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Ministry of Science and Technology

Dept. of Science and Technology

Government of India,

Technology Bhavan,

New Mehrauli Road,

New Delhi 110016

Editors

Kishor Rithe

Vibhuti Dedhia

Consultant Editors

Bharat Bhushan

Isaac Kehimkar

Editorial Assistant

Sonali V. Vadhavkar

Design & Layout

V. Gopi Naidu

Sanchita S. Kadge

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For more information on the Society
and its activities,
write to the Honorary Secretary,
Bombay Natural History Society,
Dr Salim Ali Chowk, S.B. Singh Road,
Mumbai 400 001, Maharashtra, India.
M: 91372 73106 | Website: www.bnhs.org

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The Glorious 50 years of Project Tiger in Corbett Tiger Reserve

Project Tiger became far more than a mission to save a single predator. By protecting tiger habitats, India preserved forests, rivers, grasslands, and wildlife corridors that sheltered elephants, rhinos, swamp deer, and countless lesser-known species. This series begins with Corbett Tiger Reserve, where **Kedar Gore** explores how conserving the striped king became nature's ultimate umbrella strategy, safeguarding entire ecosystems across the Reserve.

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Ngorongoro: A Living Eden

Ngorongoro is a tranquil landscape in Africa where an extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna has thrived for centuries. **Yasmin Khan**, **Hemalatha Ramachandran**, and **Medha Rajadhyaksha** share their experiences of birdwatching in this 'living Eden'. They believe that fostering a culture of birdwatching not only helps protect these beautiful life forms, but also enriches our own lives.

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Editorial



Change is both inevitable and essential in our pursuit of progress. The editorial team of *Hornbill* has always strived to bring about positive change in order to provide you with the very best. We reflected on 'Project Tiger', which was launched in 1973 merely as a project, without any legal status. In 2023, it completed 50 years. We decided to revisit some of the earliest Tiger Reserves and briefly review their present status, how they have transformed over the past five decades, and whether the governments and local stakeholders have truly achieved the vision that inspired their declaration as 'Tiger Reserves'. However, we are not merely assessing whether tiger numbers have increased. Rather, we aim to explore whether these reserves have fulfilled the broader objective of conserving native and lesser-known species. We approached passionate individuals across India who have consistently followed these Tiger Reserves over long periods and personally witnessed decades of local changes, both positive and negative, and their transformation.

This issue of *Hornbill* brings you the first article in this series, contributed by BNHS Governing Council member Kedar Gore: 'The Glorious 50 Years of Project Tiger in Corbett Tiger Reserve'. I am sure you will preserve future issues of *Hornbill* as part of this valuable collection.

We are often biased towards nature in a particular way and wish only to see forests, rivers, seas, and wildlife. But what about mountains, valleys, and craters? These are unique formations on planet Earth. We reached out to passionate earth explorers from former Sophia College, Mumbai, staff – Yasmin Khan, Hemalatha Ramachandran, and Medha Rajadhyaksha – who visited the Ngorongoro Crater in Africa and brought us an excellent piece titled 'Ngorongoro: A Living Eden'.

The Ngorongoro Crater, located in northern Tanzania within the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, is 16–19 km in diameter, spread across 304 sq. km, and has a basin 600 m deep. Although the crater has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the authors describe the threats posed to this beautiful landscape and conservation area by uncontrolled tourism.

In the Builders and Guardians section, you will read about Colonel Sir George Clarke and Freeman Freeman-Thomas, the sixth and seventh Presidents of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), respectively. Colonel Sir George Clarke, 1st Baron Sydenham of Combe, lived for 85 years and served as Governor of Bombay from 1907 to 1913, during which time he was also the sixth President of BNHS. Clarke was educated at Wimbledon and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. An army officer by profession, he served as a Royal Engineer in Egypt (1882) and Sudan (1885), and was renowned for his expertise in fortification and defence. Prior to coming to Bombay, he served as Governor of Victoria (1901–1903) and Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Freeman Freeman-Thomas, 1st Marquess of Willingdon, served as the seventh President of BNHS during his tenure as Governor of the Bombay Presidency from 1913 to 1918. Elected to the British House of Commons from the Borough of Hastings, he later served as Secretary to the British Prime Minister and as Lord-in-Waiting to King George V.

You will also enjoy reviews of several engaging books – *MINIATURE GIANTS: INSECT STORIES BEYOND THE ORDINARY* by Geetha Iyer, and *WHEN BIRDS TALKED: FOLKLORE OF THE HILLS* by Neha Negi – both published by Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd and reviewed by Dr Asad R. Rahmani.

Beyond the spotlight and the headlines stand the silent architects of conservation – the forest guards, trackers, community members, and unsung researchers who devote their lives to wildlife. Through long nights, unforgiving terrain, and the solitude of the forest, they strive to keep the heartbeat of the wild alive for another generation. In this issue, Dr Sujit Narwade highlights the efforts of a Bishnoi forest guard – a Guardian of the Grassland – working to save the Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard, whose grassland habitat in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer district is increasingly threatened by fragmentation and expanding transmission lines.

Pheasants are renowned for their flamboyant plumage and spectacular displays. Yet few can compare to the Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, a jewel of the high Himalaya found at elevations between 2,000 and 4,400 metres. Nowadays, it is increasingly difficult to witness the rare display of the Himalayan Monal in the wild. Thanks to author Kallol Mukherjee, who shares this remarkable experience with us in the article 'A Duel on the Mountain Stage'.

In previous Conservation Notes, you have already read about how severely our grasslands are affected by numerous threats, including infrastructure development, while policymakers continue to neglect their ecological importance by treating them as wastelands. It is therefore no surprise that one of India's magnificent grassland ecosystems, Velavadar, is also struggling to survive. Several studies conducted by BNHS scientists in the 35 sq. km Blackbuck National Park at Velavadar highlight its ecological uniqueness. You will enjoy the article by Ram Gopalakrishnan, which may inspire you to visit this national park, located just a three-hour drive southwest of Ahmedabad, where you can witness harriers and the rare Indian wolf.

I have often observed that many nature lovers, while passionately following one particular species, tend to overlook the countless others inhabiting the same forest. The article by BNHS scientist Dr Sachin Ranade reminds us of the importance of keeping both our eyes and ears open to unexpected discoveries. During his travels through the scenic Morni Hills in Haryana, part of the outer Himalayan Shivalik range, he had a fascinating encounter with earthworms. Although he has spent the last 25 years working on vulture conservation, he never allowed his vision to remain fixed only on the skies. Instead, he discovered remarkably long and large earthworms inhabiting this hilly forest ecosystem.

Please do not forget to read the advertisement for one of India's finest wildlife publications and purchase the new book *MAMMALS OF INDIA* by P.O. Nameer and A.J.T. Johnsingh at its pre-publication discounted price.

In Conservation Notes, I have written several recent articles on the status of grasslands in India. Coincidentally, the Supreme Court of India was simultaneously hearing an important petition concerning the protection of the Aravalli Mountains, while large protests unfolded across northern states and social media platforms. I therefore decided to visit the Aravallis personally and bring you a ground report. I hope you will enjoy my article, 'Aravallis at the Crossroads'.

Enjoy reading, and please do share your feedback.

Kishor Rithe

