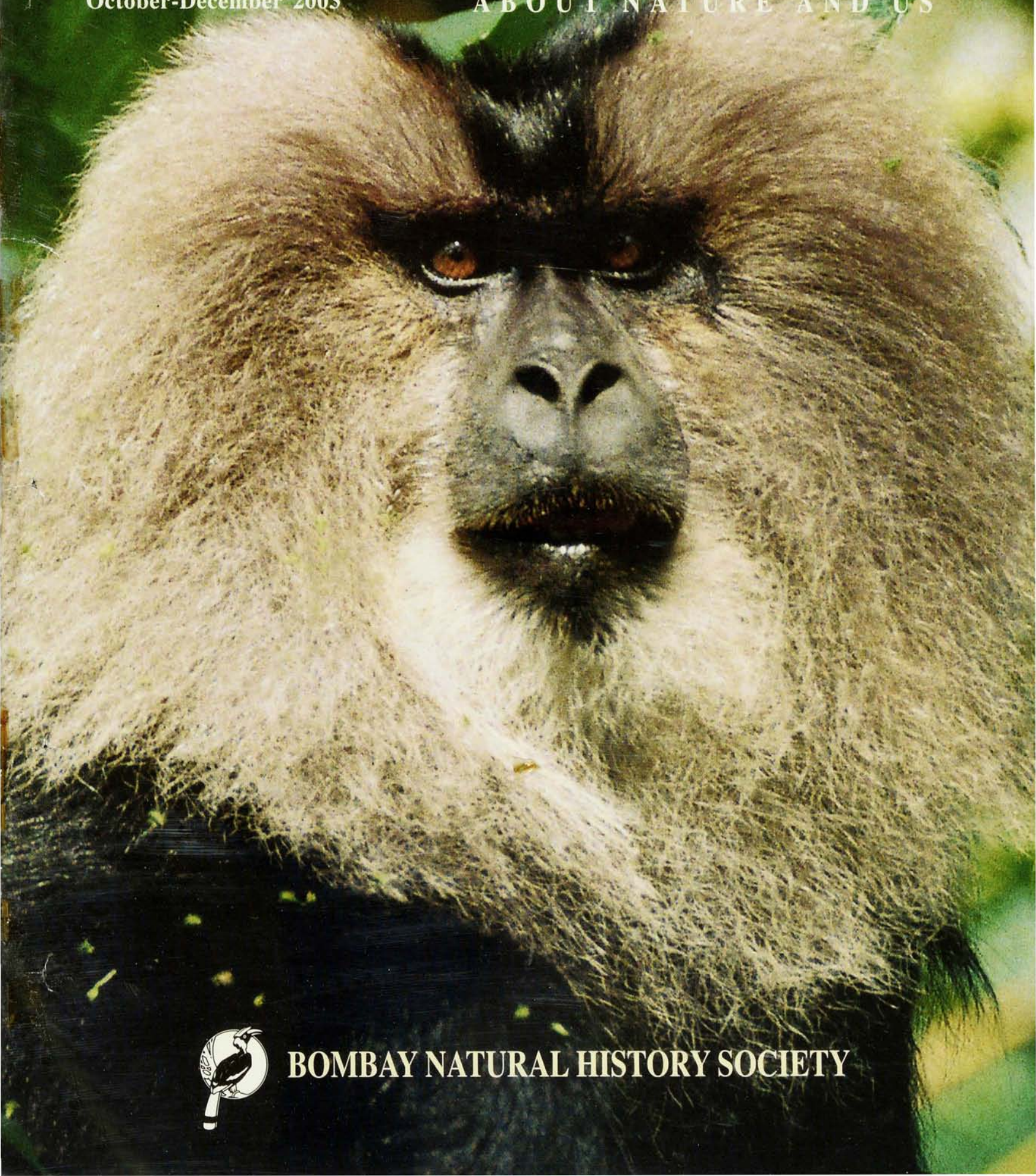


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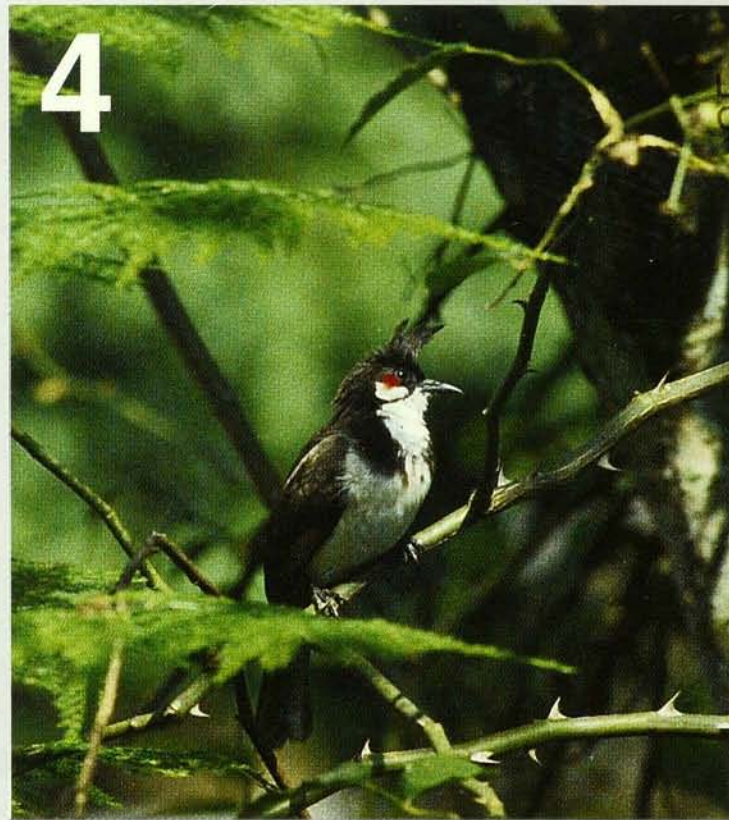
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Periyar — a dream come true — Ranjit Manakadan

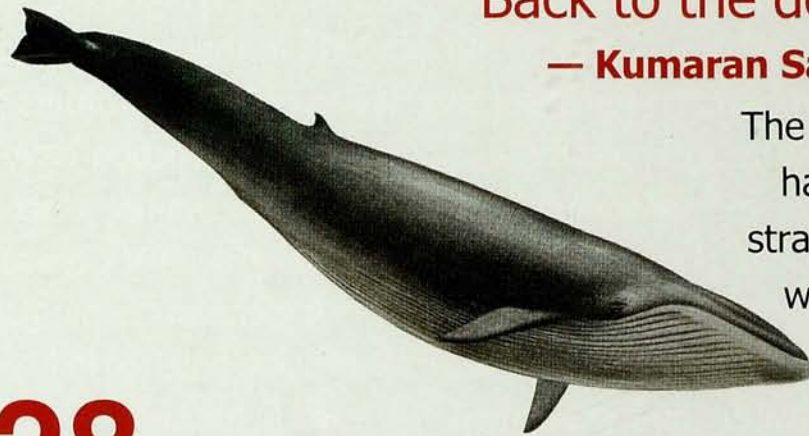
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We all dream of visiting places, for different reasons. The author cherished his dream to visit Periyar and we are sure that his account of his visit may set you dreaming about your own trip to Periyar some day.

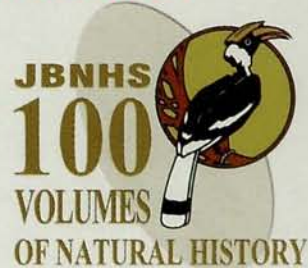
Back to the deep sea? **12** — Kumaran Sathasivam



The author gives a first hand report of how a stranded Bryde's whale was sent back to the deep sea.

28 The Centenary Journal Celebrations

A pictorial feature. Two years of planning, preparation and the combined efforts of the entire BNHS family culminated in the events from 12th to 15th November, 2003 at Mumbai.



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Published and printed quarterly by J.C. Daniel for the Bombay Natural History Society, Printed at Stusa Mudra Pvt. Ltd., Lower Parel, Mumbai. Reg. No. RN 35749/79, ISSN 0441-2370.

For more information on the Society and its activities, write to the Honorary Secretary, Bombay Natural History Society, Dr. Sálím Ali Chowk, S.B. Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023, Maharashtra, India. Tel.: (91-22) 2282 1811 Fax: (91-22) 2283 7615 E-mail: bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in Website: www.bnhs.org

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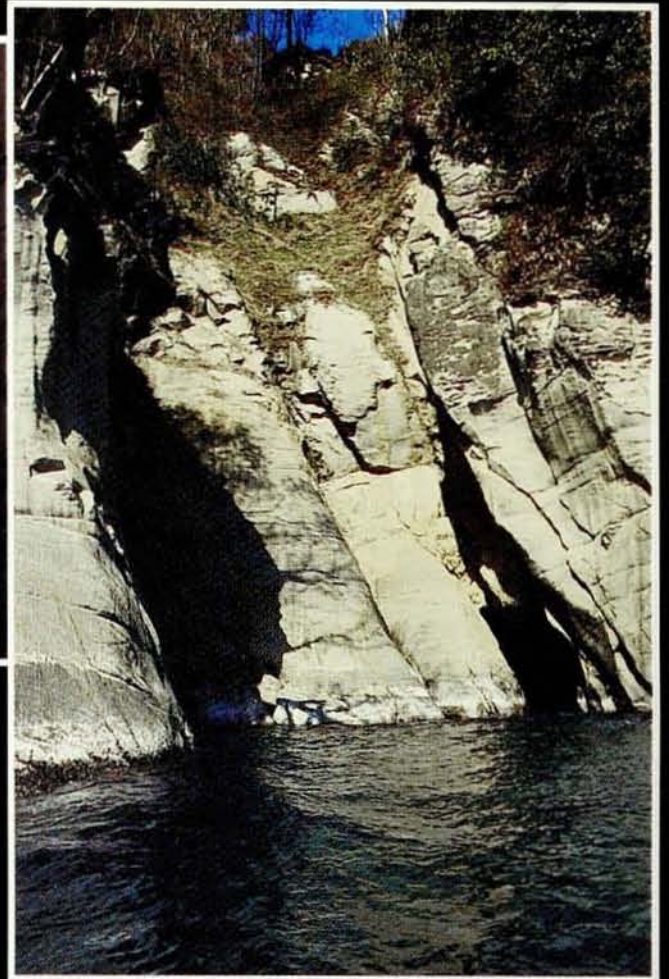
Extinction by Protection

"THE NESTS OF THE COMMON EDIBLE-NEST SWIFTLET *Collocalia fuciphaga* rank amongst the world's most expensive animal products, resulting in high levels of exploitation in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This species nests in at least 291 caves in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 81% of which are distinct cave complexes. In at least 94% of these caves, nests were being actively collected, with less than 1% of the breeding population being allowed to successfully fledge. This has resulted in over 80% decline in the population over the last decade, and the species can be considered as endangered (IUCN criteria A1c) on the Islands. Globally, however, the common edible-nest swiftlet is a species of Least Concern, as scientifically managed harvesting systems have resulted in enormous growths in its population. Consequently, CITES has not included this species in its appendices, and recommends that its conservation lies in the implementation of scientifically managed harvesting systems. An innovative conservation programme is being implemented in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands since 1999. This conservation programme has both *in situ* and *ex situ* components, and revolves on the economic value of nests to motivate people to conserve swiftlets. The *in situ* approach involves the protection of a complex of 28 swiftlet caves in the North Andaman Island, and one on Interview Island, where erstwhile nest collectors have been organised to protect caves to ensure that breeding takes place successfully, and to collect the nests after breeding is completed. This has resulted in over 3000 chicks being fledged, a growth of over 25% in the population of swiftlets at these sites, and provides the motivation for nest collectors to conserve swiftlets. At other locations, where this strategy is not being implemented, decline and extinction have taken place. The *ex situ* approach involves the development of populations of common edible-nest swiftlets in houses, by transferring their eggs into nests of the white-bellied swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*, which readily nest in houses. The white-bellied swiftlet fosters the chicks of common edible-nest swiftlet, and since swiftlets are parochial, these swiftlets which have hatched in houses are expected to return to nest. Since the swiftlet house is owned, the nests in houses will be harvested scientifically, and significant economic gains will be made. So far, 380 eggs of common edible-nest swiftlets have been transferred into nests of the white-bellied swiftlet in houses, and while nesting has not commenced, the programme is promising. The recent inclusion of the common edible-nest swiftlet in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, seriously undermines the gains made in their conservation on the Islands since 1999. It is imperative that necessary corrections be made and the species reverted to its original status, that is, excluded from the Schedules, so that the Department of Environment and Forests continues to be empowered to conserve the species."

