

HORNBILL

DISCOVER THE LIVING WORLD

APRIL-JUNE, 2022



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Editorial...

Late in the night on May 09, 2022, I was woken up by a frantic call from Parveen Shaikh, a BNHS scientist working in Chambal river. I had visited Parveen in Morena a few days ago. She took me along the Chambal river to show birds nesting on the river islands; incidentally we had a lovely sighting of a Desert Fox too. I was most impressed with her dedication to work and her remarkable initiative – “Guardians of the Skimmer”. Parveen has identified and engaged some highly committed local villagers to protect the Indian Skimmer and other birds nesting on the islands from free ranging dogs and jackals. I was thrilled to see this conservation initiative by Parveen.

That night Parveen’s voice was full of concern and she appeared to be in a state of panic. The reason – a sudden release of water from Kota barrage, into the Chambal river, had submerged two of the nesting islands of the Indian Skimmer and other riverine birds. Approximately 60 nests of Indian Skimmer with eggs and newly hatched chicks, which were present on these two islands in the upstream stretch of the river, were lost. With day-break, on May 10, Parveen was on the spot to communicate the situation on the ground. My immediate response to this alarming news was to write an appeal to the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Shri Ashok Gehlot, and to Shri Bharat Singh, Hon’ble Member of the Legislative Assembly, Rajasthan, to halt the release of water for two weeks until the chicks were ready to fly. Shri Bharat Singh wasted no time in conveying the message to the Chief Minister, and urged him to order the release of the water into the canals instead of directly into the Chambal.

The Irrigation Department immediately issued an order diverting the water to smaller canals; further release of water into the Chambal was stopped by 4:00 p.m. on the same day, i.e. on May 10. Though some nests were lost in the two islands in the upper reaches, nearly 500 nests of Indian Skimmer in the islands further downstream of River Chambal could be saved due to this timely intervention. We acknowledge the prompt action of Shri Bharat Singh and the Forest and District Administration in this matter.

Construction of dams and barrages has heavily altered the ecology of many rivers, thereby adversely affecting our riverine wildlife; and the Chambal is no exception to this. Obstruction of water due to dams and barrages has resulted in fragmentation of the Chambal, affecting key species like Gharial and Ganges River Dolphin. Unlike the Marsh Crocodile, the Gharial with its poor leg musculature cannot negotiate a route within the fragmented pools in Chambal river. Lack of minimum flow in the river also confines river dolphins to a few pools, adversely affecting their survival.





Maintaining a minimum flow of water in the river during summer and preventing excess release of water during the nesting season of riverine birds, crocodiles, and turtles, is an issue that the irrigation authorities need to be made aware of. The ignorance of a few stakeholders cannot be allowed to be the cause of the decline of endangered species, like Gharial and Indian Skimmer.

BNHS has been working on the habitats and avian diversity of the Chambal river for the past five years; and after witnessing such catastrophic events we are determined to spread awareness among all stakeholders in the forthcoming breeding season. BNHS biologists do not merely document the decline of a species, they also intervene actively to save species from further decline. I request all our readers to come forward and support BNHS in its endeavour to save our endangered species, like Indian Skimmer, Lesser Florican, Great Indian Bustard, and scores of others. Your support matters to us and to these threatened species.

Bivash Pandav, PhD

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April–June, 2022



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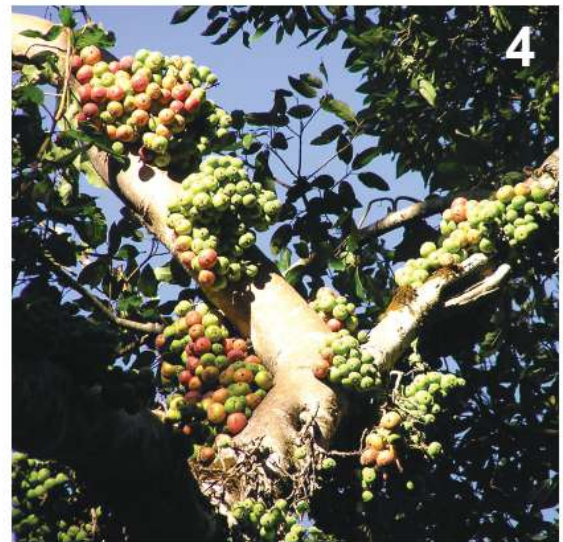
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What is so special about figs?
According to **Patrick David**
everything about figs is amazing,
right from their germination, to
growth and reproduction. It has
been estimated that more than
a thousand species of birds and
mammals feed on figs, and many
go on to disperse their seeds.
This makes fig trees a useful
tool for reforestation ... Want to
learn more? Then read on.



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Manipur Bush-quail: Lost, Found, Lost?

The Manipur Bush-quail, like
many other neglected species,
did not make it to 'The Most
Wanted' list of ten birds
that have not been seen for
decades. **Asad R. Rahmani**
feels that lack of conservation
attention and funding may
result in the disappearance of
this neglected species, and
that this needs to change,
else many more species will
disappear, unstudied and
unsung.

Others

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