

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

September 2024

Please note new address:

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

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Dear Readers,

We are having a blast getting ready for CHICAGO! Dinosaurs, fellowship, African food, seeing old friends!! There is still time to sign up, see details below. The Board is super excited to meet each other face to face and delve into some topics in more depth. We hope you can join us. There has been plenty of other activity lately: filing taxes, funding new grants, tracking existing grants, giving a facelift to the website, and as always developing better tracking systems and record-keeping. We have a great team and we are always on the lookout for new Board and Committee members. We hope you'll join us and we are looking forward to meeting you in Chicago.

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

Amy Wilson & Scott Youngstedt

1) CHICAGO!!! Fossil Lab Tour and Get-together- Sept. 21

We are excited to see fossils and other cool discoveries from the desert north of Agadez, and Paul Sereno is excited to meet a bunch of people who share his love of Niger. There is still time to make plans and signup for this exciting event: <https://myevent.com/FriendsOfNigerChicago2024>

Please join us at the lab:

3-5 pm Saturday September 21
5437 S Wabash Avenue Chicago IL 60615

The lab is on the South side of Chicago near Washington Park, and has ample parking. This is where they do the hands-on work with bones and fossils to recompose skulls and skeletons. Also curated there is evidence of early human habitation that provide more clues to geology and the evolution of the desert environment.

After the tour, join us for a social get together back at our rental house in the South Shore neighborhood near East 75th St and South Exchange Ave, (exact location TBA- please sign up so we can provide more details via email closer to the event).

SEE YOU THERE!

If you missed the video presentation Paul gave earlier this year, please contact us for the link, newsletter@friendsofniger.org

More info about the museum project at <https://www.nigerheritage.org/> and the fossil lab <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/uchicago-paleontologist-paul-serenos-fossil-lab-moves-washington-park>



Older article from *National Geographic*:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/news-ng-explore>

2) Nine Projects Selected for Funding

With the help of a great team of volunteer grant reviewers we just selected 9 projects to be funded with your generous donations. A total of \$44,938 has already been sent to the recipients and the work is beginning.

Huge thanks to **our volunteers**!! With their help we make sure that each proposal is given thoughtful consideration and each applicant receives feedback about how to write a more competitive proposal next time. Merci beaucoup!!! Fofu! Sannu!

Mary Abrams

Kelsey Andersen

John Baird

Ann Byerly

Paige Pihl Buckley

Amy Harris

John Heylin

Abdou Illia

JoAnn Lewis

Sarah Singletary

Alhassan Ali Souna

Douglas Steinberg

Susan Susanke

Amy Wilson

Scott Youngstedt

Most recently funded grants:

Fossil Lab Internship/ Fossil Lab, University of Chicago \$4,960

Internship for one Nigerienne at University of Chicago Fossil Lab to include both remote and on-site training on handling and archiving fossils as well as assistance with applying to graduate schools. The trainee will eventually return to Niger to assume responsibilities as a museologist for preservation of fossils found in Niger and to train other students interested in museology.

Youth Recycling Program/Potentiel Terre \$5,977

Unemployed youths will collect and sort plastics for recycling resulting in community cleanup and economic opportunity for individuals. Dosso Region

Literacy for Vocational Students/Dispositif d'Initiatives pour les Metiers de l'Artisanat \$5,000

Ensure 120 vocational education students achieve a basic level of literacy. Equip three classrooms and provide the first 9 months of training in foundational education (reading, writing, English, French, arithmetic). Niamey

IMini Potable Water System/Assemblée des Formateurs et Animateurs des Assoc. \$5,303

Install solar water supply equipment and construct a cement storage tank with a metal cover. Distribute water to homes, school and health clinic. Agadez Region

Goat Kits For Vulnerable Women/SCOOP-S KOKARI de Bargouma \$4,321

Provide 45 women members of the Simplified Cooperative Society (KOKARI) in the village of Bargouma with goat kits (goats and initial feed and medicines). Provide training in goat husbandry. Zinder Region

Agricultural Future - Faculty Development/Récupération des Mendiants \$5,186

Provide comprehensive training in agribusiness, modern research tools, and job application skills for future Agricultural faculty members at the Faculty of Agriculture, University Abdou Moumouni. Enhance library resources with updated computers and software.

