

FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

BNHS has reached the milestone of 141 years. The wooden display board at the Committee room of Hornbill House proudly showcases the names of all the stalwarts who have led our Society. We elect dynamic members to run our Society, and this year, we were fortunate to have six eligible candidates for six vacant posts, allowing us to avoid elections and save a considerable amount of cost and time. Let us extend our congratulations to the new Governing Council (GC) members, especially Dr Bharat Bhushan and Mr Dinesh Kothari, elected as Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer, respectively. I would also like to congratulate Ms Aditi Kothari Desai and Ms Sangita Jindal for accepting the roles of Vice Presidents. Let us warmly welcome all the newly elected, co-opted members, and nominated office bearers.

Your BNHS is renowned for its credibility and the quality of its research. Judicial institutions like High Courts and the Supreme Court also rely on BNHS reports for actions. The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court directed the Government of Maharashtra to commission a study to save the Sarus Cranes in the eastern Vidarbha landscape. We deployed a team to carry out research and filed an affidavit based on our preliminary observations. During my visit to the landscape with our senior scientists, I identified some serious issues that require urgent attention. One wetland has been converted into a water storage tank by removing soil/silt for constructing a canal, invasive species have taken over most of the wetlands, and their marshy areas have reduced. The Sur River, which was a lifeline for the Sarus population, is completely dry after the Khindsi dam, as the concerned agency ignored to continue the ecological flow of water in the river. I met with district collectors and senior forest officers and shared these observations so that they can initiate urgent actions.

I also visited the Vulture Release project in Maharashtra and was particularly pleased to meet our passionate young staff who recently joined us. They are working hard to take care of vultures in the pre-release aviary and to establish a 100-kilometre peripheral area Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ) for the vultures. Their timely reporting of banned veterinary drugs for sale in pharmaceutical shops helped the Food and Drugs Administration department take prompt actions. Your Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres at Pinjore, Rani, and Bhopal all have good news, with several young ones born to live in the wild. Importantly, more states are coming forward to either establish their state VSZ for Jatayu or to breed some species of vultures in captivity. Let us appreciate BNHS vet Dr Krishna, who acquired expertise under our scientist Mr Sachin Ranade, to treat poisoned vultures until they recover and can be safely released into the wild. This month, they released 15 poisoned Himalayan Vultures in Assam after treating them for two months.

While Tiger Reserves have undoubtedly helped build the tiger population, they have also protected other lesser-known species, including the vultures, floricans, and forest owlets. It was nice to see forest guards of Pench Tiger Reserve learning how to identify vultures and monitor wild vulture populations. BNHS programmes, led by dynamic Programme Officer Asif Khan, are gaining popularity. Thank you for giving him a good response. Please refer to the Newsletter for our April programmes and the website for the programmes scheduled for the next three months. We hope that he will also cater to the requirements of members spread across all regions.

Transmission lines are causing the deaths of large birds across the country. We requested a post-mortem of a flamingo found near Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve, and the Karnataka Forest Department conducted it. We published a special issue of Buceros last month on the impact of transmission lines on birds. We hope that the agencies will read it and understand the consequences and take proactive actions. Buceros, which is published quarterly, is complimentary for BNHS members. You only need to register on the BNHS-EIACP Cell link: <https://forms.gle/CkEts4mDyxhbp1AF9> to subscribe.

Similarly, the menace of free-ranging dogs has reached its peak in and around some of the key wildlife habitats in India. Your BNHS team is already working in Ladakh and Rajasthan, but we are yet to see any workable solutions. BNHS has filed a petition in the Supreme Court (SC), and the SC has instructed the Animal Welfare Board to give us a hearing and pass a speaking order. I attended a hearing in New Delhi on April 9th along with our partners. We hope to see a speaking order very soon from the Animal Welfare Board.

At Hornbill House, we are running our daily operations despite the ongoing renovation work. While we endure some pains, there is joy and satisfaction in knowing that Hornbill House will have a complete facelift both on the outside and within. Our collaboration with other regional NGOs is strengthening day by day. In Mumbai itself, we celebrated an Earth Day event with the NGO called New Acropolis Mumbai on "Learning from the sacred groves of India," which received a good response. Our new membership officer Ms Shreeya Sontakke and CMD head Mr Sandesh Kadam helped Ms Trishya Screwvala and her team to make it successful.

As you all know, raising funds to meet the field project requirements has been a tough job, and we have a limited corpus fund. The Vulture breeding project in West Bengal and Haryana has put us in a loss amounting to crores. Finally, after an intervention from our President, there is a positive response from the Forest Department of West Bengal to clear our pending dues of Rs.1.67 crore. You will realize how difficult it is to save species and manage the Society's finances without active cooperation from the state Governments.

I would request all of you to join the regional (state) WhatsApp groups so that you can discuss more state issues, and we can address them frequently. It will also help our Membership Department to know you better and update your latest contacts for uninterrupted communication.

Kishor Rithe
Director, Bombay Natural History Society

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