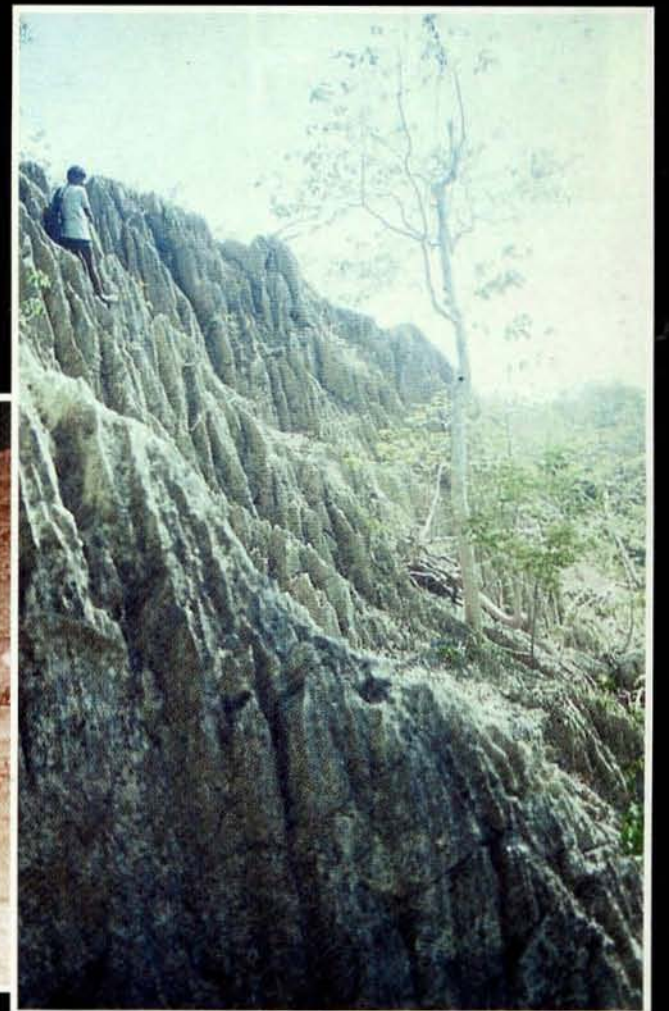
— RAVI SANKARAN

The transfer of the species to Schedule I makes it an "untouchable" and therefore under the present circumstances a sure candidate for extinction. Let us hope better councils will prevail and the species is saved by a pragmatic programme of conservation.

— J.C. DANIEL



VIEW POINT





MIHIR DEVARE

A number of mammals live in the Periyar Tiger Reserve, but the elephant appears to be the most conspicuous here

PERIYAR

— a dream come true

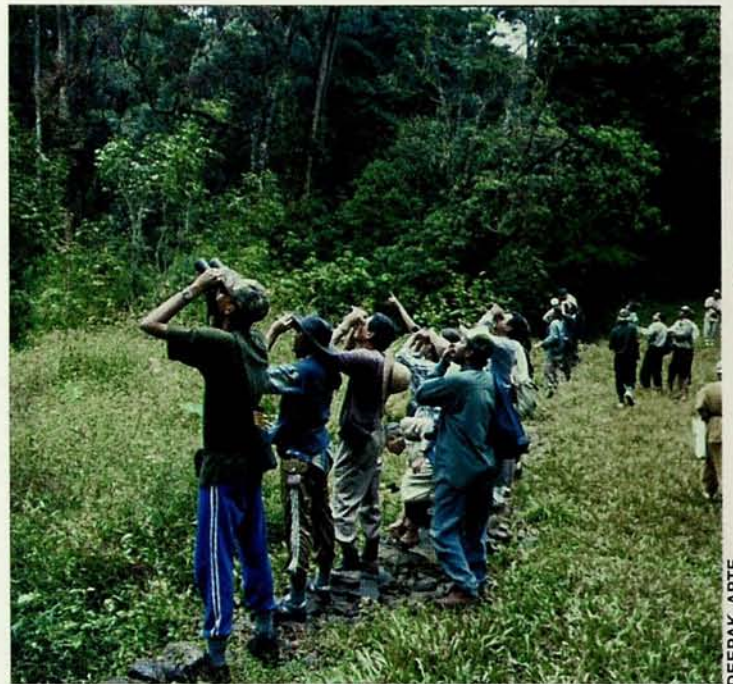
RANJIT MANAKADAN

Ranjit Manakadan is a biologist of the Society who has worked on the great Indian bustard, grassland fauna and waterbirds. He is currently working on vertebrate biodiversity.

If there was one wildlife sanctuary in India that I had always cherished to visit, it was the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala. A lot of this fascination for the place was the “picture postcard” quality of Periyar that one saw in brochures or documentaries – boats chugging in the picturesque lake, cormorants perched on stark, bleached tree stumps emerging from the lake’s waters, elephants along the water’s edge, and the lush forests. Accounts of my colleagues narrating seeing elephants swimming across the lake from boats, with only their backs and periscopic trunks visible, further kindled my desire to visit Periyar.

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

Sometimes dreams do come true, and towards the end of 1998, I was offered a trip to Periyar as one of the resource persons for the BNHS's *Correspondence Course in Ornithology*. So, one fine morning in November, together with a motley crowd of forty-odd young and not-so-young participants of the Course and the two other resource persons, we boarded a train of the Konkan Railway from Mumbai for our sojourn to Periyar. The journey was, for the most part, mundane till we traversed the southern part of Kerala, blessed with lush greenery, rivers and lakes. Most of these areas were unpolluted due to lack of industries — thanks to Karl Marx! And, in spite of the high human density of the state, people appeared scarce — courtesy the Keralite's trait of having his house hidden in the midst of a large compound of coconut, mango and jackfruit trees, and as far away as possible from his nearest neighbour! By nightfall the next day, we were at Thekkady, the entry point to the Reserve, and after a good dinner and hot water bath, all were fast asleep in a cottage styled lodge.



DEEPAK APTE

▲ Up there among the trees, that was where all the action was and therefore the attention too

▼ Where the land and water meet one does expect amphibians, but these many?



ZAFAR-UJ ISLAM



G. MAHESWARAN

▲ The red-whiskered bulbul was common in avian gatherings at the Reserve

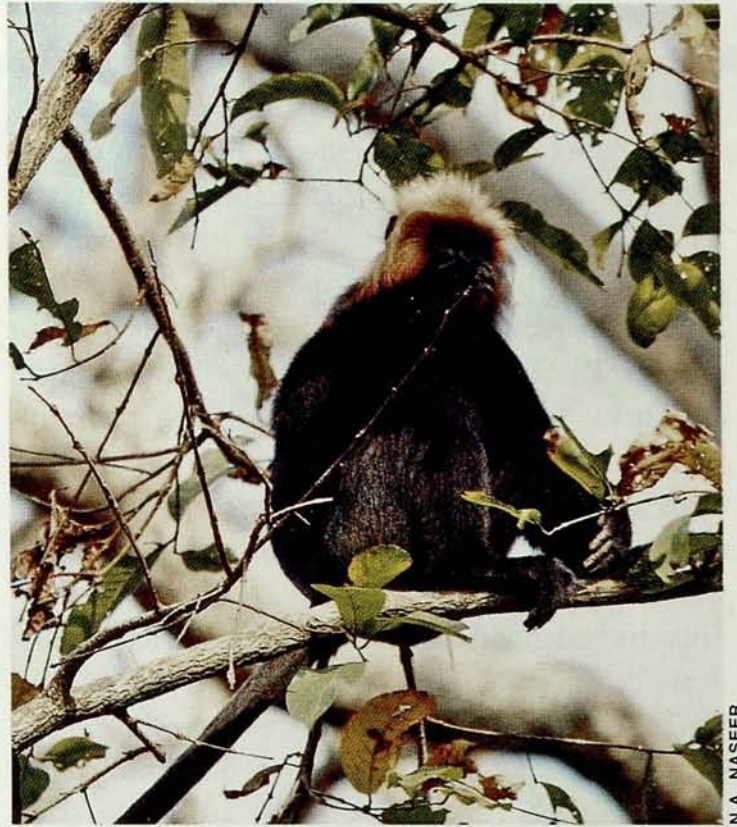
▼ The bright red flowers of the coral tree add sparks to the already beautiful environs

The Periyar Tiger Reserve, encompassing an area of 777 sq. km in the Western Ghats (900 - 2,014 m above msl) of Idukki district, gets its name from the River Periyar. The forest tracts encircle Periyar lake (26 sq. km), created by damming the river in 1895 to divert the water for irrigation to Tamil Nadu. The famed Sabarimala temple is located in the southwestern part of the Reserve. Noted for its scenic beauty, the sanctuary is a mixture of evergreen, semi-evergreen and moist deciduous forests, further enriched by the aquatic ecosystems of the lake and streams, islets, and expanses of grasslands on the higher elevations. An indication of its floral diversity can be judged by it being the home of 143 species of orchids! The major wildlife includes the elephant, tiger, leopard, lesser cats, gaur, sambar, barking deer, mouse deer, Nilgiri tahr, dhole, sloth bear, lion-tailed macaque, Nilgiri langur, Malabar giant squirrel, flying squirrel, otter, porcupine, pangolin and wild boar.

The next morning was primarily a 'general birdwatching trip' to get acquainted with the local species. Having worked in either arid grasslands or wetlands all my wildlife years, most of the birds



were 'lifers' for me. The bombardment of species of tree-creepers, woodpeckers, barbets, treepies, minivets, parakeets, drongos, doves, sunbirds, flowerpeckers, babblers, hornbills and an assortment of other noisy big and small birds was too much for me. Most of the time I was briefed on the identity of the species by the participants of the Course, instead of the other way round! The unaccustomed need of looking upwards to view birds, instead of horizontal viewing for grassland or wetland birds, gave me bouts of vertigo! We broke birdwatching by noon for a meeting and tea with the Forest Department personnel, who were very cooperative and bore the expenses for our boarding, lodging and transport throughout our stay in the Sanctuary. In return, we were to provide them with a checklist of the birds recorded in the Reserve. Evening was another long stroll of birdwatching, during which most of us got our first experience with leeches. It was a delight for me to hear some of the 'rough and tough' women squeal like 'typical women' for the first time. In the evening, Dr. Y.N. Rao (a BNHS biologist) and I gave lectures on census techniques for birds and statistical analysis of data in the



N.A. NASEER

- ▲ The Nilgiri langur is amongst the many mammals that one can see in the Reserve
- ▼ The vast expanses of water and tree covered land are home to a wide variety of flora and fauna



Interpretation Centre at Thekkady, subjects that induced deep slumber in many of the participants!

