



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

From the DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

Let's welcome the newly elected BNHS Governing Council members. Our Society is now in the capable hands of visionary leaders committed to its growth and success.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the election and cast a vote. However, only 334 BNHS members exercised this right, a concern we must address. Let us work together to increase participation in the next election and strengthen our collective role in shaping BNHS.

First let me share some big news for BNHS and also our country. BNHS scientist Parveen Shaikh and another Indian scientist Barkha Subba are among the six winners recognised by the prestigious 'Green Oscars' aka the #WhitleyAward. Parveen and Barkha received their awards from Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, a patron of the Whitley Awards in London.

In the first week of April 2026, I was invited by fishermen at the Ujani Reservoir in Maharashtra. They had gathered at the Bhigwan fish market yard to inaugurate their first dedicated weighing machine, designed specifically to measure invasive alien fish species (IAS). While the machine itself is modest, its purpose is significant. In a unique initiative for India, it will be used exclusively to weigh only invasive fish species. The fishing community has resolved to segregate African catfish (ACF) and suckermouth catfish from their catch, ensuring these species do not enter market sales. Instead, the segregated fish will be weighed and transported directly to industries for oil extraction, preventing their sale for consumption due to associated health risks. This system was established with support from the Agro-Producer Market Federation. The initiative received widespread appreciation from the Gram Panchayat, Block Panchayat, and Zilla Parishad, uniting political representatives behind this shared cause.

Dr Unmesh Katwate and his team have built a strong and trusting relationship with fishermen across the reservoir and river, fostering meaningful collaboration. In recognition of his vision, dedication, and tireless efforts, Dr Katwate was felicitated by the community.

The BNHS fishery project at Ujani is achieving remarkable success. Notably, even after seizures of invasive fish by the Fisheries Department, fishermen warmly felicitated the Assistant and Deputy Commissioners of Fisheries. They also extended a grand welcome to us, expressing appreciation for BNHS's vision.

Mrs Swati, a fisherwoman who has built a strong riverine network and provided employment to 25 fishermen, contributed native species as brooder stock. She was felicitated for her efforts, along with others addressing invasive species in different ways. Meanwhile, the BNHS team has converted existing hatcheries to produce fingerlings of native species, strengthening conservation and promoting sustainable fisheries in the region.

In the third week of April, I arrived at Kishangarh Airport near Ajmer, Rajasthan. It soon became clear why an airport exists in this relatively small town – Kishangarh is a major hub for marble trade and mining-based industries. As I travelled onward, the Aravalli Hills appeared fragile yet enduring, standing in quiet contrast to the surrounding landscape. I then reached the expansive over 500-acre campus of the Central University of Rajasthan (CURAJ), where I was welcomed by the sights and sounds of grassland wildlife, such as francolins, jackals, nilgai, and wild cats roaming freely. At CURAJ, I interacted with Vice Chancellor Dr Anand Bhalerao

and several Heads of Departments engaged in high-quality field research on the Aravalli region. I spent time in the School of Earth Sciences, exploring facilities ranging from HPLC laboratories to remote sensing and GIS units. I also met Master's and Ph.D. scholars working on critical topics such as protected area networks, ecological connectivity, ecosystem sensitivity, river systems, and the spread of invasive species.

Despite this rich knowledge base, policymakers often rely on a limited number of institutions in Dehradun for scientific advice. In contrast, BNHS has taken a forward-looking step by signing an MoU with CURAJ, opening avenues for collaborative programmes in the coming year.

I also visited the Forest Department headquarters in Jaipur to discuss ongoing and future projects with PCCF (Wildlife) Mr Arun Prasad. During this visit, I met Mr Harshvardhan, a BNHS Life Member who has been contributing to conservation efforts in Rajasthan for over four decades.

At Sariska Tiger Reserve, I learned that the Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH), earlier proposed for deletion, has now been reaffirmed as part of both the Sanctuary and the CTH through a notification dated November 11, 2025. I also observed a healthy sambar population, a positive indicator for tiger conservation. The Sariska Tiger Reserve, led by Mr Sangram Singh Katiyar and DFO Mr Abhimanyu Saharan, is effectively managing the resettlement of the Gujjar community.

On my return, the Hon'ble Governor confirmed our appointment, allowing us to meet and brief him on BNHS's priorities in Rajasthan. I also visited Poddar School and Rajasthan University, where I engaged with students, staff, and trustees, strengthening academic and community connections.

I am pleased to share that the long-awaited book *MAMMALS OF INDIA* by Drs A.J.T. Johnsingh and P.O. Nameer has finally been announced. If you have not yet reserved your copy, you can do so now at a special discounted price: https://shop.bnhs.org/product_details/341

The release of captive bred vultures in Assam has been a significant milestone for BNHS. Most of the released birds are adapting well to their new environment, though a few continue to face challenges.

A migratory wild Himalayan Griffon Vulture (HGV), first sighted in Melghat on February 3, 2026, spent some days with the released birds, before departing on March 28, 2026, is an encouraging sign of integration.

While writing this, I received the sad news of the passing of Mr Jamshed P. Irani on April 28, 2026. A gifted artist admired by Dr Sálím Ali, whose books he illustrated, and a valued supporter of BNHS, he will be deeply missed.

If you are not already following BNHS on social media, I encourage you to do so for regular updates.

Finally, I invite you to explore the BNHS Blog (<http://blog.bnhs.org>) for more field stories and insights. Contributions in any language are welcome. Academic institutions are also encouraged to subscribe to JBNHS (<https://bnhsjournal.in/index.php/bnhs/ga>), one of India's oldest scientific journals, which can support NAAC accreditation.

If you have not yet completed the Yearbook form for Life Members, you can do so here: <https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>

For assistance, feel free to reach out:

Central Marketing: cmd@bnhs.org; Membership: membership@bnhs.org; Programmes: programmes@bnhs.org

Conservation Education Centre: cec-mumbai@bnhs.org

For event reservations and content submissions, please send your photos and write-ups to Mr Gopi Naidu at g.naidu@bnhs.org.

