



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



MARCH, 2024

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Dear Members,

We bring to you, our valuable members, the latest conservation newsletter of the BNHS, which is packed with updates from our field work, and the events we conduct for nature conservation.

This is our attempt to make sure you get to know about our work in real time, and that you are with us on our journey!

Tadoba Mahotsav recognizes conservation efforts of BNHS



During the 2024 Tadoba Mahotsav, held from March 1st to 3rd in Chandrapur, the BNHS was honoured with a certificate of appreciation. The award was presented by the Forest Minister of Maharashtra on World Wildlife Day, March 3rd. We are grateful to the Tadoba-Aandhari Tiger Reserve for recognizing BNHS's efforts in nature education, community awareness, and mitigating man-animal conflict.

We are committed to continuing our collaborative efforts with the forest department.

World Wildlife Day Celebrations

The BNHS Conservation Education Centre (CEC), Mumbai, organized a citizen volunteer clean-up drive around the periphery of SGNP on the Goregaon side to celebrate World Wildlife Day. Around 80 volunteers, including BNHS members, citizens, and college students, participated in collecting non-biodegradable waste such as glass bottles, plastic bottles, discarded footwear, plastic bags, rubber pieces, and gutka packets from the habitat.

The collected trash was later handed over to recyclers for segregation and further use. This initiative helped remove non-biodegradable waste from the wildlife habitat, minimizing the threat of land and water pollution. The success of this activity was made possible by the collaborative efforts of the SGNP management, NGO Rivermarch, and the dedicated staff and volunteers of BNHS. ■



BNHS-RSPB to continue ground-breaking work in India

The BNHS-RSPB collaboration, which began 25 years ago to conserve vultures in India, will continue its ground-breaking work in 2024–25. Recently, a team from RSPB UK, including Mr Jake Zarins, Ms Mary Davies, Mr Chris Bowden and Dr John Mallord, visited the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre Rani, Assam from March 13–15, 2024. They had a productive meeting with BNHS staff and forest officers. RSPB is currently funding BNHS’s Vulture Breeding Programme and Vulture Safe Zone Programme in Assam and other states.

The meeting on March 13th began with a welcome speech by Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, BNHS, followed by a presentation on the project’s progress by Mr Sachin Ranade, Assistant Director, BNHS. This year’s successful breeding at the VCBC – 14 White-rumped vultures and 6 Slender-billed vultures – was praised by all. Important achievements, such as the ban on aceclofenac and ketoprofen in the veterinary sector by the Government of India, the majority of safe drugs – meloxicam and tolfenamic acid – noted in the undercover pharmacy survey, and the collection of cattle liver samples from the vulture Release Zone (VSZ), were also acknowledged.



Ms Alka Dube presented her team’s efforts to establish Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh as VSZ. RSPB praised the work presented by BNHS scientist, Dr Kazveen Umrigar on the Vulture Release programme in Maharashtra. The meeting also discussed the implementation of the Vulture Conservation National Strategy for India and RSPB’s role and financial requirements in the future. The teams visited the proposed Vulture Release site near Rani in Assam. ■

BNHS Team in the high altitude areas of Ladakh



The BNHS has shown remarkable dedication and effort in their project ‘On a war footing: biodiversity monitoring and conservation with the Indian Army’ in Ladakh. In March 2024, our team conducted comprehensive fieldwork, including estimating the free-ranging dog population in Indian Army formations in bordering areas, assessing garbage for interventions like organic waste composting, monitoring wild animals and birds, and conducting capacity building and awareness programmes for personnel. The team estimated the free-ranging dog population for phase II of the sterilization programme in Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary. They also conducted field surveys, deployed camera traps, and engaged in socio-economic surveys to understand ecological dynamics and human-dog interactions in high-altitude areas such as Tsokar, Tsomoriri, and Hanle in Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary. Despite winter challenges, the BNHS team’s adaptability and commitment were evident in their field plans and progress toward conservation and biodiversity management in Ladakh’s sensitive ecosystems. ■





A meeting was held with Chief Animal Husbandry Officer, Dr Stanzin Rabgais, regarding the upcoming free-ranging dog sterilization programme at Nyoma, Loma, Muth, and Hanle in Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary



