

# The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

June 2024

Please note new address:

Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503

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Dear Readers,

There is a lot going on in Niger these days. While we as an organization do not get involved in anything remotely political, we encourage you to stay informed as well as you can. Connect with your friends and contacts and keep the channels of dialogue open. Be wary of media reports which may reflect only a small slice of the story. We know that Nigeriens are very resilient and adaptable. There are a lot of good things happening there—and some of them are funded by YOU the generous members of FON. Our small grants program is a great way to show our enduring appreciation and support. In May we received 41 requests for funding! The review teams, grants committee and board are currently deliberating. Donate ASAP to increase the amount of funding we have available to allocate to this current batch of requests.

**Let's get together in Chicago the weekend of September 21-22.** We hope to tour the paleontology lab, and convene a rendezvous with members. Details TBA and we'd welcome any help with event planning.

Merci, Fofo, Mun godey, Tanimert, Foma, Thank you --

*Amy Wilson & Scott Youngstedt*

## 1) NigerHeritage – Fossils could put Niger on the map! Get link to Recording

In April University of Chicago's Professor Paul Sereno shared an impressive presentation of scientific discovery and an ambitious proposal to establish Niger as a fossil treasure trove. The Zoom session was attended by an audience of more than 40 and there have been numerous requests for a link to a recording. Paul was kind of enough to make a 'clean' version to share with our members on the condition that it not be distributed publicly because some of the information he presented to us has yet to go through scientific review. We have posted the video on our Google Drive and you can get the link to watch it by sending an email to [newsletter@friendsofniger.org](mailto:newsletter@friendsofniger.org). **When you access the link, we ask that you not distribute or post the link publicly.**

More info about the museum project at <https://www.nigerheritage.org/>

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More info about the new fossil lab in Chicago:

- <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/uchicago-paleontologist-paul-serenos-fossil-lab-moves-washington-park>;
- <https://abc7chicago.com/university-of-chicago-dinosaur-fossil-lab-opens-in-washington-park-showcasing-discoveries-archeologist-professor-paul-sereno/14757341/>



**You're invited!!** Professor Paul Sereno has invited us to a special FON tour of the fossil lab in September the weekend of **September 21-22**. Stay tuned for more details and let us know if you can help with planning the tour and a get-together for members.



## 2) FON Board & Organizational Update

Recent elections resulted in renewing several existing board members' terms and adding two new board members. After the election the board exercised its existing authority to appoint an additional member, resulting in the current Board of Directors:

Mary Abrams	Alix Barstow Fedoruk	Amy Wilson
John Baird	Nafissa Salihou	Scott Youngstedt
Brandon Bragato	Alhassan Ali M. Souna	Soufiane Younoussi
Paige Pihl Buckley	Douglas Steinberg	

When all was said and done we noticed that very few members cast votes during the recent board election. In the past we have viewed the election process as a way to check in with members and give you a voice, yet we noticed waning participation. In reality, voting for board members does not create much opportunity for exchange and feedback with members. This realization prompted a revision of the bylaws to improve two important functions: maintaining a cadre of nonprofit board members and accountability to our membership.

Our newly approved bylaws allow the board to appoint any and all board members as needed. This will replace the membership voting process and will allow the board to recruit candidates whose interests, skills and availability are a good fit for the needs of the organization at that time.

To address the aspect of accountability to membership we plan to hold annual membership meetings, at which time we can present a report of the previous year, answer your questions and hear from you. We know you have input that can make us more effective and we are eager to hear it.

Since bylaws are designed to cover worst case scenarios, the new bylaws include a procedure for the membership to hold a formal vote of confidence in the board either at the annual meeting or in a specially convened meeting of the membership. This 'safety valve' will make sure that the board of directors continues to truly represent the membership.

The revised bylaws are available on the website for your review.

### 3) Grant Updates & Special Sponsored Projects

#### Grants Completed in Spring 2024

We are very pleased to report that 10 locally initiated, innovative, FON-sponsored projects were successfully completed from February to April 2024. These projects focused on the needs of women and youth, particularly in agropastoral productivity, water access, and education. Many regions were represented, involving both rural and urban settings, including three in Dosso, two in Agadez, and one each in Tessaoua, Tillaberi, Tahoua, Niamey, and Zinder.

#### CDGES Tessaoua: School Benches

Many public schools of Niger lack basic infrastructure. To address this problem, our grant enabled CDGES Tessaoua to purchase 60 sturdy school bench/tables to benefit the education of youth in Tessaoua. Local authorities contributed by purchasing furniture for teachers. "Friends of Niger" was proudly painted on each desk!



## **Assemblée des Formateurs et animateurs des Association (AFAA): Well Rehabilitation in Agadez Region**

Access to water is a major problem for Nigériens, especially in remote, rural areas. AFAA working with the Talat N’Haba women’s cooperative in the village of Almoughda (rural commune of Tabelot, Agadez region) addressed this problem by significantly upgrading an existing well. The community well of Almoughda was old, had cracks allowing water contamination and required the arduous and time-consuming work of drawing water with buckets and ropes. This complex project involved sealing cracks, cleaning and refilling the well, as well as installing a solar pump, including a cement castle, gutters and plumbing, a water storage tank, and a protective fence. Women of Talat N’Haba enthusiastically contributed much of the labor for the completion of the project.