Thank you for staying connected with us. For any suggestions or queries, I am always available at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe

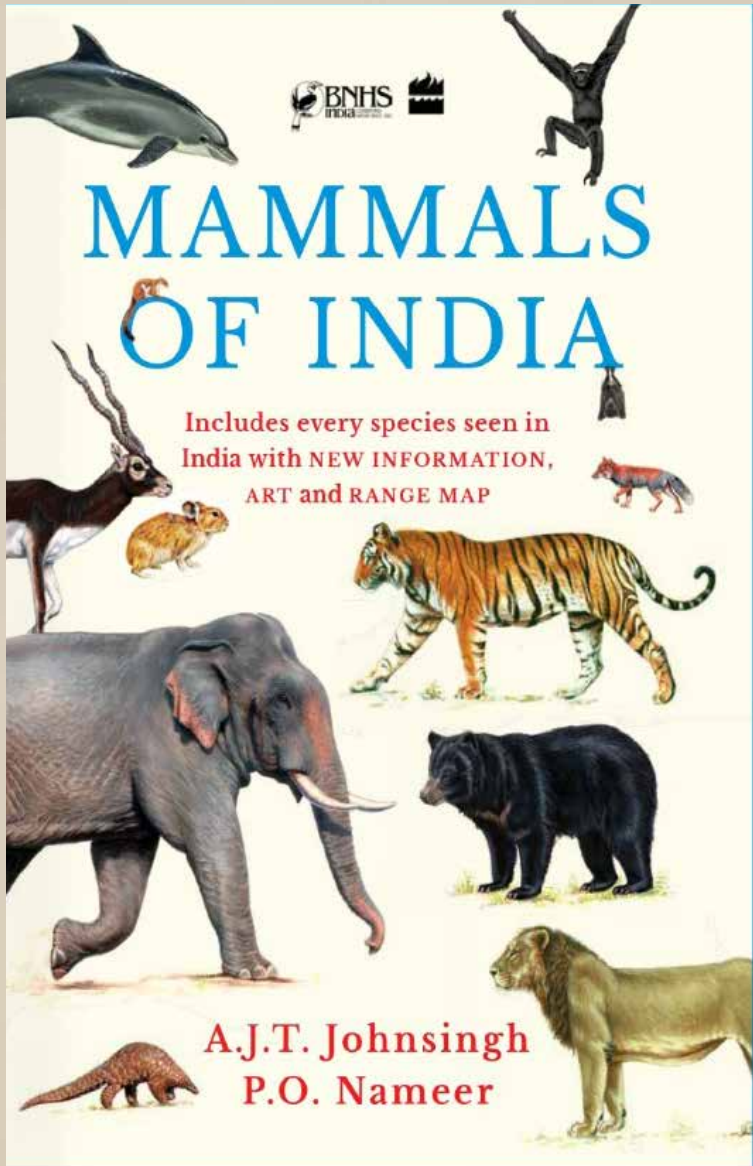
Director

Bombay Natural History Society

MAMMALS OF INDIA

(Co-published by BNHS & HarperCollins)

By A.J.T. Johnsingh and P.O. Nameer



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BNHS Scientist Wins Prestigious Whitley Award 2026 for Indian Skimmer Conservation

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is proud to announce that its scientist, Parveen Shaikh, has been honoured with the 2026 Whitley Award, a globally recognised prize for grassroots conservation leadership. The award will support the expansion of her pioneering, community-led efforts to protect the endangered Indian Skimmer across key river systems in northern India.

India holds over 90% of the world's Indian Skimmer population, estimated at around 3,000 individuals. These striking birds, known for their bright orange bills and unique fishing behaviour, depend on fragile sandbar habitats that are increasingly threatened by changing river flows and human disturbance.

Parveen's flagship initiative, 'Guardians of the Skimmer', has already demonstrated remarkable success along the Chambal River. By engaging and training local community members as nest guardians, the project has improved nest survival rates from 14% to 27%, while boosting the local population from around 400 birds in 2017 to nearly 1,000 in recent years.

With support from the Whitley Award, BNHS will now expand this model to Prayagraj, at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. This region presents new challenges, including intense human activity, pilgrimage-related pressures, boat traffic, and pollution. The initiative will involve real-time monitoring, predator-proof measures, and continued community engagement to safeguard breeding sites.

This recognition highlights BNHS's commitment to science-driven, community-based conservation and underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in protecting India's unique riverine biodiversity. ■



BNHS Meets Rajasthan Governor to Advance Conservation of Endangered Grassland Birds

In a significant step towards strengthening conservation efforts for India's threatened grassland species, the BNHS team recently met with Shri Haribhau Kisanrao Bagde, Honourable Governor of Rajasthan, in Jaipur. The meeting provided an important platform to discuss urgent conservation priorities and explore collaborative solutions for safeguarding critically endangered bird species, particularly the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican, which face severe threats from habitat loss and other emerging challenges.

BNHS Director Mr Kishor Rithe, highlighted the conservation status of these two iconic species facing severe population declines. The discussion focused on the multiple pressures affecting these birds, including habitat loss due to agricultural expansion, climate change, and infrastructure development that fragments and disrupts their natural ecosystems. A key emphasis of the meeting was the need for coordinated, landscape-level conservation strategies that extend beyond state boundaries. This is particularly important for the Lesser Florican, a migratory species that moves seasonally between Rajasthan and the Deccan region, including Maharashtra. BNHS underscored the importance of interstate collaboration to ensure protection across its breeding and wintering habitats.

The team also presented a detailed overview of the ongoing Conservation Breeding Programme for the Lesser Florican at Gorewada Zoo. The initiative focuses on strengthening population recovery through a combination of captive breeding, habitat restoration, and community engagement. These efforts aim to create a sustainable pathway for the long-term survival of the species.

A highlight of the meeting was the inauguration of the book "Harbinger of the Monsoon: The Lesser Florican" by the Honourable Governor. The publication seeks to raise awareness about the species and draw attention to its ecological significance within India's grassland ecosystems.

The Governor expressed strong support for enhanced interstate cooperation and emphasised the importance of a unified conservation approach. Protecting the Lesser Florican across its migratory range, he noted, will be critical to reversing its decline and restoring ecological balance. ■



CURAJ Signs MoU with BNHS to Strengthen Biodiversity Conservation and Research

In a significant step towards advancing biodiversity conservation and research in India, the Central University of Rajasthan (CURAJ) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Mumbai. The partnership brings together academic excellence and field-based conservation expertise to build stronger, more impactful environmental initiatives.

Signed on behalf of BNHS by Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, the agreement reflects a shared commitment to fostering collaboration in research, training, and academic exchange. With a legacy spanning over 143 years, BNHS brings deep experience in ecological monitoring and conservation practice, while CURAJ contributes robust academic infrastructure, modern laboratories, and a dynamic research ecosystem.