A meeting was conducted with Mr B.M. Sharma, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Ladakh, regarding the progress of BNHS project activities in the Union Territory of Ladakh



A wild ass was attacked by feral dogs at KotsaMahey, resulting in severe injuries. The Wildlife Protection Department team from Ladakh promptly reached the location and successfully rescued the injured wild ass

NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS VISITS

On March 12, 2024, Dr Yannick Kuehl, Executive Director for Asia-Pacific at National Geographic, visited BNHS with Mr Krishna Tiwari, an ex-BNHS member and National Geographic Explorer. Mr Rahul Khot, Deputy Director (Collections), welcomed them and briefed Dr Kuehl on BNHS's initiatives. They toured the Collections Department, exploring India's natural riches. Dr Kuehl also interacted with Ms Parveen Shaikh, Scientist, BNHS, who presented her research on the Indian Skimmer. Dr Kuehl showed keen interest in potential collaboration on National Geographic Explorer projects with BNHS, highlighting the valuable knowledge gained during his visit. ■



On March 13, 2024, fifty-five first-year B.Sc. students from SIES College, Mumbai University, visited BNHS. Mr Rahul Khot of the BNHS, welcomed the students and shared insights into BNHS activities. He discussed its history, past and ongoing projects, and its significant contributions to conserving India's flora and fauna. The visit included a tour of BNHS Collections, allowing students to explore India's diverse fauna through the specimens at BNHS. ■

On March 14, 2024, thirty gentlemen cadets from the Cadet Training Wing of the College of Military Engineering (CME) in Pune visited BNHS. The CME's curriculum encompasses the training of Combat Engineers, Military Engineering Service, Border Roads Engineering Services (BRES), and Surveys. Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, and Mr Rahul Khot, Deputy Director (Collections) of BNHS, extended a warm welcome to the visiting cadets. During their visit, the cadets explored the Collections Department. Mr Rahul Khot provided valuable insights into BNHS's activities and collections, guiding all the cadets through specimens. Capt. Abhyuday Prakash led the cadets during the visit. ■



On March 15, 2024, fifty-five 4th-semester B.Sc. (Honours) students from Navsari Agricultural University's College of Forestry visited BNHS. They were warmly welcomed by Mr Kishor Rithe, Director and Mr Rahul Khot. Mr Vinod Patil, Zoological Assistant, gave an enlightening talk on India's faunal diversity using BNHS collections. ■

Engaging the Youth



Under the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, students pursuing Master’s degree are required to participate in On Job Training (OJT) for one semester to earn four credit points. Currently, 17 students from the Department of History at Mumbai University are undergoing OJT at Hornbill House. On March 15, 2024, BNHS organized an induction programme for these students. Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, warmly welcomed and guided the students throughout the induction process. Mr Rahul Khot,

Deputy Director, along with Mr Sandesh Kadam, Sales Manager, Mr Nandkishor Dudhe, Programme Officer, Ms Sonali Vadhavkar, Publications Officer, and Mr Ankush Pimpalkar, Assistant Librarian, explained the functions of their respective departments to the students. Following the introduction, the students visited the Library, Publications, CMD, and Collections departments. Over the next few weeks, they will actively engage with each department, gaining valuable hands-on experience to prepare them for their future. ■

NATURE WALKS

The Nature-Culture walk arranged by BNHS was a hit once again! Twenty-five adventurous participants joined us, guided by Naturalists Shardul Bajikar, Gaurang Tawde, and Pranav Joshi. The journey began with the thrilling sounds of Sambar and Langurs, hinting at a predator’s presence. The group observed termites rebuilding their mound and closely examined a leopard scat, discovering bone splinters and a tooth within it. Upon reaching

the Kanheri plateau, Archaeologists Ms Resha Dongre and Ms Akanksha Gulwe led the group through some of Kanheri’s caves.

