

FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK

Dear Members,



I am always curious to hear the arguments when someone talks about the extinction of species or range extinction (the loss of a species from its known geographic range). Do you know how extinction is declared? The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a globally respected authority on the status of species and ecosystems, reviews published scientific literature based on field studies and surveys, consults experts and expert organisations, and then reaches a conclusion on the conservation status of such species.

However, the rediscovery of some species makes us rethink the concept of "extinction." Are our birders and ornithologists truly scanning every habitat within a species' known range, spending sufficient time and following proper methodology? Do they also rigorously explore areas outside the known range of species, especially when climate change has significantly altered the distributions of many?

I first encountered these questions in 1998, when I rediscovered the Forest Owlet (now listed as Endangered by the IUCN) in Melghat. Since then, the bird has been recorded at several new locations, some outside its historically known range, including Burhanpur district in Madhya Pradesh, Navsari district and Valsad district in Gujarat, and Tansa Sanctuary in Thane district of Maharashtra. This month, the species was recorded by a tourism operator in the Parond Beat of Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. This record reminds us that we must continue exploring habitats even outside the known range of species.

I cannot resist sharing another amusing observation that is increasingly becoming common. Last month, while passing through the city of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, I spent a morning at a lake at historic Hanumantal, located in the heart of the city and surrounded by Jain and Hindu temples. Suddenly, I heard a man calling birds while throwing food into the lake. To my surprise, a flock of Slender-billed Gull, which had not been visible earlier, suddenly appeared and began catching the floating food. Slender-billed Gulls breed inland but are usually restricted to coastal wetlands and do not typically visit urban centres. Some birders have also reported observing coastal birds feeding on *gathia* and *fafda* in coastal wetlands. Could such religious feeding practices be influencing the distribution of winter migrants?

This month, World Wetlands Day was celebrated across the globe. BNHS staff organised several events in different parts of India. I spent a day at SIES College of Arts, Science and Commerce in Nerul, Navi Mumbai, attending an event organised by the Navi Mumbai Environment Protection Society (NMEPS), where local activists and birders expressed their commitment to protecting birds and wetlands in and around Navi Mumbai.

As you may know, BNHS released 34 captive-bred vultures into the wild in Pench, Melghat, and Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra during December 2025 and January 2026. Several individuals have already recorded encouraging short-term successes.

Of the nine White-rumped Vulture (WRV) and five Long-billed Vulture (LBV) released in Pench, eight WRV and two LBV have been actively exploring the Pench landscape over the past two months and are attempting to settle locally. One female WRV, J102, travelled nearly 215 km over the last two months, reaching Melghat via Narkhed, Amravati, and Akola, where it was subsequently rescued and re-released in Melghat.

Another individual, J132, a Long-billed Vulture born in Haryana and released from Pench (now named *Anjan*, after Anjaneri Cliffs of Nashik), travelled 750 km westward from Pench. It located a cow carcass on its own in Nashik and began competing with wild scavengers. For three days, it fed independently.

Of the 15 LBVs released in Melghat, around 10 birds remained around the release aviary for nearly two months. One individual, F12, stayed in Melghat and explored the landscape extensively. Another individual, Z29, travelled 476 km across the Satpura landscape (covering Betul district and Khandwa district) over two months before returning to the Melghat aviary area.

Out of the five WRVs released in Tadoba, three individuals – X91, X96, and N16 – have been exploring the Tadoba landscape around Botezari over the past two months. Another bird, Z25, flew to Karnataka, where it was rescued. These early results provide valuable insights into the success of the conservation breeding programme.

BNHS's rewilding efforts have also attracted wild vultures to Melghat. It was once believed that vultures were locally extinct from Melghat. However, following the reintroduction efforts in the Melghat Tiger Reserve, a wild Himalayan Griffon Vulture was observed visiting the area. The bird has been feeding and socialising with the released vultures for more than a month.

In another notable observation last month, wild Himalayan Griffon Vulture and Eurasian Griffon Vulture were seen together in Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve after nearly a decade.

Melghat has historically been a stronghold for vultures. The continued presence of Himalayan Griffons and their exploration of the reserve over the past month are encouraging signs. Even more remarkable is the social interaction between captive-bred Long-billed Vultures and the wild Himalayan Griffon. This indicates that the released vultures are attracting wild individuals and that the habitat is gradually being accepted once again.

The chances of survival of wild vulture populations in India are also improving due to the dedicated efforts of several government officers. The Food and Drugs Administration Department of Haryana has taken commendable action against veterinary NSAIDs that are lethal to vultures. Officials inspected 113 chemist shops and collected 93 drug samples for laboratory testing.

We appreciate the proactive leadership of Mr Lalit Goel, Drug Controller of Haryana, who organised visits for chemist association members to the BNHS Vulture Breeding Centre and later conducted raids on pharmacies illegally selling banned veterinary drugs such as Aceclofenac, Ketoprofen, and Nimesulide. Continued enforcement could soon help make Haryana a Vulture Safe Zone.

Following the advice of the BNHS President, our staff also organised several nature camps at Point Calimere, Nandur Madhameshwar, Melghat, Bharatpur, and Punjab. Thank you for your enthusiastic participation.

This month, our team working at the Ujani Reservoir in Maharashtra, in collaboration with the Fisheries Department, released 12.2 million fish fingerlings into the reservoir in Pune district. BNHS had recorded a decline in native fish species due to invasive alien species such as Tilapia, African catfish, and Suckermouth catfish. This intervention aims to restore the ecological balance of the reservoir.

The fingerlings released belong to Rohu, Mrigal, and Catla, collectively known as Indian Major Carps, which play an important role in maintaining freshwater ecosystems.

I am also happy to share that the BNHS popular magazine for children will soon become a reality. This initiative has been driven entirely by our members, including fundraising efforts to support its launch. Thank you for suggesting many interesting names for the upcoming magazine. The committee will soon announce the final name.

If you are not yet following BNHS on social media, please do so to receive daily updates on our activities.

Finally, I encourage you to visit the BNHS Blog (<http://blog.bnhs.org>) and read inspiring stories from the field. You are welcome to contribute articles in any language. We also encourage academic institutions to subscribe to the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (JBNHS)* (<https://bnhsjournal.in/index.php/bnhs/ga>), one of India's oldest scientific journals, which can also help institutions earn NAAC accreditation credits.

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

For assistance, please feel free to contact:

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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