

## FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

BNHS has become a vibrant hub filled with youngsters, some of whom are interning at Hornbill House and the CEC, while others are out in the field. I will encourage them to share their experiences on the BNHS blog or website to inspire other young people to join our programmes. The BNHS blog (<https://blog.bnhs.org>) has quickly gained popularity, thanks to our intern, Oishimaya Sen, who started and now manages it.

Citizen science and community awareness significantly contribute to conservation. Our birders and BNHS members nationwide record the deaths of large birds due to collisions with transmission lines and electrocution. Similar deaths of flamingos were reported in New Mumbai by local residents. The Mangrove Foundation (MF) formed a committee, including a BNHS scientist, to investigate this matter. Based on the committee's report, the MF chief has initiated action to address the issue. The Government committees also discussed the BNHS report on Panje Wetland in Navi Mumbai.

Four BNHS members from Mangaluru, Karnataka, attended a conservation course at CEC Mumbai. I had detailed discussions with them during their visit to Hornbill House after the Course. Mr Bhuvan, Mr Arun, and their team expressed their desire to work closely with BNHS on conservation issues around Mangaluru. BNHS is always pleased to see its members involved in grassroots activities. I was happy to inaugurate an initiative by our Life Member, Mr Anirudh Chaoji, who established the Ran Mangli Foundation near Umred-Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra. He is working with locals to build their skills and capacity to help them earn a livelihood. At this event, I met Mr Srinivas Rao (IFS), PCCF P&M, who invited me to speak on the 22nd Biodiversity Day in Nagpur and promised to address wetland restoration issues through working plans. BNHS Life Members Ms Katie Bagli and Ms Zarin Virji authored a new pictorial book, *Of FEATHERS AND FRIENDS*, which was released at Hornbill House. I hope this book receives a warm response from you!

BNHS is making significant progress on various fronts, including the conservation breeding of endangered species. We have successfully raised over 800 vultures at our four captive breeding centres and created more Vulture Safe Zones in India. We have now received requests from state governments to start breeding red-headed vultures. The Himalayan vulture *Gyps himalayensis*, the largest vulture species in Asia, breeds at high altitudes in the cold weather of the Himalaya. After leaving the nest, young vultures migrate to the Indian plains for the winter. These winter visitors are falling victim to poison baits and electrocution in their wintering grounds. Seventeen such rescued birds were released in Assam after treatment on March 23rd and April 29th by the BNHS Assam team and the Assam Forest Department. Some were later sighted in Bhutan, and IFS officers from Uttarakhand informed us of their presence. BNHS teams have been busy submitting annual

reports, receiving positive feedback from Birdlife International on our Vulture Safe Zone study. The IUCN Species Congress also highlighted our pioneering work in vulture conservation breeding and rewilding in Pench and Tadoba, showcasing a video on our efforts.

I mentioned the issue of free-ranging dogs in my last letter. Following a Supreme Court order, the Animal Welfare Board (AWB) issued a speaking order. Please read more in the newsletter. I am very pleased to see that the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, which established the 'UP State Bird Sarus Crane Committee', is planning several initiatives, including a state-wide census, wetland survey, and wetland conservation. Similarly, the Karnataka Forest Department has come forward to set up a state-level Vulture Committee. States are preparing species-specific conservation action plans and taking firm steps toward protecting and conserving species like vultures and Sarus Cranes.

Tamil Nadu has the largest number of Ramsar sites in India and is the first state to form the State Bird Authority. They have continued their positive actions for the protection and conservation of wetlands and avian fauna. In a recent Tamil Nadu Bird Authority meeting, where the BNHS Director is a member, BNHS submitted views on resolving the final notification issue in bird sanctuaries, removing invasive species, and evaluating potential wetlands for IBA status (in addition to the 38 existing IBAs). ACS Forest Ms Supriya Sahu and CWLW Mr Srinivasa Reddy guided many actions in the state.

The endangered lesser florican was sighted last month in the grasslands of the Pench National Park backwater. Can we rewrite our Tiger Conservation Plans (TCP) to ensure tiger habitats are managed to meet the scientific needs of these grassland species as well?

Our elderly BNHS members are a real asset, bringing rich experience and historical memory. Esteemed supporters like forest officers, civil service officers, and armed forces officers from various states also inspire and support us. One such strong supporter, Mr J.J. Dutta, perhaps India's oldest IFS officer from the 1948 batch, turned 98 in April. As one of the longest-serving Chief Wildlife Wardens of Madhya Pradesh (retired in 1984), he was instrumental in turning MP into the 'Tiger State'. His daughter, Madhumita, responded to my letter and shared an old picture of Mr Dutta with the late Dr Sálim Ali and Mr P.M. Lad.

BNHS is building strong relationships with partner organisations. Dr Vidya Athreya, who heads Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) India, recently visited Hornbill House. Additionally, Dr Ambika Aiyadurai from IIT Ahmedabad and Dr Pankaj Sekhsaria from IIT Mumbai visited to discuss collaborations. BNHS regional WhatsApp groups are making a significant impact. Recently, our members formed the Karnataka group, which is discussing innovative ideas to support BNHS conservation work. Thanks to Zycus Cognitive Procurement for supporting our Amur Falcon conservation project in Doyang Valley, Nagaland. The BNHS team was shocked to see the Doyang River full of plastic waste. We hope to see some collective community action on the ground to clean this river.

Kishor Rithe

Director

Bombay Natural History Society

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