The next morning, fortified against leech attacks by socks dusted liberally with snuff (tobacco), and pulled over the ends of our trousers, our team set out for Mangaladevi peak, to make a checklist of grassland birds. The other two teams, one headed by the Course Coordinator Deepak Apte and the other by Lima Rosalind (a former BNHS biologist, and now with the Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad), carried out census of forest birds in the forests below. As our jeep wound its way up to drop us at the predetermined site to start the census, we had to stop to allow a huge unperturbed grand bull gaur pass to join a few others down the valley. A little above, we started our birding, which was nothing much to talk about – some larks and pipits (which we were not able to identify with

any certainty), streaked fantail warblers *Cisticola juncidis* and a black-shouldered kite *Elanus caeruleus*. In fact, we encountered more elephant dung than birds as we climbed the peak! The view and feeling was exhilarating – the cool, sweet scented air, the sparkling sunshine, passing clouds, the lawn-like grass below our feet, and the view of the plains below.

Having always been quite a reckless sort of person, I was not unduly worried about the piles of elephant dung that we came across. However, most of my companions were a worried lot, especially a young chap who occasionally exclaimed that he wished to die only after enjoying the ‘deserts’ of married life! As for me, I reasoned I could outrun a ‘fatty elephant’ downhill or uphill, was reassured by the long lifeline on my palm, and had experienced enough of the ‘tribulations’ of married life to be perturbed! As we progressed up the slope, the sun played truant and we were frequently enveloped in the clouds. Visibility was near zero to even see where we were going, leave alone permit birdwatching. And, we were stamping more and more on fresh elephant dung! Giving the ‘noble’ excuse of not wanting to be responsible for the deaths of others(!), I, as the group leader, finally gave the order to ‘retreat’, much to the relief of the others. I guess being married to a woman was not as bad as being trampled under an elephant!

As we made the return trip, it was disappointing to see clear weather again at the top and to realise that we did not make it to the summit and see the Mangaladevi temple too. Well, maybe next time, if the clouds and the elephants will it! On the way back, we did some birdwatching in the forest, and an encounter with the great pied hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, the mascot of the BNHS, was memorable. I just missed seeing it as it flew away, but was fortunate to hear its wing beats! Makes one realise how really huge the bird is, and why it is called or considered to be the *Garud* (of the Ramayana) in some regions of India.

Back to our dormitory at noon and after a quick lunch, we left by boat for Mullakudi, an

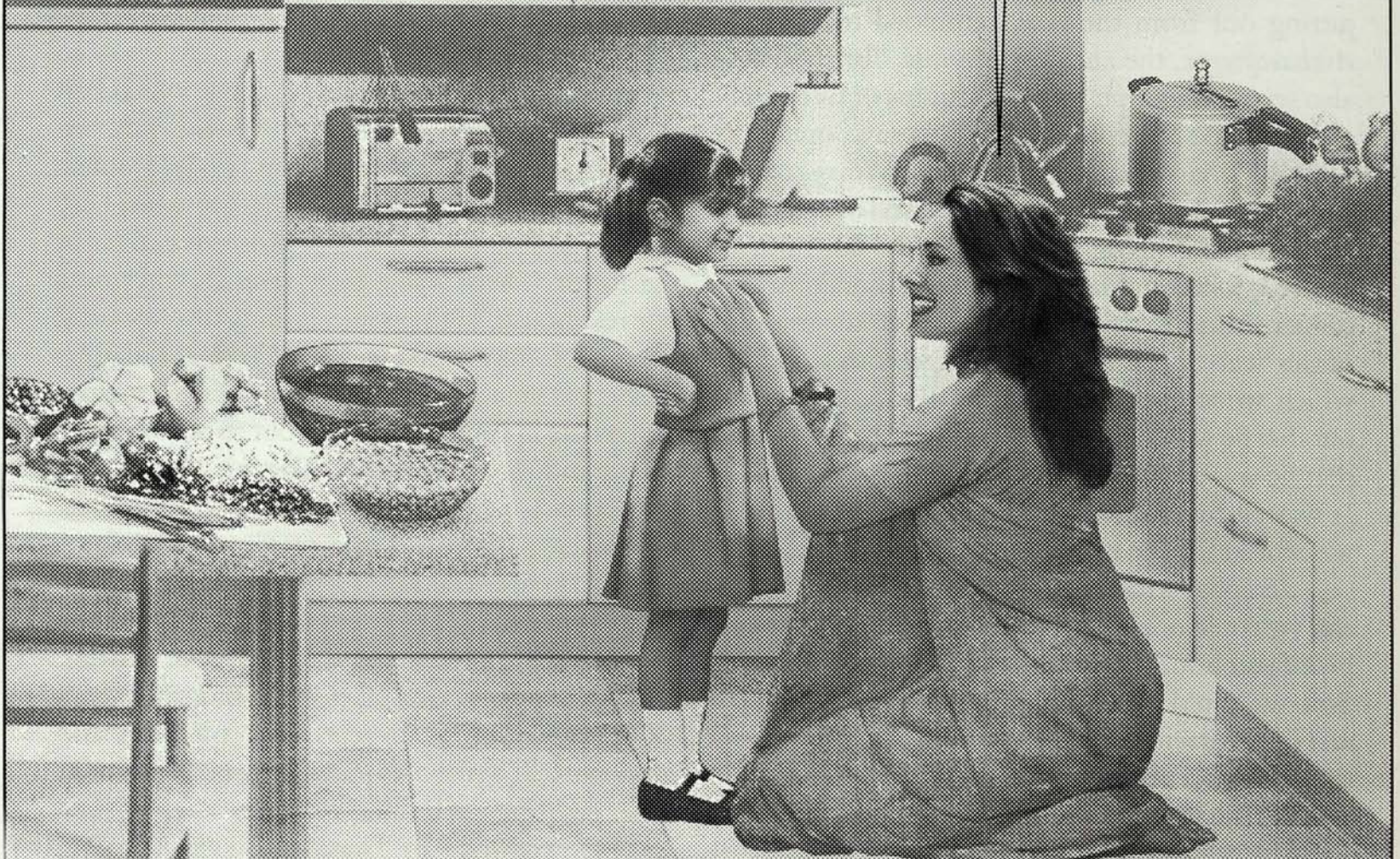


ZAFAR-JUL ISLAM

▲ Clouded skies, fresh air and a carpet of grass – nature seems to be at its best in this Reserve

*“Write your best examination
while saving time for revision”*

*“Yes, like you cook the best
food while saving LPG ”*



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island, rather a 'peninsula' jutting into the lake, where the Forest Department has a check post and rest house. We were birding during the 40 minutes boat trip, making counts and a checklist of all the large cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*, little cormorants *P. niger*, Indian shag *P. fuscicollis*, herons, egrets, osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, and the other waterbirds that we chanced to see on the way. The large cormorants drying themselves with wings spread out on the dead trees jutting out from the lake, reminded me of the *Archaeopteryx*, the ancestor of birds. Turtles were also seen basking on rocks or stumps of trees. We all hoped to see elephants, but only saw sounders of wild boar and some sambar. We reached Mullakudi late in the evening, unpacked our things, marked our sleeping territories in the dormitory, chatted, joked and lazed around till dinner. After dinner, Lima Rosalind gave us a demonstration of the 'web of life' through an ingenious game in which we all participated. Y.N. Rao, on finding out that he was a frog in the food web, commented that he was actually a prince waiting to be kissed! It was all fun and bonhomie (in candlelight) till we retired for the night.

Elephants had entered Mullakudi in the night, and we could not leave the premises of the elephant proof rest house early in the morning as planned. Still, we could do a lot of bird watching from the rest house itself, the birds in the nearby trees and the calls reverberating from the forests. After the elephants had moved off, we all walked single file along a trail for bird watching along with armed guards, as the pachyderms were still somewhere on the island. The place was filled with leeches, and most who had managed to escape leech bites till then, participated in 'a blood donation camp' in Mullakudi! Probably to help us recuperate from the blood loss, the Forest Department gave us the best lunch of the trip at Mullakudi. It was a typical Kerala meal of hot boiled rice, avial (a mix of vegetables cooked in coconut milk), papads, pickles and large helpings of delicious fried fish (the largest Tilapias I had ever seen). The stay at Mullakudi and the boat trips were the best parts of the stay for most of us. It was in Mullakudi that I had a

fleeting glance at a pair of Malabar Trogons *Harpactes fasciatus*, a species that had sort of intrigued me by its strange looks and bright colours, whenever I saw its drawing in the *Pictorial Guide*. All good things must come to an end, and in the afternoon, we got ready for our return journey to Thekkady. We were excited when the boatman told us that he had seen a herd of elephants swimming across the lake just a little away on the way to pick us up, but for us it turned out to be the usual story of 'the one that got away'.

Day four, we were transferred to Valavakkadu, a disturbed forest patch which had been planted with eucalyptus. On the way, we passed habitations, plantations and people, unlike the areas we visited earlier. It was quite hot here due to the absence of the cool protective cover of the forest. There was a dirty river flowing near our rest house, with people bathing and washing clothes. No more pristine forest! To make matters worse, we managed only to catch a few shrieking, biting bats in the mist-nets put out to demonstrate bird banding techniques. The birding in the eucalyptus forest was nothing much to talk about. There were people and cattle, moving up and down our bird trails. The night's programme was of a talk by me on my work on grassland birds in the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh. The next early mornings trail along the same path was more pleasant and productive in terms of bird records, and thankfully, fewer sightings of human beings.

We returned to Thekkady in the evening, where Lima Rosalind gave a talk on her earlier studies on the Bengal florican in Assam, while serving as a biologist of the BNHS. This was followed by a brain storming session on ornithology, where the participants sought answers on various aspects of ornithology and offered suggestions on how to make the course more interesting for future participants. The 'grilling' by the participants continued until late in the night, and after a good night's sleep, we left forlornly for the journey back to Mumbai.

Periyar will always be etched in my memory as God's own country. 



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Back to the deep sea?

Courtesy: The Encyclopedia of Mammals

TEXT: KUMARAN SATHASIVAM

Kumaran Sathasivam is a naturalist and freelance writer and has written a book on marine mammals. He has a wide ranging interest in wildlife

If you list the published records on whales in India, you will notice that the list is not particularly long and that practically all the records are of stranded animals, those caught in fishing nets or dead ones washed ashore. Though short, your list will represent practically all that is known of the distribution of whales in Indian waters. What will strike you is that about half the baleen whales reported have not been identified up to the species level.

One reason for this seems to be that whale expertise in India is limited. By the time an expert in India gets to study a whale, it is usually dead and may be in an advanced state of decomposition, making identification difficult. Little is known about living whales at sea here, because little effort

has been expended to do so. Studying live whales at sea is expensive and tricky at the best of times. At sea, even under ideal conditions, a view of a whale may consist of no more than a splash and a spout, and a brief glimpse of the back, head and fin, from a great distance.

When a whale first gets stranded on a beach, in most cases, it is still alive. Post-mortems of such incidents often reveal that the whale suffered from injuries, infections or other impairments that made it difficult for it to behave normally in deep water. It has been suggested that deep-water whales get stranded accidentally due to disorientation. However, this is an unsatisfactory explanation. As more is learnt about whale stranding, it has become increasingly clear that navigation errors and panic have little to do with stranding. The beaching generally seems to be deliberate. It appears that a whale in danger of drowning seeks refuge in shallow water with a gently sloping



KUMARAN SATHASIVAM

The whale was bid adieu with much fanfare, but did it reach its home safely?

bottom, where it can breathe and recover. It is not known, however, how many whales return successfully to the sea after resting in shallow water in this manner.

For most people, a stranded whale represents either a source of food or an animal in distress to be assisted. But for a naturalist it presents a rare opportunity to observe a live whale at close quarters. In India, every stranded whale offers a chance to add useful distributional information for the species.

