



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

From the DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

I bought and read a book titled *CONNECTIVITY CONSERVATION* – a Cambridge University Press publication edited by Kevin R. Crooks and M. Sanjayan – in 2012. I later read it thoroughly at my leisure. I often wonder how, all those years ago, the editors had so accurately foreseen what would happen to landscapes across the globe a decade later.

BNHS has been actively advocating for landscape conservation and has therefore been very vocal against destructive projects such as mining and linear infrastructure when they are proposed in wildlife habitats or ecologically sensitive areas. We often find it difficult to convince political leaders to avoid such projects in important habitats, especially when government officers fail to explain the negative impacts and, on the contrary, promote these projects while ignoring the interests of wildlife. The issues surrounding the protection of the Aravalli mountains in Rajasthan and adjoining states, and the Lohardongari iron ore mining in the Tadoba–Ghodazari WLS landscape in Maharashtra, clearly emphasise the need for connectivity conservation.

We have released our captive bred vultures into the wild in Maharashtra. The experienced BNHS team tagged the vultures in Pench, Melghat, and TATR, and subsequently released nine white-rumped vultures (WRV) and five Indian vultures (IV) in Pench; five WRVs in TATR; and fifteen IVs in Melghat. Our monitoring teams are currently engaged in tracking these birds. You may have already heard about their journeys in the wild through media reports.

BNHS's highly successful vulture conservation breeding programme is encouraging many states to come forward for vulture conservation. Funding is always a constraint. However, the state of Jharkhand quietly constructed aviaries over the past few years and has now decided to start the programme with the support of BNHS. The Chief Wildlife Warden of Jharkhand, Mr Paritosh Upadhyay, and I signed an MoU this month at Hornbill House. This is a new arrangement led by the state and supported by BNHS. I hope other states will also come forward to implement the National Action Plan for Vulture Conservation. It is also encouraging to learn that the state of Tamil Nadu is attempting to establish a Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ), which is a welcome step.

BNHS ornithologists and BNHS-IBCN members were actively engaged in conducting the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) across all Indian states and participated in this massive exercise. Most conservationists of my generation emerged from school-level green initiatives. I strongly believe that the country can nurture passionate nature enthusiasts, wildlife researchers, and conservationists through such initiatives. Hence, BNHS has been investing significantly in awareness programmes for school students and teachers for several decades. We have now decided to restart school nature clubs that were once initiated by BNHS, CEE, WWF, and many other organisations.

Towards the end of the month, I attended a workshop organised by the Tadoba–Andhari Tiger Reserve directorate at the Chandrapur Forest Academy to discuss measures to address the growing human–carnivore conflict in Chandrapur district. Statistics presented by the Forest Department recorded 200 human deaths due to tiger attacks in the district over the last five years, which is both worrying and shocking. Experts reached a consensus that the solution lies in landscape-level land-use planning, followed by strict implementation.

I visited Panna Tiger Reserve to attend the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Satpuda Landscape Tiger Partnership (SLTP). I was fortunate to witness playful fights among tiger cubs, but I was even happier to see a healthy number of vultures in and around Panna. However, it remains uncertain whether this landscape will remain intact in light of the Ken–Betwa river-linking project.

This month also brought good news: the Ministry of Jal Shakti approved our project on the Indian skimmer in the Chambal and lower Ganga rivers under Namami Gange Mission 2.0, during the 68th meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG). I thank the Honourable Minister of Jal Shakti for making this announcement in Dehradun.

Several states spend substantial funds on organising bird festivals but pay little attention to bird habitats. I hope the Ministry of Jal Shakti's approach towards sandbar-nesting birds will inspire states to invest more in river protection, including safeguarding sandbar habitats and the birds that depend on them.

Another piece of good news came from Chilika, where bird estimation results showed that over 11 lakh birds belonging to 196 species visited the wetland—an increase over last year's count. Several birders from Maharashtra had requested training in bird migration studies from BNHS. In response, a course on Ornithology and Bird Migration was organised at Nandur Madhameshwar Sanctuary in Maharashtra and was attended by 15 birders. I strongly believe in citizen science initiatives. We have also undertaken the major task of digitising bird ringing datasheets, which requires many helping hands. I thank BNHS member Mr Deepak Rajanna for organising the sixth volunteer drive for the bird ringing digitisation project at CISCO, where 109 students participated.

