

HORNBILL

January–March 2024



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Cover: Wild Water Buffalo
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Published and printed quarterly
by the Honorary Secretary for the
Bombay Natural History Society,
Printed at Akshata Arts Pvt. Ltd.,
Lower Parel, Mumbai.
Reg. No. RN 35749/79, ISSN 0441-2370.

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Views expressed by the contributors in
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Retracing Jim Corbett's footsteps is like embarking on a pilgrimage for his fans. **A.J.T. Johnsingh**, **G.S. Rawat**, and **Vishal S. Ohri** undertook a journey through the wild landscapes of Thak to relive a part of Corbett's life. They hope that the trails, rocks, and trees described by Corbett in his stories are preserved, as this will allow visitors to experience a true picture of the events that happened long ago.

Where the Grass is Green Under the Hot Island Sun

10



The Nicobar Islands stand out in the Andaman Sea for their natural grasslands. However, some argue that these grasslands are man-made and not native to the islands. **Manish Chandi** offers his perspective on this issue, drawing from observations and his relationships with those who use and live among these grasslands.

PHOTO FEATURE

Birds Around Valley School

20



R. Subba Rao shares his experience of birding and photographing birds, highlighting how advances in camera technology have greatly contributed to his wildlife photography and more. Read on for his insights.

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Editorial...

In this issue, as the *Hornbill* goes to press amidst Mumbai's scorching 39.7 degrees Celsius heat, the city experiences its hottest April day in a decade. While Mumbai sweats, other parts of the country are drenched in unusual rains, highlighting the erratic behaviour of our climate. The *Hornbill*, known for its coverage of climate change, is dedicated to dispelling myths and shedding light on its real-world impacts.

While the country grapples with the realities of climate change, the dedicated members of BNHS have continued their expeditions, exploring diverse landscapes and documenting vital observations. This issue of the *Hornbill* takes you on a thrilling journey, from trekking in the Himalayan landscape, the unique grasslands of Nicobar Island, and birding in the historical Silk Route, to observing the unusual nesting behaviour of house sparrows, a page from the field diary of Dr Atharva Singh, a BNHS scientist, and learning about wild buffalo conservation efforts.

Following the footsteps of the legendary Jim Corbett through the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) is an adventure in itself. Accompanied by legends like A.J.T. Johnsingh, scientist G.S. Rawat, and naturalist Vishal S. Ohri, every corner of TAL comes alive. I am sure you would love to discover the untamed beauty of Thak in Corbett's landscape, and be inspired to protect these natural wonders.

The Nicobar Islands, nestled in the Andaman Sea, have recently taken the spotlight in media discussions, due to concerns about destructive infrastructure development. This has understandably sparked worry among wildlife enthusiasts. The BNHS, a staunch advocate for protecting these islands, has long been conducting studies to delve into the various aspects of this unique ecosystem.

In his enlightening piece, Manish Chandi sheds light on the natural grasslands of Nicobar Island, unveiling a captivating feature of island biogeography. However, a pressing question lingers: are these grasslands truly native to the islands, or are they a product of human intervention? Manish offers his perspective on this issue, drawing from his observations and interactions with the individuals who utilize and coexist with these grasslands.

Journey to Kibber, the last village in Spiti on the traditional trade route to Ladakh and Tibet, renowned for its stone houses and rich wildlife sightings. Snow leopards, Himalayan red foxes, Himalayan griffons, and steppe eagles grace the skies and valleys, making it a haven for nature enthusiasts. Thomas Thomson's observations in 1847, about Kibber's unique stone houses, unlike the typical mud structures prevalent in other parts of Spiti, add a layer of intrigue to this village's charm.





The grasslands of Nicobar have for long served cultural, aesthetic, and ecological roles in the islands, however rapid developments raise questions about their future

This issue also features an uncommon nesting behaviour of house sparrows, shared by an avid reader. House sparrows are known to build nests in crevices and natural vegetation, and nest boxes. How did these resourceful birds come to reuse swallow nests? Does this reflect their adaptability or a touch of laziness?

Meet R. Subba Rao, a 78-year old retired cardiac surgeon turned nature photographer, whose passion for birding has been transformed by advances in camera technology. His captivating photo feature is sure to inspire budding wildlife photographers.

The Book Reviews section in *Hornbill* never fails to pique my interest and often adds a book or two to my reading list.

Dr Atharva Singh, a dedicated researcher with the BNHS working in Sikkim, recorded a tiger at 3,640 m, the highest elevation in India where a tiger has been spotted. I am sure you will enjoy reading a page from Atharva's diary, recounting his one remarkable day in the field.

Ram Gopalakrishnan, a physician from Chennai, embarked on a journey along the ancient Silk Route, a historic trade route that connected civilizations and cultures, all in pursuit of his love for birding. Ram not only enjoys the beauty of nature, but also seeks to inspire others to appreciate and conserve it. Reading about his travels, one can't help but be transported back to a time when traders traversed breath-taking mountain landscapes, exchanging horses, silk, and spices.

Lastly, the Conservation Notes remind us of the critical importance of preserving the wild buffalo, a significant species in central India. Despite facing local extinction in regions like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, the survival of the wild buffalo in Assam offers a beacon of hope.

Enjoy reading!

Kishor Rithe