In November 2000, newspapers and television reported a large whale stranded near Nagapatnam in Tamil Nadu. From the accounts, I gathered that the whale was stuck in mud and that it had been languishing there for 40 days or more. One report said that the whale was a young blue whale, while another said that the whale's mate had also been stranded along with it, but was slaughtered and consumed by the locals soon after it had been stranded. The whale had become a tourist attraction, with people going out in boats to see it. The newspapers reported that efforts were on to save the stranded whale by pulling it out to sea. However, they were not clear about the exact site of the stranded whale. Eventually, I learnt that the whale had been stranded south of Point Calimere.

On a bright sunny morning, a flotilla of boats set out for Kodikarai to rescue the stranded whale. The atmosphere was somewhat festive and one could hear the unuttered chant of "We are going to save a whale" in the air. The boats ranged from small fibreglass vessels with outboard motors, to trawlers about 12 m long. I was on one of the trawlers, which chugged along slowly through the calm sea, keeping the vegetation on the coast constantly in view. A host of terns and gulls joined us on this hour-long journey. But they were on a different mission. Tiny fish leapt out of the water as the trawler approached them and skittered along the surface. The terns caught the fish adroitly, while the gulls looked forward to getting their share from the terns. Once a pair of dolphins made a brief appearance.

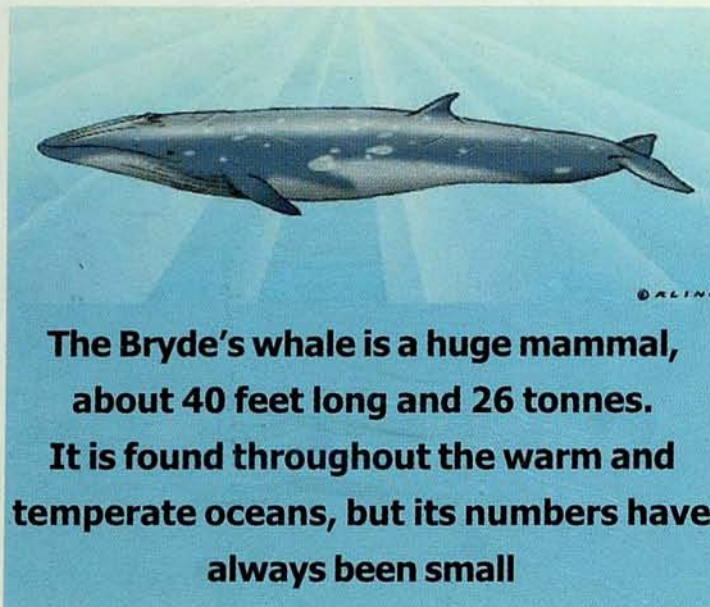
Once close to the stranded whale, the boats moved towards the land. I soon realized that the vegetation that appeared to be a continuous belt of trees was actually spaced out shrubby plants that were standing in murky water, and not on land. I guessed they were mangroves. The whale was not visible from the trawler, and the shallow water did not allow us to approach any further. The whale was clearly at the centre of the congregation of boats there. Television crews stood on the boats with their cameras to can the best frames they could get. Coast

Guard personnel in bright life-jackets, uniformed policemen and others were also present. Yellow plastic ropes floated like snakes on the coffee-brown water. The ambience of the place was like a village fair. To get to the hub of the action, all of us on the trawler stepped into one of the smaller boats and approached the crowd around the whale. As we drew closer, we saw a red

sheet, either rubber or plastic, fastened around the whale's middle with ropes. I think it was meant to protect the whale's skin from rope burns.

Once the ropes were attached to the plastic sleeve, two trawlers got ready to tow the whale. Anticipating that "man-power" might be required at this point, a number of us removed our footwear and stepped into the water. Only once inside the water did I realize that it was lukewarm and waist deep; the bottom was uneven and not of sand but of the slipperiest clay; one wrong step would have had me sinking into deep holes. There were unseen objects brushing my legs; and though the sea was quite still, there were occasional waves that rose higher than I cared for. I waded towards the closest mangrove to reach safer ground. "Don't go there," said someone, "there may be sea snakes there." I was told only later that the mangroves harboured deadly scorpionfish, which could cause death in seconds. Notwithstanding the circumstances, it was fascinating to behold the whale.

I pieced together the features of the whale as they unfolded before me over the next few hours. The slender, long whale was submerged most of the time, with only its head frequently exposed. The dorsal fin hardly ever emerged; even the large tail flukes I could see only towards the end, and one that was torn – may be a shark attack? I never saw the flippers at all. But the three ridges running from the blowhole towards the tip of the snout were clearly visible and immediately helped me to



The Bryde's whale is a huge mammal, about 40 feet long and 26 tonnes. It is found throughout the warm and temperate oceans, but its numbers have always been small

Courtesy: www.dolphinstudies.co.za

be as long as the largest boats around, the trawlers. The media reports had said that whale was 40 feet long - I think that is a reasonable estimate. The belly when exposed appeared white, possibly a little pink. The dorsal fin was triangular and slanting backwards. Its trailing edge was slightly frayed. I think that it was about a foot high, and placed at about one-third the total length, from the tail.

As I stood in the water, looking at it from a distance of a few metres, the whale did nothing but exhale audibly every couple of minutes. After breathing out, it would raise its snout and then submerge before re-emerging. It was as docile as a cow.

The whale, pulled by the trawlers without any trouble, soon started sliding away from the mangroves. Hastily, and thankfully, everyone clambered back on to their boats. By then, the whale had been towed out perhaps half a kilometre, and either its sleeve had come off or had been removed. Everyone hoped and expected that the whale would now swim towards the deep sea. But it just lay there, exhaling heavily now and then. Once, it looked as if it was heading back to the mangroves, but the boats manoeuvred it away. We waited until midday, with the whale showing no desire to return to its home. It was probably exhausted and disoriented. All the onlookers were now getting impatient. Many boats, especially the reporters, who had to file their stories for the next day, returned to Kodikarai.

The rescuers had still not given up; the ropes were re-fastened, an exercise involving the finest seamanship. Two trawlers, of which one was mine, moved parallel to each other at slow speed with just enough space between them for the whale. A large noose was held between them, with a weight to keep the buoyant rope down. As the boats drifted by, one on each side of the whale, the fishermen on the trawlers worked at a feverish pace to tighten the noose, but they were too late and the whale slipped through. The boats circled to try again, but were unsuccessful. Everyone was busy running from one side of the deck to the other to look at the whale. For a third time, the trawlers moved with the noose held between them, and this time, they caught the whale. There was jubilation as the rope tightened on the tailstock of the animal. This incredibly difficult manoeuvre was successful entirely due to the expertise of the fishermen.

The trawler swiftly towed the whale, which was now held by the tail. The tail flukes were out of the water. The whale stopped raising its snout to breathe as it had been doing all along. It was probably not able to cope with being pulled in reverse at that speed. I saw the belly of the whale at one point, and this I thought was a bad sign. The trawler slowed down, and someone said that the whale had hit the propeller. The tail flukes shuddered once and became still. A fisherman on the deck scoffed at the idea that anything


untoward could have happened to the whale, but clearly, it was just bravado on his part. Everyone realised that something was very wrong.

The trawlers stopped and everyone watched anxiously. Minutes went by and the whale did not raise its snout to breathe. Only its tail flukes were visible, with the towing rope holding them above the muddy brown water. After perhaps half an hour, a boy was sent down the side of the trawler on a rope. He severed the

rope holding the whale, and the tail flukes slipped into the water. We never saw the whale again.

The boats headed back to Point Calimere, but some questions still remain unanswered. Was the whale alive when the rope was cut? Did it slip away under the surface to breathe out of sight? Did it reach the deep sea and survive? I would like to suppose it did, but I did not believe it then and have been unable to convince myself since. ←

From Across the Ocean




HANSA KOTHARI

Dr. Ashok Kothari, EC member, BNHS and Dr. Ajay Kothari, noted aerospace engineer, USA, with the photograph of Dr. B.F. Chhappargar

In the crustacean gallery of Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C., U.S.A. are portraits of over a hundred eminent carcinologists (scientists who specialise in the study of crustacea) from the beginning of zoology in the time of Aristotle to the present day. Of the two from India, one is our own Dr. B.F. Chhappargar, a well known marine biologist and Executive Committee Member of BNHS. Notable among his studies is the discovery of three new species of crabs and two of mantis shrimps (Stomatopoda).

He is also the popular author of the series 'Seashore Lore' written under the pseudonym of "Beefsea", published in Hornbill.

That's the way to go! 


Just seen the April-June, 2003 *Hornbill*; the get-up is excellent and improving progressively. My congratulations! May I indicate some of the things about this particular issue that I like?

The centrespread (in this case of a lioness) is a wonderful idea. May I suggest that selections of photographs be made with an eye for building up a collection? Beauty and education would make the collection something of considerable value.

I particularly commend you on vacating the editorial 'pulpit' and permitting another 'view point'. This shows a considerable confidence in your readership.

The 'Readers' Space' is another wonderful idea as it makes your readers feel they too can have their say. I greatly support Col. R.T. Chacko's sentiments about great care being taken to ensure reliability. Unhappily, Col. Chacko has his facts wrong. Tso morari has water coming in from the north, from the west at Karzok and from the south. The lake is in a basin far too large for the present inflows to fill the depression entirely to permit any "...outflow... from the southern end..." This lake like several others in Ladakh and Tibet are remnants from the glacial age. Possibly in ages gone by water

may have spilled over towards where Chumar exists now. In Dr. Santokh Singh, I may have to hesitate before commenting on an opinion of an erudite scholar and a friend of several decades. The topic he has touched 'Conversation of Himalaya' needs a great deal more of concern and discussion. Today I highlight the decline of insects, and the fall in numbers of plumbeous redstarts and dippers along the River Beas.

The cuckoo problems seem to be growing with, in many areas, a drastic decline in house crow numbers. Very soon, the same areas may see a crash in koel numbers in the near future! 


*Lavkumar Khacher
Rajkot*

Marine Queries 


I have never seen fishes with their eyes closed. Don't fishes sleep?

*Amruta A. Datar
Mumbai*

Beefsea Replies: Fishes do not have eyelids, so it is hard to tell when they are sleeping. Sleep can be defined simply as a period of quiescence. Most fishes have well-defined daily cycles, with alternating periods of increased activity and rest. Lowered brain

and metabolic activity, as proved by EEG (electroencephalograms) can be taken as roughly equivalent to human sleep. 

Serving the Birds 

I would like to share an amusing experience with the readers of *Hornbill*. Several years ago, I was digging up a flowerbed under an apple tree in our garden in Srinagar, Kashmir, to prepare it for planting. Suddenly I was startled by a common myna *Acridotheres tristis*, which flew straight at my head. The bird appeared quite agitated, so I stopped digging and stood aside, thinking that I may have disturbed its nesting site. But then I recollected that the mynas usually nested in the eaves of the house. I went back to my digging, but was repeatedly driven off with these attacks on the head by the same bird, and then I realized why. While digging, I was unearthing fat grubs and pupae, mostly of woodborers, and the myna had frightened me away with its attacks to be able to pick them up and take them to its nest. It was rather amusing for me to have prepared a myna's lunch, and that too in fear of this puny little bird. 

*Vibha Kaul
Mumbai*



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AKHILESH K. SAHAY

THE MUGGER OF RANGANTHITU

HEAVEN AND EARTH AND I: ETHICS OF NATURE CONSERVATION IN ASIA

EDITED BY VIVEK MENON AND

MASAYUKI SAKAMOTO.

PENGUIN ENTERPRISE, NEW DELHI.

PP. 223, PRICE RS. 250.

