



B.G. Deshmukh The Quintessential Administrator

No organization can thrive without good leadership and swift decision makers. Even a research-based organization like the BNHS needs more than science to survive. BNHS was blessed with one such personality who entered the arena at a crucial juncture. Acknowledged to be one of the most fortunate things to happen to BNHS during a period of crisis, B.G. Deshmukh was invited

to join the Society as its President in 1993, and he held the reigns until his demise in 2011. A mentor, guide, and ardent conservationist, Deshmukh brought with him a strong bureaucratic background and work ethic. He uplifted the Society and restored its financial stability when it was most needed.

As a bureaucrat, he had held various important posts in both state and central governments,

including Chief Secretary, Maharashtra; Chairman of the Governing Board of the International Labour Organisation; Secretary of Union Labour and Rehabilitation Department; Additional Secretary; Union Ministry of Home Affairs; Municipal Commissioner of Bombay and Secretary to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. He was the Cabinet Secretary from August 1986 to March 1989. He was the Principal Secretary to three consecutive Prime Ministers – Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh, and Chandra Shekhar – from March 1989 to December 1990. He was also the Chairman of Janwani, an NGO of the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture, and President and Trustee of a number of NGOs like KEM Hospital, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, and Mohalla Committee Movement Trust.

The years after Dr. Sálím Ali's passing left the Society in need of a visionary leader to guide it towards its larger goal of nature conservation, and at the same time, to address the important issue of financial stability of the Society. Having been the seniormost bureaucrat of the country



Celebrating B.G. Deshmukh's birthday at Hornbill House



B.G. Deshmukh encouraging young talent Sooraj Bishnoi, a budding photographer in the field of natural history



With the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Mr. Vilasrao Deshmukh – at the Society's 125th year celebration, releasing LOKE WAN THO'S BIRDS

in his time, Deshmukh was just the right person for this herculean task. Having worked in government for long, Deshmukh had a clear and practical understanding of the issues rampant in the “systems” in our country, but at the same time, he was also sensitive to the issues of wildlife and its intricacies. This knowledge equipped him to guide the Society in its best interests.

He understood the need for BNHS to establish a corpus fund, and realized this dream by liaising with donors and acquiring funds for research and for running costs. He had significant personal connections that helped the Society financially in

going that extra mile. His contacts within the Government helped garner support for the varied conservation and research activities BNHS was engaged in.

At the Society, his commitment to work and the trust he demonstrated in his colleagues inspired everyone to give their best. It was not like him to hound someone into completing a job. He would instead allot a task, set a deadline, and provide everything one required to accomplish it. He would simply say, “Tell me what you need to complete this task”. Rational demands were promptly met, to ensure smooth working conditions. He was strict, professional, and result

oriented, and was gracious enough to appreciate a good effort.

Despite having held numerous high positions during his career, Deshmukh was a down-to-earth person who made it a point to know each of his staff and interact with them. He drew immense respect in bureaucratic circles during his tenure and even after retirement, which enabled him to intervene on behalf of the Society in many instances. He dedicated his time and knowledge to BNHS and his presence at Hornbill House was inspirational. His contribution towards establishing a sound financial base for the Society remains unmatched. ■