The collaboration outlines a wide range of joint activities. These include laboratory-based research in environmental toxicology, such as detecting Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) in livestock tissues using High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC), as well as studies on bioaccumulation, soil health, and biodiversity assessment. Complementing this, field-based initiatives will focus on ecological surveys, habitat restoration, and long-term monitoring of flora and fauna across Rajasthan and other regions.

A key focus of the MoU is capacity building. The partnership will create opportunities for student internships, hands-on training, and skill development in conservation science and environmental management. It also aims to encourage knowledge exchange through seminars, conferences, and joint publications, ensuring that research findings contribute to wider scientific understanding and inform policy.

Speaking on the collaboration, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Anand Bhalerao emphasised its broader significance: "This partnership is not just an agreement, it is a shared commitment to protect our environment and learn from it. When institutions come together with a clear purpose, the impact becomes much greater. I am confident that our students and researchers will gain valuable experience and, together with BNHS, contribute meaningfully towards a more sustainable future."

This partnership is expected to enhance both research outcomes and on-ground conservation impact. By bridging academic knowledge with practical experience, the CURAJ–BNHS collaboration aims to address pressing environmental challenges and contribute to India's long-term vision for sustainable development. ■



BNHS Explores Collaboration with Poddar Group for Campus Biodiversity Planning

Continuing its efforts to expand partnerships with educational institutions, the BNHS recently held a productive meeting with the Chairperson of the Poddar Group of Institutions in Jaipur. The discussion centred on exploring collaborative opportunities in biodiversity conservation and environmental sustainability.

The interaction highlighted a strong interest from the Poddar Group in working closely with BNHS to promote ecological awareness and implement meaningful conservation initiatives. Both sides discussed the potential for joint projects that integrate scientific knowledge with on-ground action, creating a model for environmentally responsible campuses.

A key outcome of the meeting was a formal request from the Poddar Group for BNHS to assist in developing a comprehensive biodiversity management plan for its upcoming university campus. The proposed plan will focus on embedding sustainable practices into the campus design and development process, ensuring that ecological considerations are prioritised from the outset.

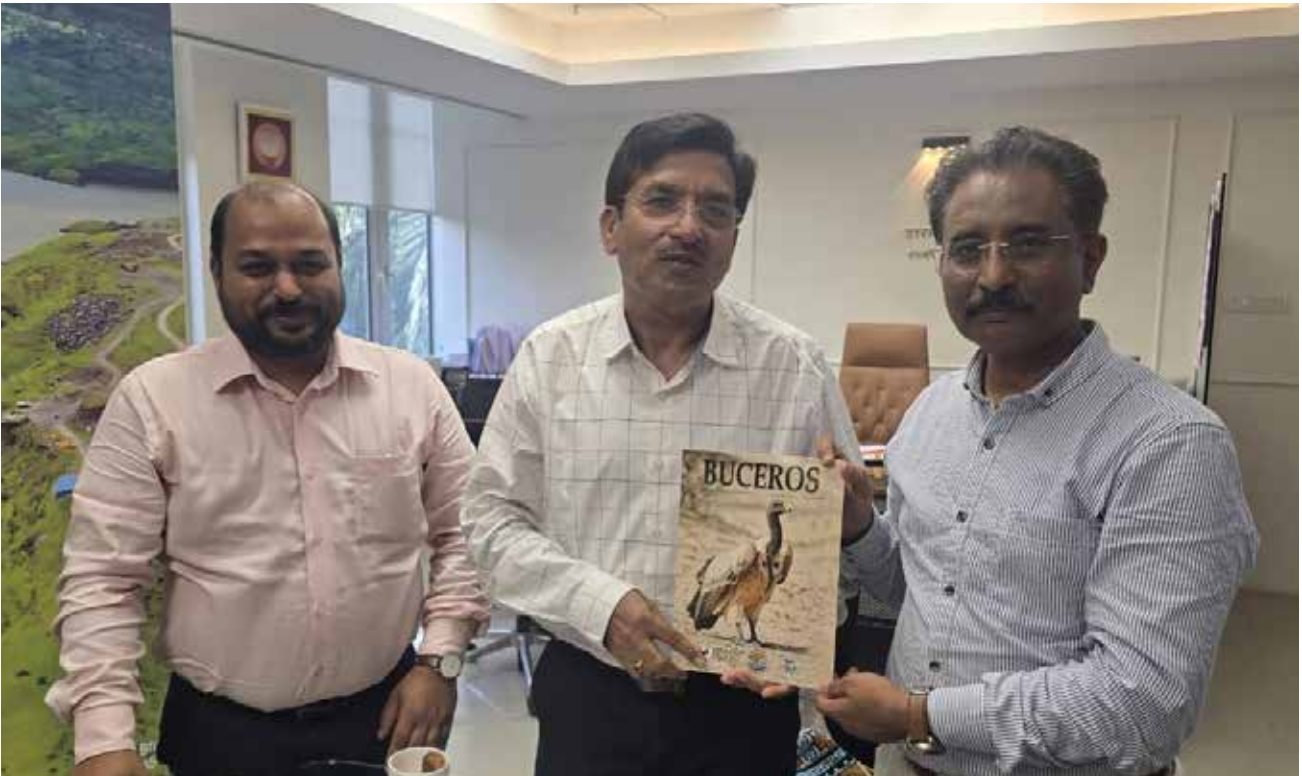
The initiative is expected to contribute to long-term biodiversity conservation while fostering environmental stewardship among students and the wider community. ■



BNHS Partners with University of Rajasthan to Support Urban Birdlife

BNHS recently visited the Department of Zoology at the University of Rajasthan. The visit focused on promoting simple, community-driven actions to support birdlife in urban environments. During the interaction, the BNHS team met with Dr Pratap Chand Mali, Head of the Zoology Department, and jointly initiated a campus-based project to improve conditions for local bird populations. As part of the initiative, the BNHS Director and Dr Mali placed terracotta earthen pots across the university campus to provide accessible water sources for birds.

The event saw active participation from students of the Zoology Department, who engaged enthusiastically in the activity. Beyond its immediate impact, the initiative also served as a platform to raise awareness about the importance of supporting urban biodiversity and adopting simple conservation practices. ■



BNHS Engages with Maharashtra Government on Ujani Wetland Restoration

In a proactive step towards wetland conservation, BNHS Director, Mr Kishor Rithe and Dr Unmesh Katwate, along with representatives of local fishermen's associations, recently engaged with the Government of Maharashtra to highlight the urgent need for ecological restoration of the Ujani wetland.