Geography departments in India carry a significant responsibility to adopt innovative approaches and support biodiversity conservation. I was pleased to attend a conference organised by the Geography Department of the renowned SP College, Pune. Magsaysay Award winner and water conservationist Dr Rajendra Singh also attended the conference, and I had the opportunity to spend valuable time discussing important environmental issues with him. His Jalbiradari initiative in Maharashtra and the BNHS team working at Ujani Wetland have decided to collaborate.

Let me now officially share some exciting news: we are going to launch a popular magazine on lines of *Hornbill*, for our student members. I request members to suggest a suitable title for this magazine. The name should be original, inspiring for young naturalists, while connect strongly to nature, and preferably not be a bird name. Please send in your suggestions by February 28 for selection

If you are not already following us on social media, please do so to receive daily updates from BNHS.

I also encourage you to read the BNHS Blog (<http://blog.bnhs.org>) for inspiring stories from the field. Please feel free to contribute articles in any language. We also encourage academic institutions to subscribe to the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (<https://bnhsjournal.in/index.php/bnhs/ga>), one of India's oldest scientific journals, which can also help institutions earn NAAC accreditation credits.

If you have not yet completed the Yearbook form for Life Members, you may do so here:
<https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>

For assistance, please feel free to reach out:

Central Marketing: cmd@bnhs.org; Membership: membership@bnhs.org;

Programmes: programmes@bnhs.org; Conservation Education Centre: cec-mumbai@bnhs.org

For event reservations and content submissions, please send your photos and write-ups to Mr Gopi Naidu at g.naidu@bnhs.org.

Thank you for staying connected with us. For any suggestions or queries, I am always available at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe
Director
Bombay Natural History Society



Four Decades of Monitoring: Asian Waterbird Census 2026 in India

The annual Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), part of the global International Waterbird Census (IWC), is a long-running citizen-science initiative that supports the conservation and management of wetlands and waterbirds worldwide. In India, the AWC is jointly coordinated by Wetlands International South Asia and BNHS, with support from the Wetlands International Global Office. The year 2026 marks a significant milestone, celebrating 40 years of the AWC and 60 years of the IWC globally.

To strengthen nationwide participation, BNHS reached out to all Principal Chief Conservators of Forests and Chief Wildlife Wardens, reinforcing the role of state forest departments as key partners in wetland monitoring. BNHS also designated state-wise coordinators to improve coordination among forest departments, AWC partners, birdwatchers, volunteers, and local organisations.

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BNHS scientists and researchers also provided on-ground coordination and support at several ecologically important wetlands across India. These included Coringa and Pulicat in Andhra Pradesh; Point Calimere in Tamil Nadu; Chilika in Odisha; Nandur-Madhmeshwar, Akshi Beach, Alibaug, and wetlands in and around Thane Creek in Maharashtra; Ankasamudra in Karnataka; Suru Valley in Kargil, Ladakh; and Pong Dam in Himachal Pradesh. This direct involvement helped streamline data collection and encouraged wider participation at key sites.

In Bihar, BNHS extended technical support to the Department of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (DEF&CC) to strengthen the state's AWC implementation. With BNHS guidance, plans were developed to cover 137 wetlands during AWC 2026. As part of this effort, a pre-census has already been completed at 25 wetlands, laying a strong foundation for comprehensive coverage during the main census period.

As the AWC enters its fifth decade, BNHS's role in AWC 2026 highlights its long-standing commitment to collaborative science, capacity building, and wetland conservation. This anniversary year not only marks four decades of sustained waterbird monitoring in the region but also reinforces the importance of strong institutional partnerships in ensuring the programme's continued success. ■



Fifteen Indian Vultures Released in Melghat Tiger Reserve

As part of its ongoing vulture conservation programme, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has successfully released 15 critically endangered Indian Vultures in the Somthana Range of Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR). The birds were translocated from the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC), Pinjore, and arrived in Melghat on April 23, 2025.

Following their arrival, the vultures were housed in a pre-release aviary at Melghat to enable gradual acclimatisation to local environmental conditions. On December 19, 2025, all individuals were fitted with GSM/satellite tags to facilitate scientific monitoring of their movement patterns and survival in the wild.

The soft-release process commenced on January 2, 2026, with aviary gates opened remotely and food placed outside the enclosure to encourage the birds to exit naturally and explore their surroundings.

The release programme encountered several challenges, including limited food availability, the absence of an existing wild vulture population to guide captive-bred birds, and the continued presence of harmful veterinary drugs in the wider landscape. These challenges were addressed through the establishment of feeding stations and by sourcing safe cattle carcasses via active partnerships with gaushalas.

