

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Members,

As I mentioned in my previous communication, during the first week of July, BNHS teams of scientists and researchers were working tirelessly in the Pench and Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserves in Maharashtra to place GPS tags on 20 vultures. These tags will help track the vultures' movements after their release into the wild. After ensuring the vultures had acclimatized and acquired certain skills required in the field, the teams decided to release them by lifting the aviary gates.

We anticipated significant challenges for the 10 White-rumped Vultures (WRVs) released in Tadoba-Andhari, as the wild population had been completely wiped out from TATR. These vultures would need to learn to explore for food and overcome daily challenges on their own. In contrast, the 10 Long-billed Vultures (LBV) in the Pench aviary were already feeding alongside wild WRVs, so their challenges were comparatively less. Our President wanted to witness this occasion in Pench. The Field Director lifted the aviary gate, and after an hour of waiting, wild vultures finally arrived at the Chital carcass placed just outside the aviary. Upon seeing them, our LBVs immediately jumped on the carcass and started feeding together. Not only that, three LBVs flew far with the wild WRVs, and the remaining vultures also left the aviary premises.

Our teams know the next few months will be tough as they monitor the vultures' movements and occasionally provide food at their respective locations if needed. You should be pleased to see your society taking the vulture conservation programme to the next level. We are thrilled to receive videos and pictures daily of our tagged LBVs feeding with wild WRVs and solitary Red-headed Vultures in the Pench landscape. BNHS staff, in collaboration with local veterinarians, Forest officers, and Forest department field staff, are working hard on the ground and need your support. These tagged vultures are exploring tiger habitats to locate wild carcasses and may eventually establish their own breeding grounds.

At the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC) in Pinjore, Haryana, our vulture team worked closely under the guidance of the Chief Wildlife Warden of Haryana, Mr Vineet Garg, IFS, to organise a capacity-building workshop in preparation for our next mission: the release of 25 vultures in Haryana. Around 30 officers from the Forest, Animal Husbandry, and Food and Drugs Administration departments from five neighbouring states attended this workshop and discussed the way forward. This workshop will undoubtedly support the Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ) programme we have launched in these states and further our conservation efforts.

Rajasthan is another state where people claim that vultures are safe due to traditional practices of disposing of cattle carcasses at specific dumps. However, BNHS members from Rajasthan feel that the population is decreasing due to the destruction of nesting cliffs for mining. BNHS organised a Jatayu workshop at the Rajasthan University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (RAJUVAS), one of the oldest veterinary universities, established in 1954. The students gave an overwhelming response and showed great interest in addressing the threats to vulture conservation. This two-day workshop was attended by around 125 students from veterinary and animal sciences. Pro-Vice Chancellor Dr Hemant Dadhich invited BNHS to establish a long-term collaboration with RAJUVAS.

Following the recent deaths of lesser flamingos in Navi Mumbai, the high-powered committee appears to be taking serious steps towards protecting the coastal wetlands around Navi Mumbai. We are pleased to see that BNHS data from long-term research projects has been useful in implementing site-specific measures. Passionate BNHS members like Major General Bhupesh Goyal from the Indian Army and veteran Cardiovascular Thoracic Surgeon Dr Ramakant Panda from Mumbai visited the BNHS project in Ajmer and extended support to our field team.

The President visited your Point Calimere Bird Migration Study Centre, where we have planned several training courses for the 2024–25 migratory season. He was happy with the training facilities and also spoke to the Forest Secretary and Chief Wildlife Warden of Tamil Nadu regarding some key projects. I am pleased to share that the state Wildlife Board of Maharashtra has asked BNHS to prepare a proposal for the conservation breeding of wild water buffalo at Gorewada in Nagpur. BNHS has won the “Wild Incubator Tech” grant of Rs 40 lakh from the Centre for Wildlife Studies, supported by the Ashraya Hastha Trust, for our two projects: “Digitization of Bird Ringing Data” and “Monitoring Wild Vultures with Satellite Tagging in Assam.”

Please continue writing to BNHS Central Marketing Department (cmd@bnhs.org), Membership Department (membership@bnhs.org), Programmes Department (programmes@bnhs.org), and Conservation Education Centre (cec-mumbai@bnhs.org) for any assistance or participating in the programme. Feel free to contact them by email to reserve your preferred dates for events.

After an incident involving the defalcation of cash, BNHS has decided to go cashless. This means that from now on, you can only make payments – such as camp or course fees, gifting membership to your friends, purchasing BNHS products / books, etc. – using UPI, QR codes, cheques, or bank transfers. Cash payments will no longer be accepted.

I hope you have filled out the online forms for the publication of the “Yearbook for Life Members”. I look forward to attending the BNHS members’ meeting in Bengaluru in the first week of September 2024. I encourage you to send event pictures and a brief paragraph to Mr Gopi Naidu (g.naidu@bnhs.org) for the newsletter. Thank you for reaching out to me at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe

Director