

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Members,

Every November is typically a busy month for all of us at Hornbill House as we celebrate 'Bird Week' from November 5–12. Launched in 2020 by the Government of Maharashtra, Bird Week commemorates the birth anniversaries of two renowned ornithologists: Shri Maruti Chitampalli, an esteemed naturalist, Marathi writer, and forest officer from Maharashtra, (November 5th), and the late Dr Sálím Ali (November 12th), who pioneered comprehensive bird surveys in India. This eight-day event honours their immense contributions to Indian ornithology.

Due to ongoing major repairs at Hornbill House and the temporary use of the auditorium space for collections, we opted for a smaller celebration here while organizing additional events at the CEC-Mumbai and various field locations across India. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our staff and partner organizations for their dedication in organizing these events and for remembering the invaluable contributions of these great ornithologists.

This month, we received a request from the Rajasthan Forest Department to investigate the recent mass mortality of birds at Sambhar Lake in Jaipur District. The Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) has identified avian botulism, a neuromuscular disease caused by the toxin from *Clostridium botulinum*, as the probable cause, confirmed through mouse bioassay results. This condition often arises due to sudden changes in water salinity or the presence of decaying vegetation. Based on experiences in the USA and Australia, most outbreaks occur during summer and autumn and often recur in the same environments.

Another concerning issue came to our attention from the Jorbeed Conservation Reserve in Rajasthan, a haven for raptors. Media reports have highlighted the increasing threat posed by free-ranging dogs (FRDs) in the reserve. Mitigating this issue, particularly by removing dogs from the carcass dumping areas, is essential to protect the wildlife.

To address a similar concern in the Union Territory of Ladakh, we conducted a workshop to devise a strategy. Veterinary officers, representatives from the Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC),

WWF, NCF, WCBCL, HEAL, the University of Ladakh, the Wildlife Protection Department, the Animal Husbandry Department, and Army officers from Leh and Hanley discussed the situation in depth. They reviewed the impact of free-ranging dogs in Ladakh, especially through the BNHS-THT Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme. Villagers from Hanley shared their concerns about the negative impact on tourism due to FRDs preying on Pallas's cats and black-necked cranes.

On a positive note, the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve recently reported the sighting of a tiger, STR T-2. This is a testament to the successful efforts led by the BNHS President and the then Forest Secretary of Maharashtra, who played a pivotal role in relocating villages from the core area between 2011 and 2016.

In literary news, former BNHS Director Dr Asad Rahmani launched his memoir, *living with birds*, in New Delhi. This inspiring book encourages birders to go beyond birdwatching and actively engage in habitat conservation. I highly recommend reading about Dr Rahmani's dedicated life and contributions.

Our gratitude to Ms Deepa Navin for donating seven books to our Library.

Mumbai also had the privilege of hosting the legendary Dr Jane Goodall in mid-November during her *Reasons for Hope* global tour celebrating her 90th birthday. She participated in India's first Ocean Literacy Dialogues (OLD), organized by the Jane Goodall Institute India (JGII), UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), the British Council, and CSMVS Museum. Her keynote speech was truly inspiring.

I am pleased to share that our BNHS team successfully tagged the first sarus crane in Gondia district. This initiative will provide valuable insights into sarus crane migration patterns within the Vidarbha landscape.

On the academic front, BNHS has signed an MoU with SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, to offer 16 certificate courses at BNHS research stations and facilities. Students will benefit from access to the BNHS journal, library, and research publications. Additionally, we had the honour of hosting National Geographic Society team, at Hornbill House, to discuss potential future collaborations.

The BNHS CEC is regaining its vibrancy by organizing various courses and events for diverse stakeholders. The Naturalist Training and Leadership Course featured several insightful evening sessions. Please check the *Systema Naturae* section in the latest *Hornbill*, and consider contributing your observations to the BNHS 150 Years Omnibus collection.

Lastly, if you have not yet completed the online form for the publication of the *Yearbook for Life Members* click here to complete your submission <https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>. For

assistance, please contact 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, feel free to reach out via email, and don't forget to send event photos and brief write-ups to Mr Gopi Naidu (g.naidu@bnhs.org).

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

Kishor Rithe

Director

Bombay Natural History Society