Well Construction Fatabadje /AFESE - NANAAY \$5,709

Drill borehole in the hamlet of Fatabadjé, near Hamdallaye, to improve the living conditions of the population by facilitating access to drinking water near households.

Agricultural Processing and Marketing Iferouâne/TAMAKRAST NIGER \$4,866

Train 40 women members of the Iferouane Cooperative in Financial management, food processing and conservation techniques. Provide food processing and conservation equipment.

Cement Well for Drinking Water/Kouldjami Elhadji Issa \$3,951

Construct a cement-lined well to provide drinking water for a community in Zinder region.

3) The Beat Goes On: More Tuareg Guitar Goodness from Niger

Eric J. Schmidt

Last month's newsletter included a great segment by Scott Youngstedt on the incredible trajectory of Tuareg guitar music in recent years (*tanimert houlane*, Scott!). As Scott shared, artists like [Tinariwen](#), [Bombino](#), and [Mdou Moutar](#) have all been touring this summer. Even as many of their North America tours begin to wind down, there are still opportunities to see some of them nearby. Many have also announced fall tours—check the dates in the June newsletter or at the links above.

One of the incredible parts of the global story of Tuareg guitar is that there have not just been a few celebrated voices—like the stars mentioned above—but a whole efflorescence of artists sharing their talents with the world. Whether you're hooked on the Tuareg sound or just want to support Nigérien musicians, here are a couple other developments to look out for.

If you're missing the *ambiance* of an Agadez wedding, check out the new single "[Ighre Massina](#)" ([I Call Out to My Creator](#)) by **Etran de l'Air**. Formed in 1995, they're one of the longest-running wedding groups in town, masterfully weaving the Tuareg sound with the lyrical riffs and rollicking bass lines of other popular Nigérien guitar styles (think Tal National). Etran are wrapping up a packed summer tour with [more dates planned this fall](#) as they launch their forthcoming album, [100% Sahara Guitar](#).

Another exciting recent development is that the artist **Boubé**, born in Iférouane, has settled into an active musical life in Montréal. If you didn't catch him in the Agadez scene, you might recognize him as the drummer on several tours with Bombino or Mdou Moctar over the years. He's now leading his own group and recently played the celebrated Nuits d'Afrique festival. Check out his album [Issaktan on YouTube](#) and his [upcoming performances](#) around Québec.

While they haven't announced any upcoming NA plans, it's always a great idea to keep an eye out for many other Tuareg artists with roots in Niger: [Les Filles de Illighadad](#), [TisDass](#) (plus Wisskarad, a new project by TisDass leader Moussa Albadé), and [Kader Tarhanine](#), among others.

Finally: **Tinariwen** are heralded as the originators of the Tuareg "desert blues" sound, but the *ishumar* style traces its roots in Niger through the late **Abdallah Ag Oumbadougou**. Earlier this year saw the release of a new career retrospective, including many previously unavailable recordings and extensive liner notes by former Tinariwen manager Andy Morgan: [Amghar: The Godfather of Tuareg Music, Vol. 1](#). This collection helps celebrate this legendary man whose songs constitute the core of Niger's Tuareg guitar repertoire.

4) We Mourn the Loss of John Soloninka, Past President FON

John Soloninka passed away August 6th, 2024 at The James Cancer Hospital in Ohio. John was so well loved by those who knew him in Niger!! His work with Lutheran World Relief promoted gardening as a means to improve nutrition and generate income in remote and rural areas throughout Niger. He befriended many Peace Corps Volunteers and partnered with them to extend the reach and benefit of programs.