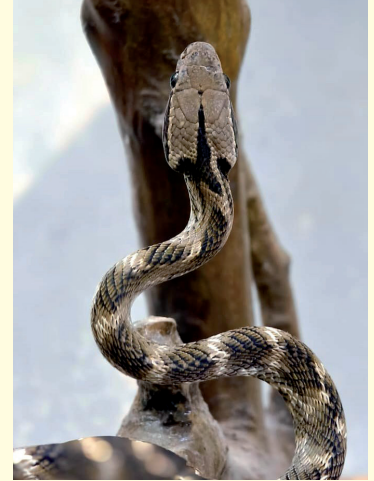
With such an enthusiastic response, we eagerly anticipate the third edition of this programme. BNHS’s Nature-Culture walk is a must-join adventure – to join this walk, write at: cec-mumbai@bnhs.org or call +91 9594929107, +91 9594953425, +91 8591315589, +91 8591318027. ■



In the inaugural edition of 'Night Under the Stars,' 27 participants joined the BNHS team for an overnight stay at the CEC-Mumbai. Naturalist Shardul Bajikar welcomed the group with an introduction to BNHS, followed by a presentation on 'Colours in the Natural World'. The evening included a short trail, and back at the campsite, an engaging 'Sky Watching' session featured discussions on the Night Sky by an avid skywatcher. Equipped with three high-powered telescopes, the group observed various celestial objects, including Jupiter and its four moon, a binary star, and the near full moon, extending well past midnight.

The following morning, the group was greeted by a beautiful yet slightly intimidating Forsten's cat snake at the Centre. During the trail, participants spotted jungle owl, spotted deer, and sambar. After a delicious breakfast, some members even saw a mongoose and a large Russell's viper basking by the roadside.

Another batch of campers will have the opportunity to join us for another exciting 'Night Under the Stars' session soon. Would you like to join us, contact: cec-mumbai@bnhs.org | +91 9594929107, +91 9594953425, +91 8591315589, +91 8591318027. ■



Mr Omprakash Gupta, Additional Chief Secretary (Finance), Govt of Maharashtra visited BNHS's Conservation Education Centre (CEC) at Goregaon on March 29th. CEC staff explained the working of the Centre and also organised a nature trail led by naturalists Shardul Bajikar and Yogesh Patel. Uday Dhage, DFO, SGNP North, and his staff, also accompanied him. The group started the walk from Jambhulmaal, the highest point in Mumbai, and passed through a pristine moist-evergreen forest patch. Along the way, they encountered and discussed interesting biodiversity facets, such as termites, pagoda ants, and rufous woodpeckers. The route was marked with numerous tracks and signs left by leopards, and the group was fascinated by the various shades of red displayed by the new leaves of Kusum trees. Cicadas and robber flies provided pleasant company, and the group observed a gecko's pearly white eggs under a large rock. Mr O.P. Gupta appreciated the work of BNHS and requested BNHS to help Govt of Maharashtra in taking the subject of environment education to Government schools in Maharashtra. ■



University Studies

BNHS is affiliated with Mumbai University and offers Ph.D. (Zoology and Botany) and M.Sc. (by Research) programmes. Our students Ms Sayali Mavalankar and Mr Advait Ghatpande have submitted their Ph.D. theses to the University of Mumbai under the subject of Zoology for evaluation to the University.

Ms Sayali Mavalankar has conducted India's first comprehensive taxonomic revision of the family Nassariidae. Her work utilized an integrative approach, combining morphological and molecular data to resolve taxonomic issues and reveal complex evolutionary patterns influenced by the Indo-Pacific barrier. She has described

two new species and documented four new records for India. Her research, enhances the understanding of India's Nassariidae diversity and contributes to global marine gastropod knowledge.

Mr Advait Ghatpande's work covers the taxonomic, population dynamics, and epibiotic studies of Muricids occurring at the rocky seashore of Alibag, Raigad, Maharashtra. His work involved a detailed account of taxonomic characterization, seasonal and spatial population density changes, and associated biota of Muricidae members found in the study site located at Alibag.

We wish both of them the best for their future academic pursuits. ■

Every forester must visit BNHS Natural History Collections – Mr J.S. Chauhan

Mr J.S. Chauhan, a respected Indian Forest Service officer and retired Chief Wildlife Warden of Madhya Pradesh, recently visited the BNHS Collection at Hornbill House. He expressed deep admiration for the collection, describing it as a true treasure of our country that every forester should visit. Mr Chauhan regretted not having had the opportunity to visit earlier during his time in the forest service and emphasized that every Chief Wildlife Warden should make a point to visit this remarkable place.