IT IS DIFFICULT to be objective when you review books by a person whom you admire for his dedication, grit and determination, especially if you have seen him grow from an awkward young man, learning conservation issues, to becoming one of the foremost fighters for India's beleaguered wildlife and wild spaces. I first met Vivek about 15 years ago when he was an M.Sc. student of the BNHS. Soon, I started hearing his name for excellent work on illegal wildlife trade, his spirited fights in the international fora to save the Asian elephant, tiger, Tibetan antelope and other wildlife, his numerous articles and speeches, his meetings with the glitterati to stop the use of that despicable item – shahtoosh, and his Rufford Award for International Conservation, which made all Indians proud. Somewhere, in between, Vivek established the Wildlife Trust of India, a highly successful NGO based in New Delhi.

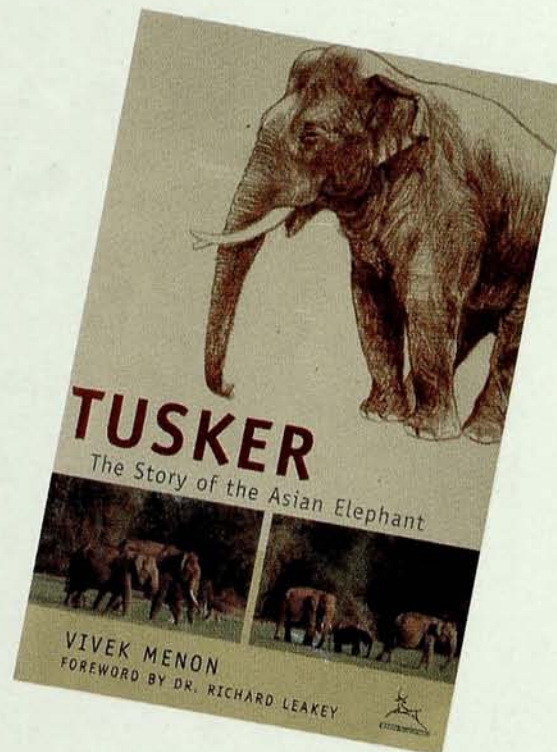
HEAVEN AND EARTH AND I has illuminating essays written by famous individuals, such as The Dalai Lama, Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan (President of BirdLife International), H.H. Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, His Majesty King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Dev of Nepal (a dedicated conservationist), our own indomitable Ashok Kumar and others. After reading this book, I realised that the message of conservation is present in all civilisations, religions and cultures. It is we who have not taken it, resulting in the terrible situation we have brought upon our planet. All the essays are interesting, but I particularly liked the message of an old Burmese grandmother (p. 86) who ends her day by praying for the safety of "nine crores living things on land and ten crores in the water". Let us learn from this kind old lady and dedicate ourselves to save the millions that are in danger of extinction due to our follies.

TUSKER: THE STORY OF THE ASIAN ELEPHANT

BY VIVEK MENON.

PENGUIN ENTERPRISE, NEW DELHI.

PP. 311, PRICE RS. 395.



TUSKER is a passionate appeal by Vivek Menon to save the Asian elephant of which less than 50,000 are left in South and Southeast Asia, with India having half the numbers. After reading the chapters, 'To kill an Elephant' and 'The Graph of Blood', I feel ashamed to call myself a *Homo sapiens* (thinking animal). Which 'thinking animal' would kill another, such as the elephant, with its own intricate social system, family life and intelligence? And, this for its tusks so that we can make trinkets such as personal seals (as done in Japan) and other trivia. Can't we have personal seals made from some innocuous material and leave the tusks for the elephant to whom they belong?

Both the HEAVEN AND EARTH AND I, and TUSKER are highly readable. I recommend both the books to all wildlifers and managers of protected areas. Penguin Enterprise also deserves praise for bringing out these low priced publications to highlight the dangers faced by our wildlife. Let us have some more of such books. 📖

✍️ ASAD R. RAHMANI

Hornbill House, Dr. Sálím Ali Chowk,
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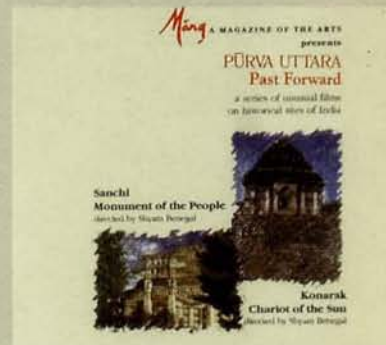
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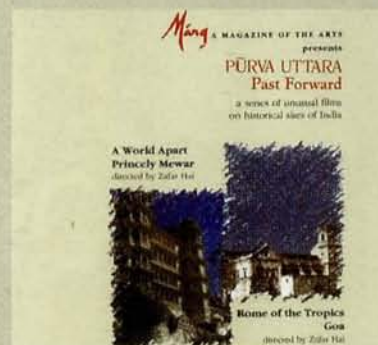
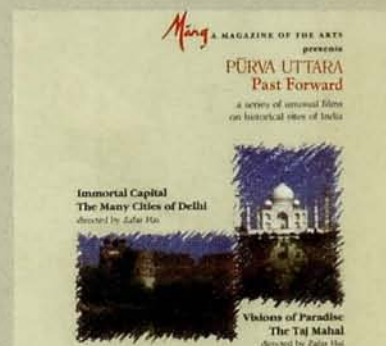
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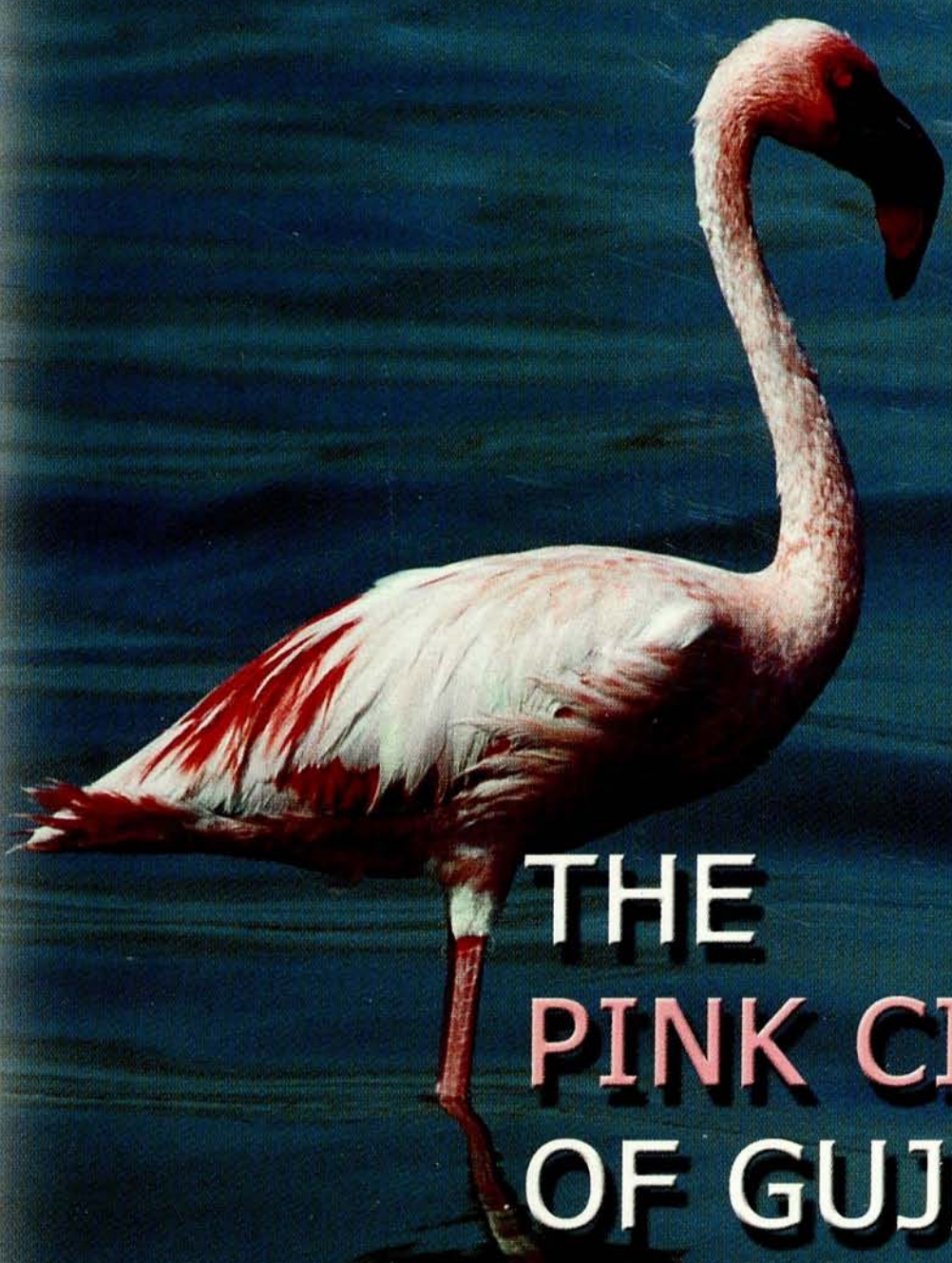
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THE PINK CITY OF GUJARAT

India has two pink cities: one in Rajasthan and the other in Gujarat. Jaipur, the pink city of Rajasthan, is well known for its beautiful architecture, while the Little Rann is famous for its pink residents, the flamingos. Naturalists and photographers look forward to visiting this place when these birds in pink plumage are ready to nest.

BHARAT RUGHANI

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS: J.K. TIWARI

J.K. Tiwari is presently working at the Seawater Farms, Eritrea, East Africa

Asia and Africa share two species of Flamingo: the lesser *Phoenicopterus minor*, and the greater *Phoenicopterus ruber*. The stronghold of both the species is Africa. Of a total estimated population of about five million lesser flamingos in Africa, an estimated four million birds occur in Eastern Africa.

The Asian population of about 150,000 birds is discontinuously distributed, with the larger part of the population occurring in India, and a small one in Pakistan and the Arabian Peninsula. Although it is the most numerous of all flamingo species, it has been classified as near threatened, due to the limited number of known nesting sites and detrimental changes to its habitat across its range.

In Asia, the lesser flamingo occurs mainly on intertidal coastal mud flats, brackish water lakes, around commercial salt works, the Rann of Kutch and occasionally on freshwater lakes and sewage ponds.

