

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Members,

Let me wish you a very happy, healthy, and peaceful New Year, 2025!

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to Dr P. Sathiyaselvam, Deputy Director and a leading scientist at BNHS, who also heads the BNHS Central Asian Flyway Programme, for winning the Sanctuary Wildlife Service Award 2024. BNHS is proud of him for this well-deserved recognition. By honouring such an outstanding scientist and conservationist, the credibility of this award is significantly enhanced. Dr Sathiyaselvam, who sustained an injury during a Sarus Crane tagging operation, underwent minor surgery and was unable to attend the award ceremony. We are pleased to share that he is recovering well.

This month, the BNHS Vulture Conservation Programme achieved another milestone by releasing 25 white-rumped vultures in Haryana from the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC) in Pinjore. The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Haryana, Sh. Nayab Singh, spent nearly three hours at JCBC and lauded BNHS's over two decades of dedicated efforts toward vulture conservation. The event was also graced by Hon'ble Environment, Forests & Wildlife Minister Mr Rao Narbir Singh, ACS Environment, Forest & Wildlife Mr Anand Mohan Sharan (IAS), Secretary (Forest) Mr Atul Sirsikar, local MLA Smt. Shakti Rani Sharma, PCCF Mr Jagdish Chander and Chief Wildlife Warden Mr Vineet Garg.

In Assam, six rescued Himalayan vultures were released from the VCBC Rani, Kamrup, on December 13, 2024, in the presence of forest officers. These vultures were saved by the joint efforts of the forest department and BNHS in Kamrup and Lakhimpur districts.

The traditions established by passionate former BNHS Governing Council members like Dr Ashok Kothari continue to thrive under the guidance of our current trustees and Director. The 10th Rare Books Exhibition, a much-loved tradition, was successfully organized in collaboration with McGill Library and

Collections, McGill University (Canada). Hosted at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) in Mumbai from December 17–22, 2024, the exhibition showcased a stunning collection of rare and antique books on natural history, wildlife, and the environment. Highlights included rare first editions by renowned naturalists such as Patrick Russell (1801), John Gould (1850–1873), and Nathaniel Wallich (1832). Hand-illustrated field guides and exquisite illustrations, particularly from Gould's the birds of asia and James Forbes's oriental memoirs (1813), were a delight for visitors.

Other noteworthy events this month included:

- The BNHS Naturalist Training and Leadership Course.
- A sapling plantation initiative at BNHS-VCBC Bhopal in memory of the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy.
- A Wader Identification Trail at T.S. Chanakya Wetland, Navi Mumbai.
- Training programmes for forest staff in Nashik, Maharashtra, focusing on bird identification and migration studies, organized by BNHS-EIACP.
- A waste management campaign at Film City led by 100 BNHS-TCS volunteers.

Special appreciation goes out to our VCBCs and Bird Migration Study Centres for their capacity-building initiatives for frontline forest staff. Regular training sessions for state forest training institutes have been particularly impactful, as seen in the monthly newsletter.

I am also thrilled to share that BNHS has signed two MoUs with the Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation

(MMBCF), Mumbai, for coastal projects. These include a study on the Charru Mussel along Mumbai's west coast and the large-scale production and sea ranching of the vulnerable Indian seahorse *Hippocampus kuda* in Maharashtra. We anticipate significant outcomes from our marine team in these projects. Team from TVS company, platinum corporate member of BNHS who made their Hosur campus declared as Other Effective Conservation Measure (OECM) visited Hornbill House to explore the opportunities to work more closely.

In Rajasthan, Dr Sujit Narwade and his team are working closely with local communities to protect sacred groves (Orans) by equipping them with scientific knowledge. This aligns with the Hon'ble Supreme Court's recent order emphasizing the legal protection of Orans.

Our gratitude extends to BNHS's foreign members for their contributions. Special thanks to Neil Simons for his efforts in preparing an outreach and fundraising plan for BNHS. We have also created a dedicated WhatsApp group for our foreign members to enhance collaboration.

The Satpuda Landscape Tiger Partnership (SLTP), a consortium of 12 conservation NGOs focused on tiger conservation in central India, celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. BNHS is proud to be one of its founding partners.

The Indian Skimmer Project continues to excel in achieving its conservation goals. BNHS scientist Parveen Shaikh conducted a national Skimmer count on January 4–5, 2025.

I also commend our Membership Officer, Mr Asif Khan, for launching several initiatives, including the new BNHS-Seva (volunteering) initiative, which attracted 85 participants within just 10 days. I look forward to working with this passionate BNHS-Force in the New Year.

Former BNHS Director Dr Asad Rahmani recently visited Hornbill House during the launch of his memoir, living with birds, at Kitab Khana in Mumbai. This inspiring book encourages birders to go beyond birdwatching and actively engage in habitat conservation, and I highly recommend it.

We were also delighted to welcome a young author and BNHS student member Katyayani Mahurkar, who donated her books, my tryst with birds and a polar bear tale, to BNHS.

Please explore the Systema Naturae section in the latest *Hornbill* magazine and consider contributing to the BNHS 150-Year Omnibus collection. If you have not yet completed the online form for the Life Members Yearbook, you can do so here:

<https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>. For assistance, feel free to reach out to our central teams via email, and don't forget to share event photos and brief write-ups with Mr Gopi Naidu (g.naidu@bnhs.org).

Thank you for staying connected, and I am always available at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe

Director, Bombay Natural History Society