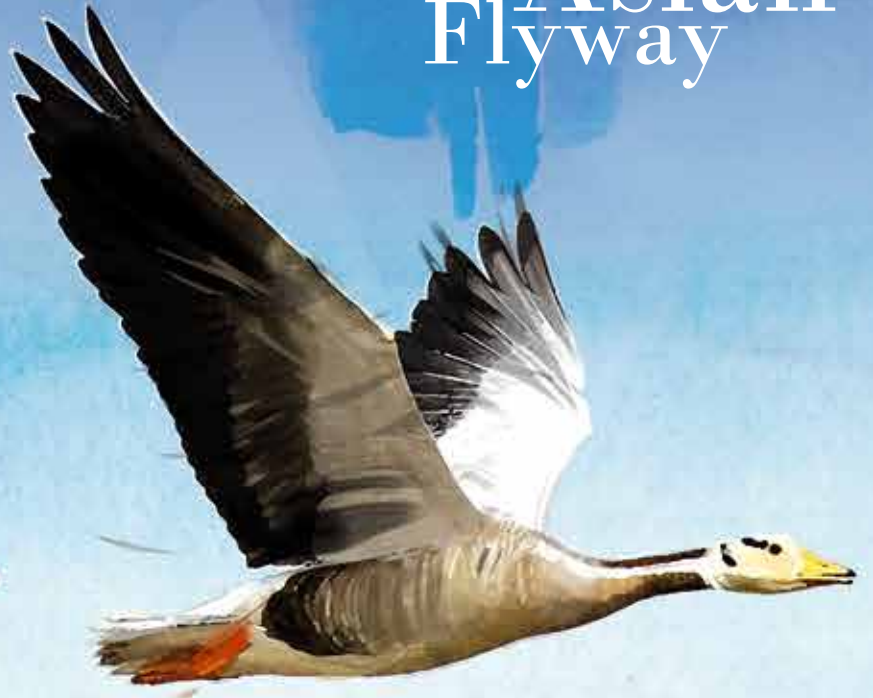


HORNBILL

DISCOVER THE LIVING WORLD

APRIL-JUNE 2017

The Central Asian Flyway



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HORNBILL

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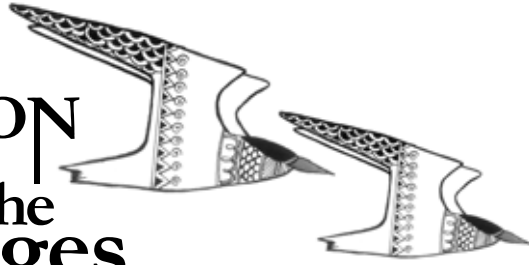


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BNHS MIGRATION STUDIES through the Ages



Bird migration, one of the most fascinating aspects of the avian world, has captured the imagination of humankind for centuries. When winter sets over the Arctic region and the Himalaya, millions of migratory birds begin an arduous southward journey of thousands of kilometres to warmer climes in tropical countries, one of which is India.

The classic method to study bird migration was through bird ringing/banding. In India, BNHS has been the pioneering organization studying bird migration, and for the last nine decades we have been painstakingly ringing and tagging birds. Our first bird ringing programme was undertaken way back in 1927. Till date, BNHS has ringed over 7,00,000 birds in India, resulting in recoveries from 29 countries, spanning five continents. The data generated from these ringing operations has contributed significantly to the understanding of the origins and migration routes of winter migrants of the Indian subcontinent. It has helped mark the boundaries of the Central Asian Flyway (CAF), which ranges from Arctic Russia to the Indian subcontinent, to delineate it from the boundaries of other flyways. The recoveries reveal the significance of traditional sites in India and Eurasia that are crucial for migratory birds to complete their annual cycle within the CAF. The data also provides information on the connectivity between stop-over and wintering sites that are important in strategizing conservation activities globally.