The release was carried out by BNHS Director Kishor Rithe, along with Vinil Hatwar, Range Forest Officer, Somthana, in the presence of Ganesh Tekade, Assistant Conservator of Forests. The effort was supported by BNHS staff members Bhaskar Das and Sooryajith P, Conservation Biologists, and Lakhan Baasudev, Field Assistant. ■



Rajasthan Gaushalas Support Vulture Conservation Through Nature-Friendly Practices

Gaushalas across Rajasthan are playing an increasingly important role in vulture conservation by adopting nature-friendly cattle management practices. By minimising the use of harmful veterinary drugs and ensuring cattle carcasses are disposed of at designated dumping sites, several cow shelters are making significant contributions to the protection and recovery of vulture populations.

Vultures in India have suffered a dramatic decline over the past decades, largely due to the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) in livestock. When vultures feed on the carcasses of treated cattle, these drugs can cause fatal kidney failure, leading to mass mortalities. Recognising this threat, many gaushalas are turning to traditional and natural medicines for cattle treatment.

Shelters such as Apna Ghar Lohargarh Gaushala in Bharatpur and Ramkali Gaushala near Halali Dam in Bhopal are among those leading the shift towards eco-friendly practices. In Rajasthan's Thar Desert region, where cattle populations are high, gaushalas are reviving older, less drug-dependent methods of livestock care and ensuring that carcasses are deposited only at designated dumping grounds.

These efforts are already showing encouraging results. BNHS staff have observed that at sites such as Bahadarariya Rai and Jorbeer in Bikaner – Asia's largest carcass dump – safe carcass disposal has helped stabilise local vulture populations. While Rajasthan's gaushalas are emerging as unexpected but vital champions of vulture conservation, there is urgent need for gaushalas in Maharashtra and southern Indian states to adopt similar practices, including reduced veterinary drug use and safe carcass disposal.

BNHS has been actively involved in vulture conservation for several decades, with its scientists contributing to these efforts since their early stages. The organisation continues to document and promote community-led initiatives that demonstrate effective pathways for reviving vulture populations.

BNHS has urged state governments, particularly animal husbandry departments, to formally integrate vulture conservation measures into livestock management policies. ■



Ambala Retail Chemist Association Support BNHS 'Save Vultures' Mission

The BNHS vulture conservation programme extends far beyond captive breeding efforts and requires widespread awareness among veterinarians, chemists, cattle owners, caretakers, and gaurakshaks about the dangers posed by harmful veterinary drugs.

To strengthen its outreach, BNHS, with the support of Mr Lalit Kumar Goel, State Drugs Controller, FDA Haryana, organised a visit for chemists to the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC), Pinjore, on January 11, 2026. Fifteen members of the Ambala Retail Chemist Association participated in the programme.

The visit aimed to enhance understanding of the ecological significance of vultures, their husbandry and veterinary care at the Centre, and the conservation initiatives jointly undertaken by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Haryana Forest and Wildlife Department. These efforts focus on the successful breeding and reintroduction of vultures in Haryana. Members were briefed on the vital role vultures play as natural scavengers, contributing to environmental hygiene and ecological balance.

During the interaction, discussions were held on four veterinary drugs that have been banned due to their lethal impact on vulture populations. The session sought to sensitise chemists to the importance of strictly avoiding the sale of these harmful medicines.

The Ambala Retail Chemist Association reaffirmed its commitment to playing a proactive role in vulture conservation, supporting national conservation efforts through responsible pharmaceutical practices. ■



Jharkhand Partners with BNHS for Vulture Conservation Breeding Programme

The Chief Wildlife Warden, Jharkhand, has signed a five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the BNHS to strengthen the conservation breeding programme for two critically endangered Gyps vulture species – white-rumped vulture and Indian vulture.

Under the collaboration, which begins in the 2025–26 financial year, BNHS will provide technical support for scientific breeding, health monitoring, staff training, and management of biological and pedigree records. The programme will be implemented by the Department of Forests, Environment and Climate Change, Government of Jharkhand, with oversight from a multi-institutional Governing Body. The Governing Body will include representatives from BNHS, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).

