

FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

It was a routine day for me at Hornbill House. I was editing a report when an elderly Life Member, Mr Suresh Malkani, knocked on the door and began a friendly conversation. He was accompanied by his young granddaughter, who was vacationing in India. I offered them a cup of tea, and during our conversation I was deeply impressed by his numerous field trips, fuelled by his passion for underwater wildlife photography. He generously offered to donate his stunning collection of old photographs to BNHS, which I gladly accepted. He also encouraged both his grandchildren to enrol as members.

BNHS is a membership-based organization, and our members are truly our greatest assets. Their contributions to society are invaluable. The other day, while attending an online meeting, I overheard someone speaking outside my cabin. Later, I realized a member had visited but hesitated to meet me without a prior appointment. I felt bad about this and immediately requested the office to display a notice: 'BNHS members can meet without prior appointment'. Please feel free to walk in – we value your service to society, and it is always a pleasure to meet you when you visit Mumbai and the Fort area.

I was pleasantly surprised to receive a prompt response from the Union Minister, Mr Bhupender Yadav, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), inviting me to discuss the BNHS letter on grassland policy. We had a fruitful meeting, and he assured me that grasslands would be given the highest priority, on par with wetlands. Similarly, several Chief Wildlife Wardens across states/UTs have been very dynamic, and I regularly receive their communications seeking support and guidance.

BNHS is renowned for its research-based conservation work, especially on avifauna. Recently, blue rock pigeons became the centre of a controversy in Mumbai. The issue was raised in the assembly, prompting the Municipal Corporation to promise action regarding kabootarkhanas in the city. Some NGOs also approached the High Court, leading the Government to appoint an expert committee to resolve the matter. BNHS is part of this committee. We are hopeful that both the welfare of the pigeons and the health of the community will be safeguarded.

Your society has also taken an important decision that will benefit many of you. Ordinary BNHS members who have, over the years, paid annual/3-year/5-year membership fees totalling Rs 17,700 (equivalent to the Life Membership fee) will now be awarded Life Membership. Others can upgrade by paying the difference. Please contact our Membership Officer, Asif (WhatsApp: +919819570758), if you qualify or would like to upgrade your membership category.

BNHS has been an alma mater to countless individuals serving across India and abroad. Over the years, BNHS has supported not just individuals but institutions as well. SACON and WWF-India are just a few examples. BNHS has also been collaborating with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for a long time. IUCN

India, which BNHS supported from the very beginning, recently elected its new Governing Body. I was fortunate to visit their office in New Delhi this month, and it is thriving under the leadership of Dr Yash Veer Bhatnagar. We look forward to working jointly with IUCN on new projects.

You may recall the BNHS SEVA initiative we launched earlier this year for members. Many of you have already made significant contributions. For instance, our digitization project – focused on nearly a century of bird migration data – is being led by our member from the IT sector, Mr Deepak Rajanna. This herculean task was opened up for volunteers, and several members have enthusiastically joined, including Dhruv Swamini (Gurgaon), Asha Pradeep (Bengaluru), and Minal Mehta (Mumbai). They have been contributing tirelessly since April 2024 and are excited to be part of the BNHS SEVA initiative. I warmly invite more of you to engage with BNHS through this platform.

This initiative was recently featured on the BNHS Blog (<http://blog.bnhs.org>), which was also created voluntarily by one of our members, Oishimaya Sen. Please feel free to contribute to this blog in any language.

Do not miss the *Systema naturae* section in the latest issue of *Hornbill* magazine. We welcome your contributions as part of the BNHS 150-Year Omnibus Collection.

If you have not yet completed the Yearbook form for Life Members, you can do so here:

<https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khuez>

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