



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



JANUARY, 2023

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

At the outset I wish all of you a very happy and prosperous New Year. I sincerely hope that the year 2023 will bring peace to this world and let our denizens in the wild live in peace.

Each month, BNHS will bring you, our valuable member, a conservation newsletter that is packed with updates from our field work, publications and the events we hold for nature conservation.

This is our attempt to make sure you get to know about our work in real time. This is our attempt to make sure you are with us on our journey!

Recent amendments in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972

This year, our Parliament passed a major amendment to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (WLPA). We are proud of the fact that India has a set of wonderful and elaborate laws to protect its environment. Enacted in 1972, India's WLPA is inspirational for many other national legislations.

Being fifty years old, the law did need an update, particularly in its schedules which identify species to be protected. BNHS has been at the forefront of ornithology, bird monitoring as well as taxonomy and has been helping the government with list of species that require representation in the Act. We have been advising the government on the matter of the WLPA amendment. We also deposed to a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science, Technology and Environment on this matter. Now, the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment 2022 has been passed by both houses of Parliament and has received assent from the President of India.

The Government has heeded many of BNHS's suggestions. While there are still improvements to be made, the following are the important things to know.

Amongst the good things in the new Amendment, the following are noteworthy

1. A definition of invasive species:

For the first time, our wildlife legislation has a definition of invasive species, and specifies that they need to be tackled.

As per this amendment, an invasive alien species "means a species of animal or plant which is not native to India and whose introduction or spread may threaten or adversely impact wild life or its habitat"

It would have been better if law defined invasives as species not native to an ecosystem (rather than 'India', given an Indian species can also be invasive in other regions of the country), but this is an important step towards identifying and eradicating invasive species comprehensively

2. A bigger, more comprehensive list of schedules:

Many of the suggestions BNHS had given have been accepted towards having more species in the protected schedules of the WLPA.

For instance, BNHS had suggested that certain critically endangered species should be in schedule I of the Act. The following species have now been inserted in schedule I:

- I. Baer's Pochard
- II. Sociable Lapwing
- III. Yellow-headed bunting
- IV. Spoon-billed sandpiper

Further, Some critically endangered birds (as per the IUCN Red list) such as Masked finfoot and Swamp grass babbler have been included in this amendment of WLPA.

There are also some aspects of the new Amendment which need to be addressed or modified.

1. Elephants can be easily transported and transferred under the new law. The Amendment says:

"Provided that the transfer or transport of a captive elephant for a religious or any other purpose by a person having a valid certificate of ownership shall be subject to such terms and conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government."

Though the government will set terms and conditions, BNHS believes that the use of wild elephants should be stopped. BNHS had articulated this in its submission.

2. The declaration of vermin - The definition of vermin has been expanded, in a manner which deems that any wild animal notified under section 62 can be vermin. BNHS has said that any vermin declaration should be done only after baseline assessments of its population.

It is also to be noted that for many common animals are in schedule I, the highest schedule for protection of animals, we

(Continued on next page)

would approach the declaration of vermin with caution.

The earlier Act specified that animals in Schedule I and Part II of schedule II could not be declared vermin. However, individual animals could be taken down on a case to case basis.

3. State Boards for wildlife

We also note that the new Amendment allows a smaller version of State Boards for Wildlife (SBWL). The new law says:

'The Board may constitute a Standing Committee for the purpose of exercising such powers and performing such duties as may be delegated to it by the Board. The Standing Committee shall consist of the Vice-Chairperson, the Member-Secretary, and not more than ten members, to be nominated by the Vice-

Chairperson, from amongst the members of the Board.'

