

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Members,

I am writing to you from the forests of Pench Tiger Reserve, where the Governing Council members are discussing crucial issues shaping the future of BNHS. Establishing infrastructure for any NGO requires serious deliberation. When utilized optimally, infrastructure can be a significant asset, driving positive change on the ground; otherwise, it risks becoming a liability. In 2018, BNHS acquired 19 acres of land near Bhisli, Tal-Chimur, District-Chandrapur in Maharashtra, with plans to develop a state-of-the-art Conservation Research and Education Centre. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed this vision. However, under the leadership of our President, the Governing Council has now taken up the project once again. We extend our gratitude to the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) for funding Rs 2 crore towards this initiative.

The Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre at Pinjore is in high demand among forest staff from various states for training purposes. However, the lack of residential facilities has been a challenge. BNHS had previously procured land and constructed a building at the site, but the project was abandoned for some reason. The Governing Council has now decided to complete the construction, ensuring it can accommodate trainees and BNHS staff.

Beyond infrastructure, the Governing Council also reviewed the progress of various projects, including the release of vultures – 25 in Pinjore, Haryana, and 10 each in Pench and Tadoba, Maharashtra – as well as the sarus study project in Gondia district, Maharashtra. However, a serious threat looms over the released vultures due to electrocution from electric transmission lines. Tragically, four vultures from Pinjore and two from Maharashtra have died due to this hazard. Despite these challenges, some released vultures are thriving in the wild, covering vast landscapes and even making national headlines. One white-rumped vulture released from Tadoba travelled nearly 4,000 km, passing through Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka before succumbing to electrocution in Tamil Nadu.

Another vulture, N-10, has travelled through five states, covering 3,187 km in the past three months before reaching Gadchiroli, Maharashtra. You can read more about these reports on our website. The Governing Council also commended the ongoing digitisation of Bird Migration data. BNHS's Bird Migration Programme will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2027, marking a significant milestone.

I am pleased to share that the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has officially banned the manufacture, sale, and veterinary use of the drug Nimesulide and its formulations. The notification was issued on December 30, 2024, under Section 26-C of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. BNHS has long advocated for this ban, submitting multiple representations to the Drugs and Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), which had recommended the prohibition to the Ministry. We now urge the Government of India to establish a mechanism for pre-market safety testing of veterinary drugs to prevent further harm to vultures, as we have identified other drugs posing similar risks.

Looking ahead, the Vulture Release Programme will soon expand to Kaziranga Tiger Reserve in Assam and Melghat Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra. The pre-release aviary construction is underway in Melghat, while the land for the project in Assam has been finalized.

This month, BNHS also convened a meeting with corporate partners in Mumbai, who were deeply impressed by our field projects and have pledged financial support. Additionally, BNHS has a longstanding collaboration with India Post, and this month, we jointly organized the MAHAPEX 2025 event at the World Trade Centre in Mumbai. During the event, we premiered a new awareness film on the menace of pigeons in urban areas, made possible with support from the JSW Foundation.

A heartfelt thank you for the overwhelming response to BNHS SEVA, our volunteering initiative for members. So far, 87 members have enrolled, with 40 actively contributing their knowledge, skills, and networks across various departments.

I am also delighted to share that Shri Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Forest, Environment & Climate Change, Labour, and Employees' State Insurance, Government of Odisha, has felicitated Dr P. Sathiyaselvam for his outstanding work with BNHS in Odisha. Under the BNHS-Chandrapur Forest Academy MoU, our "Behavioural Change Conservation Programme" at Chandrapur has received an excellent response. Thirty-six teachers have been trained in conservation education, and we hope they will inspire young minds to engage in wildlife conservation. BNHS has also adopted Kihim village for holistic development. This is where Dr Sálim Ali first conducted his birding sessions, and during my recent visit, the villagers expressed their excitement about their village gaining global recognition on the tourism map thanks to his legacy.

Please check the Systema Naturae section in the latest *Hornbill* magazine and consider contributing your observations to the BNHS 150-Year Omnibus collection.

Lastly, if you have not yet completed the online form for the publication of the Yearbook for Life Members, please do so here:

<https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>. For assistance, feel free to reach out to: BNHS Central Marketing (cmd@bnhs.org), Membership

(membership@bnhs.org), Programmes (programmes@bnhs.org), or Conservation Education Centre (cec-mumbai@bnhs.org). For event reservations or submissions, please contact us via email and share event photos and brief write-ups with Mr Gopi Naidu at g.naidu@bnhs.org.

Thank you for staying connected with BNHS. I am always reachable at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe, Director

Bombay Natural History Society