
Nigeria

Bethel Clement
Nigeria

Samuel Nti
Ghana

Hassanatu Patrick
Sierra Leone

Ilyas Ibrahim
Ghana

Damen Michael Tongkyen
Nigeria

Chukwuma Dike
Nigeria

Jemimah Amos
Nigeria

Recent Master's in Conservation Biology graduates of the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI), Centre of Excellence, have joined the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Young Professionals Taskforce (YPTF)—an international platform for emerging conservation leaders under 35 to engage in global species conservation. This joint effort by the Centre for Species Survival Nigeria, based at APLORI, and the Taskforce aims to strengthen the presence of young African professionals in global species conservation within the SSC network.

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8 *Aficionado's Binoculars'*

Captures a Transition of an Enthusiast from Cloud-Based Accounting to Ornithology

Olatunji Olumide Mathew

As a Cloud based accountant working with the National Park Service, Nigeria, my career has always revolved around numbers and public financial management. However, in 2016, while working at Kamuku National Park in Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State, I stumbled upon a passion that would change my perspective on nature forever (bird-watching).

The Spark of Interest

During my breaks, I often visited the park's research unit to learn about wildlife conservation from a senior colleague. Watching them identify bird species from field guides and photographs fascinated me. It was my first time seeing a bird guide, and I was amazed by the precision and dedication required. I was eager to join them on their next field outing. Peering through binoculars, I saw birds in a way that I never had before: vibrant colors, complex patterns, and captivating behaviors. Yet, I couldn't name a single species. My identification skills were nonexistent, but the experience kindled a spark. When Ranger Adie and the research Head were transferred, I decided to continue what they had started.

Finding a Birding Companion

In 2019, I met Ranger Dahiru Aliyu, a colleague recently posted from Chad Basin National Park. He shared my growing love for birds, having explored the wetlands of Maiduguri. Every Saturday, we gathered with other rangers at Bagoma, near Birnin Gwari, to watch birds along the water bodies and savannah. Notable sightings included the Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Long-tailed Glossy Starling, Crested Lark, Green Wood Hoopoe, African Grey Hornbill, Grey Kestrel and the stunning Beautiful Sunbird. But my favourites were the Pied Kingfisher and the African Jacana, their movements and habitats endlessly captivating.

Joining the Abuja Bird Club

Ranger Dahiru introduced me to the Abuja Bird Club. On a weekend visit to my family in Abuja, I attended one of their outings at the Abuja Park and Zoo. There, I met seasoned Professional birders like Dr. Ulf Ottosson, Zainab Adeiza, and Dr. Hope Ovie Usieta, who introduced me to BirdLasser, an app for recording bird sightings. That expanded my knowledge and commitment to bird-watching.

Expanding My Horizons

In 2021, I was transferred to the National Park Headquarters in Abuja after nine years in Kaduna. Settling into the new role in Finance Department, I

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attended a 2-day awareness creation seminar on bird conservation organized by APLORI under Nigeria Bird Altas Project (NIBAP), where I learned to submit information about bird distribution in Nigeria. Armed with this knowledge, I began surveying the Mini Park within my office premises, documenting over 60 resident and migrant species in two years.

In July 2022, I visited IITA I badan during my Vacation where I went on a bird expedition with the Ibadan Bird Club.The lush forest and diverse birdlife reinforced my appreciation for conservation. Despite my busy schedule in the finance department, I remained dedicated to ornithology sharing Knowledge and Continuing the Journey.

In 2024, I delivered a paper on the impact of Migratory birds on the environment during the Wildlife of Africa Conservation initiative (WACI) a program organized alongside the National Park Service. Also during the World Migratory Bird Day in 2024, I participated in Educating students on the importance of migratory bird conservation and protection during their breeding and non-breeding season. I also completed courses on eBird, enhancing my understanding of bird ecology.

The pinnacle of my achievements was my nomination by the Conservator General ,National Park Services, Nigeria to attend the 4th Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) National Cordination Group Meeting (NCG) meeting in April,2025at Abuja. This recognition by the service's leadership was a great honour and validated my dual role as both an accountant and conservationist. The meeting exposed me to key biodiversity frameworks and connected me with national experts, profoundly deepening my understanding of ecosystem conservation beyond bird species.