## **Société Coopérative Simplifiée des Femmes Couturières “FAKRU”: Dairy Cows**

This project directly benefitted 15 women of the FAKRU women’s cooperative in Abalak by adding eight cows to the existing herd of 48 goats. Many other people in Abalak also benefitted from increased dairy production. Milk production rose from 25 liters a day to 73 liters a day with 60% of the production made into cheese and 20% made into curdled milk. The milk and milk products were made available for purchase locally, significantly increasing the incomes of the primary beneficiaries and making healthy food available.

*From the report--What was the most successful aspect of the project:*

“The most successful aspect is the production of milk, the making of cheese, and the generation of monetary income. These three aspects played a considerable role in addressing the food security of beneficiaries’ households.”//

L’aspect le plus réussi, c’est la production du lait, la fabrication des fromages, la génération des revenus monétaires. Ces trois aspects ont joué un rôle considérable dans la lutte contre la sécurité alimentaire des ménages des bénéficiaires.



### Special Sponsored Projects.

When FON member Joel Neuberg [67-69] retired, he looked at his personal finances and decided he could afford to make an annual pledge to support projects in his host village. At the point when his investments had mandatory withdrawals, he chose to donate those funds directly to FON thereby eliminating the tax deduction and delivering the maximum to FON. Joel was very eager to have his funds benefit his village.

Like Many villages, at the local level they did not have the capacity to develop their own proposal, but working with his contacts in the village, they identified a Nigerian nonprofit organization to partner with the village to help them develop and implement projects.

The Board sees the role of fiscal project sponsor as another way of meeting our mission. Helping members help Nigeriens is in fact a win-win! Often referred to as a “pass-through”, there is more to it

than merely using our bank account. As a non-profit we have to be careful to have all our activities serve our non-profit purpose, as well as meet our business and accountability standards. Everything flowing through our bank gets reported to the IRS. To that end, we’ve developed business protocols to handle fiscal sponsorship.

In the beginning, Joel’s village, Guecheme, and their NGO partner wrote up a proposal using the basic FON grant request format. Our Grants Management committee reviewed it to make sure it had a good chance of succeeding and met our basic eligibility requirements. During the committee review we often pass along any suggestions or feedback based on our experience. We sign a simple agreement with a project sponsor clarifying roles and responsibilities to avoid confusion. Joel acted as a liaison or Project Champion for this project and maintained a dialogue with the NGO through the implementation phase. At the end of the project he followed up with them to make sure a final report was provided to FON.

In true solidarity, Joel continues to donate to the FON general fund as well as his special targeted annual funding. When we asked Joel if he was comfortable with us sharing his story, he said ‘Anything you do to generate income for FON is fine with me.’

## 4) Saharan Tuareg Music in North America in 2024

Scott M. Youngstedt

Until recently, Nigérien music was largely unknown outside of Niger despite its beauty, complexity, and diversity. This has changed in recent years with the rise of Tuareg musicians who have produced highly acclaimed albums and toured internationally. **Bombino** and **Mdou Moctar** are the most popular and both are touring in North America this summer. In world music circles, their style has come to be known as “Desert Blues,” though this term oversimplifies their music. This is a special opportunity to support Nigérien musicians and to enjoy a Nigérien cultural event close to home.

**Bombino** (born 1980 as Omara Moctar) is a singer, songwriter, and guitarist of the Kel Air Tuareg. He and his excellent band are powerful, energetic performers. His early life is chronicled in the documentary film, *Agadez, the Music and the Rebellion* (2010). He is the first Nigérien to be nominated for a Grammy.

**Mdou Moctar** (born 1986 in Tchintabaraden as Mahamadou Souleymane) is a singer, songwriter, and guitarist. He and his outstanding band creatively blend rock and Tuareg takamba and assouf styles. See recent Washington Post article <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/06/19/mdou-moctar-concert-dc/>

For a remarkable trifecta, **Tinariwen** will also be touring in North America this summer. Tinariwen are Tuareg musicians of Northern Mali. Band leaders Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, Alhassane Ag Touhami, and Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni have been performing together since the 1970s. They are regarded as pioneers in the “Desert Blues” style who opened doors for younger musicians such as Bombino and Mdou Moctar to earn fame. They are masterful performers.