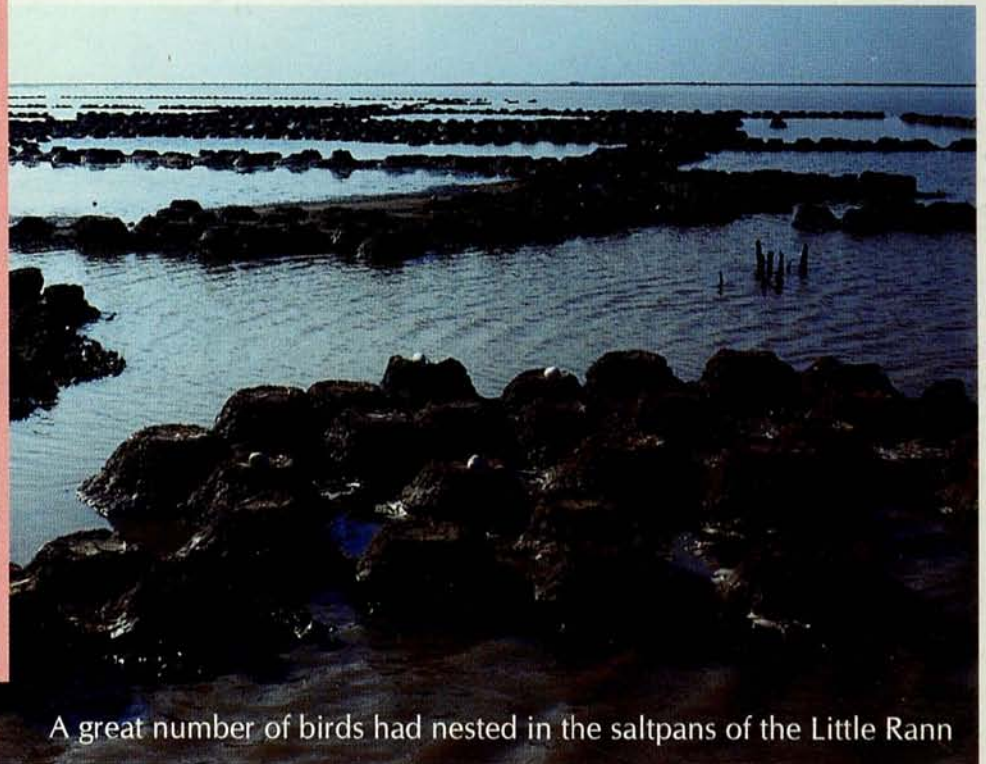
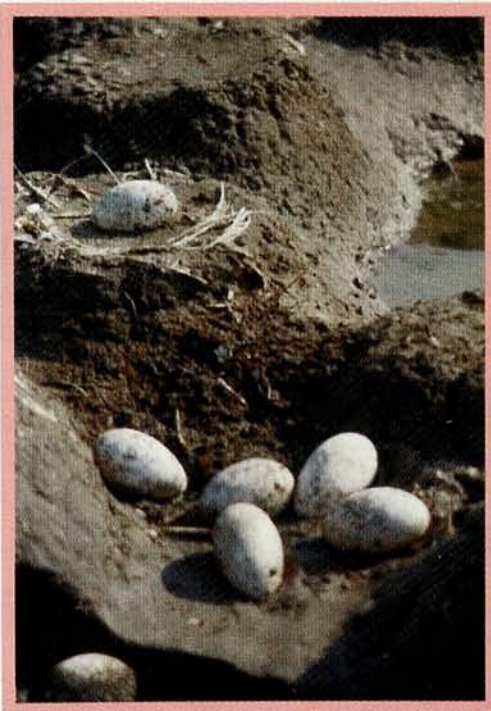
Lesser Flamingos

We visited the Little Rann of Kutch for a survey from September 23-28, 1998. During the survey, Sabir Malik and Devji Dhamecha along with the Forest Department officials located a huge colony of lesser flamingo.

The flamingos had chosen the abandoned saltpans near the Vachraj Solanki *Beyt* this time. The *beyt*, known as TM-Agar in the Little Rann, is about 38 km from the small town of Jhinjuvada. We approached the flamingo colony (S.N. Varu, Devji Dhamecha, Dhanji Meghani, two local assistants and I) from here in a hired tractor. These tractors are specially designed for the saltpan workers, to enter flooded portions of the sticky mud areas. The back of the tractor has a special bowl shaped structure, known as *supdi* locally, which is used to carry material and people in the Rann by the saltpan workers.

We reached the nesting site in the evening and perforce had to spend the night on a *beyt* (island) in the Rann. The next morning, we left for the flamingo colony, but had to stop again when our tractor got stuck in the mud. Determined to reach our goal, we walked in knee-deep water towards the nesting site.

The lesser flamingos were using 29 salt pans covering an area of 2,400 acres for nesting.



A great number of birds had nested in the saltpans of the Little Rann



A tractor is the best transport for the saltpan workers in the sticky mud areas

Dhamecha had observed nearly 35,000 chicks in August, but we, unfortunately, saw none. However, we counted about 100,000 adult birds and many nests with eggs in them.

An impending cyclone warning had led to the salt workers abandoning the pans. The area was flooded about 25 cm deep in water, and perfect for the flamingos that did not miss this ideal spot for nesting.

It is unlikely that the lesser flamingo will select the same site year after year as observed in the Flamingo City in the Great Rann, where the greater flamingos nest after a good monsoon. The TM-Agar site was later abandoned due to a cyclone.

Greater Flamingo

The Flamingo City nesting colony at Hanj *beyt* is a well-known nesting site of the greater flamingo that was discovered by the most well known Indian ornithologist Dr. Sálim Ali. The area lies on the international boundary and it is difficult to reach the colony. Good rainfall and an undisturbed area ensure the nesting of flamingos in Flamingo City.

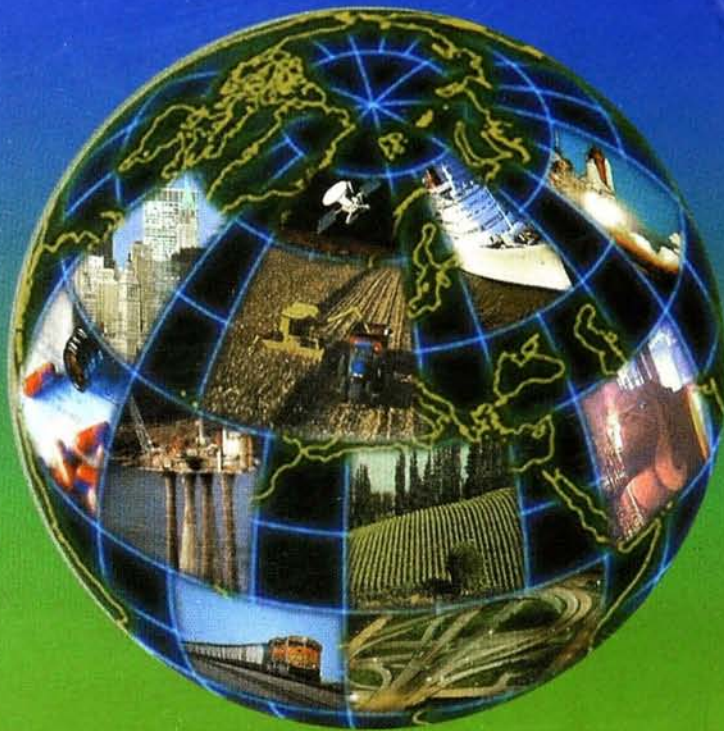
An Assistant Commandant of the Border Security Force had seen the nesting of greater flamingo in the Great Rann of Kutch from February to March 1999. The nesting was in the same place where in 1960 Dr. Sálim Ali had observed the nesting of rosy pelicans.

Return to a nesting site by the flamingos is possible only under certain conditions. There should be a restriction on the number of people visiting the site. Insensitive photographers cause heavy loss to active nesting colonies. The eggs and chicks suffer due to exposure to the scorching heat of the sun. Only people having special interest in the conservation and study of flamingos should be allowed to enter the nesting colony, and they should be accompanied by the Forest Department staff, to ensure that the birds and their nests are not disturbed.

Camping of wildlife enthusiasts or any other visitors on the Flamingo nesting islands should be banned, as people often camp too close to the nesting sites.

These pink wonders will then return year after year to the same site.





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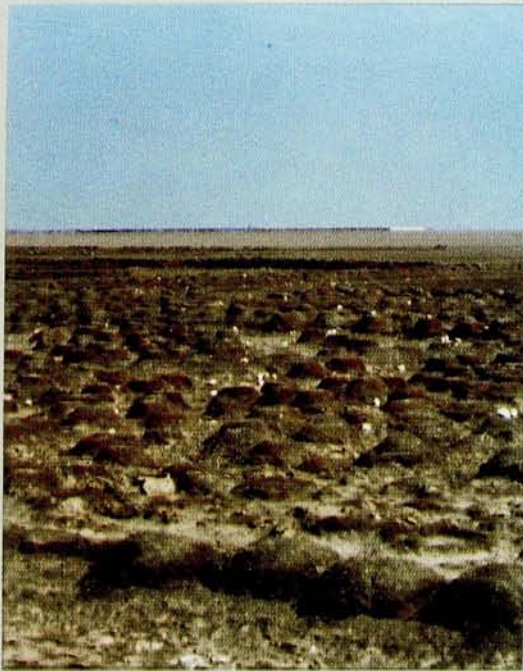
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TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS: P.M. LAD

P.M. Lad is a former Chief Conservator of Forests, Madhya Pradesh. He enjoys watching and photographing birds

Will history repeat itself in Flamingo City?

The famous Flamingo City of Khawada in the Rann of Kutch no longer has breeding flamingos. Unbelievable, but true. Locals will tell you that until a few years back you could see thousands of nest mounds in the Rann, but today there are none. Nobody knows why the flamingos stopped coming. Last winter I happened to visit the Little Rann and came across a small breeding area. I saw a large number of egg shells and mounds in a salt pan. The flamingos were breeding, but in salt pans!

Salt pans are scattered almost all over the Little Rann. Sea water enters these pans during storms in the sea that coincide with high tides. This trapped water along with rain water is then a suitable breeding site for flamingos. Apparently, the ground water of the Rann is more than five times as rich in salt than sea water.

My first instinct was to pass this information on to Shri Pathak, Conservator of Forests & Wildlife, Junagarh and suggest that he find out why the flamingos were breeding in salt pans. He has promised to observe the movement of these birds and of the water in the Rann this monsoon.

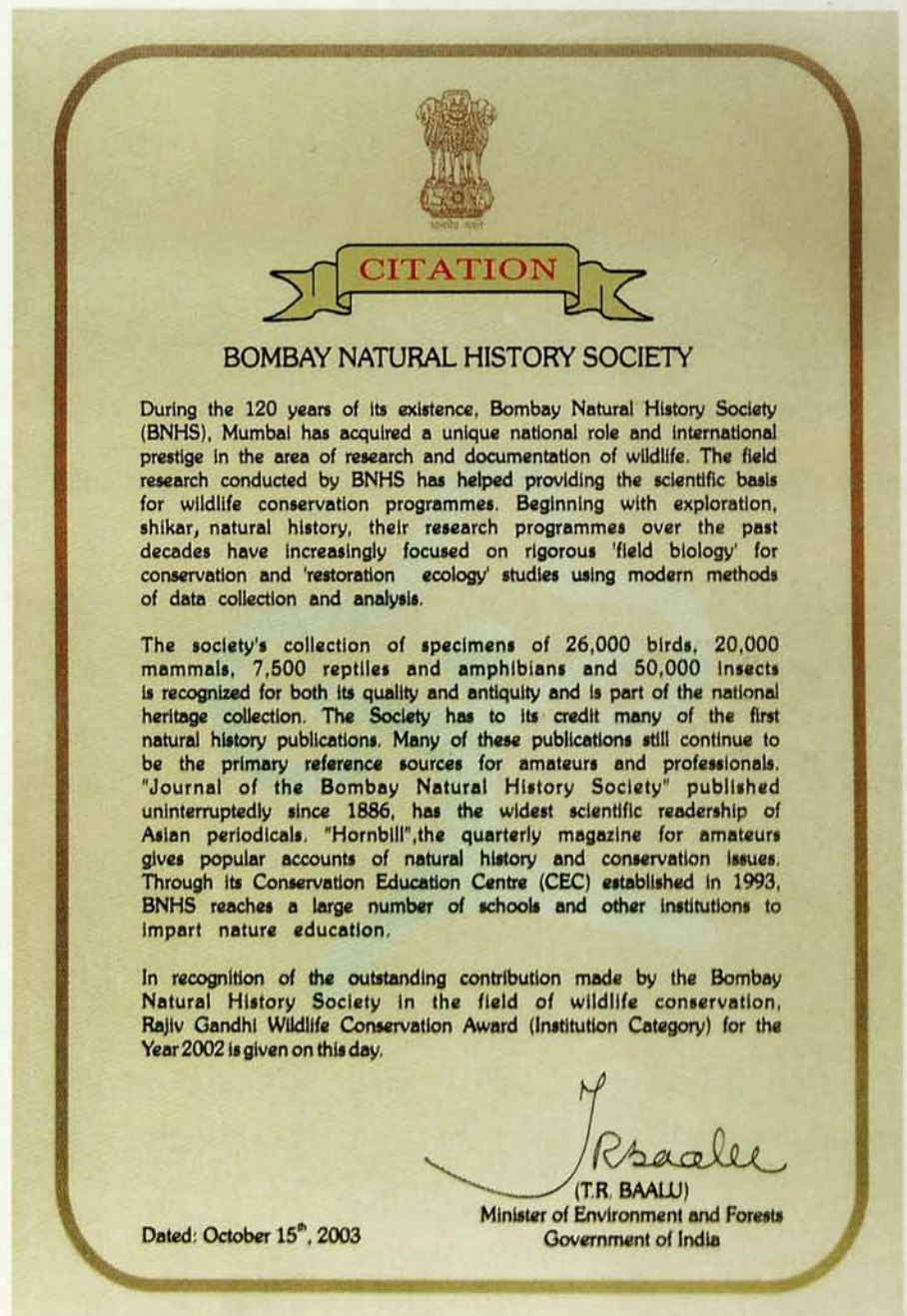
Is it possible to create a salt pan-like situation on a large scale by artificially constructing bunds to retain sea water? I am sure a two to three year study will provide sufficient information to help restore Flamingo City to its past glory.