In Conclusion, what began as casual curiosity has blossomed into a defining life pursuit. Bird-watching has taught me that patience yields the most beautiful rewards, whether waiting for an uncommon species to appear or meticulously documenting sightings. My accounting skills unexpectedly found a new purpose in analyzing bird population trends and conservation metrics that will also aid sustainability reporting.

9

My Experience as a Corp Member in APLORI

Andrea Iliya

In Nigeria, where fields like Medicine, Pharmacy, and Law often overshadow other disciplines, studying Forestry & Wildlife can sometimes invite skepticism. When I reveal my course of study, people often responded with quirky remarks like,"So you'll end up working in a zoo,"a comment that hardly captures the true breadth of conservation practice. True, there's nothing inherently wrong with working in a zoo, but let's face it many Nigerian zoos have their own set of challenges.

My 11-month internship at APLORI transformed that very perception and reshaped my ambitions. I am Andrea Iliya and I recently celebrated my Passing Out Parade (POP) from the National Youth Service Corp(NYSC) in March 2025.

Having served at the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute a centre of excellence dedicated to capacity building in tropical ecology and conservation research in West Africa. From the moment I first stepped onto the APLORI campus, I was captivated by the serene environment a true sanctuary for both people and nature.

During my first week, I was assigned to the Biodiversity Information Development (BID) Unit, where I had the chance to meet inspiring research associates and swiftly integrate into the team. That same week, I joined the bird ringing team on a field expedition. Although I had studied Ornithology in school, nothing could have prepared me for the hands-on experience: from tagging birds and identifying them by their physical characteristics and calls to differentiating genders in the field. Every moment was a deep dive into the practical side of what I would only read about in textbooks.

My time at APLORI was a mosaic of learning experiences. I participated in laboratory work at the Molecular Ecology Laboratory, where I witnessed PCR techniques being used to trace a lion's parentage an endeavor to determine the animal's origin through its DNA. I attended numerous workshops and seminars that broadened my perspective on conservation, biodiversity, and ecology. Regular bird-watching sessions with the Jos Bird Club every second Saturday, collaborative projects with researchers, and fieldwork alongside master's students further enriched my journey.

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One of the high points was mastering essential skills like research proposal research writing, employing the statistical programming language R i n biodiversity research, and executing scientific field work. Empowered by this hands-on learning, I even conceptualized a project on Khaya senegalensis (African Mahogany) with guidance from my supervisors which is now awaiting publication.

Reflecting on my year at APLORI, I feel incredibly fortunate. It was a period of learning and unlearning, meeting kind-hearted mentors, supportive colleagues, and engaging community members. The nurturing environment of the students' hostel and the welcoming local community made every challenge surmountable, leaving me a better person both professionally and personally.

Looking to the Future

With the wealth of knowledge gained during my NYSC period at APLORI, I am excited to advocate for biodiversity conservation in Nigeria—a country
where the concept still struggles to gain widespread understanding. I believe that the immersive, practical experience I received, combined with the supportive network of mentors and peers, has armed me with the tools necessary to make a tangible impact in the conservation landscape.

For any aspiring conservationist, my advice is simple: seek out opportunities that challenge and broaden your perspective. The hands-on experience at institutions like APLORI not only transforms academic learning into practical skill but also fosters a deep connection to the environment, propelling you toward a future where you can make a true difference.

10

APLORI Supports 2025 Plateau State Literary Society Festival

As part of its broader strategy to promote environmental awareness and advocate for responsible environmental practices, the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI), a recognized Centre of Excellence, continues to employ innovative approaches, including the use of the arts to inspire change and nurture climate-smart ambassadors.

APLORI's involvement in the 2025 Plateau State Literary Society Festival aligns beautifully with its mission to promote environmental awareness through creative expression. This is because literary work is a powerful tool for deepening understanding of conservation and biodiversity.
Through storytelling, poetry, essays, and other creative expressions, writers can make complex environmental issues more relatable and compelling.