The BNHS team presented its ongoing work on Ujani wetland ecorestoration to Mr Sanjay Belsare, Secretary, Irrigation, Government of Maharashtra. A major concern highlighted during the discussion was the discharge of untreated sewage into the wetland, which continues to threaten water quality and biodiversity. BNHS emphasised the need for immediate and coordinated action to address this issue and prevent further ecological degradation.

The meeting also addressed challenges faced by local fishing communities. The widespread use of fine mosquito nets by migrant fishermen has adversely impacted native fish populations and, in turn, the livelihoods of traditional fishermen. In response, the Secretary assured support for measures to curb such practices and promote sustainable fishing. ■



BNHS Engages with Forest Officials on Sariska Expansion and Conservation Opportunities

In a recent visit to the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Alwar, Rajasthan, the BNHS Director, along with the Rajasthan team, held discussions with senior forest officials to explore opportunities for collaboration and long-term conservation planning. The BNHS delegation met with Mr Sangram Singh Katiyar, Forest Director of Sariska Tiger Reserve, and Mr Abhimanyu Saharan, IFS, Deputy Chief Forest Officer. The meeting provided an opportunity to review ongoing conservation efforts and discuss future strategies for strengthening biodiversity protection in the region.

A key highlight of the discussion was the proposed expansion and rationalisation of the reserve's boundaries. The Sariska Tiger Reserve is set to increase in size from 488 sq. km to over 900 sq. km, incorporating critical tiger habitats. This move represents a significant step forward in enhancing habitat connectivity and strengthening conservation outcomes, reflecting the Rajasthan government's commitment to wildlife protection.

The dialogue also focused on approaches to sustainable habitat management, with an emphasis on safeguarding endangered species and maintaining ecological balance within the reserve. Both sides underscored the importance of collaborative efforts between research institutions and forest departments in achieving long-term conservation goals.

In addition to its importance as a tiger landscape, Sariska is also known for its population of Long-billed Vultures. Recognising this, BNHS expressed interest in initiating focused studies on these birds, further expanding its conservation and research footprint in the region. ■



BNHS Visits Siliserh Lake, Rajasthan's Newest Ramsar Site, Calls for Management Plan

As part of its ongoing efforts to support wetland conservation across India, BNHS recently visited Siliserh Lake in Alwar, Rajasthan – one of the country's newest Ramsar-designated wetlands. The visit aimed to assess the site's ecological significance and advocate for strengthened management measures.

Siliserh Lake, a human-made waterbody constructed in 1845, was designated as India's 96th Ramsar site on December 13, 2025. Spread over approximately 7 sq. km and located within the buffer zone of the Sariska Tiger Reserve, the lake plays a vital ecological and socio-economic role in this semi-arid region. The wetland supports nearly 150 species of birds and serves as an important water source for irrigation and local communities. Its recognition under the Ramsar Convention is expected to enhance conservation efforts, improve biodiversity outcomes, and strengthen climate resilience in the region.

In addition to its ecological value, Siliserh Lake also holds potential for promoting sustainable eco-tourism, contributing to local livelihoods while encouraging conservation awareness. It is now the fifth Ramsar site in Rajasthan, further highlighting the state's growing importance in wetland conservation. ■

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India's First Suckermouth Catfish Collection Centre Inaugurated at Ujani Reservoir, Maharashtra

In a landmark step towards managing invasive species and restoring freshwater ecosystems, India's first suckermouth catfish collection centre was inaugurated on April 7, 2026, at Bhigwan along the Ujani Reservoir. The initiative marks a significant advancement in efforts to address the growing ecological threat posed by invasive fish species.

Led by Dr Unmesh Katwate, Senior Scientist and Project Head, in collaboration with Shri Bharat Mallav, Chairman of the Ambika Fisheries Co-operative Society Ltd., the initiative establishes a structured system for the collection and monitoring of invasive suckermouth catfish. The event brought together key stakeholders from across sectors, including BNHS Director Dr Kishor Rithe, representatives from the Fisheries Department, Cipla Foundation, the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC), and members of local fishing communities. Their participation reflects a shared commitment to tackling invasive species and protecting native biodiversity.

The newly established centre provides critical infrastructure for coordinated action. It enables regular collection of invasive catfish, supports data-driven monitoring, and strengthens engagement with local fishermen, who play a central role in the initiative through the Ambika Fisheries Co-operative Society. By creating a baseline system to track invasive biomass, the initiative lays the groundwork for long-term ecological monitoring and adaptive management.

The removal of invasive suckermouth catfish is expected to reduce pressure on native fish populations, contributing to the recovery of aquatic biodiversity in the Ujani Reservoir. More importantly, it signals a growing recognition of invasive species management as a conservation priority. Through such partnerships and on-ground interventions, BNHS continues to support science-based solutions that balance ecological restoration with community livelihoods. ■



BNHS Conducts Comprehensive Survey at Ujani Reservoir, Flags Emerging Ecological Concerns

On April 7, 2026, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) team undertook a detailed boat survey across the Ujani Reservoir to assess the health of this critical freshwater ecosystem. The survey was led by Dr Unmesh Katwate and BNHS Director Dr Kishor Rithe, with participation from a multidisciplinary team of researchers and local stakeholders.

The exercise combined bird monitoring, water quality assessment, and bathymetric profiling to provide a comprehensive understanding of the reservoir's current condition. Observations from the field indicated a concerning decline in migratory bird populations, alongside signs of deteriorating water quality—both pointing to increasing ecological stress in the system.

The survey also documented harmful fishing practices, particularly the use of fine mosquito nets. These nets indiscriminately capture juvenile fish, disrupting natural recruitment processes and posing a long-term threat to fish populations and associated livelihoods.

The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted conservation action. Key priorities include regulating and phasing out destructive fishing methods, strengthening native fish conservation breeding programmes, and promoting community-led stewardship of the reservoir.

This assessment highlights the importance of integrated, science-based monitoring in identifying emerging threats and informing timely interventions. Through such efforts, BNHS continues to work towards restoring ecological balance while supporting sustainable livelihoods dependent on freshwater ecosystems. ■



BNHS Reviews Native Fish Conservation Efforts at Ambika Fisheries Hatchery

As part of its ongoing work at the Ujani Reservoir, the BNHS team visited the Ambika Fisheries Hatchery in Bhigwan on April 7, 2026, to assess progress under the native fish conservation breeding programme. During the visit, Dr Unmesh Katwate, Senior Scientist and Project Head, shared updates on the initiative, noting that 12 native fish species have already been collected. Preparations are currently underway for their systematic propagation, positioning the hatchery as an important centre for conserving and restoring native fish diversity in the region.