To highlight the findings of bird migration studies over the decades, BNHS will soon publish INDIAN BIRD MIGRATION ATLAS, a compendium of ringing recovery data of the past 90 years. This publication, besides its contribution to Indian Ornithology, will provide ornithologists and amateur birders information on the origins, migration routes, as well as stop-over and wintering sites of waterbirds migrating into the Indian subcontinent. Such information is essential to take management measures for protecting migratory birds and their habitats in the CAF. We are working to release the book during the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Conference of Parties (COP) meeting in Philippines in October 2017.

The advancement of technology, including satellite telemetry applications, has the potential to provide more precise information on the movement pattern of bird species. There is an urgent need to undertake these studies on a larger scale, especially since they can help fine tune conservation strategies for migrant birds. A combination of traditional bird ringing and satellite telemetry data can provide more precise policy inputs for migratory bird conservation. BNHS aims to develop a 'Decision Support Tool' for bird flyways within the next three years as mandated by Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). This is especially binding on India as it is a signatory to the Convention on the Conservation of

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Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), by which India has pledged to protect migratory species and their habitats.

Climate Change has added new dimensions to bird migration. The consequences of climate change not only influence migratory movements but also destroy traditional wintering sites. We are already seeing erratic patterns in some species, both in flock sizes and movements. Thus, it is all the more important to work on the CAF and the sites that are vital wintering sites in India. The body of scientific work done by BNHS is proving crucial for developing conservation strategies for wetlands, both inland and coastal, that are most vital for CAF. The working draft recently prepared by BNHS identifying 20 important wetlands and 28 sites within 9 wetland clusters across 14 states of India was appreciated at the MoEFCC, and will be used to undertake regional consultation and to develop site specific action plans. More specifically, this initiative will help to abide by the CAF Action Plan, (Actions 3 to 5).

The BNHS Wetlands Programme aims to undertake sharply focused advocacy work. We are diversifying our bird ringing programme, and we have already received necessary permissions from most of the coastal states of India, some of which have identified BNHS as the nodal agency for bird ringing in their states.

Compared to the other flyways of the world, designing and implementation of management strategies in CAF has been a challenge, as this flyway extends along regions that include highly populated, polluted, and rapidly developing nations. Although the CAF Action Plan has been framed, there is insignificant progress among the Range States (the countries that come under the flyway). Since one-third of the 30 range states in the CAF are among the world's least developed countries, there are numerous practical difficulties that need to be addressed for the successful implementation of the Action Plan. BNHS has been working with the MoEFCC for successful implementation of the actions envisaged in the CAF Action Plan, and this has been recognized by MoEFCC in the CAF country reports. The implementation of the CAF Action Plan in India could also be of help to replicate the conservation strategies in all other CAF range countries.

BNHS has been participating in various CAF and CMS meetings, workshops, and scientific committee meetings and has been actively involved in the framing of science-based action plans for the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats. BNHS participated in a meeting to conclude and endorse the CAF Action Plan conducted in New Delhi from June 10–12, 2005. BNHS also played a crucial role in formulating single species action plans for globally threatened species, like Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Great Knot. Many of the BNHS's flagship programmes are extremely helpful for addressing flyway-level conservation issues. These include our nine-decade bird migration studies and our two-decade Important Bird Areas (IBA) programme.

This special issue of *Hornbill* aims to provide readers with information on the CAF, and on the CAF Action Plan and its sister agreements, implementation strategies and issues to be addressed by the implementing agencies, and to garner national and international cooperation for successful implementation of the CAF Action Plan and its sister agreements. It is also an effort to reach a wider constituency of scientists, institutions, and individuals.

We also aim to use Citizen Science to document bird migration. To illustrate, very recently in June 2017, one of our members sent some images of Curlew Sandpiper with rings and colour flags from Navi Mumbai. These were birds ringed by BNHS in 2014 at Sewri in Mumbai. All the birds were in full breeding plumage. The images provided valuable evidence that species like Curlew Sandpiper are not only wintering but overwintering at traditional sites. Such information is extremely vital for conservation. Incidentally, the Mangrove Foundation of Maharashtra has extended BNHS financial support to ring migratory birds and study the coastal wetlands of Maharashtra. We appeal to our members and photographers to look for birds with rings or other tags and send us their images with mention of the location and date of sighting.