

## FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

Your Society is undergoing crucial transformation. We have a dynamic new President joined in March 2023, Mr Pravinsingh Pardeshi, a retired IAS officer well-known for his green passion, who has several conservation accomplishments to his credit. He has provided you with a new platform to actively participate in your Society's research and conservation mission. As a result, I now see admiration from old members and a flow of new members, who want to join your Society's mission.

I have witnessed this transformation since I joined as Honorary Secretary in July 2022. The deputation of our earlier Director Dr Bivash Pandav was terminated by his parent organisation in March 2023, and the Governing Council (GC) asked me to handle his responsibilities as an Interim Director. This provided me with an opportunity to work with the passionate and dedicated BNHS field staff and scientists, and see their imprints in different landscapes and seascapes.

Our GC first addressed critical financial issues, including growing salary overheads, financial losses, and the sinking corpus; our flagship projects like Vulture Conservation Breeding Programme (VCBC) had a deficit in conservation focus. The GC explored development avenues like starting the much-awaited renovation of our precious specimen collection at Hornbill House, purchased 8.74 ha of agriculture land for GIB conservation in Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan. BNHS is slowly rebuilding its strong association with other partner organisations, including the smaller grassroots NGOs remotely working in different landscapes with equal passion and zeal.

I am sure you must have read the success stories where BNHS advocacy team could bring out the notification to impose ban on veterinary use, manufacture and distribution of Aceclofenac and Ketoprofen, responsible for vulture population decline.

I have visited Rajasthan twice, first to execute the land purchase deed and later to attend a workshop organised by WCS India. I used these visits to interact with our members and associates where our previous Directors, specially Dr Asad R. Rahmani had invested years to develop relations. Sevaram Mali of Kheechan, Sumersingh Bhati of Sanwata village, Forest Guard Kamlesh Bishnoi and Pankaj Bishnoi of Khetolai and Tanerao Singh, Pradhan of Sam block Panchayat and Malsingh Jamda of Godawan Conservation Society from Desert National Park are a few who are fighting a conservation battle to save grassland habitats and birds. BNHS has added to their strength by connecting them with our members and supporters from the Government. We hope to develop similar networks in other landscapes. I will share these stories later.

Our Governing Council cares about lesser-known species and habitats, including the grasslands, orans, wetlands, etc. and has mandated the same to our staff. During my trips to Rajasthan, I visited Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary (where my course student Savita Dahia (IFS) is posted as a Dy. CF) and Dhawa Doli Wildlife Sanctuary/Oran situated 45 km from Jodhpur in Barmer district, Rajasthan.

Dhawa Doli is an oran (sacred groove) that is famous for Blackbuck, Chinkara, and Nilgai besides the Spiny-tailed Lizard and other reptiles. We met Mr Shrawan Patel a passionate local young man, trying hard to bring back the past glory of this Sanctuary through several interventions. I experienced his positive energy and enthusiasm while he showed us the oran and explained its beauty and problems. We were shocked to see stinking sewage water filled in agriculture fields

adjoining to this oran. Coots and other birds were looking for food in the slurry! I wish the children of Jodhpur visit this place to learn how this pollution will soon reach to their homes! The woes of the farmers from the affected 22 villages has gone unheard by Jodhpur Development Authority (JDA) even after a long protest at the Collectorate; they have given up this hopeless battle.

Jodhpur city, which is also called Sun city, is the second largest city of Rajasthan State, it has a population of over 13 lakh and generates around 380 tonnes of municipal solid waste (MSW) daily. There is no arrangement for segregation of waste at source. The Municipal Corporation Jodhpur operates and maintains the city's three Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs). But the mystery remains, how does polluted water from Jodhpur city reach Jojari river, a tributary of River Luni. The issue of sewage water has reached the High Court and National Green Tribunal, but the havens of Dhawa Doli are already badly affected. The pollution is directly killing the blackbucks, chinkaras, and migratory birds. A tourist centre, once visited by thousands of foreign tourists is now in shambles. The local Bishnoi community have been greatly impacted due to loss of a livelihood opportunity. Can we expect any miracle from the recently announced Amrit-Sarovar scheme of Government of India for the rejuvenation of this river and the wetland?

I was fortunate to visit Point Calimere on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023 to purchase land for the expansion of our Bird Migration Study Centre. On the next day, a herd of five chital welcomed me to the land we had purchased. Chital were once introduced by the Forest department in Point Calimere WLS, and have now spread in the adjoining areas. BNHS will celebrate hundred years of its bird ringing program soon; this year, we hope satellite tag 10 birds of various sizes like the Great Knot, Black tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper under the guidance of Dr Balachandran, who is spending his post-retirement life studying birds and saving their habitat. I saw the Gull-billed Tern, Painted Stork, White Ibis, Red Shank, Green Shank, and Curlew Sandpiper, and Kentish Plover and Lesser Sandplover with colour flags. Hope their numbers will increase by the time our first batch of students arrive for the course in mid-October.

Your Society is also exploring the possibility of collaborating with members in the south to open an office at Trichy. This is an era where multidisciplinary institutions need to work together. BNHS would love to work with IIM Trichy, Forestry College and Research Institute, Mettupalayam (Ooty), Pondicherry University, old AVC College, Mayiladuthurai, Kerala Veterinary and Animal Science University, NCBS, Rishi Valley school, etc.

Our programmes and specially the courses have been benefitting members. Karthik N.J is a Research Scholar with the Department of Wildlife and Management, Kuvempu University, Shankaraghatta, Shivamogga, Karnataka, who attended the Point Calimere course in November 2022 and later applied for internship. BNHS provided him a month-long internship at Pong Dam in February 2023 and later a 10-day internship at Nasik in June 2023. He has been an ambassador of BNHS and approached the Forest Department to facilitate BNHS study in Magadi tank in Gadak district of Karnataka.

Another member Ashish Loya, from Haiderpur, Uttar Pradesh, a Yoga master in Art of Living, attended the 2022 workshop and later worked for inclusion of Haiderpur wetland as priority action in the National Action Plan. Similarly, Vasanth from Karnataka volunteered in Pulicat during the bird migration study conducted in December 2022. He later applied for the JRF position in Vulture project Pinjore. Our dynamic Governing Council gets a boost when they hear such wonderful stories of members involvement. Please share your such experiences with me so that I can share them with our fellow members to celebrate.

Kishor Rithe  
Director  
Bombay Natural History Society

1<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2023.