

# HORNBILL

DISCOVER THE LIVING WORLD

OCTOBER-DECEMBER, 2018



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## Meeting conservation challenges in a rapidly world

The last few months of 2018 have been full of mixed emotions as we lost quite a few stalwarts: Dr B.F. Chhapgar, Shri Digveerendrasinh Solanki, former Maharaja of Vansda, Vice Admiral Manohar P. Awati, and some very close friends and associates, Harry Andrews, Bishwaroop Raha, and Jaimesh Thapar. All were strong supporters of BNHS for a very long period of time.

On one hand, we are yet to come to terms with the loss of so many friends, nature lovers, and well-wishers, while on the other, wildlife has witnessed a low on several fronts. From the Avani episode to the deaths of several lions due to disease, to the decimation of wildlife on roads, fences, canals, transmission lines, and fishing nets, wildlife in India is witnessing a grave situation. As if this was not enough, natural calamities too have taken a toll on wildlife. Seven cyclones hit the east coast this year, of which Gaja, in particular, hit Point Calimere hard, causing severe casualties among birds – nothing seems to be going right for wildlife at this point of time.

Imprudent actions have resulted in diversion of forest land and loss of key forests in wildlife corridors, ultimately bringing human-wildlife conflict to our doorstep. The new 'Green Field' alignments of national highways and expansion of state highways crisscrossing through and around protected areas will only worsen the situation: isolation of wildlife and its decimation on roads is now certain. While Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has recommended mitigation guidelines for linear infrastructure, our dismal record of implementation of safeguards provides little confidence as to their effectiveness. The flipside of this policy is that now every concerned government agency believes that, with these guidelines, roads, highways and railways can be built wherever one desires. It is, therefore, not surprising to see a surge in the number of proposed linear projects through critical wildlife areas, such as Bandipur, Ranthambhore, Tadoba, and Melghat, to name just a few.

The choking air of Delhi, the ever increasing summer heat and erratic rains, recurring droughts and failing agriculture, are signals that Climate Change is no longer a myth; it has already entered our homes. And unless we become 'climate smart', we will be at its mercy. Our generation believes that the solution to this impending peril rests in the emerging technologies, forgetting that there is no better technology than nature, which witnessed far more violent forces during the course of evolution and continued to flourish. Nature-based solutions will thus be far more relevant in today's time than engineering solutions alone. Thus, a blend of engineering and the secrets of nature is the best way forward. A recent example is the blend of hard structure and sand impregnation used to restore the beach of Puducherry.

Among all this multitude of depressing news, a refreshing piece of news was in-principle approval by the Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife (MSSBWL) on 5th December, for the declaration of about 200 sq. km in Kanhargaoon in Chandrapur district as a wildlife sanctuary. The decision was taken at the 14th board meeting chaired by the Chief Minister. The Board



also decided to expand the Umred-Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary and Bor Tiger Reserve by relocating three villages each from these PAs. As a member of the Board, BNHS strongly supported these moves.

Coming to more BNHS-specific news, our half-yearly newsletter *eco.Scapes* is receiving excellent response. We hope to connect with members through the newsletter on the work we do, and on how our members can contribute to the Society. We appeal to our members to help in the recruitment of more members.

Our recent title INDIAN BIRD MIGRATION ATLAS has received excellent response. We have about 100 copies left of the first edition and we urge those who are desirous of having a copy to get one without delay, before the stock is sold out. The Marathi translation of THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS was released last month and is receiving excellent response; we hope that Dr Sálím Ali's classic reaches a large number of Marathi readers. The Gujarati translation is in the offing, and you will see it in the bookshops soon.

Our initiative for digitization of specimens in the BNHS Collections has received a major boost with the support of CIDCO and MMRDA, and full-fledged digitization work is under way. In the last two months, we have digitized about 300 specimens and we aim to complete digitization of the entire Collections within the next eight to ten years.

Another achievement, thanks to our long-term major research and conservation projects, is that our CRISIL rating has been elevated to 1A from 1B for the NGO sector.

In my recent appeal to members, we requested members to 'adopt' any of the 20 species that we are working on to develop species conservation action plans. We aim to release these action plans during the upcoming CMS COP-2020 in India. Our appeal resulted in three donations of Rs Two lakhs each to develop action plans for Lesser Flamingo, Greater Flamingo, and Crab Plover. We still need and solicit support for Black-tailed Godwit, Little Stint, Eurasian Curlew, Indian Skimmer, Yellow-breasted Bunting, White-headed Duck, Long-toed Stint, Ferruginous Duck, Black-bellied Tern, Sociable Lapwing, European Roller, Red Knot, Common Pochard, Lesser Sand Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Great Knot, and Bar-tailed Godwit.

And last but not least, we are delighted to announce that we will be holding an international conference in the coming year on 'Wetlands, Migratory Waterbirds, and Flyways of Asia', that will be held in Lonavla, Maharashtra, from 18th to 22nd November, 2019. The conference website will be launched by 1st January, 2019, and participants can register online. It will be an eventful five days, with deliberations on wetlands and migratory birds of the Asian flyways, and on meeting conservation challenges in a rapidly changing world. Unfortunately, the capacity of the conference is limited to 300 individuals, and so we recommend early registration as soon as we go online, to avoid disappointment.

**Deepak Apte**



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Passion for wildlife takes a trekker on innumerable long walks through forests, in valleys and over mountains, but some journeys are special; Sigur Range is one such place for **A.J.T. Johnsingh**. Read on to soak in his passion for wildlife and Sigur.



### Extinction, courtesy

#### *Homo sapiens*

Planet earth has witnessed five mass extinction events since the first life forms appeared, but none are like the sixth species-extinction event that is currently in process. **Ranjit Manakadan** and **Asif Khan** discuss the human-induced extinctions on our planet.



### The Borgad

#### Conservation Story

Nature Conservation Society of Nashik was instrumental in restoring the lost glory of Borgad hills, situated near Nashik. **Pratiksha Kothule** shares the work of her mentor Bishwarup Raha, her team, and the local communities that fructified this effort.



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