



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



JANUARY, 2024

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Dear Members,

We bring to you, our valuable members, the latest conservation newsletter of the BNHS, which is packed with updates from our field work, and the events we conduct for nature conservation.

This is our attempt to make sure you get to know about our work in real time, and that you are with us on our journey!

Twenty Jatayus released successfully in Pench and Tadoba Tiger Reserves in Maharashtra

In a significant development for vulture conservation in India, Maharashtra's Forest Department, in collaboration with the BNHS, successfully released 20 Critically Endangered vultures bred at the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre in Pinjore, Haryana, in Pench and Tadoba Tiger Reserves in Maharashtra on January 21, 2024. The vultures underwent a soft release process, housed initially in pre-release aviaries within the Pench and Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserves.

In the Pench Tiger Reserve, ten long-billed vultures were released into the pre-release aviary set up in the East Pench range, an area long known as a vulture habitat. Meanwhile, in Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, a dedicated Jatayu Conservation Project was inaugurated by Hon. Mr Sudhir Mungantiwar, Cabinet Minister for Forests, Cultural Affairs, and Fisheries of Maharashtra. The project aims to reintroduce vultures into the area, with an initial batch of ten white-rumped vultures housed in a pre-release aviary in the Botezari area of the Kolsa range. The vultures will be kept in these aviaries for around three months to acclimatize with the local conditions and to allow them to naturally meet the wild vultures before they are released into their natural habitat.

BNHS's Vulture Conservation Breeding and Research Center at Pinjore, Haryana, has been functioning since 2001. Between 1990–

2006, India witnessed a significant decline its vulture populations, primarily attributed to the widespread veterinary use of diclofenac, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), in cattle treatment, prompting urgent conservation efforts. Species like the long-billed vulture, white-backed vulture, and slender-billed vulture were classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN. To counter this decline, conservation breeding centres were established in Haryana, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal to revive vulture populations through breeding programmes.

In Pench Tiger Reserve, the release was overseen by Dr Prabhu Nath Shukla, Field Director, PTR, and Ms Pooja Limbgaonkar, Assistant Conservator of Forests, along with other forest officials and experts.

At Tadoba, the release event was graced by Mr Pravinsingh Pardeshi, President, BNHS, and CEO MITRA. Mr Shailesh Tembhurnikar (IFS), Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force), Maharashtra State, Hon. Mahip Gupta (IFS), Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Shri. Kishor Rithe, Director, BNHS were the chief guests at the event. The successful release of these vultures marks a significant step towards restoring ecological balance in the region. ■



Awareness Programme at VCBC Rani, Assam

Bharati Foundation – a local NGO, has spearheaded an initiative to expose students from rural Kamrup to the fascinating world of vultures! On 18th and 19th of January, batches of students from Sanpara High School, Dakshin Kamrup Vidyapeeth High School, Brindawati High School, Phulguri High School, Upperdani High School, and Rani High School, accompanied by their respective teachers, were briefed on vulture conservation in Assam, emphasizing

the crucial role students play in safeguarding these majestic birds.

Equipped with telescopes and binoculars, the students immersed themselves in the captivating experience of watching vultures in the wild. BNHS biologists conducted engaging interactive sessions and screened documentaries, inspiring the students with a deeper understanding of vulture conservation. The students collectively pledged to champion the cause of vulture and wildlife protection. ■



BNHS blog is live!

We are delighted to inform you that your Society has stepped into the blogging realm; the blog is live and can be accessed at: <https://blog.bnhs.org/>.

The BNHS blog, features fascinating articles on nature and biodiversity, insightful facets, and updates on conservation efforts and wildlife initiatives in regional languages, besides

English. Through this blog we aim to further exchange of thoughts and experiences, and engage in discussions via the comment sections. We envision the blog evolving into a vibrant online community dedicated to the exchange of knowledge on biodiversity and conservation, and we look forward to your participation. ■

Indian Skimmer Count

The BNHS in collaboration with Bird Count India, conducted the 4th coordinated Indian Skimmer Count in two phases: December 2023 and January 2024. The second phase of the count was conducted on 27th – 28th January 2024. As in the first phase, participants were encouraged to visit the shortlisted sites or other

potential sites of their choice where Indian Skimmers are likely to be observed. This initiative aims to bridge the knowledge gap regarding the Indian skimmer population. Over 50 participants registered for the counts, contributing valuable data. The final report will soon be available on the BNHS website. ■



Kala Ghoda Festival – 2024



BNHS Stall at the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival, Asia's largest multidisciplinary street arts festival held from January 20–28 this year, attracted numerous art and nature enthusiasts

Capacity Building Workshop on EIA and CRZ

A workshop for BNHS staff on Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) was held at the BNHS Conservation Education Centre (CEC), Mumbai on January 4 and 5, 2024. Renowned environmental lawyer Adv. Ritwick Dutta provided

guidance on relevant laws and processes, with support from Mr Debi Goenka (former Hon. Secretary, BNHS) and Mr Kishor Rithe (Director, BNHS). Expertise on the subjects was also shared by Mr Prasad Khale and Ms Shweta Bhat from the Conservation Action Trust (CAT), Mumbai.



