

FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

I wish you a very happy and healthy new year!

I am writing this message from the confluence of the rivers Chambal, Parvati and Duar (seasonal) at Palighat near Sawai Madhopur, in Rajasthan! BNHS under the leadership of our scientist Parveen Shaikh, conducted the 4th Indian Skimmer Count from December 23 and 24, 2023; the birders visited more than 25 sites for the count. I was thrilled to witness seven Indian Skimmers (besides gharials and crocodiles) that had arrived here for breeding on the sand bars and another twenty birds at Rajghat near Morena (MP). I also got an opportunity to visit Morena (Deori), where the Forest Department of Madhya Pradesh has established a gharial rearing centre where I interacted with a few passionate and dedicated forest officers who are preserving our natural heritage.

Atharva Singh and Hemadri Mondal, our two scientists who recently recorded a tiger at high altitude (3,640 m) in Sikkim through a camera trap, visited New Delhi in the first week of December and met the Director General (DG) of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) Mrs Rashmi Shukla at the SSB Force Head Quarter, with BNHS President Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi. They discussed the menace of free ranging dogs (FRD) as well as garbage management issue in the settlements around the fringe areas of Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary (PWS) in East Sikkim. Cases of killings of Himalayan Goral were also highlighted during this meeting. The DG has assured support for initiatives like Animal Birth Control (ABC) program and proper waste management to help control the population of FRD in the three SSB border outposts, located in the fringe areas of PWS. The CWLW of Sikkim Forest Department has been informed about the outcome of this meeting.

During the Annual Research Seminar (ARS)–2023 of the BNHS at Chandrapur Forest Academy (Maharashtra), we had decided to launch a digital magazine – Dhanesh; the articles published in Dhanesh will be in regional languages. We have begun work on this idea and will initially post articles in eight regional languages.

The theme of the BNHS wall calendar for 2024 focuses on our scientists and the species and landscapes they work in, our calendar as always has received a wonderful response. If you have not bought a copy, then do contact Sandesh Kadam – our staff from the CMD.

Two course participants Deepak Rajanna and Oishimaya Sen, who attended BNHS workshops at Point Calimere and CEC Mumbai respectively, have joined as volunteers at Hornbill House to contribute to our conservation efforts.

As you are aware, the Mangrove Foundation and BNHS organised a stakeholder's seminar on "Marine megafauna (dolphins, whales, etc.), seabirds, shorebirds, their habitats

and addressing the threats” on November 30, 2023, at Airoli, Mumbai, to address the stranding of marine mega fauna. The minutes highlighting the actions to be taken were circulated to all the participants and the CWLW has responded promptly to set up a State Stranding Centre.

I am pleased to inform you that Dr V.S. Vijayan, Chairman of Sálím Ali Foundation and Founder Director of SACON (Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore) has responded to the fundraising appeal in my last letter. He has suggested that we should try to get larger research projects as we had in the past. We have decided to work on this.

Your Governing Council has asked us to revive the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) for taking science-based conservation actions in Important Bird Areas. We had our first online meeting on December 16, 2023. All the IBCN state co-ordinators were overwhelmed to e-meet again. I would like to thank Trident Pneumatics Pvt. Ltd who has committed to support these conservation actions.

The IBA Programme was initiated in India in 1998 and thereafter we established the IBCN. The IBA programme published many important books, including “Important Bird Areas in India” (2004), which described 466 sites for bird conservation. The second of edition (2016) added new sites to this database. Other books, include the “Potential Ramsar Sites in India” and “Threatened Birds of India” and many state-wise books. BNHS achieved scientific documentation of IBAs through scientific surveys, and these publications are proving helpful to NGOs and Government for taking conservation actions.

We discussed several specific issues during our meeting like FRD menace in black-necked crane area, need to study the sarus in Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, amur falcon conservation through livelihood in Nagaland, vulture conservation in Jharkhand, and use of Bhagalpur Bird Migration Centre. The network decided to use digital platforms and WhatsApp groups for frequent communication. The group will discuss the strategy to create more vulture safe zones, address the FRD issue, threats to river, and bird trade in the coming months.

I celebrated the last day of 2023 at our Bharatpur field station provided by Exotic Heritage Group. We have been ringing birds since 1927 and have spent enormous efforts shaping the Bharatpur wetland. I met dedicated forest officers like Mr Athirvel Field Director of Ranthambore Tiger Reserve at Ranthambhore and Mr Manas Dy. CF of Bharatpur, who have shown equal vigour to work with BNHS. I also met several life members in Rajasthan, who wished to contribute more. At Bharatpur, I met people old and new who shared their memories of Dr Sálím Ali, Mr J.C. Daniel, Dr Asad Rahmani to Dr Vibhu Prakash, while welcoming me with huge expectations. I don’t want to make false promises, but I want to assure you that you will see more action in Rajasthan in 2024. I visited two gaushalas (cow shelters), one in Kheda Masalpur near Karauli (saw around 100 WRV and LB-vultures) and other at Bharatpur run by Apna Ghar (saw around 300 Egyptian Vultures), where I met their trustees, who assured support in Vulture Conservation.

I have one more good news to share with you; Dr Y.V. Jhala a famous retired scientist from the Wildlife Institute of India, who completed his Ph.D. from BNHS, will be teaching a 20-day long Conservation Biology and Wildlife Management (CBWM) course conducted by BNHS, in collaboration with our partner NGOs, starting from this year.

Kishor Rithe

Director

Bombay Natural History Society

1st January 2024.