



FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK

Dear Members,

I bought and read a book titled *CONNECTIVITY CONSERVATION* – a Cambridge University Press publication edited by Kevin R. Crooks and M. Sanjayan – in 2012. I later read it thoroughly at my leisure. I often wonder how, all those years ago, the editors had so accurately foreseen what would happen to landscapes across the globe a decade later.

BNHS has been actively advocating for landscape conservation and has therefore been very vocal against destructive projects such as mining and linear infrastructure when they are proposed in wildlife habitats or ecologically sensitive areas. We often find it difficult to convince political leaders to avoid such projects in important habitats, especially when government officers fail to explain the negative impacts and, on the contrary, promote these projects while ignoring the interests of wildlife. The issues surrounding the protection of the Aravalli mountains in Rajasthan and adjoining states, and the Lohardongari iron ore mining in the Tadoba–Ghodazari WLS landscape in Maharashtra, clearly emphasise the need for connectivity conservation.

We have released our captive bred vultures into the wild in Maharashtra. The experienced BNHS team tagged the vultures in Pench, Melghat, and TATR, and subsequently released nine white-rumped vultures (WRV) and five Indian vultures (IV) in Pench; five WRVs in TATR; and fifteen IVs in Melghat. Our monitoring teams are currently engaged in tracking these birds. You may have already heard about their journeys in the wild through media reports.

BNHS's highly successful vulture conservation breeding programme is encouraging many states to come forward for vulture conservation. Funding is always a constraint. However, the state of Jharkhand quietly constructed aviaries over the past few years and has now decided to start the programme with the support of BNHS. The Chief Wildlife Warden of Jharkhand, Mr Paritosh Upadhyay, and I signed an MoU this month at Hornbill House. This is a new arrangement led by the state and supported by BNHS. I hope other states will also come forward to implement the National Action Plan for Vulture Conservation. It is also encouraging to learn that the state of Tamil Nadu is attempting to establish a Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ), which is a welcome step.

BNHS ornithologists and BNHS-IBCN members were actively engaged in conducting the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) across all Indian states and participated in this massive exercise. Most conservationists of my generation emerged from school-level green initiatives. I strongly believe that the country can nurture passionate nature enthusiasts, wildlife researchers, and conservationists through such initiatives. Hence, BNHS has been investing significantly in awareness programmes for school students and teachers for several decades. We have now decided to restart school nature clubs that were once initiated by BNHS, CEE, WWF, and many other organisations.

Towards the end of the month, I attended a workshop organised by the Tadoba–Andhari Tiger Reserve directorate at the Chandrapur Forest Academy to discuss measures to address the growing human–carnivore conflict in Chandrapur district. Statistics presented by the Forest Department recorded 200 human deaths due to tiger attacks in the district over the last five years, which is both worrying and shocking. Experts reached a consensus that the solution lies in landscape-level land-use planning, followed by strict implementation.

I visited Panna Tiger Reserve to attend the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Satpuda Landscape Tiger Partnership (SLTP). I was fortunate to witness playful fights among tiger cubs, but I was even happier to see a healthy number of

vultures in and around Panna. However, it remains uncertain whether this landscape will remain intact in light of the Ken–Betwa river-linking project.

This month also brought good news: the Ministry of Jal Shakti approved our project on the Indian skimmer in the Chambal and lower Ganga rivers under Namami Gange Mission 2.0, during the 68th meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG). I thank the Honourable Minister of Jal Shakti for making this announcement in Dehradun.

Several states spend substantial funds on organising bird festivals but pay little attention to bird habitats. I hope the Ministry of Jal Shakti's approach towards sandbar-nesting birds will inspire states to invest more in river protection, including safeguarding sandbar habitats and the birds that depend on them.

Another piece of good news came from Chilika, where bird estimation results showed that over 11 lakh birds belonging to 196 species visited the wetland—an increase over last year's count. Several birders from Maharashtra had requested training in bird migration studies from BNHS. In response, a course on Ornithology and Bird Migration was organised at Nandur Madhameshwar Sanctuary in Maharashtra and was attended by 15 birders. I strongly believe in citizen science initiatives. We have also undertaken the major task of digitising bird ringing datasheets, which requires many helping hands. I thank BNHS member Mr Deepak Rajanna for organising the sixth volunteer drive for the bird ringing digitisation project at CISCO, where 109 students participated.

Geography departments in India carry a significant responsibility to adopt innovative approaches and support biodiversity conservation. I was pleased to attend a conference organised by the Geography Department of the renowned SP College, Pune. Magsaysay Award winner and water conservationist Dr Rajendra Singh also attended the conference, and I had the opportunity to spend valuable time discussing important environmental issues with him. His Jalbiradari initiative in Maharashtra and the BNHS team working at Ujani Wetland have decided to collaborate.

Let me now officially share some exciting news: we are going to launch a popular magazine on lines of *Hornbill*, for our student members. I request members to suggest a suitable title for this magazine. The name should be original, inspiring for young naturalists, while connect strongly to nature, and preferably not be a bird name. Please send in your suggestions by February 28 for selection

If you are not already following us on social media, please do so to receive daily updates from BNHS.

I also encourage you to read the BNHS Blog (<http://blog.bnhs.org>) for inspiring stories from the field. Please feel free to contribute articles in any language. We also encourage academic institutions to subscribe to the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (<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 may do so here: <https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>

For assistance, please 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