Naturalist Training and Leadership Workshop – II

Following the conclusion of the Part I of the Naturalist Training Workshop, Part II commenced with an insightful session by Mr Pradip Patade, a senior naturalist specialising in intertidal biodiversity. This was followed by an engaging presentation by Kaivalya Varma, an outdoor expert emphasizing 'Leave No Trace' principles and outdoor ethics.

The morning session featured a forest walk led by Dr Anish Andheria, Interim Hon. Sec., BNHS, accompanied by Dilip Giri, Drashti Danani, Kiran Thumma, and Shardul Bajikar. The group walked along the Pongam slope towards the Vihar Lake, discovering leopard scrape marks and encountering barking deer along the route. Dr Anish Andheria later conducted an audiovisual session on population estimations using camera traps. In a subsequent session, Ms Drashti Danani delved into arthropod ecology, building upon her earlier session on insects.

The session concluded with Shardul Bajikar emphasizing the role of effective communication in wildlife conservation, drawing from his own experiences to illustrate the importance of audiovisual communication strategies. ■



CEC-Mumbai recently organized a CSR activity for employees of Worley India Private Limited Company on January 20, 2024. The event commenced with an introduction to BNHS and CEC, along with instructions for forest clean-up guidelines to be followed while in the field. Participants were divided into groups, for a nature trail and forest clean-up.

A total of 160 employees actively participated in the event, assisting in cleaning up the area around CEC-Mumbai. They collected water bottle caps, wrappers, and other debris that could pose a threat to wildlife. Their efforts contributed significantly to maintaining a clean and safe environment for animals, and marked a small step towards forest conservation.

Amur Falcon project restarted in Nagaland

Mr Sulanthung Humtsoe, an Education Officer at BNHS in Nagaland, oversees the Society's activities for the project "Conservation Education for the local community of Nagaland". The project's primary objective is the long-term conservation of Amur Falcons in the region, which is now recognized as the 'Amur Falcon Capital of the World.'

In January 2024, Sulanthung undertook extensive visits to all villages within the project area in the Wokha district of Nagaland where he engaged with village and school heads initiating discussions on the implementation of project activities. These activities will include teacher training workshops, the establishment of eco-clubs, training sessions for local community members and homestay owners, and the development of effective livelihood mechanisms. Thanks to Zycus Infotech for financial support.



Strengthening bonds and skills BNHS and the Indian Army



The BNHS in collaboration with the Indian Army conducted a series of activities to raise awareness and build capacity regarding the issues of free-ranging dogs (FRDs) and garbage in the Ladakh region. The BNHS team conducted an awareness workshop in Tangtse and Durbuk, engaging with military personnel, including Lt. Col. Abhishek Singh, AQMG, HQ 114 Infantry Brigade, Tangtse and Major Abhishek Kumar, SM, HQ 81 Infantry Brigade, Durbuk.

During the workshop, Mr Niaz Khan presented information about Ladakh's wildlife to 08 Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and 29 other Ranks. The session included open interactions, addressing questions, and highlighting the concerns of FRDs and their connection to improper garbage disposal. Pocket guides on the flora, birds, and

mammals of Ladakh published by BNHS were distributed for a better understanding of the local wildlife.

The team also met with Col. Himanshu Rawat VSM and Lt. Col. Sachin Siachen Brigade, Partapur, briefing them on the BNHS project objectives and presenting results from previous activities. The focus was on addressing the challenges posed by free-ranging dogs and the environmental impact of improper waste management in army formations.

In Siachen Basecamp, Mr Prateek, SRF, BNHS, delivered a presentation to 126 army personnel, including officers, JCOs, and other Ranks. The presentation covered the project's significance and emphasized the importance of Ladakh's wildlife. ■

BNHS members' wildlife odyssey at Melghat Tiger Reserve

The BNHS in collaboration with the Nature Conservation Society, Amravati (NCSA), recently organised a camp at Melghat Tiger Reserve. The camp brought together nature enthusiasts and researchers for an immersive experience through one of India's biodiverse landscapes, the central highlands, in pursuit of the elusive and recently rediscovered Forest Owlet.