At the same time, discussions highlighted growing challenges. Shri Bharat Mallav, who leads the hatchery, pointed to the increasing difficulty in sourcing native fish species, attributing their decline largely to the spread of invasive species in the Ujani Reservoir. This trend poses a significant threat to local biodiversity and the sustainability of traditional fisheries. The visit reinforced the urgent need to strengthen conservation breeding efforts as a key strategy for safeguarding native fish populations. ■



Monitoring Invasive Species: Early Trends from Ujani Catfish Collection Centre

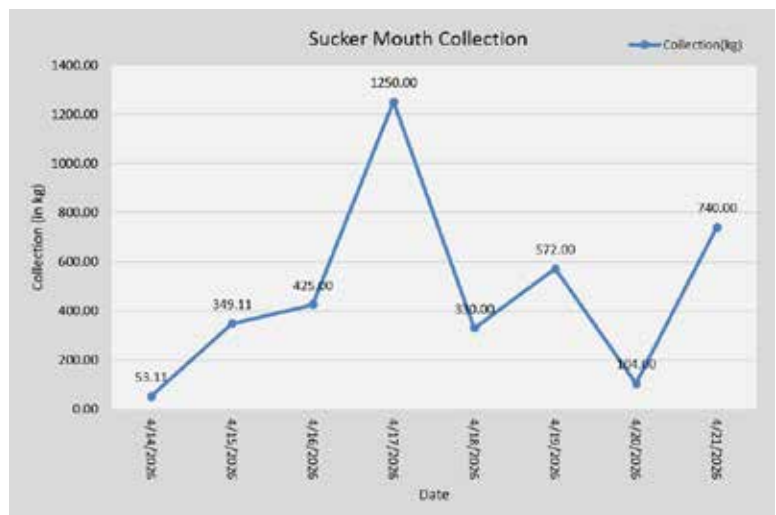
Ongoing monitoring at the newly established suckermouth catfish collection centre in Bhigwan is beginning to generate valuable insights into the scale of invasive species presence in the Ujani Reservoir. Systematic data recorded over multiple days in April 2026 highlights significant variation in the daily biomass of catfish removed.

Reported daily collections ranged from modest quantities to substantial volumes, with recorded weights of 53.11 kg, 349.11 kg, 425 kg, 1,250 kg, 330 kg, 572 kg, 104 kg, and 740 kg. The highest single-day removal—1,250 kg—was recorded on April 17, while the lowest, 53.11 kg, was documented on the first day of collection.

These figures underscore the extent of invasive suckermouth catfish dominance in the reservoir and reinforce the urgency of sustained removal efforts. The variability in daily catch also reflects changing patterns in fishing activity and species distribution, offering important insights for future management.

Importantly, the establishment of a structured system for daily quantification marks a significant step forward. By generating consistent, measurable data, the initiative enables more informed decision-making and supports adaptive management strategies aimed at restoring ecological balance.

Through continued monitoring and collaborative action, BNHS and its partners are working to better understand and address the impacts of invasive species, while supporting the recovery of native fish populations and the long-term health of the Ujani ecosystem.





Recognising Community Champions in Conservation at Ujani Reservoir, Maharashtra

Community participation remains at the heart of successful conservation efforts, and this was evident during the recent inauguration event at Bhigwan, Ujani Reservoir, on April 7, 2026. Alongside institutional initiatives, a special moment was dedicated to recognising the contributions of local stakeholders who play a vital role in on-ground conservation. A team of fishermen led by Mrs Swati Vijay Kewate and Mr Vijay Kewate was felicitated for their sustained efforts in supporting native fish collection and breeding activities. Their work has significantly contributed to advancing the objectives of the BNHS-led project in the region.

Such acknowledgements not only celebrate individual contributions, but also reinforce the role of local communities as key partners in conservation. By supporting and empowering these stakeholders, BNHS continues to promote inclusive approaches that strengthen both biodiversity conservation and community stewardship



BNHS Team Visits Tata Power Mahseer Hatchery to Strengthen Freshwater Conservation Efforts in Maharashtra

As part of its Wetland Ecorestoration and Fisheries Development Programme, the BNHS Ujani project team undertook a field visit to the Tata Power Company's Mahseer Conservation Hatchery at Walvan, Lonavala, on April 24, 2026. The visit aimed to build technical capacity and draw insights for ongoing freshwater conservation initiatives.

The hatchery is dedicated to the conservation breeding of Mahseer (*Tor spp.*), a key freshwater bioindicator species that has seen significant population declines due to habitat degradation, illegal fishing, and the introduction of exotic species. The facility demonstrates a well-established, science-based approach to conservation aquaculture.

During the visit, the team observed several innovative practices, including broodstock attraction through reservoir-based systems, spawning stimulation using artificial waterfalls, and structured juvenile rearing over a period of four to six months. The hatchery currently produces approximately 4–5 lakh hatchlings per cycle and has generated over 15 million hatchlings over the past five decades. Maintaining optimal water quality is central to the hatchery's success, with parameters such as pH, total dissolved solids (TDS), and oxygen levels carefully regulated to ensure healthy breeding conditions. These practices provide a strong model for integrating ecological principles into aquaculture systems.

The visit, led by Dr Unmesh Katwate and supported by team members and local collaborators, offered valuable learning opportunities directly relevant to planned Mahseer breeding and restocking efforts in the Ujani Reservoir and the Bhima River. ■



New Blue-tailed Bee-eater Colonies Protected in Tungabhadra Backwaters, Karnataka

Recent field surveys by the BNHS, in collaboration with Team Green HBH and the Karnataka Forest Department, have led to the identification and protection of two significant breeding colonies of Blue-tailed Bee-eaters in the Tungabhadra backwaters. The surveys recorded approximately 150 active nests near Muthugur Gram Panchayat and around 170 nests near Adavi Ananda Devanahalli, highlighting the region's importance as a breeding habitat for ground-nesting birds.

At the same time, the team identified potential threats to these colonies. Ongoing NAREGA-related earthwork activities were observed near the first site, while agricultural disturbances were noted in the vicinity of the second colony. Recognising the urgency of the situation, BNHS and its partners initiated immediate engagement with local authorities.

