



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



JUNE, 2022

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Starting this June, BNHS will bring you, our valuable member, a conservation newsletter that is packed with updates from our field work, publications and the events we hold for nature conservation.

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

Saving Indian Skimmers

In early May, we received distressing news from our scientist Parveen Shaikh that a sudden water release from the Kota barrage had drowned many Indian Skimmer (*Rynchopsalbicollis*) chicks in National Chambal sanctuary in Rajasthan. At least 22 nests with 60 skimmer eggs and chicks were drowned. Indian Skimmers are striking and endangered birds. They are black and white, with a bright orange bill which has a longer lower mandible than the upper portion of the beak. Using this special beak, the Indian Skimmer

'skims' river waters for prey. It also nests exclusively on sandy islands and sandbars in rivers. Unfortunately, this habitat is under threat from sandmining as well as any changes in water level.

As we learnt of the release of water, we contacted the government of Rajasthan. The government responded swiftly and regulated the flow of water to Kota barrage. Thanks to this the remaining chicks are safe – and will take flight after two weeks of being in their nests. ■



A rescued Indian Skimmer chick in Rajasthan

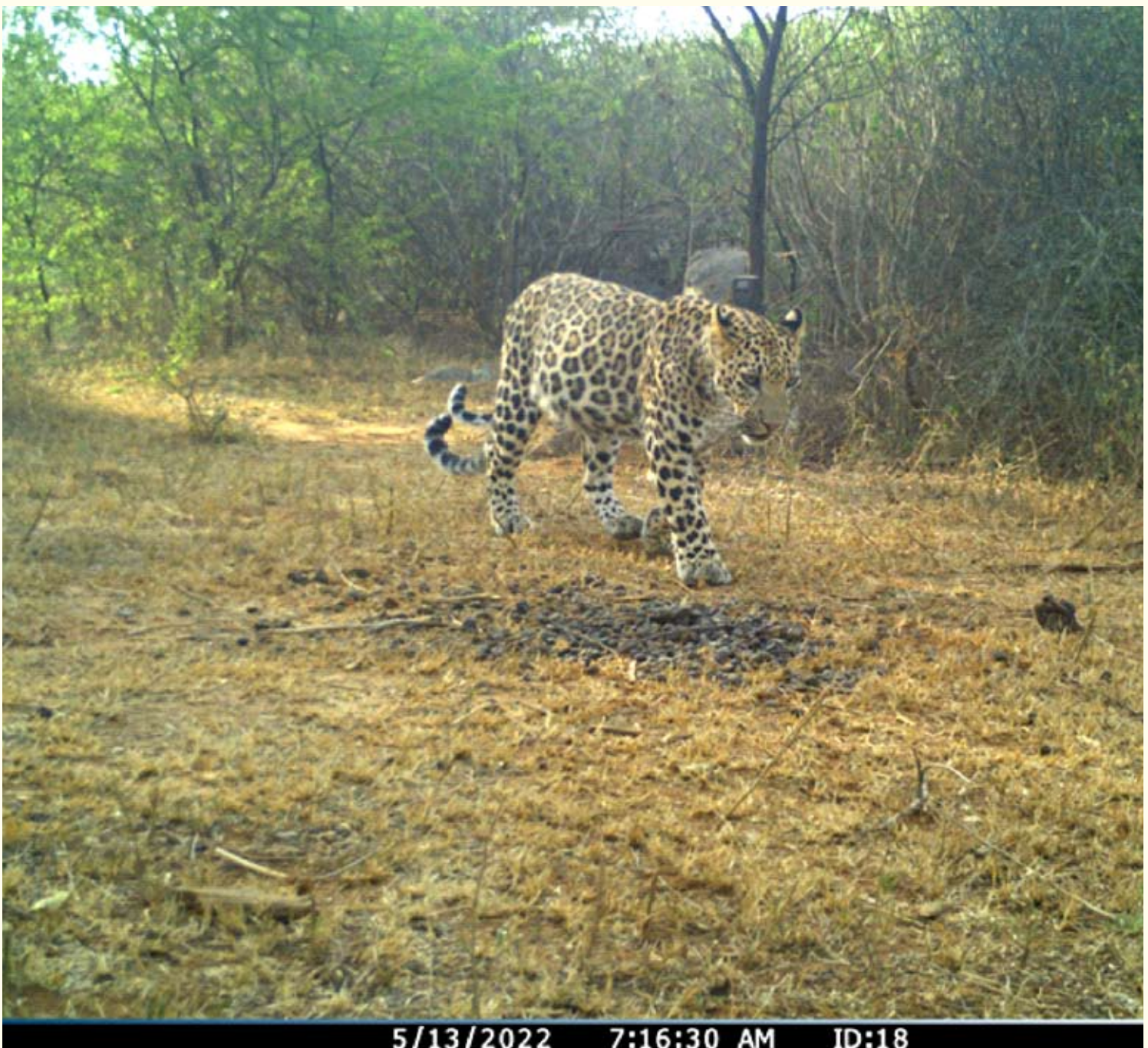
Hyenas and Leopards in Delhi!