During his visit on Wednesday, March 20, 2024, Mr Chauhan was warmly welcomed by Mr Kishor Rithe, the Director of BNHS, who provided him with an overview of the organization's initiatives.

Mr Chauhan then toured the collections department, where he had the opportunity to explore the natural treasures of India. Rahul Khot, the Deputy Director, Collections, guided him through the history of the collections and showcased several fascinating specimens, including those specifically collected from Madhya Pradesh. Mr Chauhan praised BNHS's efforts to preserve these priceless natural history collections.

In the visitors' book of BNHS, Mr Chauhan wrote that the BNHS Collection helps us gain a deeper understanding of India's natural wealth. Ms Parveen Shaikh, Scientist-C, and Dr P. Sathiyaselvam, Deputy Director, Wetland Programmes were also present during the visit.



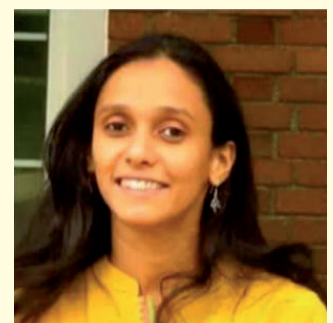
Dr Reshma Pitale featured in Travellers World

Dr Reshma Pitale, Scientist-C, BNHS, has been featured in Travellers World – an Online Magazine, on World Women's Day for her work on elusive neglected marine flatworms.

Her journey began at BNHS while examining worm specimens from Lakshadweep. These tiny creatures, which had not been officially reported in India for 112 years, captured her interest. She went on to describe some species and report others previously known only from the other side of the world. Reshma is fascinated by the intricate

realm of marine invertebrate taxonomic study. She has a passion for identifying species, unravelling their unique features, and deciphering their habitats.

After completing her doctoral work, Reshma has primarily focused on conserving the Thane-Sewri seascape, crucial for waders and the lakhs of flamingos that visit mega cities like Mumbai. Leading a team, she studies the seasonal dynamics of microscopic mudflat-dwelling organisms such as worms, shells, and mussels. ■



BNHS initiated conservation actions in Rajasthan

BNHS has been collaborating with the Indian Army since its inception. Recently, the BNHS Director and Lt. Gen A.K. Singh held a meeting at Hornbill House to discuss various conservation issues, notably focusing on the conservation of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in Rajasthan and other areas under the Southern Command. As a result, the Indian Army's Southern Command has established a study group dedicated to species conservation in Army areas. Additionally, BNHS officials, including the Director, Assistant Director, and staff in Rajasthan, met with the Adm Commandant in Pokharan to design the study and initiate conservation actions in Army areas. ■



Dr Pratapsingh Kataria and Dr Jitu Solanki from Bikaner presented their work to the BNHS Director and team

BNHS members plan initiatives in Rajasthan

The BNHS team met with the Divisional Forest Officers (DFO) in Jaisalmer and Bikaner, and also BNHS members in Bikaner and Sawai Madhopur. We are planning to launch several conservation activities at the Jodbeed Gadhwal Conservation Reserve in Bikaner, as well as in Bharatpur and Jaisalmer, in collaboration with the Forest Department, with support of local BNHS members. Stay tuned for further updates on these initiatives. ■

Wind under the Wings



BNHS hosted a Donors' Meet 'Wind under the Wings' on March 21 – World Forest Day – at Hornbill House. Representatives from various organizations such as the Kalaghoda Association, ICICI Foundation, Axis Bank Foundation, and Dadasaheb Film City attended the event. Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, warmly welcomed the guests and provided an overview of BNHS's rich history, current activities, and future plans.

Subsequently, our Principal Investigators (PIs) presented insights into their ongoing projects, including wetland conservation, marine life, vulture conservation, Indian skimmers, and collections. Additionally, there was a brief overview of our library and publications. The donors expressed significant interest in our projects and pledged their support during the interactive Q&A session. ■

Vulture Conservation in Assam



During an awareness programme on vulture conservation organised by the DFO of West Kamrup Division in Assam, Mr Sachin Ranade, Asst. Director and Sr. Centre Manager, highlighted the importance of local community involvement. He also discussed issues like unintentional poisoning incidents. The programme was attended by village heads, forest department staff, and residents from nearby areas.



