

# HORNBILL

DISCOVER THE LIVING WORLD

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## FEATURES



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### House Crow: Intelligent Villain or Misunderstood Genius?

House crows are intelligent, adaptable, and deeply social creatures exhibiting a remarkable range of cognitive abilities. Long woven into folklore and symbolism these birds are known for their capacity to form bonds and recognize human faces.

**Asad R. Rahmani's** narrative sets one thinking: is the house crow an intelligent villain or misunderstood genius.

### Kaziranga, the Pride of India

**A.J.T. Johnsingh and Naveen Pandey**

have explored Kaziranga's pristine wilderness more than a dozen times, drawn by its sweeping grasslands and captivating forests teeming with biodiversity. But, each time they left they carried with them the hope that the magnificent Kaziranga Tiger Reserve – with its awe-inspiring landscapes, charismatic species, and extraordinary people – would continue to inspire generations for years to come.



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## PHOTO FEATURE



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### Dew Flowers of India

The dew flowers are usually nestled in the undergrowth, spread across grasslands and plateaus, or peeking out along coastal belts and agricultural fields. Many species bloom only briefly during the rainy season, while others persist year-round.

**Mayur Nandikar** highlights the traits, habitats, and origins of these delicate, short-lived blossoms – beautiful and fleeting, much like dew itself.

## Others

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# Editorial...

The monsoon has now embraced almost the entire country, with the exception of a few regions like Ladakh. The persistent showers have stirred Mother Earth into action, triggering new growth from rootstocks. Some shrubs and trees must already be in bloom – and if not, just wait a few more weeks to witness a spectacular burst of colour!

Urban planners and nature lovers have planted many flowering avenue trees along roadsides across Indian cities, drawing attention whether the species are native or exotic. Personally, I am not fond of exotic trees despite their vibrant blossoms. In this edition's Readers' Space, you will be introduced to one such non-native tree: the Pink Trumpet Tree *Tabebuia rosea*, presented by Sangeeta Jain from Mumbai, Maharashtra. Named for its large, trumpet-shaped pink flowers that bloom in spring, this tree is native to Central and South America. Yet, you will find many of them lining Indian city roads.

If you enjoy watching wild flowers, you will also enjoy the article 'Dew Flowers of India', with its stunning photographs, contributed by Mayur Nandikar.


The *Hornbill* features are always a highlight. Dr Asad Rahmani shares a fascinating piece on a bird that is often misunderstood: the crow. His article, 'Intelligent Villain or Misunderstood Genius?' explores the reputation of this species that is so often in the spotlight – though rarely for good reasons. Crows are probably the subject of more stories than any other bird.

I have also heard unusual stories about crows in rural India. Witnessing crows mating is considered a bad omen, believed to foretell death. Grippled by this myth and anxious about its implications, some people try to ward off the supposed danger by sending postcards falsely announcing a death – thinking it will avert the real one. Have you ever witnessed crows mating?

We also pay tribute to Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh, who passed away last year. A beloved contributor to *Hornbill*, he regularly transported readers deep into India's forests through his evocative writing. Mr Naveen Pandey, who spent time with Dr Johnsingh in Kaziranga, shares 'Kaziranga, the Pride of India' – an article they co-authored shortly before Dr Johnsingh fell ill. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985 and a Tiger Reserve since 2007, Kaziranga is home to several bird species.

For long-time BNHS members, there is a special feature on the Builders and Guardians of BNHS. This issue features one of the early trustees, Colonel George Robert Canning Harris (1851–1932), better known as Lord Harris. He served as the second President of BNHS during his tenure as Governor of Bombay from 1890–1895. Dr Bharat Bhushan, Hon Secretary, offers a brief yet fascinating glimpse into his contributions to BNHS, India, and even cricket!





In the past three issues, *Hornbill* introduced the ‘*Systema naturae* 2033’ initiative, inspired by the 1983 *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF NATURAL HISTORY* edited by Robert Hawkins and published by BNHS. We invite you to explore ‘Call to Contribute: BNHS 150 Years – THE BOOK OF INDIAN TREES’. If you have a background in botany, we encourage you to participate.

In the ‘Diary of a Scientist’ section, meet Dr Himadri Sekhar Mondal, a BNHS researcher who shares his experiences in Sikkim through ‘Learning from the Wild: A Day in the High Himalaya’. Dr Mondal completed his Ph.D. on the white-bellied heron and joined BNHS in 2018, working across Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim.

The Nature Watch section features ‘Home in the Hills: Nest Builders of Ranikhet’ by Shaafay Khalid and Kaleem Ahmed, accompanied by beautiful bird photographs by Shaafay. This article goes beyond typical birdwatching and encourages readers to document the nesting and breeding behaviours of birds.

We must acknowledge the recent loss of some of BNHS India’s most dedicated conservationists and naturalists: Mr Sunjoy Monga, a passionate birder and mentor to many, Padma Shri Maruti Chitampalli, forester and Marathi writer, Mr Valmik Thapar, tiger expert and former Chair of the BNHS Conservation Subcommittee, and Dr Saramma Marselin Almeida, eminent botanist. Their absence is deeply felt – not only by their families, but by the nation. BNHS will always honour their legacies.

The Nicobar Islands, situated in the Andaman Sea, have recently drawn media attention due to alarming infrastructure development plans. This has raised serious concerns among conservationists. In Book Reviews, we spotlight *THE GREAT NICOBAR BETRAYAL* by Pankaj Sekhsaria, an environmental advocate deeply committed to the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. I first heard him speak at BNHS, passionately critiquing the infamous Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), which slices through Jarawa tribal land. Another book reviewed by Dr Asad Rahmani, *TALES FROM THE JUNGLES: NARRATIVE OF A NEMOPHILIST* by Saiyed Tariq, also seems quite interesting. I am sure readers will appreciate it. I have reviewed the book *ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS AT THE LOCAL: NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE IN INDIA* by Satyajit Singh and Ajit Menon, published by Orient BlackSwan. It promises to be a valuable resource for academicians. The ‘must-read’ *JUNGLE BUNGLE* is a collection of over 30 short, first-hand conservation stories written by Nandu Andhare.

In Conservation Notes, you will find an article on the urban pigeon menace in India. When you read it, you might hear objections from so-called animal lovers who resist actions like banning *kabootar khanas*, yet seldom engage with the science behind urban ecology. I encourage readers to reflect: where was this outcry when Municipal Corporations took bold preventive action to control rat populations in order to curb the potential spread of plague? Conservation sometimes requires tough decisions.

Enjoy reading!

Kishor Rithe