A formal request was submitted to the Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) to safeguard the nesting habitats. Following a joint inspection involving the PDO, the Deputy Range Forest Officer (DRFO), and the BNHS team, it was confirmed that no further disruptive activities would be permitted in the identified nesting areas. By combining field research with responsive governance, BNHS continues to play a vital role in protecting critical habitats and ensuring the survival of key bird species. ■



Captive-bred White-rumped Vulture Successfully Re-released at Bandipur, Karnataka

A captive-bred White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* was successfully re-released into the wild in April 2026, following a carefully coordinated inter-state effort involving multiple agencies. Originally bred at the conservation facility in Pinjore, Haryana, the bird was first released in Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra. Over time, it dispersed across Telangana and eventually reached Karnataka, where it was rescued in Kalaburagi district by the Forest Department after being found in distress.

Acting on the guidance of the Chief Wildlife Warden of Karnataka, officials identified Bandipur Tiger Reserve as a suitable habitat for re-release. The translocation process began on April 5, 2026, led by Shri Sumit Patil, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kalaburagi, along with Mr Vijay Kumar, Range Forest Officer, Chittapur, and their team. The operation was supported by BNHS, with Ramesh H., Junior Project Fellow, accompanying the effort to ensure adherence to scientific protocols.

The bird was transported following established safety and handling guidelines to minimise stress and ensure its well-being. Upon arrival at Bandipur, consultations were held with local forest officials and researchers to identify an appropriate release site. With guidance from Shri Prabakaran S, IFS, the vulture was released near the Bandipur–Mudumalai landscape, an area known to support an active population of wild vultures. This strategic selection increases the likelihood of successful reintegration into the wild.

This operation highlights the importance of coordinated conservation action across states and institutions. By combining scientific management, field-level expertise, and administrative support, such efforts contribute meaningfully to the recovery of critically endangered vulture populations in India. ■



White-rumped Vulture Rescued and Rehabilitated in Karnataka

A captive-bred White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, identified by Ring No. X96, is currently under care and observation following its recovery in Karnataka. The bird was originally released at Tadoba Tiger Reserve and was later found in Koppal district earlier this month.

Acting on the guidance of the District Forest Officer (DFO), Koppal, the vulture was safely transferred to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Zoological Park in Hampi for monitoring and care. A joint assessment was subsequently carried out by teams from the BNHS and Team Green HBH. Observations indicated that the vulture is active, alert, and in good health, displaying natural avoidance behaviour, an important trait for eventual release into the wild.

Zoo officials reported that the bird is being provided with a daily diet of approximately 500 grams of meat, along with initial hydration support through Oral Rehydration Solutions (ORS) and other fluids. Weighing 4.1 kg, the vulture falls within the ideal range for release, based on standard conservation guidelines.

During the visit, the BNHS team also suggested improvements to enclosure management to enhance the bird's comfort and well-being. These included the installation of an appropriate perch and better water availability to help reduce heat stress. Discussions are ongoing with zoo authorities regarding the next steps, including potential release options, necessary legal procedures, and the possibility of transferring the bird to BNHS for further conservation action. ■



BNHS Rescues Injured Vulture in Madhya Pradesh

A recent rescue in Bhopal has brought renewed attention to the growing threat that kite strings pose to birdlife, particularly vulnerable vulture species. On April 11, 2026, an Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* was rescued by a local NGO and brought to Van Vihar National Park, Madhya Pradesh, after suffering a severe wing injury caused by kite-string entanglement.

The bird was found in a weakened state, unable to stand due to prolonged trauma and starvation. Its left wing showed extensive tissue damage and infection – injuries commonly associated with synthetic and glass-coated kite strings, or manja, which can cut deeply into flesh and restrict movement. For vultures, already under pressure from declining populations, such injuries can be life-threatening. As key scavengers, vultures play an essential role in maintaining ecosystem health by removing carcasses and reducing the spread of disease.

Following initial care, the vulture was transferred to the BNHS's Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Bhopal. The veterinary team initiated immediate treatment, including antibiotics to control infection, pain management, and carefully monitored feeding. Over the next ten days, the bird showed steady improvement, gradually regaining strength and activity. Given the severity of the wing injury, surgical intervention is now being planned in consultation with veterinary experts. After surgery, the bird will undergo a period of rehabilitation at the centre, with the aim of eventual release back into the wild once it regains full flight capability.

This case highlights the broader conservation challenge posed by kite-string injuries, particularly during peak flying seasons. It also underscores the important role of BNHS and its Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres, not only in breeding endangered vultures but also in rescuing, treating, and rehabilitating injured wild individuals.

Addressing this issue will require continued awareness and responsible practices, including the use of safer alternatives to harmful kite strings. Such measures can significantly reduce risks to birds. Each successful rescue and recovery contributes to strengthening wild populations and supports ongoing efforts to conserve India's threatened vulture species. ■

Strengthening Vulture Conservation Efforts at VCBC Rani, Assam

The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) at Rani continues to play a pivotal role in advancing vulture conservation across Assam, combining research, monitoring, and community engagement to support the recovery of these critically endangered birds.



Building Awareness and Outreach in Kamrup district: VCBC-Rani remains an important hub for information and awareness on vulture conservation. In April 2026, the centre hosted several visitors, engaging them in discussions on threats faced by vultures and the importance of community participation in conservation and reintroduction efforts. Such interactions help extend conservation awareness beyond the centre, as visitors carry these insights back to their communities.



Post-release Monitoring of Reintroduced Vultures: As part of ongoing reintroduction efforts, regular monitoring of released vultures is being conducted using GPS tracking through satellite tags. Teams from VCBC travel across Assam and Meghalaya to track movement, habitat use, and foraging behaviour of these birds. This field-based monitoring provides critical data to assess the success of reintroduction programmes and identify emerging threats in their environment.

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Expanding Conservation Education: Awareness and advocacy programmes under the Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ) initiative were actively carried out throughout the month. In Biswanath district, outreach sessions led by BNHS biologist Mr Gitartha Borah reached around 200 participants at Jinjia Mahabir Higher Secondary School (93) and Balichang Higher Secondary School (107). These programmes aim to build awareness among students and local communities about the ecological importance of vultures and the need for their protection.



Community Engagement Initiatives: Efforts to strengthen community participation continued in Sivasagar district, where BNHS staff conducted a series of meetings in villages such as Dhaibari and Singioni. These sessions focused on encouraging local involvement in conservation actions and promoting awareness about the role of vultures in maintaining ecological balance.

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Promoting Vulture-safe Veterinary Practices: Engagement with the veterinary sector remains a key component of conservation efforts. In March 2026, an advocacy meeting was held with Veterinary Officer, Dr Sivasankar Taye of Mathurapur, Charaideo district, to promote the use of vulture-safe Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). Such initiatives are critical in addressing one of the primary threats to vulture populations.