Would you believe it if we said that elusive hyenas and leopards are found in Delhi?

BNHS run Conservation Education Centre-Delhi in association with the Department of Forests and Wildlife, Government of Delhi is monitoring the biodiversity of the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary. In the month of July 2021, monitoring and data collection camera traps were installed in different types of habitats in the sanctuary. The results are stunning.

Various mammals, birds and insects were recorded in the camera trap. Since August 2021 Leopard *Panthera pardus* has been recorded regularly in various cameras. We have also found striped hyenas *Hyaena hyaena*. Other sightings include Nilgai *Boselaphus*

tragocamelus, Indian Crested Porcupine *Hystrix indica*, Blackbuck-*Antelope cervicapra*, Small Indian civet *Viverricula indica*, Golden jackal *Canis aureus*, Indian grey mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*, Indian hare *Lepus nigricollis*, Gray langur *Semnopithecus entellus*, Monkey *Rhesus macaque*, Northern Palm squirrel *Funambulus pennantii*, Bush rat *Rattus fuscipes*. Also, six species of avifauna, one species of reptilia, and one species of butterfly were observed. We have conducted surveys and divided the sanctuary into 16 grids to deploy the camera traps. The sightings show the importance of the sanctuary for biodiversity in the bustling city of Delhi – and that the sanctuary is still functionally connected to other parts of the Aravalli hill range. ■



Leopards in camera trap in Delhi. If you look carefully, you will see two tails!

