

FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

This month has been a remarkable one for BNHS, filled with achievements and recognition for its efforts in conservation. Sakal, a Marathi daily, awarded BNHS with the prestigious 'Sakal Samman' in the social work category during its 53rd Foundation Day celebrations on February 03, in Mumbai. This recognition acknowledges BNHS's remarkable 140 years of accomplishments. Additionally, CRISIL, a global analytical company specializing in assessing and enhancing financial market functioning, has rated BNHS under its Voluntary Organization Grading as VO 1A – indicating Very Strong Delivery Capability and High Financial Proficiency. Moreover, BNHS has been nominated on the State Bird Authority of Tamil Nadu. All these achievements will surely inspire us to further our mission of conserving biological diversity through research and public awareness.

In Rajasthan, BNHS's work related to grassland conservation is well-known. On the occasion of World Wetland Day, BNHS scientist Dr Sujit Narwade and his dedicated team organized the Kurja (demoiselle crane) festival in Khichan to felicitate local heroes, who have done extraordinary work for bird conservation. It is noteworthy that they organized this festival even without any funds, showcasing their commitment and dedication.

Another BNHS scientist, Dr P. Sathiyaselvem, and his team collaborated with the Bihar Forest Department to organize an international workshop in Patna (Bihar) to address illegal bird trade. The conference was a grand success; the concrete decisions recorded in the minutes and the Patna declaration will be implemented in the next few months. Bihar has set an example of change through committed officers like CWLW Prabhat Kumar Gupta and Forest Secretary Ms Bandana Preyansi.

BNHS staff Niazul Khan has been working tirelessly with the Indian Army, local councils, and the Animal Husbandry Department to address the issue of free-ranging dogs (FRD) in high-altitude areas like Spiti, Lahaul, and even Siachen. Your Society filed a petition in the Supreme Court (SC) on the issue of FRD, leading to the SC asking the Animal Welfare Board to give us a separate hearing.

You will be happy to learn that BNHS has identified thirty local youths around the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve and trained them to earn a livelihood as nature guides at resorts around Tadoba.

As you know, BNHS has released 20 vultures in pre-released aviaries at Tadoba and Pench, where they are undergoing rewilding exercises. The vultures in the Pench aviary have attracted wild vultures to feed with them, which is a positive sign for their rewilding process. We hope that this will help to expedite their rewilding process. In addition, people from Chandrapur and Nagpur districts will have to ensure that NSAID-free carcasses are available for the vultures. To support this effort, BNHS has trained veterinary officers through a course organized from February 15–17, 2024, at Chandrapur Forest Academy in Maharashtra. Additionally, BNHS President Mr Praveen Pardeshi has requested the Food and Drugs Department (FDD) of Maharashtra to ensure that banned NSAIDs are unavailable in pharmacies in Vidarbha. Mr Abhimanyu Kale Commissioner of FDD, has conducted meetings of chemists and druggists at Ramtek and Chandrapur. We thank RSPB for supporting the BNHS Advocacy Cell in conducting a similar Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ) programme in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Assam. The webinars conducted by the BNHS Advocacy Cell to free Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh from NSAIDs received a good response. We have also learned that one of the thirty-one released captive-bred vultures from West Bengal has bred in the wild.

BNHS delegation under the leadership of Dr P. Sathiyaselvem participated in deliberations on Central Asian Flyway, Energy Infrastructure, and Indian Skimmer in Sumarkand (Uzbekistan). BNHS was also invited by the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) at Bhopal to participate in writing the new National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). We hope that Important Bird Areas are brought under the ambit of the National Biodiversity Act and that BMCs accept the responsibility of their protection and conservation. Additionally, BNHS has written to the MoEF&CC to establish the Grassland Authority of India to focus on the protection and management of grasslands in India.

BNHS has received a communication from the Southern Command of the Indian Army, about conducting a study on the conservation of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in the Pokhran Field Firing Range (PFFR) in Jaisalmer.

After the tragic death of four flamingos colliding with a newly erected signboard behind DPS lake in Navi Mumbai, BNHS's prompt action led to the removal of the signboard, showing the positive impact of immediate conservation efforts.

The BNHS Conservation newsletter is now published every month, providing detailed information on our achievements and future programs. I encourage you to read the newsletter for more information on our conservation efforts.

Kishor Rithe
Director
Bombay Natural History Society

1st March 2024.