

FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

The BNHS celebrated World Environment Day across the country on June 5th. It was heartening to see events from Ladakh to Tamil Nadu in the south, and from the deserts of Rajasthan to Jharkhand, Odisha, and the North East.

On the morning of June 7th, we received sad news. Dr A.J. T. Johnsingh, a strong pillar of the Society, has passed on. He had been battling cancer for the past few months while continuing his wildlife research and conservation efforts from the hospital. I had the privilege of working with him during my tenure on the MoEF&CC's Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) in Delhi from 2009 to 2014. We conducted several site inspections together and exchanged views and opinions while writing reports. The SC-NBWL greatly benefited from his vast field experience. India will not see another towering figure like Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh. Before he departed this world, he handed over a script of his new book on Indian mammals, co-authored with Dr P.O. Nameer. He also contributed six new chapters to his previous book, 'Walking the Western Ghats'. We hope to publish both books soon. I urge you to reach out to potential donors to sell the plates of handmade paintings of Indian mammals to support his book. This would be a fitting tribute to this great scientist.

I visited Pinjore, Haryana, from June 10–13, 2024. The Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre established by the BNHS in 2003 is spread over one acre of land near the Bir Shikargaha Wildlife Sanctuary at Pinjore. The BNHS team started breeding vultures with 20 pairs at this Centre, and today the population has reached 400. The Forest Department has decided to release 25 birds into the wild in Haryana this year, the first time on such a large scale. Thanks to Chief Wildlife Warden Mr Vineet Garg and ACS (Forest) Mr A.M. Sharan for providing a special budget to procure 25 tags, enabling us to monitor the movement of these birds' post-release.

Tamil Nadu Government has set up India's first 'State Bird Authority' and appointed your Society as a member of this Authority. I visited Chennai to meet the dynamic ACS (Forest) Ms Supriya Sahu, IAS, to discuss a few issues related to birds and their habitats in Tamil Nadu. I also met Mr Vijaya Kumar and Mr K.V. Sudhakar of the Madras Naturalists' Society (MNS) at the Gandhi Nagar Club on June 13th to understand MNS's activities and explore the possibility of working together. Several volunteers are working with MNS to collect scientific observations of migratory birds. MNS shared field knowledge, which I relayed to the government during the meeting with the ACS (Forest).

While in Chennai, I visited IIT Madras on June 13th and 14th and was impressed by the contribution of BNHS GC member Mr Kumaran Sathasivan in establishing a Heritage Centre. Professor Susy Verghese showed us the biodiversity at the IITM campus and the challenges they faced. The Prakriti Eco Club of IITM has made this possible. Meanwhile, your President Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi and Vice President Mr Saurabh Singh visited the Chambal River to witness the dedicated work of BNHS scientist Ms Parveen Shaikh and her team in protecting the nests of Indian skimmer and black-bellied terns. They are trying to raise funds to support this ground-breaking work and expand it to other rivers like Mahanadi and Godavari. Ms Parveen sent us good news that the population of Indian skimmers at Chambal River has increased this year to 800 from merely 400 birds in 2017.

Following the visit of Lt. General Mr A. K. Singh, GOC-in-C, Southern Command to Hornbill House and his orders to form a study group, I had a productive meeting with Indian Army officers from Pokharan in March 2024 to discuss grassland and GIB conservation within Army areas. The committee had a meeting this month and our BNHS scientist Dr.Sujit Narwade has submitted recommendations based on BNHS studies to be incorporated in to action plan.

I was in Panaji (Goa) to attend a workshop organized by the Goa State Biodiversity Board and the National Biodiversity Authority in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society-India to discuss the concept of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). OECMs is a proposed certification mechanism for green, biodiversity-based initiatives on non-government lands. OECMs will strengthen efforts to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, 2010 (Target-3), and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), 2022, aiming to bring 30% of the earth's land and sea under biodiversity areas by 2030.

The monsoon brought fresh breezes to Hornbill House as our Vulture team left on a mission to work in Pench and Tadoba Tiger Reserve to put GPS tags on 20 vultures and release them into the wild. We hope these tagged vultures will successfully explore the tiger's habitat, search for wild carcasses, and later find their own breeding places.

Your Society accepts in-kind donations too. We have received donations of books from Mr Yogesh Thakkar (5 books), Mr Kamlesh Gandhi (8 books), Ms Dilnavaz Variava (41 books), Ms Shakuntala Bharwani (93 books), and Ms Rivka Israel (72 books) on behalf of Dr Rachel Reuben and Ms Elizabeth Reuben. The BNHS Library has started a book lending facility for outstation members too. The digitization work undertaken by the Library team is nearing completion, and your Governing Council has decided that these digitized books, reports, etc., should be made available to members on our website.

The Conservation eNewsletter will now publish activities of the BNHS state-wide chapters. Make a habit of reading the BNHS monthly Conservation eNewsletter for all the good news from the field. Your President expects your proactive participation in building a new BNHS. We look forward to receiving your ideas at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe
Director
Bombay Natural History Society

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