Strengthening Collaboration with Forest Departments: Regular coordination with forest officials continues to support effective conservation action on the ground. Advocacy meetings with Range Forest Officers across Moran and Biswanath Wildlife Division focused on strengthening collaboration, enhancing capacity, and promoting training of frontline staff in vulture conservation and rescue operations.

Vulture Breeding Success: Twenty nestlings have been bred at VCBC, Assam this season. Ten White-rumped vulture nestlings have been ringed and marked with microchip. These young birds are ready to fledge out. The remaining nestlings are still young and are being cared for by the parents.

Through these integrated efforts, spanning research, education, and partnerships, VCBC Rani continues to make significant contributions to the conservation and recovery of India's vulture populations. ■





BNHS supporting Jharkhand forest department in Conservation breeding of Vultures

As part of its ongoing efforts to expand vulture conservation initiatives across India, Dr Sachin Ranade from VCBC-Assam recently completed a three-day visit to Jharkhand. During the visit, he reviewed an existing facility and provided recommendations to help develop it into a functional VCBC. The suggested improvements aim to strengthen its capacity to support conservation breeding, rehabilitation, and related research activities.

Dr Ranade also visited Koderma district to evaluate its suitability for future vulture reintroduction programmes. Preliminary assessments indicate that the region holds promise as a potential release site. The visit included interactions with Mr Awanish Kumar, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Mr Ravi Ranjan (PCCF WL & CWLW), Mr S.R. Natesha (CCF), Mr Awanish Chowdhury (DFO HO), Mr Ajinkya Bankar (DFO), and Mr Soumitra Shukla, DFO Koderma. ■



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Earth Day 2026: BNHS Engages Young Minds Through “Earth’s Living Stories” in Mumbai

Marking Earth Day 2026, the BNHS hosted an outreach programme titled “Earth’s Living Stories” at Hornbill House in Mumbai. Organised by the Natural History Collections Department in collaboration with the Children’s Museum of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS), the session introduced young participants to biodiversity through interactive, specimen-based learning.

Held on April 22, the programme brought together 74 participants, including children from early learners to teenagers, along with parents, guardians, and faculty members. The group was coordinated through an NGO in partnership with CSMVS, ensuring a structured and inclusive experience.

The session opened with an introduction to BNHS, outlining its legacy and role in conservation. Participants were then divided into smaller groups and guided through curated learning stations within the Collections Department. Each station explored a different faunal group, including insects, with a focus on butterflies, herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians), mammals, and avian specimens from BNHS’s taxidermy collection.

The displays featured species across a range of conservation categories, from Extinct in the wild to Least Concern, helping participants understand biodiversity and the varying levels of conservation concern. Facilitators encouraged interaction and discussion, explaining ecological roles, conservation challenges, and scientific insights in an accessible way. A structured rotation ensured that all groups engaged with each theme.

The programme concluded with a collective environmental pledge, with participants committing to adopt sustainable practices and promote conservation awareness. Copies of BUCEROS, BNHS’s avian ecology newsletter published in collaboration with the Environmental Information, Awareness, Capacity Building and Livelihood Programme (EIACP), were also distributed.

Through such initiatives, BNHS continues to use its natural history collections to create engaging learning experiences that foster awareness and inspire future conservation action. ■

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BNHS-CEC Engages Students and Communities Through Nature-based Learning

The Bombay Natural History Society's Conservation Education Centre (CEC) continues to inspire a deeper connection with nature through a series of engaging programmes. From school outreach to corporate engagement and hands-on learning experiences, these initiatives brought together diverse audiences to explore biodiversity and conservation in meaningful ways.



Nature Trails for Schools: The CEC hosted 76 students and nine teachers from JBCN High School for an interactive nature trail on March 23. Participants explored the BNHS Reserve, observing insects, butterflies, and birds while learning about biodiversity and ecological patterns. The experience offered a lively introduction to nature through direct observation and guided interpretation.

A similar session was conducted for students of Diamond Jubilee High School on March 27, where the focus was on plant diversity. Students learned about plant structure, seasonal cycles, and different forest types, gaining a better understanding of the ecological role of vegetation. ■

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Community Engagement with RPG Foundation: On March 28, BNHS collaborated with the RPG Foundation to host an interactive environmental stall as part of a larger outreach initiative. The stall featured hands-on activities such as eco-printing and a ‘bird beak game’, helping participants understand concepts like bird adaptations in an engaging manner. The event saw participation from over 500 individuals, reflecting strong community interest in environmental learning. ■



Courses for the Upcoming Academic Year: The CEC has also announced admissions for its 2026–2027 courses, which include programmes in herpetology, butterfly studies, botany, ornithology, and a leadership course in biodiversity conservation. These courses aim to build foundational knowledge and practical skills in conservation science. ■

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CSR Engagements and Experiential Learning: On April 11, the CEC organised a CSR Nature Trail and eco-painting workshop for 104 employees from BlackRock. Participants explored plant diversity during a guided trail and later engaged in a creative session using natural pigments to paint cotton bags, highlighting the link between sustainability and everyday practices.

Another CSR Nature Trail was conducted on April 18 at the Bhandup Pumping Station for employees of Aprava Energy Ltd. This session focused on mangrove ecosystems and their ecological importance, including their role in supporting birdlife and maintaining coastal balance. Participants also learned about the significance of Thane Creek as a flamingo habitat and a key migratory site. ■



Immersive Learning Through Wildlife Observation: The Wildlife Hide Activity, held on April 12, 18, and 19, offered participants from BNHS courses a unique opportunity to observe birds in their natural habitat from concealed hides. Species such as the Black-naped Monarch, White-browed Bulbul, and Rufous Woodpecker were recorded, providing valuable insights into bird behaviour with minimal disturbance.

Supporting Urban Biodiversity: On April 20, Bisleri International Pvt. Ltd. contributed compost to the CEC's butterfly garden as part of its Earth Day initiative. The activity highlighted the role of sustainable waste management in supporting urban ecosystems and enhancing habitat quality for pollinators.

All programmes were coordinated by the CEC team, with Education Officer Kimaya Gajare and BNHS naturalists leading various sessions. Through these diverse initiatives, BNHS continues to promote environmental awareness, hands-on learning, and community participation, reinforcing the importance of connecting people with nature to build a more sustainable future. ■



BNHS Connects Students with Wildlife at Tadoba

The BNHS, in collaboration with the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), has successfully conducted a large-scale environmental education initiative titled “Chala Mazya Tabobala”, bringing students closer to nature through guided jungle safaris.