Exclusively tailored for BNHS members, the camp offered a rare chance to delve into rugged terrains and witness the beauty of the natural world. Among the myriad mammalian species, participants spotted the elusive leopard and the rare chousingha, and documented 130 species of birds during the four-day camp, showcasing the remarkable diversity of Melghat. The highlight of the trip was the sighting of the Endangered Forest Owlet, presumed to be extinct for over a century before its rediscovery in 1997, sparking hope for its ongoing survival in the region.

The members also visited the Forest Training Institute at Chikaldhara, Amravati, where they engaged with Mrs Mukta Tekale, Director, Forest Training Institute, and faculty members Mr Vinod Deshmukh and Mr Patil, gaining invaluable insights into the Forest Department's conservation efforts for biodiversity preservation. The expedition also welcomed Mr Amol J. Sawant, Joint Secretary, Satpuda Foundation, who shared valuable perspectives on broader conservation efforts and emphasized the importance of collaborative endeavours in safeguarding our natural heritage.



This camp not only deepened members' connection with nature, but also highlighted the pivotal role organizations like BNHS, NCSA, and the Satpuda Foundation play in fostering a community dedicated to the conservation of our planet. ■

Training Programme for IFS Officers

BNHS conducted a one-week training programme on 'Advances in Bird Migration Studies and Flyway Management' from January 8–12, 2024, in Mumbai. This programme was financially supported by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) RT Division, Government of India.

The Government of India has committed to taking the lead role in developing the institutional mechanism for the Central Asian Flyway. Hence, a training programme was designed to convene distinguished IFS officers to deliberate on the latest developments in bird migration studies and strategies for effective flyway management.

Twenty-three officers from 14 different states participated in the course, featuring expert lectures, group discussions, panel sessions, and field visits. Activities commenced with an inauguration at Hornbill House followed by lectures, a group discussion on the role of IFS Officers in conservation, and visit to the Library and Natural History Collection of BNHS.

The Officers visited the Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Centre in Airoli on day two, followed by

further expert lectures. Day three included a flamingo safari and a bird ringing session in the evening at the Mankhurd Saltpans. Day four featured a visit to BNHS-CEC, Mumbai, to understand the role of education and outreach in conservation, and a panel discussion on forest department functioning and career development. The course concluded with expert lectures and certificate distribution on the last day at the Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Centre in Airoli. ■



Over 170 FRD treated under ABC Programme in Ladakh



In August 2023, a collaborative effort between the BNHS, the Indian Army's 14 Corps, and the Animal Husbandry Department aimed to address the issue of free-ranging dogs (FRD) through sterilization in Nyoma and Hanle formations. The team, in coordination with the Animal Husbandry Department, conducted sterilization procedures at the Indian Army's 254 Brigade in Nyoma, followed by a similar initiative in Hanle. A total of 89 dogs in Nyoma and 32 dogs in Hanle were successfully sterilized, adhering to the Animal Birth Control Rule of 2023.

In December 2023, the BNHS conducted a joint sterilization programme of free-ranging dogs in the Drass army formations, Kargil in collaboration with the Wildlife Protection Department and Animal Husbandry Department. The sterilization programme covered various army formations, including the 56 Mountain Brigade, Kargil Battle School, Batra Transit Camp, and Kill Valley in Drass. A total of 52 dogs were sterilized over the four-day programme.

The sterilized dogs are released back into their respective areas. This collaboration demonstrates a proactive approach to address the issue of free-ranging dogs, while considering the biodiversity significance of the regions involved. ■



BNHS team at Kaziranga Bird Conservation Festival



Dr Biswajit Chakdar from BNHS acted as a resource person in five capacity-building training programmes, held from January 5–8, 2024, on bird identification techniques for frontline forest staff and other stakeholders of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve



Dr Biswajit Chakdar delivered a presentation on bird survey methods to IFS probationers of the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy, on January 8th at Agoratoli Range, Kaziranga



The collaborative efforts of BNHS and Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve resulted in the organization of the Kaziranga Bird Conservation Festival and the 5th Waterbird Count from January 9–10, 2024. Dr Biswajit Chakdar, along with Mr Aniket Pawar, Biologist, and Mr Debabrata Das, Field Assistant, actively participated in the event. The festival, inaugurated by Shri Chandra Mohan Patowary, Hon'ble Minister, Department of Environment and Forests, Government of Assam, commenced on January 9th in Agoratoli, Kaziranga. On January 10th, a simultaneous bird census was conducted across 115 wetlands in the three divisions of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve.

