

HORNBILL

DISCOVER THE LIVING WORLD

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BNHS
India CONSERVING
NATURE SINCE 1883

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Editorial...

It is with mixed feelings that I write this last editorial for *Hornbill* in the capacity of Director of BNHS, as well as Editor of *Hornbill* and *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. I am extremely happy that I could contribute to this magnificent institution in terms of strengthening science, institution building, financial stability, succession planning, and pursuing an unbiased conservation agenda.


The Wetlands Programme that we launched five years ago is today one of the flagship projects of the Society. Some remarkable work is being undertaken by a highly talented team, and the insights we are gaining through bird ringing and colour flagging have been remarkable as well, and will help shape the conservation agenda of key flyway sites in India. The recently launched national count of Indian Skimmer is part of this programme and we hope to generate excellent data. Indian Skimmer has been recently 'upgraded' to Endangered (from the earlier Vulnerable) category under the IUCN Red List, which reiterates that our rivers and associated habitats are declining in quality. It is a cause for concern, not just for conservation scientists but for the entire human population, that our freshwater security continues to be compromised and our river basins continue to degrade. At the same time, we are describing several new species of freshwater fish, reinforcing the fact that we know far too little about freshwater resources, and that they require a careful approach in any developmental agenda.

Our Vulture Programme is also at a crossroads; we released a few captive-bred vultures in the wild from our West Bengal Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre. The satellite-tagged birds continue to provide vital information on their movements and feeding locations. This data will help to streamline our full-fledged vulture release programme in the coming months and years.

Our Climate Change and Himalaya Programme continues to provide vital information on high altitude avifauna and we hope to generate substantial data over the next few decades to help us understand the distribution ranges of avifauna and how these are affected by climate change in the extremely fragile Himalayan mountainscape. It will help us develop a fresh conservation blueprint for this region.

The Marine and Coastal Biodiversity Programme continues to help us understand the intricacies of elevated sea surface temperature and coral reefs. We recently launched CoMBAT (Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Assessment Tool), a free app available at <http://combat.bnhs.org>. The tool, which is currently focused on the coastal areas of Maharashtra, took three years of hard work to develop. It will help citizens to understand key biodiversity sites of coastal Maharashtra. Please use the tool and send us your feedback at da.apte@bnhs.org so that we can continue to improve its user interface.





And, last but not least, there has been a revival on projects on bird hazard to aircraft. Studies on bird hazard to aircraft in India were pioneered by BNHS in the 1980s with surveys of 22 aerodromes. After this project, except for some inconsequential work in the early 1990s, BNHS was out of this research domain for more than two decades. A revival took place in 2015, and till now BNHS has undertaken studies in a few airfields of the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard, along with a one-year study in the airport at Mumbai, the second busiest airport in India.

This year has been bad, especially since we lost some of the finest conservation stalwarts due to the pandemic – Ulhas Rane and Dr Bhavbhuti Parasharya. Another great loss, not due to the pandemic, but nonetheless a significant loss, was of my dear friend Ajay Desai, an authority on Asian Elephant. I have some fantastic memories of watching elephants in Mudumalai, Nagarhole, Bandipur, and Corbett, among other places, with him.

My journey of the last 27 years with BNHS has been extremely rewarding and the experience and knowledge I gained from the Society is more than any textbook could provide. Several people have been part of this journey, and I remain grateful to all those who extended support to me, and to the Society.

The new year will bring a new Director – Dr Bivash Pandav – to the Society. Bivash brings with him two decades of field experience in wildlife studies, and I wish him all the best, and great success. I hope he will continue to maintain the research-based conservation focus which is fundamental to the existence of BNHS and look after the staff, without which Hornbill House would be just four walls.

Deepak Apte, PhD



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October–December, 2020



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A Prime Minister and a Naturalist

“They were ‘birds of the same feather’ when it came to matters relating to nature” says **Jairam Ramesh**. Read on to find out how an ornithologist helped his Prime Minister shape her passion to conserve India’s biodiversity into action.



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Tell-Tale Signs in Nature

Animals are known to leave tell-tale signs of their presence. Experience and help from experts has, over the years, taught **Rushikesh Chavan** to read habits and behaviours of animals, both on land and in water, using these signs. He shares a few tips.



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