Photo: CEC Delhi archive

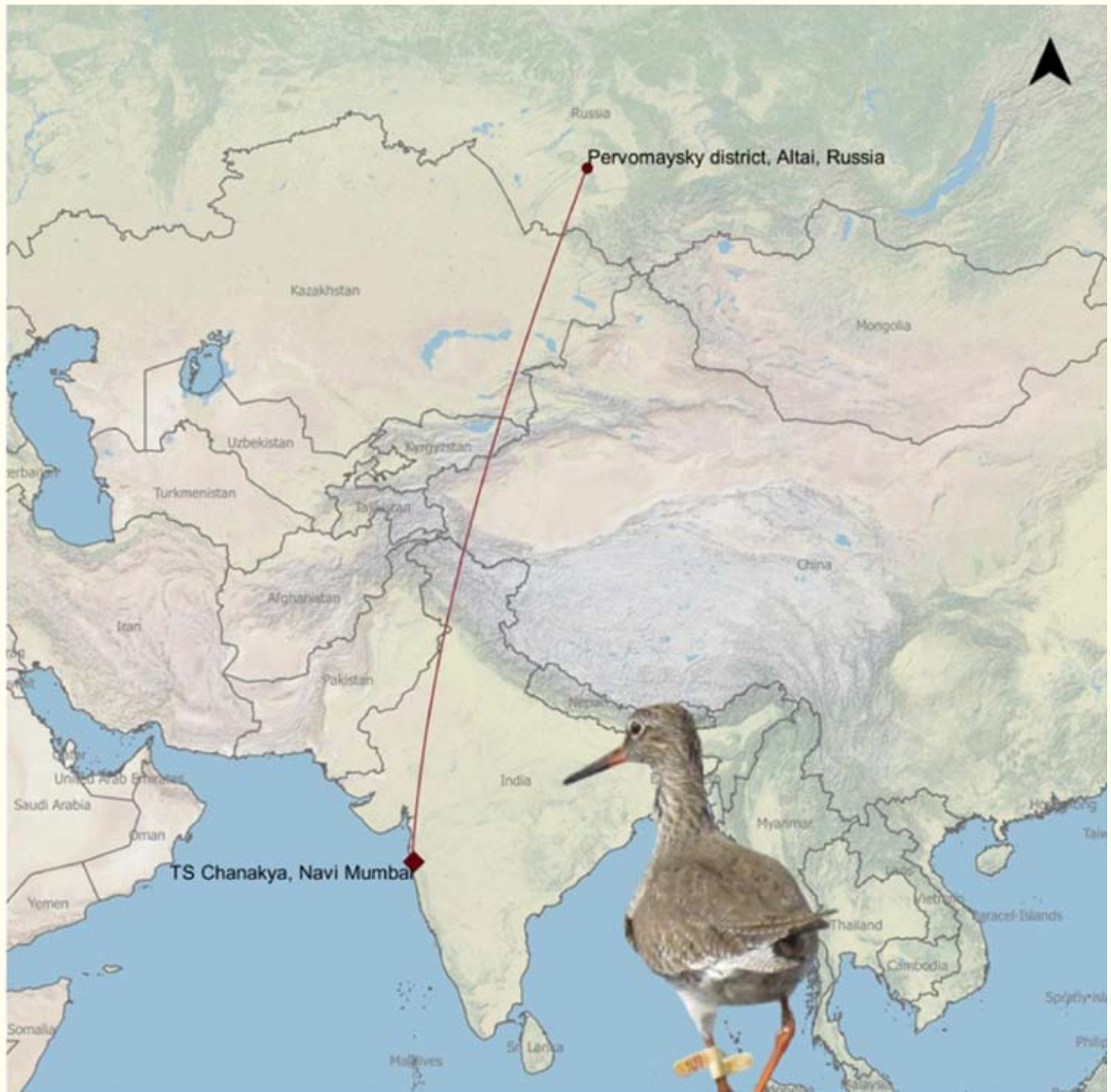
Our tagged birds make long, inspiring journeys!

Birds that have been tagged by us are making inspiring journeys that help us understand the paths that migratory birds take, the places that are important for their rest, refuge, feeding and other life-cycle activities. These are some of the birds tagged by us which we have recently resighted. Black-winged stilt tagged in 2017 in Chilika has been found at Ulungur lake, China

A Common Redshank has traveled from Mumbai to Altai, Russia!

A Kentish Plover moved from Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu to Bhigwan, Pune in Maharashtra.

In order to understand their migration patterns, we have recently ringed and put satellite transmitters on lesser flamingos in Navi Mumbai in March. ■



Legend
 ◆ Ringing Site
 ● Resighting Site

0 500 1000 1500 km

A Common Redshank tagged by us has moved from Mumbai to Altai, Russia



TWO NEW ROCK GECKOS FROM PENINSULAR INDIA

BNHS researchers along with collaborators from three other institutions described two new species of Rock geckos of genus *Hemidactylus* from the dry rocky zones of Karnataka state, Peninsular India.

● ***Hemidactylus mahonyi* sp. nov.**
Mahony's Rock Gecko


This gecko is described from Sandur Hills, Karnataka State of India.






● ***Hemidactylus srikanthani* sp. nov.**
Srikanthan's Rock Gecko

This gecko is described from Devarayana Durga Hills, Karnataka State of India.

ADHIKARI O. D., ACHYUTHAN N. S., CHETHAN KUMAR G., KHOT R. V., SHREERAM M. V. & GANESH S. R. (2022) Two new species of *Hemidactylus* Goldfuss, 1820 (Squamata: Gekkonidae) from the rocky outcrops of the Deccan plateau, peninsular India. *Zootaxa* 5129 (2): 227–249. DOI: 10.11646/ZOOTAXA.5129.2.4





Two new species of gecko described

Found: two new geckos!