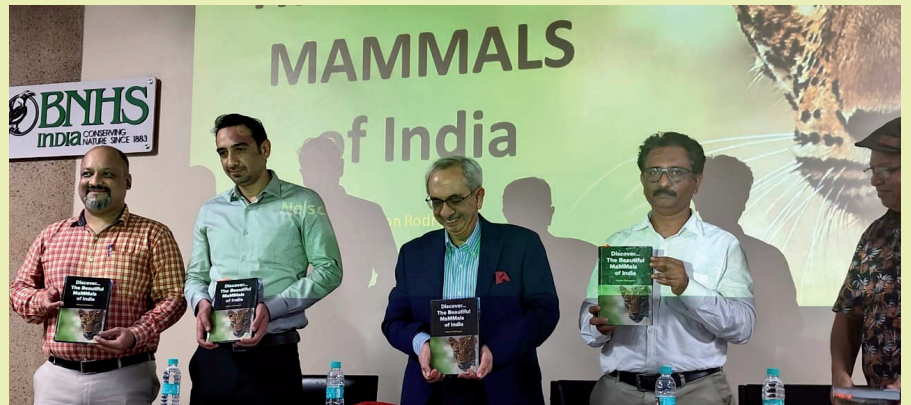
The awareness session for ranger trainees from the Assam Forest School in Jalukbari included participants from both Assam and Sikkim. The session focused on vulture conservation efforts in Assam and across India, highlighting the crucial role of the Forest Department as frontline staff in wildlife protection.



The Airport Authority of India (AAI) personnel, including Shri. Sanmukh Jugani, Regional Executive Director of AAI-North-East Region, visited the VCBC for an awareness session, along with 20 colleagues. They learned about the BNHS and its work in wildlife conservation, specifically in vulture conservation in Assam.



Meeting with Mr Aashish Vyas, DFO Jaisalmer, for GIB conservation in the Thar Desert of Jaisalmer



Congratulations to our members Dharmendra Khandal and Nelson Rodrigues on their recent publications. It is always a proud moment for us when we learn that our members are furthering the vision of the organization in their own unique ways.

UPCOMING PROGRAMMES

CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF THE WILD

Wildlife Photography Workshop and Night Camp at BNHS-CEC, Mumbai

April 20–21, 2024

Wildlife photography is a mesmerizing art form that not only captures the beauty and diversity of the natural world but also serves as a powerful tool for conservation, education, and inspiration. Through the lens of a camera, photographers have the ability to transport viewers to remote landscapes, unveil the mysteries of elusive creatures, and evoke a deep appreciation for the fragile ecosystems that sustain life on our planet. As stewards of the natural world, wildlife photographers have the power to inspire change, raise awareness, and foster a deeper appreciation for the beauty and diversity of our planet’s precious ecosystems.

This workshop, will be an intensive overnight experience, focusing on the intricate details of photography, with respect to nature and wildlife photography. It will feature detailed hands-on field sessions and classroom sessions will be involved with live demonstrations. To ensure personalized attention, the workshop will accept only a limited number of participants, allowing for one-on-one interactions and a deeper learning experience.

Expert: Mr Nayan Khanolkar

Mr Nayan Khanolkar is an avid nature photographer, who has dedicated nearly three decades to documenting Indian wildlife. His background as a biology lecturer enhances his understanding of flora, fauna, and animal behavior, enriching his photography with scientific insight. Over the years, he has received numerous international accolades, including the Wildlife Photographer of the Year, World Press Photo, and Big Picture Award, among others. In recent years, Mr Khanolkar has shifted his focus exclusively to the issue of human-wildlife conflict. Through his photography, he strives to raise awareness about the conservation of India’s rich wildlife heritage and to sensitize people to animal behaviour.