See tour dates:

- Bombino - <http://www.bombinomusic.com/tour>
- Mdou Moctar - <https://www.mdoumoctar.com/tour>
- Tinariwen - <https://store.tinariwen.com/live>

BOMBINO			MDOU MOCTAR		
JUNE	JULY	OCT	JUNE	OCTOBER	OCTOBER
28 NY NY 29 New Orleans	2 Roseburg OR 3 Seattle WA 4-5 Portland OR 6 San Francisco 7 Quincy CA 10 Santa Fe NM 12 Ottawa 14 Quebec 16 Montreal 18 Baie-st-paul 20 Trumansburg NY 21 Guelph CAN	3, Pittsburgh PA 4 Tulsa OK 5 Little Rock AR.	21 Buffalo 23 Boston 25 NY NY 26 Brooklyn 27 Wash. DC 28 Philadelphia	4 Westerly RI 5 Woodstock NY 6 Burlington VT 7 Montréal Canada 8 Ottawa Canada 9 Toronto Canada 11 Columbus OH 12 Grand Rapids MI 13 Madison WI 14 Minneapolis MN	16 Omaha NE 17 Denver CO 18 Salt Lake City UT 19 Boise ID 22 Seattle WA 23 Portland OR 25 San Francisco CA 26 Los Angeles CA 28 Phoenix AZ 29 Albuquerque NM

TINARIWEN	
JULY	AUGUST
19 Asheville NC 20 Atlanta GA 21 Carrboro NC 23 Washington DC 24 Philadelphia PA 26 Brooklyn NY 27 Boston MA 28 Newport RI 30 Montréal Canada 31 Toronto Canada	2 Chicago IL 3 Minneapolis MN 5 Denver CO 8 Vancouver Canada 9 Seattle WA 10 Portland OR 12 Berkeley CA 13 Los Angeles CA 14 San Diego CA

## 5) Niger-related News

### ▪ **Attack against the delegation of the Prefect of Bilma**

According to local and security sources, during the day of Friday June 21, 2024, the official vehicle which transported Commander Amadou Torda and six (06) of his collaborators including officers of the Gendarmerie and the National Guard, was attacked by unidentified armed individuals who came in two (02) vehicles. The attack took place in Agueur, about fifteen km from Bilma while the prefectural delegation was returning from Dirkou where it took part in a reading session of the Holy Koran for peace and social cohesion in Niger, at the initiative of a coalition of local associations.

According to the same sources, there was an exchange of fire and finally, the attackers who were heavily armed and who, obviously, had carefully planned the assault, took the upper hand and managed to kidnap the members of the delegation of the Prefect.

Article in French:

<https://www.actuniger.com/societe/20204-attaque-contre-la-delegation-du-prefet-de-bilma-le-corps-sans-vie-dun-officier-de-la-garde-nationale-retrouve-pres-du-lieu-du-drame.html>

### ▪ **Coup-hit Niger was betting on a China-backed oil pipeline as a lifeline. Then the troubles began**

A pipeline project built with China's support that would make Niger an oil-exporting country is being threatened by an internal security crisis and a diplomatic dispute with neighboring Benin

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/coup-hit-niger-betting-china-backed-oil-pipeline-111346218>

### ▪ **Niger revokes French nuclear group's license at major uranium mine**

Niger's military government has revoked the operating license of French nuclear fuel producer Orano at one of the world's biggest uranium mines, as it continues to cut ties with former colonial power France.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/21/niger-revokes-french-nuclear-groups-licence-at-major-uranium-mine>

### ▪ **Three borders zone: around ten terrorists including a leader of the EIGS neutralized**

Une dizaine de terroristes, dont un membre influent de l'État islamique, ont été neutralisés la semaine dernière au cours de différentes opérations menées par les Forces de défense et de sécurité (FDS) dans le département de Téra, région de Tillabéri, dans la zone dite des trois frontières. Selon le ministère de la Défense, ces opérations ont également permis d'interpeller plusieurs terroristes, de saisir des moyens de déplacement et de détruire des moyens de communication.

<https://www.actuniger.com/societe/20207-zone-des-trois-frontieres-une-dizaine-de-terroristes-dont-un-chef-de-leigs-neutralises-armee.html>

## 6) In Brief

### **We note the passing of Franceen F. Fallett.**

Franceen was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Niger 1967-69 and served as Peace Corp secretary with Susan Josenhans. Franceen passed away June 21, 2024, in Ojai, California. No obituary or funeral information is available at the time of this newsletter.

Susan said Franceen gave English lessons to President Hamani Diori during her time in Niger. Additionally, a number of items Franceen collected while in Niger are currently being held and displayed at the National Afro-American Museum in Wilberforce, Ohio.

## **YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK**

Friends of Niger is an organization to initiate and support activities related to Niger and its people. We pursue three main purposes:

1. Connecting and engaging people who have connections to Niger including diaspora, and those who have worked or are working in Niger,
2. Supporting development and humanitarian activities in Niger, and
3. Advocating for and educating about Niger

To donate write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to

**NEW ADDRESS: Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503,**

OR go to [www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org) to use PayPal.

### **Board of Directors**

Officers: Amy Wilson/President, Alix Barstow Fedoruk/Vice President, Mary Abrams/Grants Management Committee, John Baird/Past President; At Large Board members: Brandon Bragato, Paige Pihl Buckley, Alhassan Ali Mamadou Souna, Douglas Steinberg, Nafissa Salihou, Scott Youngstedt, Soufiane Younoussi

### **For more about Friends of Niger:**

- Our website <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: [\(Friends of Niger\) FON](#)
- Submit news topics and articles: [camelexpress@friendsofniger.org](mailto:camelexpress@friendsofniger.org)
- Contact President Amy Wilson, [president@friendsofniger.org](mailto:president@friendsofniger.org)

**“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”**