The *maximum* number of members of the SBWL (twelve) has been specified, but not the minimum number. BNHS had earlier pointed out that full SBWLs should meet in order to take decisions on projects or proposals that have significant impacts on wildlife. We need a richness and diversity of opinions for issues like mining, dams, highways and others which come up for SBWL consideration. Creating a much smaller SBWL seems to privilege a much more restricted form of decision making which will not always be in favour of wildlife. This is a regressive move which is likely to be detrimental for protecting wildlife in states. ■

Achievements by BNHS staff

Neha Sinha honoured by the Nature Chronicles Prize 2022

Neha Sinha is head of Conservation and Policy in BNHS and is a noted author. She was awarded by the Nature Chronicles Prize 2022. This is a biennial, global prize based in the United Kingdom



that awards progressive, non-traditional, non-fiction writing on our relationship with Nature. Neha was awarded for her essay, 'City of Covid trees,' which emphasised the importance of urban nature during the Pandemic and in our lives. It explored the importance of planting native trees and vegetation in cities where we live as a decolonised, empowered choice. The award was presented in November 2022 in the UK.

The Award winning essays have been published in an anthology, *Nature Chronicles*, by Saraband publishers, UK. ■

Dr. Vibhu Prakash awarded the Lifetime Service Award by Sanctuary Nature Foundation

Dr. Vibhu Prakash awarded the Lifetime Service Award by Sanctuary Nature Foundation!

Dr Vibhu Prakash, former BNHS Deputy Director, eminent ornithologist and pioneer of *Gyps* vulture breeding in India was awarded the prestigious Lifetime Service Award by Sanctuary Nature Foundation.

Dr. Prakash conducted his Ph.D. in Keoladeo National park, Bharatpur. Subsequently, he brought to our notice that *Gyps* vulture populations were crashing in India, a cataclysmic crash that came into wider attention at the end of the 90s. *Gyps* vultures were being poisoned by the veterinary use of painkiller diclofenac. (It has since been proven that other anti-inflammatory drugs like ketoprofen and nimesulide are also fatal for *Gyps* vultures).

Since the 90s, Dr. Prakash dedicated his life towards the recovery of the vultures, pioneering the conservation breeding of Indian vulture, White-rumped vulture, and Slender-billed vultures in BNHS run centres. Starting from Pinjore (Haryana), we also have centres in Buxa (West Bengal), Rani (Assam) and Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh) run along with state forest departments. The goal of conservation breeding was to eventually release



Dr. Vibhu Prakash addressing the gathering after receiving the Lifetime Service Award from the Sanctuary Nature Foundation

captive-bred vultures, while simultaneously carrying out advocacy against the illegal veterinary use of diclofenac. Dr Prakash's work has been distinguished with meticulousness, patience, scientific temper and a pioneering spirit. We are proud of him! ■

BNHS wins the Habitat Trust Action Grant 2022!

BNHS project 'Guardians of the Skimmer'- Conserving riverine birds through community participation received the Habitat Trust Action Grant 2022. The project is focused on conserving two endangered riverine birds, the Indian Skimmer and the Black-bellied Tern, at the National Chambal Sanctuary and is led by Ms. Parveen Shaikh.

This community-based conservation project includes direct protection of nests by community members, who are trained as nest guardians. There will be Stakeholders' engagement and capacity building for conservation of riverine nesting birds. We hope that this project will help in improving nest survival of these species and stabilize focal species population at Chambal.

This project will give an evidence-based conservation plan for both the species which can be adopted across other river systems in India.

Indian Skimmer (present population 2000-2500 birds) and Black-bellied Tern (<1500 birds) were once widely abundant throughout Southeast-Asia but are now extinct from most of the range-countries owing to a multitude of threats. They



Ms. Parveen Shaikh received the Habitat Trust Action Grant for her commendable action research on riverine nesting birds in Chambal river



90% of Indian Skimmer population in the country nest in National Chambal Sanctuary



With less than 1,500 of them left in the wild, National Chambal Sanctuary holds the key to survival of Black-bellied tern



Ms. Parveen Shaikh with nest guardians in one of the islands in Chambal

are presently distributed only in India, Bangladesh; with few records in Pakistan and Nepal. India is hosting a significant (>90%) breeding population of both these species and is the only hope for preventing them from extinction.

