

HORNBILL

October–December 2024



GOVERNING COUNCIL

PRESIDENT

Mr Pravinsingh Pardeshi, IAS (retd.)

VICE PRESIDENTS

Ms Aditi Kothari Desai

Ms Sangita Jindal

Mr Saurabh Singh

HONORARY SECRETARY

Dr Bharat Bhushan

HONORARY TREASURER

Mr Dinesh Kothari

DIRECTOR

Mr Kishor Rithe

MEMBERS

Ms Aishwarya Shridhar

Mr Arvind Mishra

Dr Asad R. Rahmani

Mr Debi Goenka

Dr Jayant S. Wadatkar

Mr Kedar Gore

Mr Kuljyoti Lahkar

Mr Kumaran Sathasivam

Dr Parvish Pandya

Mr Peter Lobo

Mr Praveen Kumar Vashishta

Mr Rohan Bhate-Shah

Mr R. Sreenivasa Murthy

Dr V. Shubhalaxmi

The Secretary,
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

Gayatri W. Ugra

Isaac Kehimkar

Editorial Assistant

Sonali V. Vadhavkar

Design & Layout

V. Gopi Naidu

Sanchita S. Kadge

Cover: Mount Victoria Babax

by Shalini Gopalakrishnan

Published and printed quarterly
by the Honorary Secretary for the
Bombay Natural History Society,
Printed at Akshata Arts Pvt. Ltd.,
Lower Parel, Mumbai.

Reg. No. RN 35749/79, ISSN 0441-2370.

For more information on the Society
and its activities,
write to the Honorary Secretary,
Bombay Natural History Society,
Dr Sálím Ali Chowk, S.B. Singh Road,
Mumbai 400 001, Maharashtra, India.
Tel.: (91-22) 2282 1811
Fax: (91-22) 2283 7615
E-mail: info@bnhs.org
Website: www.bnhs.org

Views expressed by the contributors in
the *Hornbill* are not necessarily those
of the BNHS. Unsolicited articles and
photographs, and materials lost or
damaged are not our responsibility and
no claims will be entertained.

CONTENTS

FEATURES

The Calls of the Valparai Frogs

4



Valparai, a town nestled within the Anamalai Tiger Reserve, is a haven of natural beauty. After spending two monsoons exploring this plateau, **Preethi S.** is well-acquainted with the region's diverse flora and fauna. Yet, Valparai continues to surprise her at every turn. In this narrative, she shares fascinating encounters with amphibians during a monsoon trip to Valparai – a place she fondly describes as a paradise for researchers and wildlife enthusiasts.

Birding in Mizo Hills

10



When **Shalini Gopalakrishnan** embarked on a birding expedition to Mizoram, she never imagined she would encounter two rare gems of the avian world the Mount Victoria babax and the Chin hills wren-babbler. During her unforgettable journey, she recorded sightings of over 100 species and now plans on returning to relive those magical moments.

Others

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Book Reviews | 15 |
| Readers' Space | 21 |
| Nature Watch | 22 |
| Remembrance | 30 |
| Conservation Notes | 31 |

Editorial...

We hope 2025 brings more joyous and eco-friendly moments from the field to share with you. As we wrap up 2024, this final issue highlights special stories from lesser-known regions and little-known species.

Our main feature highlights the Anamalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore district, a true paradise for researchers and wildlife enthusiasts. The Western Ghats, home to over 520 herpetofaunal species – nearly 90% of which are endemic – serve as the perfect backdrop. Preethi S., from WCS-India's Western Ghats agroforests team, shares her passion for herpetofauna in this piece. A special thanks to Shashank Dalvi for providing the stunning accompanying images.


This issue will also inspire you to visit Mizoram. A birdwatcher's paradise, Sailam Bird Sanctuary and Phawngpui National Park (known as the Blue Mountains and boasting Mizoram's highest peak) sit near the Myanmar border. Visiting Phawngpui during the Rhododendron bloom is an unparalleled experience. Shalini Gopalakrishnan, the author, vividly recounts her encounter with the park's diverse bird species.