BNHS receives award for conserving wildlife



The Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Conservation Award (Institution Category) for 2003 was given to the Bombay Natural History Society. The Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee presented the award to Shri B.G. Deshmukh President, BNHS at the 1st Meeting of the National Board for Wildlife in Delhi on October 15, 2003. The award consists of a citation and cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh.



Dated: October 15th, 2003

(T.R. BAALU)
Minister of Environment and Forests
Government of India

IT WAS TIME FOR CELEBRATIONS AT THE BNHS



(L-R) Mr. Hemendra Kothari, Chairman DSP Merrill Lynch, Mr. B.G. Deshmukh, President BNHS, Mr. Bittu Sahgal, Chairman, Centenary Journal Seminar, Hon'ble Shri Sushilkumar Shinde, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Dr. J.J. Bhabha, Chairman NCPA, Dr. A.R. Rahmani, Director BNHS and Mr. J.C. Daniel, Honorary Secretary BNHS at the Tata Theatre, NCPA, on November 12, 2003

2003 is a special year for the BNHS as its *Journal* completed 100 volumes of publication. Peer reviewed, the *Journal* is an authority on and is the seminal database for information on the biodiversity of the Asian Region.

This milestone called for celebrations that began on November 12, Dr. Sálim Ali's birthday at the Tata Theatre, NCPA, Mumbai. A range of programmes had been arranged for the occasion. The spotlight was, however, on the *Journal* released by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Maharashtra Shri Sushilkumar Shinde.



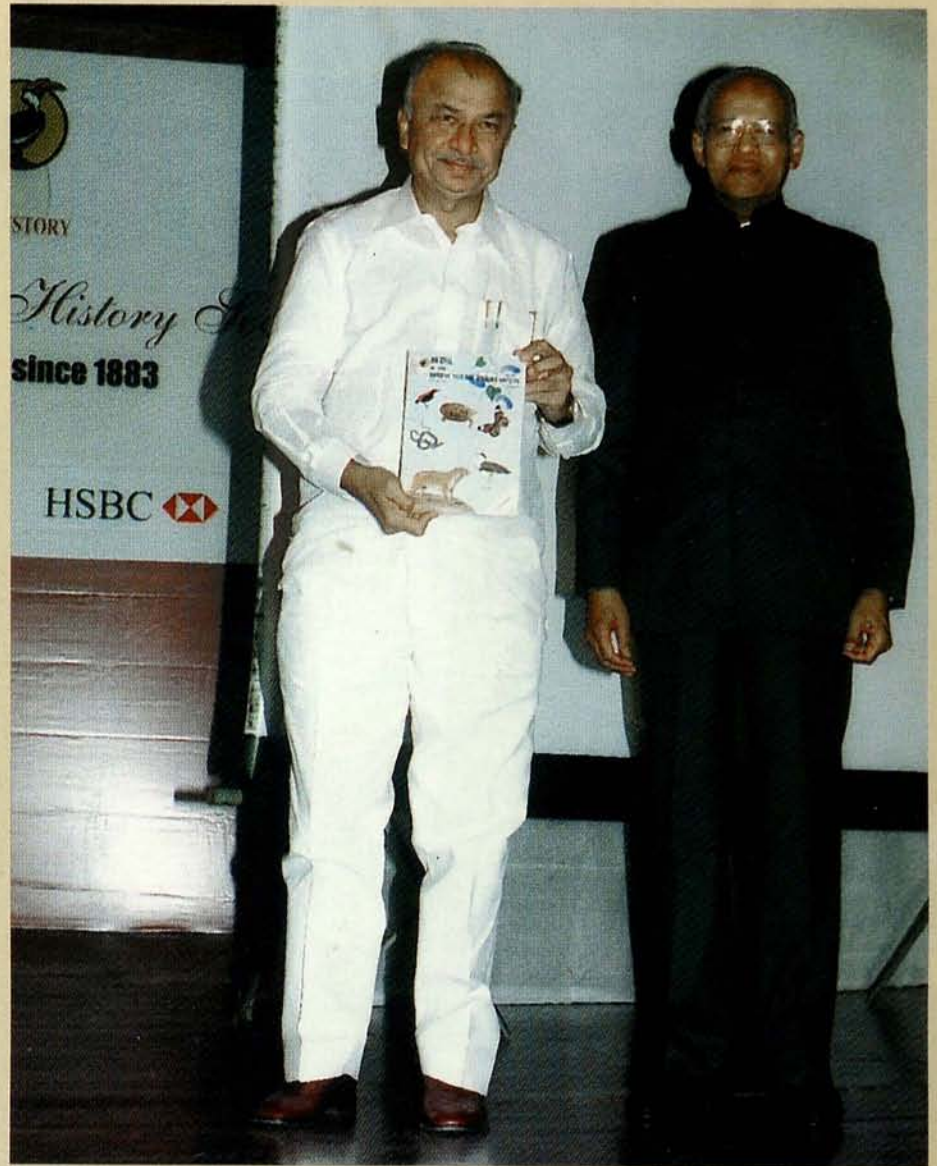
The evening began with a welcome address by Mr. B.G. Deshmukh

On this occasion, the Chief Minister sanctioned Rs. 11 lakhs from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund towards the various activities of the Society.

The venue for the events that followed for the next three days was Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Powai, Mumbai. An international workshop on 'A Look at Threatened Species' saw audio-visual presentations from environmentalists and biologists, and the release of four titles.



120 years of BNHS and its role in the history of conservation breezed past the audience in the form of an Audio-Visual presentation given by the Tiger Man of India – Valmik Thapar



Time stood still for a while when another historic moment in the history of the Society finally arrived. The Hon'ble Shri Sushilkumar Shinde released the 100th Volume of the Journal amidst a huge gathering of distinguished guests from all over the world



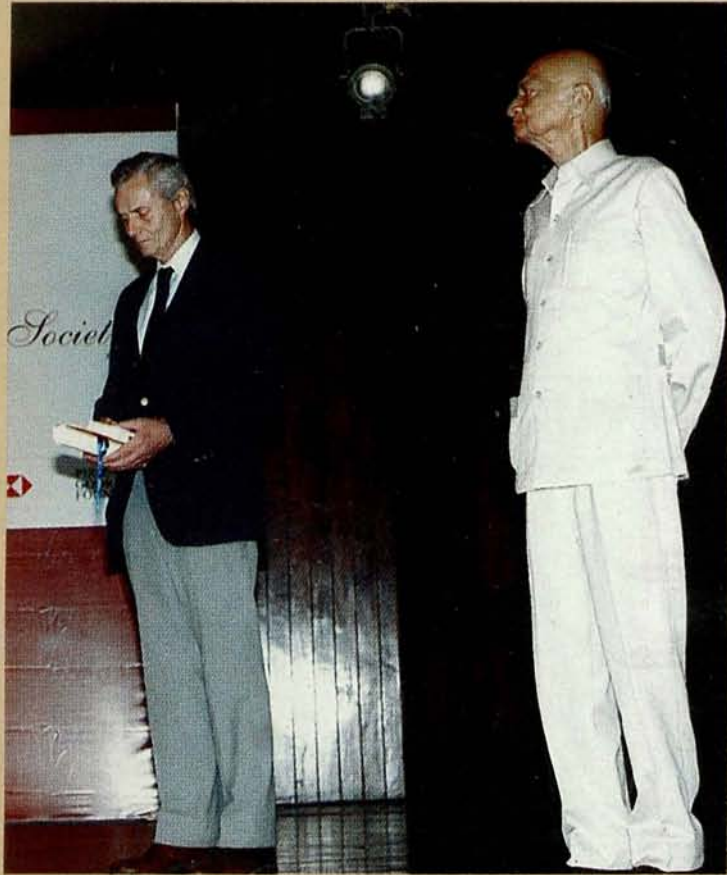
Mallika Sarabhai and other artists of the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts presented a dance drama "The Conference of Birds"

**CENTENARY
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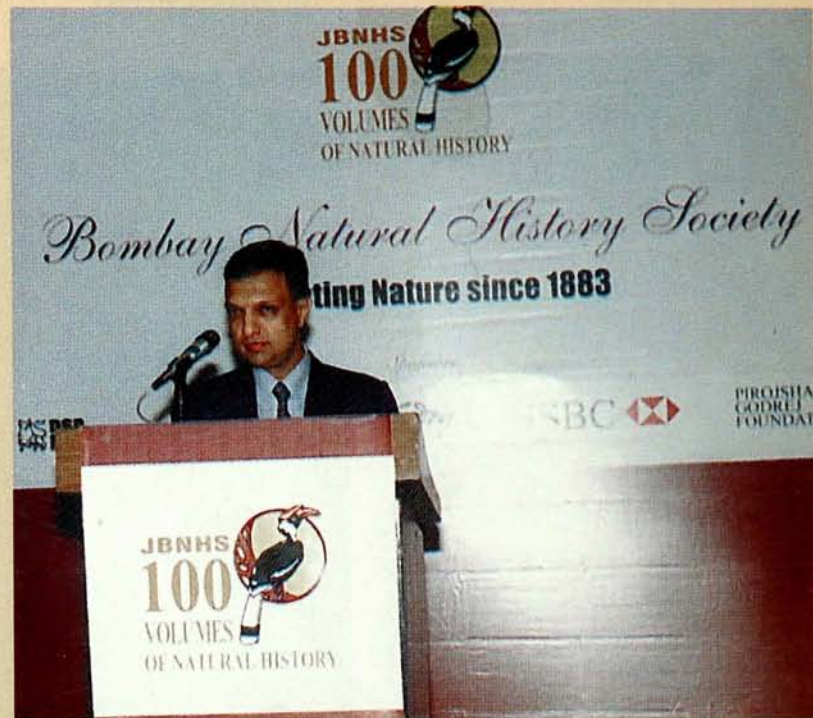
TATA



Clockwise from top left: Mr. Zafar Futehally, a veteran conservationist and former Honorary Secretary of the BNHS, presented Dr. George Schaller with the biannual Sálim Ali International Award for Conservation of Nature for the year 2003; Mr. T.J. Roberts with the Sálim Ali-Loke Wan Tho Lifetime Achievement Award for his efforts and contribution to conserve the flora and fauna of the Indian subcontinent; Mr. Jamshed P. Irani with the Sálim Ali-Loke Wan Tho Special Award for his contribution to ornithology; Mr. Lavkumar Khacher with the first Sálim Ali-Loke Wan Tho Award for Excellence in Ornithology



The first day cover and stamps (above) commemorating 100 volumes of Natural History were released by Mr. A.P. Srivastava, Postmaster General, Mumbai Region (seen with Mr. B.G. Deshmukh)



Mr. Nachiket Mor Executive Director ICICI Bank announced Rs. 50 lakhs for the Green Governance Programme



Kumail Khorakiwala the operating Trustee of Burhani Foundation India, presented the best Hornbill Club awards to five schools on this occasion