Rivers in India are under tremendous pressure of dams, lift irrigation, illegal

sand mining etc. The National Chambal Sanctuary holds a significant population of both these species, but water levels here are stochastic, due to the above threats. And because of low water levels during the breeding season, nesting sandbars get connected to river banks, providing nest access to predators. ■

Capsule Course in Field Ornithology and Bird Migration

Level : Basic

Venue : BNHS–Bird Migration Study Centre, Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu

We are happy to announce dates for one of our most sought-after training courses – Field Ornithology and Bird Migration – at Point Calimere. The new format of this course has been designed to cater to all who would like to learn more about birds through ringing and banding. This training course includes both on-field and classroom sessions dealing with a variety of topics like bird identification, monitoring, ringing/banding, bird migration study techniques and flyways, with talks from experts in the field of Indian ornithology.

The BNHS–Bird Migration Study Centre at Point Calimere has been instrumental in supporting and developing bird migration studies in India and in Central Asian Flyway since early 1960s. The Centre was established in 2008 and has been imparting training to people from different walks of life. Located at a unique location, with the mudflats of the Great Vedaranyam Swamp on one side and a tropical dry evergreen forest on the other side, the Centre has facilities to ring both land and shorebirds. Over 290 species of birds have been reported from this area.

The Course includes field trips to the Great Vedaranyam Swamp, Udayamarthandapuram, and Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary.



What this course wants to achieve:

Through this course BNHS intends to create a network of birders and bird ringers who can contribute effectively to enhance our understanding on migratory birds.

Duration of workshop	04 Days
Number of people	20 individuals
Period	4 th to 7 th February, 2023
Last date for receiving applications	15 th January 2023. Applicants will be enrolled on a first-come first-served basis. Please send your interest by email to: Dr. Ramesh Kumar (r.selvaraj@bnhs.org).
Venue	Kodikarai (Point Calimere), Vedaranyam, Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu Google map link - https://goo.gl/maps/tzVJtayHrbHJcrN1A
Accommodation and Food	Shared tent accommodation (2 persons per tents) with cots, fan, extension cord and blankets will be provided. Fresh Traditional Tamil Nadu food and Local travel arrangements within Point Calimere are included in the course fee.
Age group	No limit
Target Audience	BNHS members, college students, researchers, birdwatchers, photographers, Forest department staff, Business groups & Corporate employees
Fees (per person)	Rs. 12,000/- Rs. 10,000/- (for existing BNHS Members) (includes tent accommodation and food)
How to make the payment	The course fee can be transferred by either of these three ways: I. Through NEFT : BANK ACCOUNT NAME : BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY BANK NAME : STATE BANK of INDIA BANK ACCOUNT NUMBER : 10473844805 BRANCH NAME : GATEWAY of INDIA, COLABA BRANCH MICR CODE : 400002073 BRANCH CODE : 8780 IFS CODE : SBIN0008780 BANK ADDRESS : RAMNIMI 8, MANDLIK ROAD, COLABA, MUMBAI 400001 BANK TELEPHONE NUMBER : 022-22873994/22835602 II. By clicking on this active link: https://bnhs.org/cec-membership-form III. By scanning the QR code



LIST OF TALKS

- Bird Families and Identification – **Waterbirds** – Groups of Birds, Taxonomy (Scientific Names and Their Significance), Similar Looking Species
- Bird Families and Identification – **Landbirds** – Groups of Birds, Taxonomy (Scientific Names and Their Significance), Similar Looking Species
- **How To Count?** – Survey Methods, Census Techniques, Technologies Used in Counting/Analysis.
- **Nesting Habitats** of Indian breeding birds, heronries
- **Migration And Flyways** – Phenomenon of Migration, History of Migration Studies, Flyways And The Importance of CAF And EAAF & Threats to migratory birds and challenges that they have to tackle during the long journeys across different landscapes.
- **Bird Migration Study Techniques** – Basics of bird ringing and data collection. Need to introduce different colour banding studies. Use of devices. Advantages and limitations of using each technique.
- **Significance of Bird Ringing Data** (morphometrics, ageing, sexing, moult, plumage, weight changes).
- **Global significance of Bird Marking Studies** in bird conservation & their habitat conservation.
- **Wetland Conservation and Habitat Restoration** – by involving multiple stakeholders & enhancing local livelihood.
- **Case Studies** – Indian Skimmer conservation, highlights of bird ringing in Mumbai coasts
Group Discussion, feedback, evaluation of the workshop & report submission.