The initiative builds on BNHS's pioneering role in vulture conservation and captive breeding in India and will add Jharkhand to the national network of Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres. The MoU reflects Jharkhand's commitment to safeguarding threatened species and contributes to national efforts to restore vulture populations and ecological balance. ■

Vulture Census Conducted at Jorbeer Conservation Reserve

BNHS, in collaboration with Dungar College and the Rajasthan Forest Department, conducted a two-day vulture census at Jorbeer Conservation Reserve on January 22–23. Led by Rahul Nandi, Project Fellow, and Dr Neelkanth Bora, Assistant Director, BNHS, the survey documented both resident and migratory vulture species. The exercise generated valuable data that will contribute to long-term monitoring and conservation of raptors in western India. ■



GPS-Tagged Vulture from TATR Rescued in Kalaburagi, Karnataka

A white-rumped vulture (M38, PTT Z25), part of the ongoing rewilding programme, was successfully rescued near Chittapur, Kalaburagi, by the Karnataka Forest Department in coordination with BNHS. The bird had travelled from Tadoba–Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) through Telangana into Karnataka before showing signs of exhaustion.

Timely veterinary care was provided at Kalaburgi Zoo, where the vulture was advised a ten-day recovery period prior to release. A joint monitoring visit by BNHS and the Forest Department reviewed the bird's condition and recovery.

The visit reaffirmed the importance of continued GPS tracking for monitoring post-release movements and reinforced the strong inter-agency collaboration that underpins vulture conservation and rewilding efforts. This successful intervention highlights the growing network of cooperation between state forest departments, zoos, and BNHS in safeguarding India's critically endangered vultures. ■



Vulture Conservation Efforts Strengthened in Karnataka

On January 21, 2026, Dr. Sujit Narwade, Deputy Director, BNHS, held discussions with Mr Sumit Patil, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kalaburagi, to advance vulture conservation initiatives in Karnataka. The dialogue focused on strategies to release captive-bred vultures into landscapes where wild populations persist, thereby enhancing survival prospects and fostering integration into natural habitat.

Mr. Patil highlighted Bandipur as a promising release site, noting the presence of wild vultures in the area.

The meeting underscored Karnataka's growing commitment to safeguarding critically endangered species through science-based planning and inter-agency collaboration. By aligning conservation action with ecological realities, BNHS and the Karnataka Forest Department continue to reinforce India's leadership in vulture recovery and rewilding. ■



Study Launched to Detect Vulture Toxic NSAIDs in Vulture Food at Jorbeer, Rajasthan

BNHS scientists, in collaboration with the Bikaner Forest Division and the National Research Centre on Equines (NRCE), have launched a study at Jorbeer, Bikaner, to detect vulture toxic Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) in livestock carcasses consumed by vultures. The study addresses a critical conservation concern, as drugs such as diclofenac have been linked to catastrophic vulture declines across South Asia. By analysing carcass samples, the initiative aims to assess contamination risks, strengthen enforcement of NSAID bans, and promote vulture-safe alternatives such as meloxicam. Given Jorbeer's importance as a major congregation site for resident and migratory vultures, the study is expected to generate vital insights for conservation action. ■





BNHS join hands with Ministry of Jalshakti to protect Indian Skimmer and their Sandbar Habitats

On January 13, 2026, at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, Union Minister for Jal Shakti, Shri C.R. Paatil, launched a community-led conservation project titled 'Safeguarding Breeding Habitats of Indian Skimmer and Sympatric Birds through Monitoring and Community Participation in the Ganga Basin'.

The project will be implemented by the BNHS, in collaboration with the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and aims to protect the breeding habitats of the endangered Indian skimmer and other sandbar-nesting birds across the Ganga Basin.

India supports over 90 per cent of the global Indian skimmer population. However, habitat loss, unregulated water releases, sand mining, and human disturbance continue to threaten the species. Building on the successful community-based conservation model developed along the Chambal River, the project will be implemented in priority river stretches, including the Chambal, the Upper Ganga (Bijnor and Narora), the Ganga–Yamuna confluence at Prayagraj, and the Lower Ganga near the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary.

Local community members will be trained as Nest Guardians and River Guardians to monitor nests, protect vulnerable sandbars, and support scientific monitoring, strengthening both conservation outcomes and local livelihoods.

In addition to the Indian skimmer, the initiative will benefit species such as the black-bellied tern, river tern, river lapwing, and little tern, contributing to healthier river ecosystems in line with the Namami Gange programme. ■



Symposium Highlights Wetland Conservation and Sustainable Tourism at Pulicat

As part of the Pulicat Bird (Flamingo) Festival held on January 10–11, 2026, the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department, with technical support from the BNHS, organised a symposium on ‘Wetland Conservation and Sustainable Tourism’ on January 10, 2026.

