



FROM THE DIRECTORS DESK

Dear Members,

World Environment Day was celebrated across the country on June 5th through several events and activities. In this issue, you will read about a number of innovative programmes organised by BNHS staff on this occasion in different parts of the country.

I was fortunate to share the dais with Dr S.K. Verghese, Deputy Inspector General, Indian Coast Guard; Dr Mahesh Kumar Farejiya, Deputy Director General (Engineering), Fishery Survey of India (FSI); Dr Manas Kumar Sinha, FSI; and Dr Soniya Sukumaran, CSIR–National Institute of Oceanography, to discuss the critical issue of “Navigating the Marine Debris Crisis: Science, Impact, and Strategies” at the World Trade Centre Complex, Mumbai. I thank the Fishery Survey of India (FSI) for bringing together all the important stakeholders to deliberate on this vital issue. I hope to see a common strategy, based on our collective marine research, being developed through existing legal and statutory mechanisms to address this growing challenge.

Last year, I informed you about the progress of the renovation of Hornbill House. The work on the second floor, including the RCC slab, was completed, and the library resumed its operations. Renovation of the first floor began in March 2026, and I am happy to share that we expect this floor to be ready by the end of this month.

The work of establishing the BNHS Education and Training Centre at Bhis, Tehsil Chimur, Chandrapur district, Maharashtra, began in March 2025. Within a year, we successfully completed the construction of two large buildings covering a total built-up area of 14,000 sq. ft. Both buildings now have RCC slabs, and tiling work is currently in progress. This project has been funded by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). We have also begun establishing a genome sequencing laboratory at the research centre and have already recruited two scientists. My sincere thanks to Teva Pharmaceuticals for their generous financial support.

Our vulture conservation programme continues to set new milestones in India. An Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*, also known as the Long-billed Vulture (X67), released in Maharashtra’s Melghat Tiger Reserve in January 2026, flew an extraordinary distance of 3,334 km before reaching Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan. During its journey, it also visited Satpura Tiger Reserve near Pachmarhi and Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, now well known as the home of India’s reintroduced cheetahs. As I write this, the bird has returned to Kuno National Park.

Forest staff working across different states are our true foot soldiers, serving tirelessly day and night. They need continuous capacity enhancement to keep pace with advancing fields such as avian research. This month, BNHS organised a series of capacity-building training programmes in Bhagalpur and Munger, Bihar, where participants received both classroom and field-based training on the breeding ecology of sandbar-nesting birds.

BNHS collaborates with several NGOs on important national and international conservation issues. During the Mumbai Climate Week meeting organised by Project Mumbai at Andheri, around 10–12 NGOs working on coastal issues came together to discuss a common strategy for addressing climate-related threats. I shared BNHS’s vision for climate action along the west coast seascape. All participating organisations resolved to work collectively on the identified issues and threats.

The plantation programme on Tata Power land near Mulshi, Pune, Maharashtra, has been highly successful. We have already achieved the target of planting 90,000 saplings across 14.7 acres. The native species are now benefiting from the monsoon rains, which will significantly improve their survival.

We must recognise the immense potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI). BNHS has begun leveraging artificial intelligence and computer vision to translate research into effective conservation action. We have established a dedicated IT Cell that is helping us adopt the latest digital technologies to improve response time and support informed conservation decisions.

Using these technologies, we have initiated the digitisation of BNHS’s historic bird migration records. Many of these records date back to the 1940s and 1950s and contain valuable handwritten information on both sides of the data sheets, often recorded in faint ink. These documents required highly accurate digitisation to improve accessibility, searchability, and analysis. BNHS has successfully used AI and machine learning to convert these handwritten records into searchable digital formats with remarkable accuracy.

An efficient workflow has been established, comprising high-resolution scanning to capture even faint handwritten details; systematic organisation of extracted information into individual spreadsheets with matching names and numbers; and AI/ML-assisted data extraction using Optical Character Recognition (OCR), followed by rigorous manual quality checks.

This initiative has enabled us to build a future-ready database for querying and advanced analytics. We are also visualising bird-ringing and resighting data on interactive maps. I am confident that you will enjoy these pictorial representations very soon.

The BNHS Central Marketing Department (CMD) and the EIACP Division are quietly reaching out to institutions across Mumbai to promote BNHS and its mission. During the month, CMD successfully organised 18 exhibitions across the city, engaging nearly 10,000 people in conversations on biodiversity and conservation. These initiatives have strengthened public awareness of environmental issues while showcasing the Society's work in research, conservation, and education.

We expect to receive copies of the much-awaited book *Mammals of India* by Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh and Dr P.O. Nameer by 20 July. Around 300 copies have already been sold under the pre-publication offer. The book continues to be available at a special discounted pre-publication price. You can book your copy using this link https://shop.bnhs.org/product_details/341.

This month, the BNHS team also achieved several important milestones at Ujani by establishing hatcheries for indigenous fish species and cultivating important aquatic plant species required for future eco-restoration initiatives.

As you may recall, in the previous issue we appealed for support to digitise E.P. Gee's invaluable wildlife films, a project that requires dedicated funding. I sincerely thank all those who responded positively, including Dr K. Ullas Karanth.

While finalising this newsletter, I learnt that on June 26, the Wildlife Department of Ladakh imposed a penalty of ₹50,000 each on four vehicles found violating the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. These tourists had engaged in illegal off-roading by driving through ecologically sensitive lakes and river streams in Ladakh. Acting under the directions of Lieutenant Governor Shri V.K. Saxena, the Ladakh Administration has, for the first time, initiated prosecution and imposed penalties on offenders for such violations. This is a welcome step towards protecting these fragile ecosystems.

In another deeply disturbing incident, on June 28, 2026, nearly 200 encroachers ambushed 40 Forest Department personnel in the Amakhujri area of the Gudi Range, Khandwa district, Madhya Pradesh. The attackers pelted the officials with stones using slingshots, severely injuring several personnel. One forest guard had his ear sliced off, others suffered serious head injuries, and more than ten staff members were grievously wounded. Investigators found that the attackers had pre-planted nail-studded wooden and pipe traps along forest tracks to puncture vehicle tyres and prevent the patrol team from escaping. With no mobile network in the area, the trapped personnel were unable to call for help. We must strongly condemn this brutal attack. I urge BNHS members to write to the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, requesting stringent action against the culprits and stronger protection for our forest staff.

If you are not already following BNHS on social media, I encourage you to do so and stay updated with our latest activities and conservation initiatives on a daily basis.

Finally, I encourage you to read the BNHS [Blog](http://blog.bnhs.org) (<http://blog.bnhs.org>) for more inspiring stories from the field. Please feel free to contribute articles in any language. We also encourage academic institutions to subscribe to 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 here: <https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>

For assistance, feel free to reach out: Central Marketing: cmd@bnhs.org; Membership: membership@bnhs.org

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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