The Eastern Ghats, a lesser-known mountain range in India, are struggling to gain recognition and attention from policymakers. In our Reader's Space section, Trevor Price from the Department of Ecology and Evolution, University of Chicago, shares his memories of Lambasingi (formerly spelled Lammasinghi) near Visakhapatnam. His short narrative discusses the loss of an ancient tree once crucial to the area's identity and possibly a magnet for tourists. Since 2018, Lambasingi has seen a surge in tourism, providing much-needed livelihoods to locals. We hope this growing tourism helps preserve the natural state of the Eastern Ghats rather than accelerating its destruction.

This is the second issue of *Hornbill* under the “Systema naturae 2033” initiative. Inspired by the 1983 *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF NATURAL HISTORY*, edited by Robert Hawkins and published by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), this project led by Dr Bharat Bhushan, our Honorary Secretary, will culminate in the BNHS 150 Years Omnibus of Natural History. This issue features a BNHS member Savio Fonseca's account of the Sri Lanka Frogmouth, sighted in the Western Ghats' dense forests at Bhagwan Mahaveer National Park, Goa.

In this issue's book review, Rahul Khot introduces *THE TREASURES OF NANYUKI*, a fiction title by Subrata Mukhopadhyay. The story follows “Gola”, a Mowgli-like character, on his adventures through forests in India and Kenya. This thrilling tale is sure to captivate children and young adults alike. I have reviewed the book *ENDANGERED PARROTS OF THE WORLD ON STAMPS, COINS, AND BANKNOTES* by BNHS life member Mr Sushilkumar Agrawal. This book uniquely combines popular hobbies such as stamp and coin collecting with a





focus on endangered parrots listed on the IUCN Red List and their conservation status. While it appeals to nature enthusiasts and conservationists, it is also a valuable resource to government personnel, including police, customs officers, and enforcement agencies, who work to combat the illegal wildlife trade and smuggling.

Ashok Captain's name is synonymous with herpetofauna. His article, *Naja sagittifera: Cost per Pixel* gives an account of his friend Girish Choure's visit to the Andaman Islands, featuring rare photographs. The Andaman Islands are home to some of the most breath-taking snakes on our planet including endemic ones like the Andaman bronzeback, the Andaman cat snake, the Andaman keelback, the Andaman pit viper, and the most elusive of them all (though not in alphabetical order), the Andaman cobra!

Since 2017, the BNHS Indian Skimmer Programme, led by Parveen Shaikh, has engaged nationwide birders through surveys. BNHS has invested significant conservation efforts and funds to protect the skimmer across major rivers in India, including the Chambal, Mahanadi, and Godavari. Our work has inspired numerous birders to focus on the species. In this issue's Nature Watch, BNHS's senior researcher Khushboo Rani celebrates the return of the Indian skimmer to the Ganga River at Bihar's Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS). Established in 2009, VGDS serves as a refuge for endangered species, including the Gangetic dolphin and now the Indian skimmer, which was not seen in the area since 2011.

In early 2025, I attended a conference at Tadoba-Chandrapur where scientists discussed non-invasive wildlife population management techniques, such as reversible chemical contraception, immuno-contraception, and translocation of animals for managing locally abundant/surplus wildlife populations. They feel that these strategies are crucial for addressing conflicts in landscapes like central India, where tiger (and leopard populations in Sangli, Pune, and Ahmednagar, all sugarcane intensive districts) can sometimes outstrip the ecosystem's capacity. Kedar Gore, a BNHS Governing Council member, shares his thrilling experience at Padmashi Camp in Kanha Tiger Reserve's Kisli Range.

I work diligently to bring you solid Conservation Notes from different parts of India, highlighting the pressing conservation concerns facing various ecosystems. In this issue, I share my recent field trip to Ladakh, where we examined the impact of free-ranging dogs on endangered species and their dwindling habitats.

Finally, do you read the advertisements in *Hornbill*? Don't just flip past them – consider gifting a BNHS membership to a loved one! It is a perfect way to make them a true friend of nature, allowing them to explore the wonders of wildlife.

Enjoy reading this issue!

Kishor Rithe