Status of butterflies & odonates in Pong dam, Himachal Pradesh

As a part of key fauna documentation under the NMHS-BNHS project – “Conservation and Wise Use of Five Wetlands in three Himalayan States to secure Habitats of Birds Migrating within the Central Asian Flyway”, BNHS is conducting butterflies and odonates survey at Pong Dam Lake Wildlife Sanctuary in Himachal Pradesh. These insect groups are selected as representative and indicator taxa.

Pong reservoir is situated in the foothills of the Dhauladhar ranges at low elevation of about 430m. The mixed forest

surrounding the reservoir and freshwater habitat along the banks of river Beas support a variety of insects. In the pre-monsoon survey, we recorded 92 and 38 species of butterflies and odonates respectively while in the post-monsoon survey, we observed around 50 butterflies and 20 odonates. Odonates are known to be habitat specific and hence good indicators of the freshwater ecosystems. An interesting find was of *Aristocypha quadrimaculata*, a damselfly that is known to inhabit hill streams. Butterflies like Indian Cabbage White and Vagrant were also recorded. ■

Trapping the migrants in the heart of endemics – Bird ringing in the Upper Palani Hills

A short bird ringing camp was conducted in Upper Palani Hills, Tamil Nadu by BNHS team lead by Dr. Ramesh Kumar and Mr. Sivakumar from 24th to 28th November 2022. The bird ringing activities were conducted in this stunning landscapes of Poomparai forest range where altitude varied from 1950m to 2250 m above msl. The vegetation of the area consists of Shola forests, Pine Plantations, Wattle Plantations and some open mixed vegetation with human settlements.

During this period, 41 individuals of nine bird species were ringed, including endemic birds Nilgiri flycatcher *Eumyiasal bicaudatus* and Palani Laughingthrush *Montecincla fairbanki*. Other species like Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus*, Hill swallow *Hirundodomicola*, Black-throated munia *Lonchurakelaarti*, Indian White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*. The Grey wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea* was also ringed.

Though Palani Hills is known for its endemic birds, several migratory landbirds also visit during winter. Earlier, BNHS has undertaken studies here during 1990s and in 2002. However, due to high tourism activities, the landscape is changing very rapidly. Regular long-term monitoring of this rapidly changing landscape is necessary in the area, and BNHS scientists are keen in continuing ringing activities here. ■

SAD DEMISE



BNHS deeply mourns the sad demise of Mohd. Shamim, our vulture keeper at the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre in Bhopal. Mohd. Shamim tirelessly worked with BNHS for nearly a decade and was a key member of our team in trapping wild vultures. We will sorely miss him and pray for his departed soul to rest in peace.

BUCEROS newsletter

We are happy to share the e-copy of BUCEROS newsletter, which features ENVIS activities, bird news, and articles. The highlight of this issue is the launch of a new mobile application developed for effective data collection during grassland bird and associated species surveys.

Please find the latest issue of BUCEROS through the following link:

http://bnhsenviis.nic.in/Database/Newsletter-BUCEROS_19767.aspx

Thank you for reading and for being with us on this conservation journey!

Signed

Bivash Pandav

Bivash Pandav, Director, BNHS



BNHS MISSION

Vision: Premier independent scientific organization with a broad-based constituency, excelling in the conservation of threatened species and habitats.

Mission: Conservation of nature, primarily biological diversity, through action based on research, education and public awareness.

CONTACT US

Bombay Natural History Society

Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400 001

Tel: (91-22) 2282 1811; E-mail: director@bnhs.org; Web: www.bnhs.org
