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CONTENTS

FEATURES

Monkey with a Golden Fleece

4



Human actions often have unforeseen consequences. While we fragment forest habitats, our bridges have the opposite effect – they enable both humans and animals to cross. When animals use these bridges, they can reach the territories of related species, creating opportunities for interbreeding. **Asad R. Rahmani** reminds us, “As we grapple with the challenges of conservation in an increasingly interconnected world, we must be mindful of the delicate balance we strive to preserve.”

PHOTO FEATURE

Whispers of Affection

24



Kokkare-Bellur in southern India is home to a vibrant heronry where waterbirds adorn the landscape. **Aksheeta Mahapatra** had the extraordinary opportunity to witness the intimate courtship rituals of painted storks up close. This is the story of one particular pair, whose journey she followed throughout the breeding season.

Others

Nature Watch	09
Book Reviews	11
Readers' Space	23
Diary of a Scientist	28
Remembrance	30
Conservation Notes	31

Editorial...


I recently returned from Ladakh, where the black-necked cranes have migrated to their wintering range, which includes parts of southern China and Bhutan. Brown bears are busy gaining weight in preparation for hibernation as winter approaches. The northern high-altitude landscapes of India – particularly the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, along with the state of Himachal Pradesh – are unique in their rich biodiversity. You can appreciate this through the article “Wild Symphony of Pheasants”, which explores koklass and cheer pheasants in the Shimla Water Catchment Wildlife Sanctuary in Himachal Pradesh. Researchers Rupali Thakur and Deputy Conservator of Forests N. Ravishankar Sarma highlight important aspects of this high-altitude sanctuary.

Primates have always fascinated humans, including common langurs and macaques. Dr Asad Rahmani, former Director of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), who travelled extensively in India to study floricans and bustards, also fell in love with the golden langurs of Assam. He recounts his most unforgettable journey in 1985, crossing the Sankosh River in Assam’s Manas National Park and encountering the golden langur. He reminds us that human actions for development often have unforeseen consequences, such as fragmenting forest habitats. However, certain linear infrastructure projects without wildlife mitigations can also facilitate wild animal movements, albeit with great risks to their life. Dr Rahmani aptly notes, “As we grapple with the challenges of conservation in an increasingly interconnected world, we must be mindful of the delicate balance we strive to preserve.”

Waterbird populations respond to the status of their habitats. In spite of several threats, some habitats in India show improvements in their management. Kokkare-Bellur in southern India, for example, hosts a vibrant heronry where waterbirds thrive. In her article “Whispers of Affection”, Aksheeta Mahapatra, a Ph.D. scholar at the Wildlife Institute of India, explores the captivating courtship rituals of painted storks. Combining her research, conservation expertise, and community engagement, she follows the journey of a particular pair throughout the breeding season, offering insights into protecting waterbirds and their habitats.

Hornbill readers eagerly await reviews of new publications. This time, M.R. Maithreyi’s review of BURNING BRIGHT by Harnihal Singh Sidhu will encourage you to explore the book. Another highlight is THE BEAUTIFUL MAMMALS OF INDIA by BNHS Life Member Nelson Rodrigues, reviewed by Anwaruddin Choudhury. Additionally, A TRYST WITH NATURE: LABOUR, SELF, AND LANGUAGE by Savyasaachi, reviewed by Ambika Aiyadurai, will further nurture your love for nature.





We invite you to contribute to the BNHS 150 Years Omnibus of Natural History – *Systema Naturae*. Please submit your articles, field notes, and photographs to the Editors of *Hornbill* at systema150@bnhs.org. Contributions can range from in-depth research on species or ecosystems to brief notes on behaviour or conservation concerns observed in the field. Photographic documentation, whether professional or amateur, adds a valuable visual dimension to your work, capturing the beauty and complexity of our natural world.

This issue also features articles such as “Dancing Cranes and Declining Wetlands: The Story of Sarsai Nawar” by BNHS researcher Omkar Joshi, “Chambal Badlands” by our scientist Parveen Shaikh, and “A Lifelong Affair with Odonates” by Neha Mujumdar. These articles exemplify the depth and quality expected for *Systema Naturae*.

You will also find interesting observations about the recent sighting of a blue-and-white flycatcher by Sachin Pawar and insights about a baza by Vijaya Bharat in the Readers’ Space.

Since the December 2023 issue, we have introduced a page from the diary of a BNHS scientist/researcher. These entries spotlight the hard work of BNHS researchers, often unrecognized and underappreciated. In this issue, “A Day in Tadoba with Vultures and Tigers” by young biologist Bhanu Pratap Singh will surely inspire others to join BNHS as biologists or volunteers and contribute to wildlife conservation.

We also pay tribute to former BNHS scientist Dr Robert Grubh (April 26, 1943 – September 25, 2024). *Hornbill* remembers his invaluable contributions, including the major project “Ecological Study of Bird Hazards at Indian Aerodromes” (1981–1989) and his tenure as a Governing Council member from 2000–2002 and 2010–2012.

For the past year, I have been sharing conservation notes focusing on high-priority concerns. This issue addresses the conservation of marine megafauna, particularly efforts to prevent whale and dolphin strandings on the west coast. We highlight the probable causes, potential solutions, and BNHS initiatives like collecting sighting data through a mobile application – JALCHAR, which is available on Play Store. We hope you will join and support these crucial conservation efforts.

Enjoy reading this issue!

Kishor Rithe