

FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

BNHS members commenced the new year with a bird survey at Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), recording two previously undocumented species for the Park. The Hornbill House, which has drawn visitors for years, has recently become the focal point for trainees from several states. The Research and Training Division of the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change requested BNHS to organise a week-long training programme on 'Advances in Bird Migration Studies and Flyway Management' in Mumbai. Twenty-three IFS officers from 14 states participated from January 8–12, 2024, featuring expert lectures, group discussions, panel sessions, and field visits along with a visit to the Library and Natural History Collection of BNHS. The Officers recognized the importance of considering birds, their habitats, and migration in infrastructure planning nationwide.

BNHS values collaborations both nationally and globally. In 2004, BNHS joined the Satpuda Landscape Tiger Programme (SLTP), with three other partner NGOs, funded by the UK based Born Free Foundation. This programme has since evolved into a long partnership involving around 12 NGOs and multiple donors. All these partners and donors convened a seminar at Bandhavgadh Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, from January 10–13, to discuss conservation strategies, especially for lesser-known species in Central India.

I received several messages from BNHS members on January 18 after they read their Society's mention by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Mr Narendra Modi and Dy. Chief Minister of Maharashtra Mr Devendra Fadnavis during the inauguration of Mumbai's Atal Setu (MTHL project) – India's longest over bridge through a sea. BNHS provided scientific expertise to Government departments to suggest mitigation measures, showcasing the Society's contribution during the planning of this critical infrastructure project. I am sure you must be feeling proud of your Society and your scientists.

In another case, while the country was celebrating the Ram temple *praan pratishtha* at Ayodhya, our scientists were busy transporting 20 Jatayu's (vultures) from Pinjore (Haryana) to Maharashtra. The State Forest Minister of Maharashtra released the birds in an aviary at

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve and Pench Tiger Reserve. BNHS has been breeding vultures successfully since 2002; more than 750 birds have been bred at four breeding centres. The positive outcome of earlier release efforts of eight birds from Pinjore and thirty-one birds from Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal, has bolstered our hopes and we are hopeful that Maharashtra will succeed in reviving the vulture population in its Tiger Reserves by making the entire state Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ). We appreciate the commitment of the Veterinary Department and Food and Drugs Control Department of Maharashtra for organising capacity building workshops and meetings for their staff to make Maharashtra a VSZ.

To address various challenges and changes in policies, building capacities of our staff is also essential. BNHS organized a workshop on "Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)" at CEC-Mumbai, Goregaon, January 4–5, 2024, for staff working on coastal ecosystems.

Last month, I had informed you about the first phase of the National Indian Skimmer count. The second phase of the Count took place on January 27–28, 2024, where 50 participants visited the shortlisted sites or other potential sites of their choice where Indian Skimmers are likely to be observed to bridge knowledge gap regarding their population. The final report of these counts will be uploaded on the BNHS website soon.

You must have noticed that Mr Asif N. Khan, your Programme Officer, has added innovative outdoor programmes. This year he has conducted two programmes in Melghat Tiger Reserve with local NGO Nature Conservation Society, Amravati (NCSA), resulting in remarkable responses and wildlife sightings. The second batch held between January 27–30 sighted a leopard, the rare chousingha (four-horned antelope), and 130 bird species including the Endangered Forest Owlet, presumed to be extinct for over a century. He also organised programmes in the coastal areas of Mumbai like Tree Walk on January 14 at Shivaji Park, in Dadar, and at Hornbill house.

The contribution of BNHS members is commendable. Ms Oishimaya Sen, who attended a BNHS workshop at CEC-Mumbai, now volunteers at Hornbill House. She has designed and started the BNHS blog with the support of Harrier, a software firm owned by our Life Member Mr Amit Badiyani. Please visit: <https://blog.bnhs.org/> and share your suggestions, if any.

In February, BNHS will host the Kurja (demoiselle crane) festival in Rajasthan and an international workshop in Patna to address illegal bird trade. Training courses for naturalists (February 22–26, 2024) and veterinary officers (February 15–17, 2024) will be held at Chandrapur Forest Academy in Maharashtra; also, a BNHS delegation led by Dr Sathiyaselvem will visit Sumarkand (Uzbekistan). I will update you on these in the coming month.

Kishor Rithe
Director
Bombay Natural History Society

1st February 2024.