The evening concluded with a dinner on the lawns of the NCPA

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Mr. J.C. Daniel Executive Editor, Journal of the BNHS welcomed the participants and guests

The three day workshop at the IIT Powai, Mumbai on 'A Look at Threatened Species' began with a keynote address by Dr. Lee M. Talbot an ecologist and geographer. He is presently Professor of Environmental Science, International Affairs and Public Policy, George Mason University, USA



VARAD GIRI



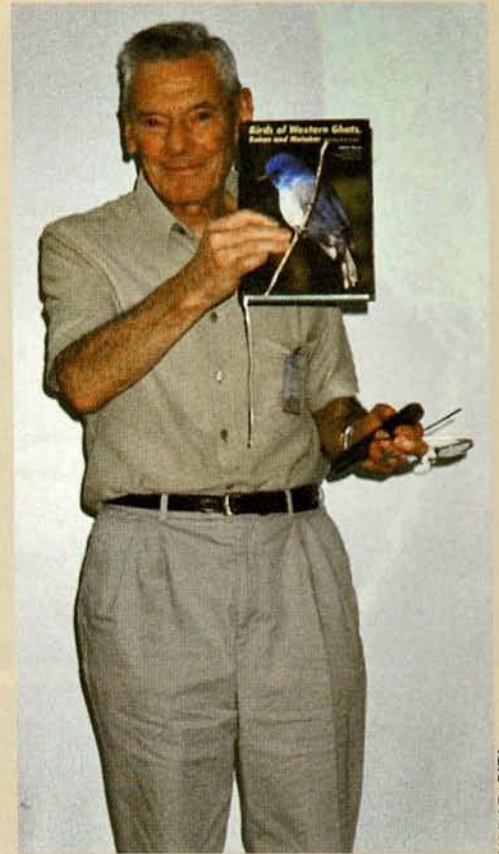
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Dr. A.R. Rahmani briefed the participants on the events of the next three days

(In the front row L-R) Mr. Himmatsinhji, Mr. Lavkumar Khacher, Dr. M.K. Ranjitsinhji, Mrs. Lee Talbot, Mrs. T.J. Roberts, Mr. T.J. Roberts, Dr. Pratap Saraiya and Dr. E. Bharucha



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VARAD GIRI



VARAD GIRI



VARAD GIRI

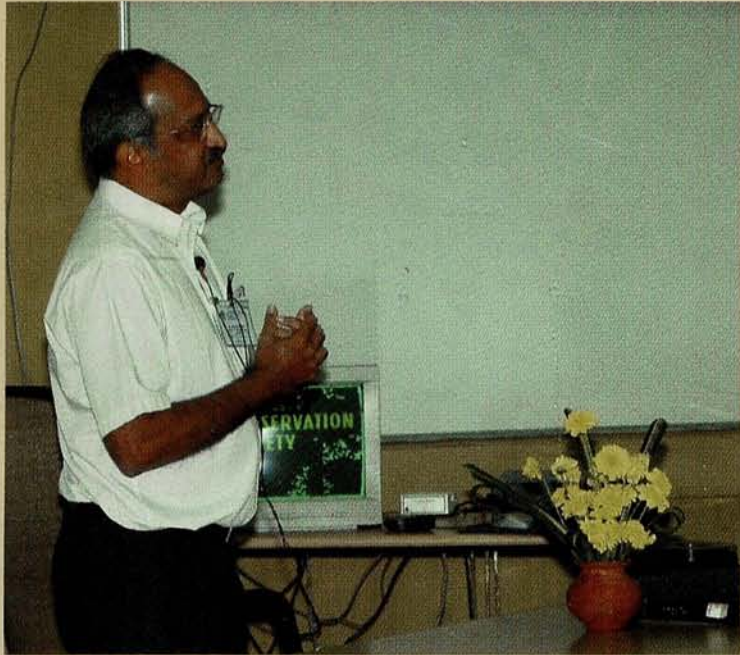
Clockwise from top left: Four new titles were released during the inaugural programme at the IIT: Dr. Pratap Saraiya, Trustee of the Seth Purshotamdas Thakurdas & Divaliba Trust released *Cassandra of Conservation* by J.C. Daniel, Mr. T.J. Roberts released the *Birds of Western Ghats, Konkan & Malabar* by Dr. Satish Pande, Mr. Steve Parr, International Officer RSPB released *Saving Asia's Threatened Birds*. The book was also released in Tokyo a day earlier. Mr. Lavkumar Khacher released *Petronia*, a commemorative volume on ornithology by Dr. Sálím Ali's friends, colleagues and students

CENTENARY JOURNAL SEMINAR

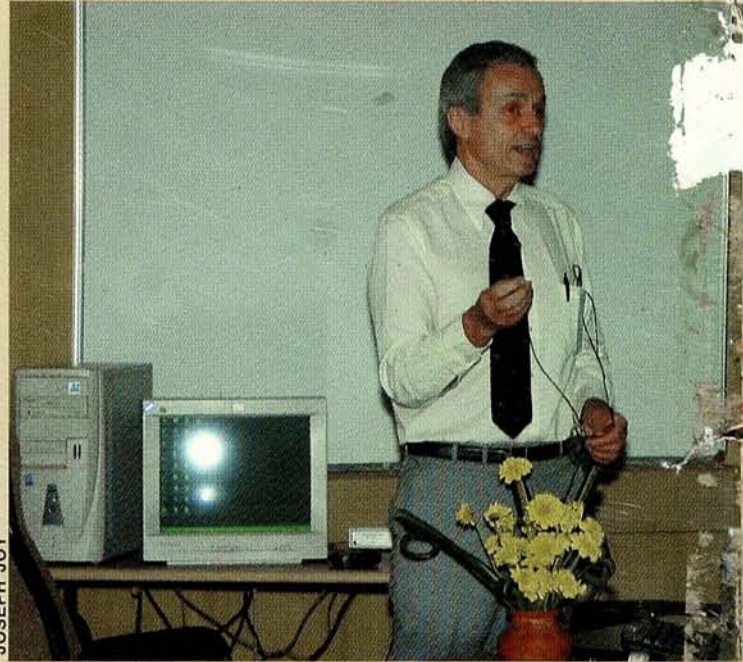
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JOSEPH JOY



JOSEPH JOY



JOSEPH JOY



JOSEPH JOY



VARAD GIRI



JOSEPH JOY

The three day workshop saw presentations by individuals from around the globe on a variety of threatened species. Clockwise from top left: Dr. Ullas Karanth, Dr. George Schaller, a short tea break before proceeding to the next session, audience interaction with the speaker, Dr. Susanne Schultz, Dr. M.A.R. Khan and Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh

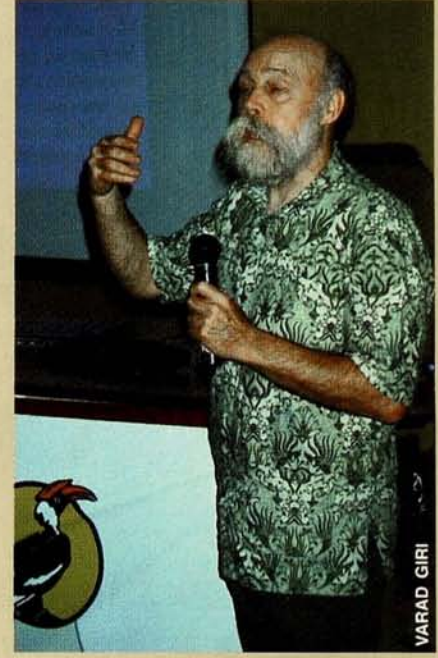


VARAD GIRI



VARAD GIRI

In conclusion, Mr. Mark Behan said that he was greatly impressed by the growth and capacity building of BNHS over the years



VARAD GIRI

Mr. Jack Frazier spoke on the conservation of marine turtles

Young BNHS researchers like Girich Jathar also presented their work at the seminar



JOSEPH JOY

A part of experts and the audience in serious discussion



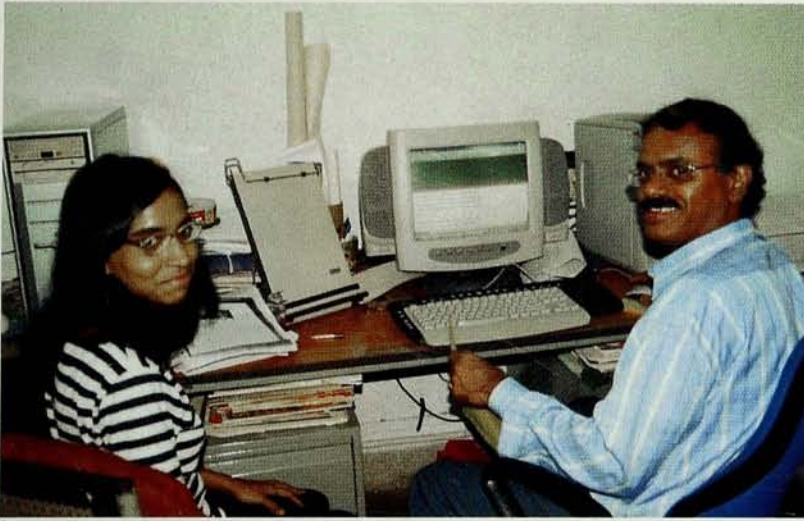
VARAD GIRI

Saving Asia's Threatened Birds was presented to some institutes



JOSEPH JOY

One last picture for the album: the participants of the workshop



Divya Fernández and Gopi Naidu working on the special issue of the Journal that was released on November 12

Behind the Scenes

The event lasted for just four days, but the preparations had started two years earlier for the special issue that was released. A number of members and staff of the BNHS were responsible for making the four days a successful and memorable experience for many. The culmination of the activities at the IIT brought to end another historic event in the life of the BNHS. ■

Working towards a Green India

INDIA IS THE WORLD'S sixth richest nation as far as biodiversity is concerned. The country is, in effect, a vast gene bank for nature. Its diverse habitats not only support wildlife, but also rich natural resources. However, the very same wealth of these areas is the cause of their destruction. After unplanned exploitation of resources from fossil fuels to timber and oil to water over the last five to six decades, the attention is now on sources that are confined within protected areas or in proximity of wilderness areas, creating conflicts among conservationists and industry. Shortsighted developmental policies and short-term interests have caused irreversible damage to nature. All our rivers originate in these forests. The richest fishing grounds of the world are in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zones. If we can protect these areas, then we could to a large extent tackle food and water security issues.

Sustainable development requires a long-term perspective and broad-based participation in policy formulation, decision-making and implementation at all levels. If planners, financial institutions and captains of industry could be persuaded to integrate environmental concerns and precautions at the project planning phase, large-scale

destruction of the environment could be avoided. Corporate Environment Responsibility (CER) is the new mantra in the private sector today and it is to further such positive trends that the BNHS Green Governance Programme (GGP), supported by the ICICI Bank, has been launched. The idea is to sensitise corporates, financial institutions, armed forces and journalists towards biodiversity, wildlife habitats, various environmental laws and conventions, through various media such as newsletter, audio-visuals, workshops and seminars. Lenders will be sensitised on the ecological consequences of financing environmentally damaging projects. The project also aims to constitute an annual award for best corporate initiatives for environmental conservation.

As part of the GGP the Society invited the men in uniform to formalise our association with the armed forces. At the invitation of the Conservation Department of the Society Lt. Gen. Vinayak Patankar PVSM, UYSM, VSM, Bar, QMG, of the Indian Army presently based in Jammu-Kashmir visited Hornbill House on November 11, 2003, while Vice Admiral Sureesh Mehta, AVSM, Director General of the Coast Guards came on December 2, 2003. 🌳

We thank our sponsors

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for their generous and continued support towards
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All the volunteers who joined us in this effort
are sincerely thanked.





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