BNHS researchers Omkar Adhikari and Rahul Khot along with their collaborators from Indian Institute of Science, Osmania University and Madras Crocodile Bank Trust have described two new species of *Hemidactylus* geckos from Karnataka. *Hemidactylus mahonyi* sp. nov. or Mahony's rock gecko has been described from Sandur hills, Karnataka while *Hemidactylus srikanthani* sp. nov. or Srikanthan's rock gecko has been described from Devarayana Durga hills, Karnataka. The findings have been published in *Zootaxa* journal ■

Making our voice heard for wildlife

BNHS has been engaging with the Government of India on the proposed changes to the Wild life (Protection) Act, 1972. An amendment to this Act was introduced as a Bill in the Lok Sabha in 2021. BNHS has made representations to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and was also invited to depose in front of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment and Forests. The Standing Committee was tasked with reviewing the changes to the Act. Several of BNHS' point were accepted by the Standing Committee and were part of its final recommendations.

These include an updated definition of invasive species. BNHS had stressed that it is important for invasive species to be defined and tackled and such species are not only those which are 'foreign' to our country but also those which are foreign to a particular ecosystem.

The Committee agreed and its report said that species could be alien and invasive as far as a particular ecosystem within the country is concerned. Invasive alien species may not be just restricted to those from outside India.

The Wild life (Protection) Bill suggested the creation of a Standing Committee within State Boards for Wildlife. BNHS was of the opinion that the suggested Standing Committee was very lean and did not fully represent environmental concerns. Many important decisions would be taken without wildlife issues being considered.

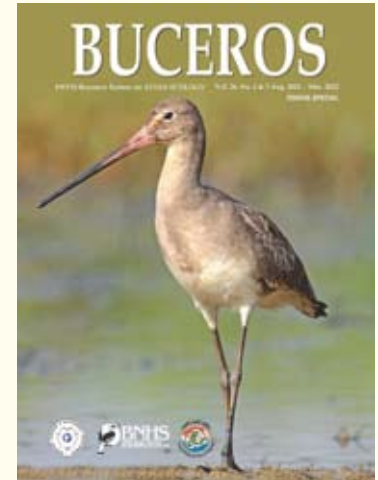
The Parliamentary Committee agreed with our view and said that if a Standing Committee of the SBWL is to be formed, then it must mandatorily have as its members: a) at least one-third of the non-official members of the SBWL; b) at least three institutional members (like ICFRE, NTCA, etc); and c) the Director of the Wildlife Institute of India or his/her nominee. ■

BUCEROS Newsletters honours the birds of Odisha :

BNHS has come out with a special issue of BUCEROS which will take you on a journey through Odisha. This issue of BUCEROS highlights bird diversity in Odisha, wetland sites, waterbird diversity, threats faced, and ongoing conservation efforts. Articles on globally threatened birds of Odisha provide detailed information on the important bird areas, threatened species, and recommendations for conserving the same. The authors also mention why Odisha is a stronghold for endangered birds like the Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis*

and an understudied potential habitat for the Vulnerable and Endemic Green Avadavat *Amandava formosa*.

The issue also presents a successful revival story of an eutrophicated lake, Ansupa lake, which acts as a catchment area and home to around 85 species of waterbirds, including 9 globally threatened species. An article on Mangalajodi focuses on the conservation efforts by locals and presents a transforming story of poachers to protectors who are now working towards safeguarding this amazing ecosystem. ■



Camps and visits for members and citizens



BNHS has been leading many exciting camps for members and enthusiasts.

BNHS organized an 'Endemics of Andaman' birding camp during 12–19 February 2022 in Andaman and Havelock Islands.

During the camp, participants visited the main island of Andaman (South part) as well as Havelock Island to see endemics like Andaman Teal, Andaman Bulbul, Andaman Shama, Andaman Flowerpecker, Andaman Serpent Eagle, Andaman Coucal, Andaman Woodpigeon, Andaman Cuckoo-dove, Andaman Masked-owl, Andaman Drongo, Andaman Treepie, etc. Other birds like Ruddy Kingfisher & Mangrove Whistler (mangrove specialists), Collared Kingfisher, Blue-eared Kingfisher, Daurian Starling and Long-toed Stint were also seen! We've also organized camps to Assam, Darjeeling, and Tadoba National Park.

On 5 May, we held a free treewalk and Season Watch workshop for BNHS members at the beautiful Conservation Education Centre in Mumbai. ■

Thank you for reading and for being with us on this conservation journey!

Bivash Pandav

Dr. Bivash Pandav
Director, BNHS



BNHS MISSION

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

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