"Everyone who knew John loved him. He was so generous. We had such good times and good meals at his house. His house, which was always a home for us." - Daniel McCormick

"John was the perfect liaison between the volunteer world and the NGO/International Development world. I think he mentored many of us who continued in that world and always appreciated and respected the work the Peace Corps Volunteers were doing in the field. It was great to talk shop or unwind on the weekends with him." - L Eric Lindberg

After returning to the US, John kept up his friendships through the Friends of Niger organization. Indeed, John played a big role in FON. He started out serving as recording secretary from 1998 to 2000. After that, the group was inactive for a couple of years and John stepped up to bring it back to life. He served as president of the Friends of Niger from 2006 to 2015. We have so much to thank him for.

John will be remembered very fondly by many and he will be missed.

Memorial service to be held September 7, 2024, at Christ The King Lutheran Church in Saint Clairsville, Ohio <https://www.shaw-davis.com/obituaries/john-soloninka>



John Soloninka with Amy Wilson Niamey 1993

5) Niger-related News

Floods are hitting Niger hard:

Floods have claimed 217 lives, injured 200, and affected over 350,000 people across Niger in the past three months, according to Nigerien authorities. The capital Niamey has been nearly isolated due to exceptional river flooding caused by heavy rains since June, submerging the city's main exit routes. The flooding has displaced 11,500 residents in Niamey alone, according to the latest official figures. *From Sahel Research Group, 22 August 2024*



Inondations au Niger : 217 morts, 353 287 sinistrés, et 12 milliards de FCFA mobilisés sur fonds propres pour faire face à la crise

Un bilan tragique a été dressé : 217 personnes ont perdu la vie, dont 108 par noyade et 109 à la suite de l'effondrement de leur habitation. En outre, 200 personnes ont été blessées et des milliers de familles sont aujourd'hui sans abri. Le bilan des destructions matérielles est également accablant : 46 525 ménages sinistrés, 39 479 maisons effondrées, et 16 965 têtes de bétail décimées. Les infrastructures publiques n'ont pas été épargnées, avec 81 classes et 3 centres de santé endommagés, ainsi que des milliers de greniers et hangars détruits.

<https://www.actuniger.com/societe/20362-inondations-au-niger-217-morts-353-287-sinistres-et-12-milliards-de-fcfa-mobilises-sur-fonds-propres-pour-faire-face-a-la-crise.html>

Video reporting of flooding:

AFP News Agency - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwKdI0OLs-s>

CGTN Africa - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv-pLYEjfMY>

FRANCE 24 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McDI6rgOg2o>

Medical costs reduced : Le Niger réduit à 50% les frais de soins médicaux

Annoncée le 22 août, cette réforme touche les établissements de santé publics. À partir du 1er septembre, les tarifs diminueront pour les consultations, les hospitalisations et les examens.

Parmi les autres allègements sont aussi: l'accouchement qui sera désormais gratuit, la suppression du forfait à vie de 150.000 FCFA pour la dialyse.

Le gouvernement explique cette décision par la nécessité de la justice sociale envers les populations en milieu rural qui ont l'accès limité aux soins. Elle devrait encourager des habitants à se faire soigner. <http://news.aniamey.com/h/120988.html> August 26, 2024

U.S. military completes withdrawal from key drone base in Niger

WASHINGTON, Aug 5 (Reuters, Reporting by Idrees Ali) - The United States military has completed its withdrawal from air base 201 in Niger, officials said on Monday, after Niger's ruling junta ordered nearly 1,000 U.S. military personnel to leave following a coup last year. Air base 201, a drone base near Agadez in central Niger that was built at a cost of \$100 million, had provided crucial intelligence about Islamist militant groups before the coup.

"The effective cooperation and communication between the U.S. and Nigerien armed forces ensured that this turnover was finished ahead of schedule and without complications."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/us-military-completes-withdrawal-key-drone-base-niger-2024-08-05/>

US completes withdrawal from last base in Niger

August 05, 2024, By Carla Babb

Only a "handful" of American military personnel are still in Niger, a U.S. defense official told VOA following the announcement. Those who remain are working out of the embassy, including the top American officer overseeing the effort, Maj. Gen. Kenneth Ekman.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/us-completes-withdrawal-from-last-base-in-niger/7730618.html>

In case you missed it

[World Hausa Day!](#)

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 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
- Contact President Amy Wilson, president@friendsofniger.org

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