- Maximum Participants** : 15 persons only (on first come basis)
- Fees Per Participants** : Rs. 5,500/-
- Fees for Members** : Rs. 5,200/-
- Fees Includes** : Experts Charges, Dormitory Stay, and CEC Charges

(Note: Participants have to pay extra Rs. 700/- in cash on arrival for food, i.e. 4 Tea, 2 Refreshments, 1 Dinner, 1 Breakfast)

Registration Link: <https://forms.gle/7BShZ9gBdxm7rnP27>

Last Date for Registration: 12th April 2024

Mazgaon Hill Heritage Tree Walk

21st April, Sunday

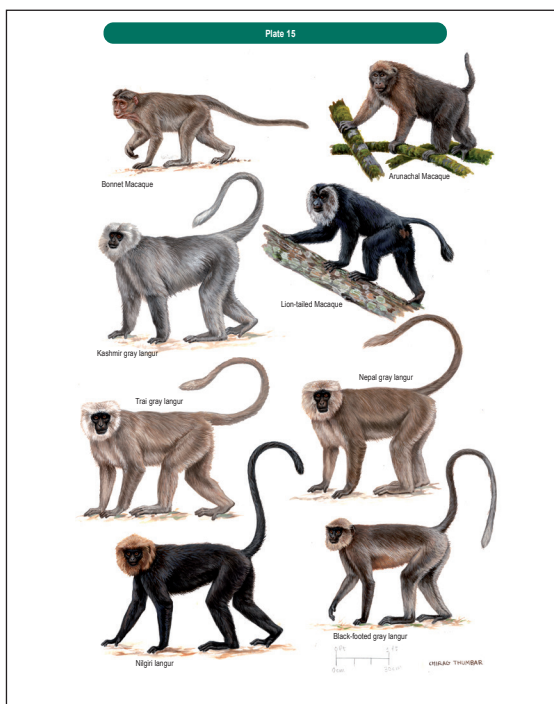
There is another Hanging Garden tucked away in the Dockyard area of Mazgaon called Joseph Baptista Garden. Built on a water reservoir in the late 1800s, this garden is popularly known as Mazgaon Hill. It is situated behind the Dockyard Road Railway station and offers great views of the city’s eastern coastline. The garden features some very ancient Kailashpati, Jackfruits, Mango, Branching Palm and other trees, which tell the history of the place through their presence.

- Grade** : Easy (1–2 km of easy walk, with a slight climb at the start)
- Reporting** : In front of the Main Gate of Joseph Baptista Garden, at 8:30 a.m.
The programme will conclude between 10:30–11 a.m.
- Charges** : Rs. 700/- for members, Rs. 800/- for others.
- Cost includes** : Entry ticket/permission charges (if any) and BNHS expertise only.
- Further query** : E-mail us at programmes@bnhs.org or call/WhatsApp +91-9969798447 (Mon–Fri 09:30 a.m. to 05:30 p.m.).



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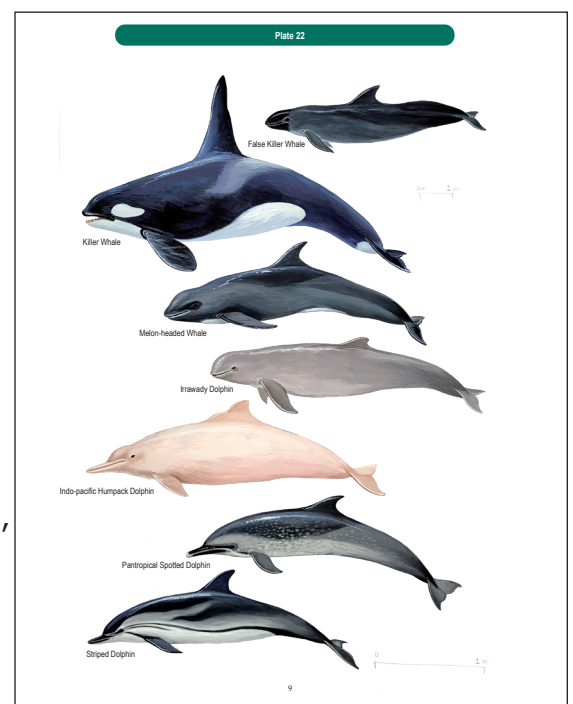
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Vision: Premier independent scientific organization with a broad-based constituency, excelling in the conservation of threatened species and habitats.

Mission: Conservation of nature, primarily biological diversity, through action based on research, education and public awareness.

CONTACT US

Bombay Natural History Society

Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400 001.

Tel: (91-22) 2282 1811; Email: director@bnhs.org; Web: www.bnhs.org