FROM THE DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

Diwali greetings ! Diwali is the festival of lights, and I am sure our Newsletter will continue to shine a light of hope for conservation. However, while writing about lights, I received a complaint that an organisation based in Pune has been illuminating forts in the Western Ghats! Maharashtra has hundreds of historic forts, many surrounded by forests, rocky cliffs, grasslands and ancient ruins. These habitats support a variety of nocturnal birds, particularly owls, nightjars and other species that are active after sunset. Artificial illumination of these sites is disturbing news for the nocturnal birds that inhabit the forts and their surroundings.

Three years ago, the Department of Cultural Affairs, Government of Maharashtra, consulted BNHS to develop guidelines on the impact of artificial lighting on archaeological monuments, including forts.

A 2025 study by Ghosh and Kumar examined trends in night-time illumination in the ecologically sensitive zones surrounding 631 protected areas across India. It reported significant increases in night-time light levels in 84% of the zones studied, with a mean increase of 234% in areas experiencing high growth. These findings highlight the growing concern over light pollution and its penetration into forest habitats.

Every year, October brings with it the celebrations of Wildlife Week! This year, BNHS staff demonstrated several innovative ways of celebrating the occasion. I am sure you will appreciate their efforts as you read through this Newsletter.

As part of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's (MoEF&CC) Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP), BNHS organised a certificate course in 'Nature Conservator-cum-Ecotourism Guide', specially designed for young people working at Nandur Madhameshwar Wildlife Sanctuary in Nashik, Maharashtra.

This two-month-long course aims not only to build the capacity of local youth in the field but also to equip them with the skills to develop a tourism plan for the sanctuary. The training covers the preparation of multilingual signboards and field guides, planning essential tourist facilities and services, developing botanical and butterfly gardens, and planting native species to attract arboreal birds to the tourist complex. I hope such initiatives will help create a strong network of local nature guides who can address the tourism-related challenges faced by our wildlife destinations.

Another important exercise conducted this month was the 'All-India Sarus Crane Survey', which received an overwhelming response. Several birdwatchers participated in the survey and contributed valuable data and observations.

On October 12, 2026, 62 officer trainees from the Central Academy for State Forest Service (CASFOS), Coimbatore, accompanied by a faculty member, visited the BNHS's Natural History Collections Museum at Hornbill House in Mumbai. We also had the pleasure of hosting Professor Anjali Goswami from the Natural History Museum, London, during her visit to Mumbai.

The BNHS-CEC, Goregaon and BNHS Point Calimere teams have planned several nature camps and programmes for BNHS members over the next three months, including visits to Sattal–Pangot in Himachal Pradesh and Chambal–Bharatpur in Rajasthan. I hope you will make the most of these opportunities to explore and experience nature.

The BNHS fisheries project at Ujani Reservoir is gaining popularity among the local fishing community. On Saturday, October 17, BNHS launched a conservation initiative at Bhigwan in Pune district to release 4.5 million fingerlings of native fish species that have become rare or are on the verge of extinction in the reservoir. The team also planted 21,000 aquatic plants that have disappeared from the ecosystem. Around 35 native fish species in the reservoir have become locally extinct, while another 40 are on the verge of disappearing. This initiative is an important step towards restoring the reservoir's aquatic biodiversity.

The BNHS Nature Clubs in four districts of Maharashtra organised several events during Wildlife Week. Following the celebrations, the BNHS team conducted a ten-day environmental education campaign across the Patan and Karad talukas of Satara district. The campaign reached 21 schools and educational institutions, encouraging students to connect with nature through interactive learning, biodiversity awareness and nature-based activities.

BNHS has also begun working with State Forest Departments to assess ecosystem services. A series of workshops was conducted in Gujarat this month at Jamnagar, Velavadar National Park, Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary and Kaj lake. I would like to thank Dr Anand Chaudhary, Central Asian Flyway Coordinator, BirdLife International, for guiding these workshops.

Thank you for sharing your encouraging feedback on our new children's magazine, *Aranya*. I hope our members will continue to contribute to this publication and help us make it even more engaging and informative for young readers. If you are not already following BNHS on social media, I encourage you to do so and stay updated on our activities and conservation initiatives.

Let me also share an example of how timely information from citizens can help save wildlife. I received an email from T.R. Pattinam in Karaikal district, Puducherry, reporting alleged organised bird hunting, trapping and illegal commercial wildlife trade. The complainant specifically requested intervention by an independent central agency. We immediately shared the information with Dr Ramesh Kumar Pandey, Additional Director General (Wildlife), MoEF&CC, who promptly initiated action.

A team comprising a Head Constable and other police personnel proceeded to the reported location in Karaikal. Upon reaching the site and conducting a ground verification, they found evidence of bird trapping and hunting. The officers immediately contacted the Conservator of Forests (CF) and the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Puducherry, to conduct a joint inspection.

During the joint operation, the team seized five bird traps, trapping wires and other associated materials. They also rescued 13 live birds: nine egrets, one pond heron and three common sandpipers. A wildlife offence was registered under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. One person, Shri Laxmanan (60), a resident of Mariamman Temple Street, T.R. Pattinam, was detained. Following further enquiry, another alleged poacher, residing on Eda Street, was arrested.

I sincerely congratulate the citizen who came forward and shared this valuable information with us. I would also like to appreciate the prompt response and action initiated by Dr Ramesh Kumar Pandey, ADG (Wildlife), MoEF&CC.

Finally, I encourage you to read the BNHS Blog (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:

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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