BNHS at Dibru-Saikhowa NP & BR's Management Plan up-gradation meeting



Dr Biswajit Chakdar contributed to the stakeholders' meeting focused on the up-gradation of the Management Plan of Dibru-Saikhowa National Park & Biosphere Reserve, which took place on January 25th in Tinsukia, Assam.

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS AND PROGRAMMES

Conservation Biology and Wildlife Management (CBWM) Training Programme

November 10–29, 2024 - Amravati, India

Learn how to manage wildlife habitats for sustainable development through research-based conservation actions at micro, macro, and landscape levels

Course Goals

Demonstrate how scientific studies in conservation biology can be applied to wildlife management. Participants will be introduced to biodiversity conservation, sustainable development issues, and trained in scientific reporting, proposal writing, field equipment use, and relevant computer software.

Language

The course will be conducted in English, with a maximum of 20 trainees per session.

Who Should Apply

Scientific and field personnel from government wildlife agencies, non-governmental organizations, and universities. Participants from Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and Malaysia are also eligible.

How to Apply

Request an application form from the Course Coordinator, complete it with all required information, and submit it by **March 31, 2024**, for competitive selection. Fees are payable only upon selection. Applications are accepted throughout the year, but those received after **March 31, 2024**, will not be considered for the upcoming course.

Course Fee

\$2000. (Deserving Indian participants may be selected at a subsidized fee of INR 40,000)

For more information, write to: satpuda2001@gmail.com or conservation@bnhs.org. or visit www.bnhs.org

NATURALIST TRAINING WORKSHOP, CHANDRAPUR

Join us for an immersive Naturalist Training Workshop, curated especially for professionals and aspiring naturalists' eager to deepen their understanding of natural history, field biology, outdoor ethics, and beyond!

Date: February 22 to 26, 2024

Location: Chandrapur Forest Academy, Chandrapur.

Language: The course will be conducted in English, with a maximum of 35 trainees per session.

This five-day long workshop promises a transformative experience! Hurry reserve* your spot today and embark on a journey filled with captivating lectures, interactive discussions, and hands-on field sessions led by renowned experts in nature education, conservation, and wildlife research with the BNHS.

For inquiries and registration, write at r.kasambe@bnhs.org OR f.hirkani@bnhs.org.

*Due to overwhelming registrations the first batch will feature seasoned naturalists and safari guides from the enchanting landscapes of Tadoba

Training Programme for Veterinarians

In light of recent initiatives to rewild vultures in the Tadoba and Pench Tiger Reserves, BNHS is proud to announce a 3-day capacity-building programme for Veterinarians at the prestigious Chandrapur Forest Academy, Chandrapur, from February 15–17, 2024.

This programme is crucial as we work to rewild and reintroduce vultures into their natural habitat. With the support of the Hon. Minister of Forests, Cultural Affairs, and Fisheries, Shri Sudhir Mungantiwar, and the dedicated efforts of BNHS staff and Field Directors of Pench and Tadoba Tiger Reserves, 20 vultures have been released into pre-release aviaries. It is imperative that our veterinary field staff is equipped with the latest knowledge and techniques to ensure the safety and well-being of these majestic birds. The sessions will include critical topics such as vulture conservation, the impact of NSAIDs on vulture populations, and best practices for creating vulture-safe environments.

For details and inquiries, contact: k.umrigar@bnhs.org.

Wildlife Watch from Hide

February 2024

- Dates** : 1st February 2024 onwards
- Timings**
- Morning slot** : 7:00 am to 11:00 am
- Evening slot** : 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm
- Fees** : Rs. 300/- per person per slot (for two hours)



Leopard Trail

Saturday, 17th February 2024

- Time** : 8:00 am to 10:00 am
- Fees** : Rs. 350/- (For BNHS Members)
Rs. 450/- (For others)
- Fees include** : CEC entry fees and BNHS expertise.



Walk in the Woods: Winter Version

Saturday, 24th February 2024

- Time** : 8:00 am to 10:00 am
- Fees** : Rs. 350/- (For BNHS Members)
Rs. 450/- (For others)
- Fees include** : CEC entry fees and BNHS expertise.

For further details, contact:

Conservation Education Centre, Mumbai

9594953425/8591315589/8591318027; Email: cec-mumbai@bnhs.org

(Monday to Friday 09:30 am to 05:30 pm)



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17th February, 2024
Flamingo &
Wetland Walk at TS Chanakya

.....
25th February, 2024
SGNP Bird Count

For further details, contact:
www.bnhs.org or
 Email us at programmes@bnhs.org



BNHS MISSION

Vision: Premier independent scientific organization with a broad-based constituency, excelling in the conservation of threatened species and habitats.

Mission: Conservation of nature, primarily biological diversity, through action based on research, education and public awareness.

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