

FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

I wish you a very happy New Year!

The month of December, especially the last week, always brings mixed sentiments. There is either a sense of fulfilment or regret over unmet goals. I am sure you will be happy to see that BNHS achieved many milestones in 2025, with several new initiatives lined up for 2026.

For me, December was very hectic but also deeply satisfying. As one of the country's oldest organisations, BNHS often receives invitations from institutions working across diverse landscapes. This month, I was fortunate to participate in a two-day conclave organised in Guwahati (Assam) by the 13th Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum. The discussions on The Future of the Third Pole and Himsagar (Eastern Himalaya) were truly enriching. The participants shared insights drawn from real-world experience, wisdom earned through both successes and failures on the ground. BNHS life member Mr Ranjeet Barthakur and the Balipara Foundation have strongly supported this Forum, now in its 13th year. One aspect I especially appreciated was the organisation of panel discussions across four academic institutions: Guwahati University, Cotton University, IIT Guwahati, and Assam Royal Global University. Most discussions highlighted the urgent need to take science and research to local communities through simple and accessible media.

Another BNHS life member and strong supporter, Mr Raj Singh from Bharatpur (Rajasthan), runs the Antara River Cruise. During his visit to Hornbill House, we discussed the possibility of using the cruise to collect data from riverine habitats along the Ganga. He welcomed the idea, and we signed an agreement this month. Ms Parveen Shaikh, BNHS scientist is currently conducting training workshops for the Antara staff, who will later assist BNHS in data collection. Let us congratulate Ms Parveen Shaikh on receiving Sanctuary Wildlife Service Award 2025 for her path-breaking work on conserving the Indian Skimmer. I am also happy to share that after almost three decades, BNHS has restarted bird ringing in Bharatpur (Rajasthan). Credit goes to Dr Sujit Narwade and Ms Parveen Shaikh for accepting this new challenge.

Ujjani, designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in Maharashtra, is where the BNHS wetland eco-restoration project continues to receive strong community support. The BNHS team conducted a workshop training around 120 fishermen to adopt native fisheries and bird guiding as alternative livelihoods.

This month, we were also preparing to release our captive bred vultures back into the wild in Maharashtra and Assam. The experienced BNHS team tagged vultures in Pench, Melghat, and Tadoba–Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), and closely monitored them post-tagging to ensure their comfort. Finally, nine white-rumped vultures and five long-billed vultures were released in Pench. Our monitoring teams will remain busy in the New Year tracking these birds, and you will soon hear about their journeys in the wild through media reports.

Before the release, we received encouraging news from our field staff that two vultures released in 2024 had settled in Pench, Madhya Pradesh, and formed a pair. This greatly motivated our teams. Interestingly, during the release on December 11, these two previously released vultures, along with other wild vultures,

arrived at the release aviary to snatch the food kept for the newly released birds. This interaction helped our vultures leave the aviary and begin competing with wild birds from day one.

With the success of our vulture breeding and release programme, several Chief Wildlife Wardens have been visiting our Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres (VCBCs). Many are also sending batches of foresters to learn from BNHS's efforts. Mr Vivek Saxena, an old friend and the Chief Wildlife Warden of Haryana, recently visited VCBC Bhopal.

Dr P. Sathiyaselvam, Head of the Central Asian Flyway Programme, has tagged Greylag Goose in Bihar. His team is leading the Asian Waterbird Census in collaboration with Wetlands International South Asia (WISA), with BNHS mobilising its Bird Conservation Network for this massive effort.

We were delighted by the discovery of a potential habitat for the Indian Caracal in Rajasthan. BNHS firmly believes that local communities can achieve remarkable outcomes when treated as partners and when their capacities are strengthened. Congratulations to Sumer Singh Bhati and Pankaj Bishnoi for this important discovery.

Congratulations as well to BNHS University Ph.D. students Sachin Ranade and Ruchi Dave for successfully completing their doctoral programmes. We hope their research will significantly contribute to vulture conservation.

My thanks to our social media team, Bustard Media, for their excellent outreach efforts, which have doubled the followers on BNHS's Instagram page and strengthened our presence on platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. If you are not yet following us, please do so to receive daily updates from BNHS.

Finally, I encourage you to read the BNHS Blog (<http://blog.bnhs.org>) to explore these inspiring stories from the field. You are most 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 here: <https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>

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