In line with this vision, APLORI was a part of the 2025 Plateau State Literary Society Festival, which took place in Jos. The event, themed "Exploring the Plateau's Creative Economy: How far Thus Far?" also featured the launch of the second volume in a growing anthology series, titled "Nesting on the Rocks".

The Director,APLORI was represented at the event by Iniunam Iniunam- a research associate at APLORI.

11 *Preparing Staff and Students for Security and Emergency Response*

Understanding and responding effectively to security threats and emergencies in the workplace is an essential responsibility for every organization. Recognizing the critical importance of this, the management of the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI), a designated Centre of Excellence, recently took a proactive step toward enhancing workplace safety by organizing a comprehensive security and emergency response training for its staff.

Held at the institute's facility in Jos, Plateau State, the training brought in seasoned safety and security experts to educate and sensitize staff on essential safety protocols. The sessions covered both theoretical and practical aspects, ensuring that employees were not only informed but also equipped to act appropriately in the event of an emergency.

Story 11

According to Professor Adams Chaskda, Director APLORI, the training forms part of the institute's commitment to standard operational procedures that emphasize staff welfare and institutional resilience.“Security is safety in its own right,”he stated, highlighting the institute's proactive stance.“This is not just a training; it is a necessity. Emergencies can happen at any time, and preparedness is key to ensuring the safety of our people and the continuity of our mission.”

The workshop covered the following areas: **Emergency Preparedness, Wildlife Protection, Preventing Poaching and Illegal Activities, Team Coordination, Visitor and Community Safety and fire management techniques**. The training simulated emergency and response scenarios to both fire and security breach. This will help conservationists and rangers stay ready to handle emergencies, keeping themselves, the environment, and wildlife safe.

12 *APLORI Bridges Gap Between Learning, Research and Practice*

The leadership at APLORI understands that when students can witness research and conservation in action, what is learned in textbooks is transformed into skill and understanding. Educators leading these school visits have witnessed firsthand how practical exposure deepens comprehension and sparks curiosity. For instance, when university departments such as the Federal University in Lokoja's Zoology department, Modibbo Adama University of Technology in Yola, Gombe State University, Gombe , the Department of Zoology at Bauchi's Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University and Mass Communication students from the University of Jos, experienced the institute's facilities. They gain insights that will help them establish a competitive edge in an increasingly globalized academic and professional landscape.

APLORI has long distinguished itself as a dynamic space where theoretical knowledge meets hands-on learning. By opening its doors to visitors from primary through tertiary institutions, the institute provides an invaluable bridge between lecture-based learning and real-world application. This approach not only grounds academic concepts in tangible experiences it also empowers young scholars to see, touch, and engage with ideas that might otherwise remain abstract.

This experiential learning environment fosters critical thinking, initiative, and the kind of adaptive reasoning that is necessary in today's rapidly evolving world. When theory is constantly reinforced with practice, students and by extension, their educators can evaluate learning outcomes in a comprehensive way. They can see the direct impact of conservation strategies, understand data collection methods, and appreciate the intricate connections between scientific research and

environmental stewardship.

Moreover, by exposing students to advanced, real-world conservation practices at an early stage, APLORI is equipping them to become proactive global citizens. The institute's commitment to integrating practical experiences within its curriculum is a model for other institutions striving to infuse tangible learning into academic programs. It not only uplifts the local academic community but also sends a strong message internationally about the value of combining in-depth

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Abuja Bird Club…




NUC Team Led by Prof. Usman Gimba on Resource Verification Visit to APLORI



2024/2025 MSc. Cohorts with Lecturers


Modibo Adama University of Technology Yola, Adamawa State Zoology Department Visit to APLORI Centre of Excellence


Students of the Department of Forestry and Environment Federal College of Forestry Jos.




400 Level Zoology Students of ATBU Bauchi , Bauchi State during an Educational Visit to better understand Conservation Practice.

400 Level Zoology Students of Gombe State University, Gombe during an Educational Visit to APLORI.

Zoology Students from Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State Visit to APLORI.

Unijos Mass Communication Students on a Science Communication Visit to APLORI

A.P. LEVENTIS ORNITHOLOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

PC: Joseph Izang

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