Implemented between November 20, 2025 and April 30, 2026, the programme reached an impressive 159 schools across Chandrapur district. A total of 4,190 students and 323 teachers participated, including those from primary, upper primary, high schools, ashram schools, and special schools located in and around the buffer zones of the reserve.

The safaris were conducted through key core areas of the reserve, including the Moharli, Khutwanda, and Kolara gates. These visits offered students a rare opportunity to observe wildlife in its natural habitat, creating a meaningful and immersive learning experience.

During the safaris, participants encountered iconic species such as tigers, leopards, and sloth bears, along with a variety of herbivores. They also observed crocodiles at Teliya Lake and Tadoba Lake, adding to the richness of the experience.

The initiative has been widely appreciated by both students and teachers, emerging as a favourite component of BNHS’s education programmes. By combining experiential learning with conservation messaging, the programme has helped foster a deeper understanding of wildlife and the importance of protecting natural ecosystems. ■



Over 70 Bird Species Recorded During April Bird Count at Sanjay Gandhi National Park

The BNHS, along with its members and volunteers, conducted the April Bird Count at Sanjay Gandhi National Park on April 26, 2026. The single-day survey recorded over 70 bird species, highlighting the rich avifaunal diversity of this important urban green space.

Participants documented a variety of species during the count, including the Brown Hawk-Owl (also known as the Brown Boobook), Red Spurfowl, Indian Cuckooshrike, Loten's Sunbird (Long-billed Sunbird), and four different species of woodpeckers. These observations reflect the ecological significance of the park as a habitat for diverse birdlife.

The bird count is part of the ongoing 'SGNP Bird Monitoring Programme', a citizen science initiative launched by BNHS in February 2021. The programme aims to systematically monitor bird populations across Sanjay Gandhi National Park and the Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Conducted on a monthly basis, the counts bring together the Forest Department, BNHS members, birdwatchers, and volunteers to contribute to long-term data collection and conservation efforts. This collaborative approach not only generates valuable scientific data but also encourages public participation in biodiversity monitoring. ■

You can visit www.bnhs.org or email programmes@bnhs.org to take part in the next count. ■



Grassland Loss in Northern Karnataka Raises Urgent Conservation Concerns

Native grasslands in northern Karnataka, once widely regarded as “wastelands,” are now facing rapid transformation due to expanding urbanisation and infrastructure development. This shift is leading to increasing habitat fragmentation and loss, posing a serious threat to the region’s biodiversity. A recent observation at the Aliyabad grassland near Bidar illustrates the scale of the issue. The site has historically supported important species such as the Lesser Florican, Blackbuck, and Indian Fox. However, the gradual conversion of these open landscapes into residential areas has significantly reduced available habitat, forcing wildlife to adapt to shrinking and increasingly fragmented spaces. Addressing this challenge will require a combination of sustainable land-use planning, stronger policy recognition, and active community engagement. BNHS is actively working with Bidar forest division of Karnataka to highlight the ecological value of these grasslands. Through research, advocacy, and outreach, BNHS is driving efforts to integrate grassland conservation into regional planning frameworks. Recognising grasslands as vital ecosystems, rather than wastelands, is an essential first step towards their conservation. ■



Publishing Workshop Guides Aspiring Authors Through the Writing and Publishing Journey

A publishing workshop was conducted on April 27, 2026, by Mr Ashutosh Ramgir, Business Head at Sakal Publication, to encourage learning and creative engagement of staff. The three-hour interactive session was designed to support aspiring authors and provide practical guidance on navigating the publishing world.

The workshop focused on addressing common questions faced by emerging writers and offered a comprehensive overview of the publishing process. Participants gained insights into the evolving publishing landscape, including traditional, self-publishing, and hybrid publishing models, along with the opportunities and challenges associated with each approach.

The session explored the role and responsibilities of authors beyond writing. Discussions covered collaboration with editors and publishers, promotional strategies, and ways to build meaningful engagement with readers.

The workshop served as a valuable platform to better understand the publishing ecosystem. ■



BNHS Bird Ringing Digitisation Initiative

The BNHS continues to advance long-term bird conservation research through its Bird Ringing Digitisation Project, an ambitious initiative aimed at converting more than seven-lakh historical bird ringing records into a centralised digital database.

The archive, which includes records dating back to 1927, contains invaluable information on bird migration routes, population trends, and important stop-over sites along the Central Asian Flyway. Once fully digitised, the database is expected to significantly strengthen research, monitoring, and conservation planning for migratory birds across the region.

The success of the project has been made possible through the dedicated efforts of researchers, interns, and volunteers who have worked extensively to organise and digitise decades of handwritten and physical records. Their contributions are helping preserve a critical scientific archive and making it more accessible for future generations of researchers and conservationists.

Among the contributors, researcher Rose Francis played a particularly significant role in accelerating the digitisation process. In recognition of her efforts, she was acknowledged by the Director of BNHS during the “Capacity Enhancement Workshop to Strengthen BirdLife Partners’ Ability to Implement Migratory Bird Conservation in the Central Asian Flyway” held in New Delhi from March 9–13, 2026. ■

Remembering Mr. J.P. Irani

(September 04, 1938 April 28, 2026)



We are deeply saddened to share the passing of Mr J.P. Irani, a distinguished Indian wildlife artist and Life Member of the Bombay Natural History Society.

Mr Irani was closely associated with the Society for many years, and his contributions form an integral part of its legacy. His illustrations became essential to ornithological study in India, most notably through his work for the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan by S. Dillon Ripley and Sálim Ali, as well as for The Book of Indian Birds.

His association with the Society was not merely professional, but deeply personal. When Dr Sálim Ali requested illustrations of Jerdon's and Indian coursers for outreach material to be distributed in their potential habitats, Mr Irani undertook the work pro bono. Such gestures towards the Society speak of a relationship built on mutual respect, shared purpose, and a quiet commitment to the cause of natural history.

Mr Irani possessed a rare ability to combine scientific accuracy with artistic sensitivity. Working primarily in watercolour, he captured the finest anatomical details and natural postures with remarkable precision. In an era before digital imaging, his work played a crucial role in documenting India's avian diversity, serving both researchers and birdwatchers alike.

He will be remembered as an artist who bridged science and art with humility and dedication. His work continues to educate, inspire, and guide all those who seek to understand the natural world more closely.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, colleagues, and the wider natural history community.

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