

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Members,

While you are reading this message, some of our members may be enjoying the last remaining blooms of the beautiful karvi *Strobilanthes callosa*, which blossoms once every eight years, at BNHS-CEC in Goregaon. It is a breathtaking sight when Karvi flowers bloom in the Western Ghats.

I am sure you would be interested to hear about the status of the twenty vultures we released last month in the Pench and Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserves in Maharashtra. Of the ten white-rumped vultures (WRVs) released in Tadoba, seven are being regularly monitored by our teams in the Tadoba landscape. Unfortunately, two vultures (J73 and J76) are missing, and one (N-11) is currently in Chhattisgarh. The vultures in Tadoba are fed on goat, cattle, or tiger kills once every 7–10 days, if they do not find natural wild carcasses. We had anticipated that younger vultures would explore further, and this has been confirmed as one subadult bird travelled non-stop to Chhattisgarh and was later rescued.

The ten Indian vultures released from the Pench aviary have been seen feeding alongside wild vultures. It is heartening to see the Vulture Conservation Programme progressing to this level. We are thrilled to receive daily videos and photos of our tagged Indian vultures feeding with wild white-rumped vultures and solitary red-headed vultures in the Pench landscape. The Field Director of Pench Tiger Reserve has also announced a special scheme for village Panchayats in the PTR buffer zone to establish Vulture Restaurants or carcass dumps near villages.

At the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC) in Pinjore, Haryana, our vulture team is diligently working towards the release of 25 vultures, under the guidance of Mr Vineet Garg, IFS, Chief Wildlife Warden of Haryana. Trained officers from the Forest, Animal Husbandry, and Food and Drug Administration departments from five neighbouring states will play a crucial role post-release.

In other good news, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister felicitated BNHS staff member Ms Alka Dubey for her awareness work on the Vulture Safe Zone. The Forest Department has also inaugurated a conservation breeding centre for red-headed vultures in Gorakhpur, with Chief Minister Mr Yogi

Adityanath presiding over the event. On September 7, our staff at VCBCs in Bhopal, Rani (Assam), and Pinjore (Haryana) celebrated Vulture Awareness Day with various programmes.

Your Bird Migration Study Centre (BMSC) at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu, continues to be a centre of excellence for forest staff from various state academies. This month, staff from the Forest Academy in Kundal, Maharashtra, visited the BMSC for field training.

I also visited the Department of Environmental Studies at MIT-WPU Pune to explore potential collaborations. I was pleased to see the enthusiasm among the professors to work with BNHS scientists. I hope to see a collaborative action plan soon.

Following the recent deaths of lesser flamingos in Navi Mumbai, the Government of Maharashtra established a high-powered committee that has taken serious steps to protect the coastal wetlands around Navi Mumbai. I attended its last meeting, where the majority of members expressed their support for giving these wetlands legal protection as Protected Areas (PAs). BNHS data from longterm research projects has been instrumental in guiding these wetland-specific conservation measures.

You may have seen a post shared by our President, Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi, on the state WhatsApp groups, highlighting the fundraising efforts of our trustees. He mentioned over ten new projects initiated with donor support. Additionally, he listed some of BNHS's major achievements in the 2023–24 fiscal year, which were also presented during our Annual General Meeting.

As you know, the Maharashtra State Wildlife Board requested BNHS to draft a proposal for the conservation breeding of wild water buffaloes at Gorewada, Nagpur. This proposal, along with projects for the conservation breeding of seahorses and a study on Charru mussels in the Mumbai seascape, has been approved.

I also visited the TVS plant in Hosur, Karnataka, where the company has created wetlands and protected biodiversity, making the campus a breeding habitat for several species, including painted storks and the slender loris. Other companies with large tracts of land could follow their example, as this campus has been designated an Other Effective Conservation Measure (OECM) site. I also attended a BNHS members' meeting in Bengaluru, where they decided to establish a BNHS city chapter. The Indian Armed Forces have always been supportive of BNHS since its establishment in 1883. I had the opportunity to meet Vice Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, along with our Chairman of the Conservation Committee, Mr Debi Goenka, to discuss marine megafauna and the impacts of climate change. I look forward to seeing this collaboration strengthen in the coming months. This month, we mourn the passing of Dr Robert Grubh, a retired BNHS scientist. His contribution to a major BNHS project "Ecological Study of Bird Hazards at Indian Aerodromes" (1981–1989) will be remembered. He also served on the BNHS Executive Committee from 2000–2002 and 2010–2012.

If you have not done so already, please fill out the online form for the publication of the "Yearbook for Life Members". Feel free to continue writing to BNHS Central Marketing ([cmd@bnhs.org](mailto:cmd@bnhs.org)), Membership ([membership@bnhs.org](mailto:membership@bnhs.org)), Programme ([programmes@bnhs.org](mailto:programmes@bnhs.org)), and Conservation Education Centres ([cec-mumbai@bnhs.org](mailto:cec-mumbai@bnhs.org)) for assistance. You can also contact them by email to reserve your preferred event dates. I encourage you to send event pictures and a brief write-up to Mr Gopi Naidu ([g.naidu@bnhs.org](mailto:g.naidu@bnhs.org)) for our newsletter.

Thank you for reaching out to me at [director@bnhs.org](mailto:director@bnhs.org).

Kishor Rithe

Director

Bombay Natural History Society