

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Members,

Every year, we celebrate Wildlife Week from October 1 to 7, a cherished tradition for wildlife enthusiasts across the nation. During this week, our entire staff actively engages in promoting the message of wildlife conservation to the public in various ways. This year, the BNHS Bengaluru chapter organized a birding trek in Bengaluru; and a special film screening was held, featuring a documentary by renowned wildlife filmmaker Shekar Dattatri on the Indian skimmer. The film highlights the important work of BNHS scientist Parveen Shaikh in conserving the Indian skimmer, with the hope that it will help raise funds to extend her conservation efforts to other rivers to protect this species.

We also received some exciting news during the first week. The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has funded the establishment of a research and training centre in Chimur, Chandrapur District, Maharashtra, where we have already acquired 19 acres of land.

This month saw significant international collaboration as well. Our partner, BirdLife International, organized an Asia Partner Meeting in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. Additionally, a separate session on SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction) brought together partners from countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Myanmar to discuss vulture conservation challenges. Dr P. Sathiyaselvam presented BNHS's efforts within the Central Asian Flyway initiative. This BirdLife partnership meeting will enable BNHS to collaborate more closely with Asian counterparts on the conservation of important species, including the black-necked crane, vultures, migratory birds, and seabirds.

October is also a month of major Hindu festivals, from Dussehra to Diwali. However, it is troubling that many bird species are still used in religious practices during this season, despite their protected status under the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Based on a recent rapid survey across select cities in West Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, I urge the public to help end illegal practices involving bird-derived products for rituals. For instance, intermediate and great egrets are often killed in significant numbers for their flight feathers, especially during their breeding season when they gather in large colonies.

The Indian roller (Neelkanth) is also captured in large numbers in October, especially before Dussehra, as it is believed that sighting a Neelkanth brings good luck. A BNHS ornithologist recently recorded over 100 Indian rollers for sale in specific markets in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, alongside white-throated kingfishers, a day before Dussehra.

Similarly, Diwali brings additional challenges for owl species, as they are targeted by occult practitioners for use in black magic. Studies on owl trafficking by TRAFFIC India and WWF-India have documented an underground market for owls around Diwali.

To protect these birds, especially during the festive season, we must all raise awareness and take action. Let us work together to end these harmful practices and celebrate in ways that respect and conserve our nation's wildlife.

The Delhi Public School (DPS) lake is a crucial high-tide roosting site for migratory and non-migratory bird species from September to May. Around 9,500 birds, including near-threatened species like the lesser flamingo, curlew sandpiper, black-tailed godwit, and painted stork, are recorded here each year. Migratory birds benefit from the low disturbance levels at DPS lake, which is close to Thane Creek, thus minimizing the distance between feeding and roosting sites and helping birds conserve energy. To maintain this as an ideal roosting habitat, effective water level management is necessary. BNHS has requested that the government designate it as a conservation reserve.

Our marine conservation programme is also actively engaging coastal communities along with other stakeholders in Maharashtra. As part of this initiative, we recently launched the JALCHAR app, designed to help record sightings of marine megafauna in Maharashtra's coastal waters.

At the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC) in Pinjore, Haryana, our vulture conservation team, guided by Mr Vineet Garg, IFS, Chief Wildlife Warden of Haryana, successfully tagged 25 vultures. Meanwhile, the Bird Migration Study Centre (BMSC) at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu, continues to serve as a premier training centre for forest staff from various state academies. This month, staff from the Forest Academy in Kundal, Maharashtra, visited BMSC for field training.

In publishing news, BNHS and HarperCollins Publishers India Pvt. Ltd signed an agreement to release mammals of india, a comprehensive guide by Drs A.J.T. Johnsingh and P.O. Nameer. This will be the first complete reference guide covering all 428 recognized species of Indian mammals, with details on taxonomy, conservation status (IUCN Red List, CITES Appendix, and Indian Wild Life Protection Act schedules), distribution maps, habitat information, population data, and English names. This beautifully illustrated book honours the late Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh and promises to be a valuable addition to any collection.

We were delighted to welcome Dr Reylene Cooke, a raptor researcher, Dr John White, a rodent ecologist, and Dr Michael Weston from Deakin University, Australia, to Hornbill House. Their talk on the impact of rodenticides on native wildlife and human health provided invaluable insights for our scientists.

This month, we also mourn the passing of Mr Uma Pratap Singh, who dedicated over four decades, even post his superannuation, of service to Hornbill House. His commitment and integrity will be deeply missed and fondly remembered.

If you have not yet completed the online form for the publication of the "Yearbook for Life Members," please do so at your earliest convenience. For any assistance, feel free to contact BNHS Central Marketing (cmd@bnhs.org), Membership (membership@bnhs.org), Programmes (programmes@bnhs.org), or Conservation Education Centres (cec-mumbai@bnhs.org). To reserve your event dates, you may also reach out via email. We encourage you to send event pictures and a brief write-up to Mr Gopi Naidu (g.naidu@bnhs.org) for our newsletter. Thank you for staying in touch with me at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe

Director

Bombay Natural History Society