Held at Krea University, Sri City, the symposium brought together policymakers, scientists, conservation practitioners, corporate representatives, and students to highlight the ecological importance of Pulicat Lake, a key coastal wetland and migratory bird habitat. The event featured six expert lectures and three panel discussions on wetland conservation, bird migration, and sustainable ecotourism with community participation. Nineteen experts from government agencies, academia, the private sector, and conservation organisations contributed to the discussions, including international experts from Sri Lanka and the Netherlands. Student participation was a key focus, with 95 students from six schools and six universities, including IIT Tirupati and Krea University, in attendance.

On January 11, 2026, an informal interaction titled “Coffee with Corporates” facilitated dialogue between corporate representatives and government officials on corporate engagement in wetland conservation and sustainable tourism. The two-day event underscored the need for cross-sector collaboration and sustained action, with the Forest Department seeking expert inputs toward declaring Pulicat Lake a Ramsar Site. ■

BNHS Participates in National MISHTI Workshop

Dr Tejal Vijapure, Senior Scientist at the BNHS, attended a national-level workshop on MISHTI (Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats and Tangible Incomes) held in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, on January 8–9, 2026.

The workshop served as an important platform for interaction among forest officials from multiple states, subject experts, scientists, conservation practitioners, key stakeholders, and implementing agencies working across India's mangrove ecosystems and coastal landscapes. It also facilitated valuable dialogue with professionals engaged in mangrove restoration, ecosystem-based livelihood initiatives, and the management of invasive species.

During the workshop, Dr Vijapure shared BNHS's initiatives on mangrove ecosystems along the west coast, as well as research and management efforts addressing invasive species such as *Mytella* in mangrove mudflats. These exchanges helped position BNHS's field-based conservation work within the broader national framework of mangrove and coastal ecosystem management. ■



Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh
Shri Pawan Kalyan inaugurated the programme



Shri Anand Mohan, Chief Executive Officer of
National CAMPA, delivered the keynote address

BNHS Highlights FRD Management Efforts at Ladakh Workshops

The BNHS Ladakh team participated in human–wildlife conflict management workshops held in Leh and Kargil, engaging with community leaders and local stakeholders.

The team highlighted BNHS's work in free-ranging dog (FRD) management, including the sterilisation of over 2,500 dogs in key wildlife habitats. Participants expressed strong interest in expanding mass sterilisation efforts and assured continued community support for BNHS conservation initiatives across the Ladakh region. ■





SP College Hosts International Conference on Conservation and Water Security

Sir Parashurambhau College, Pune, hosted an international conference on January 30, 2025, bringing together academics, scientists, and practitioners to explore the links between climate change, resource management, and ecological integrity. The participation of representatives from the BNHS elevated the conference into a high-level forum for dialogue between research, policy, and community-based conservation practice.

Keynote insights on integrated conservation were shared by Mr Kishor Rithe, Director of BNHS, and Dr Unmesh Katwate, Senior Scientist, during a panel on 'Climate Change and its Impacts on Water Security'. Addressing the Geography Conference, Shri Rithe outlined a three-pronged conservation strategy focused on scientific research, community participation, and effective policy implementation. He highlighted BNHS's long-standing research contributions to environmental policy, particularly in mitigating human–wildlife conflict and protecting endangered ecosystems.

A strong practical perspective on river rejuvenation was provided by Dr Rajendra Singh, the 'Waterman of India', who advocated watershed-based, ridge-to-valley management and emphasised rivers as living ecosystems sustained through community stewardship.

The conference concluded with active participation from students and researchers nationwide, outlining a collaborative roadmap for water security amid climate change. Dr Rajendra Singh, Magsaysay Award winner and founder of Tarun Bharat Sangh, praised BNHS's research-led conservation work and announced a future collaboration between his Jal Biradari initiative and BNHS on river conservation efforts in Maharashtra. ■



BNHS–EIACP Conducts Mass Awareness Programme in Thane

The BNHS–EIACP Centre conducted awareness programmes at multiple locations in Thane district from January 9–24, 2026. Informative and interactive exhibition stalls were set up at Tata Consultancy Services, Thane; Axis Bank Ltd., Airoli; and B.N. Bandodkar College of Science (Autonomous), Thane.

The initiative aimed to promote awareness about birds and their conservation and engaged over 500 participants, including corporate employees, students, and faculty members. BNHS–EIACP representatives Nandkishor Dudhe, Yogesh Dhamnaskar, and Niraj Patel interacted with visitors by sharing insights on avian ecology, promoting BNHS membership, distributing BUCEROS newsletters, demonstrating the Birdle mobile application, and showcasing outreach materials developed under the BNHS–EIACP programme. ■



Uttarakhand Forest Guard Trainees Visit JCBC, Pinjore

Two batches of Forest Guard trainees from Uttarakhand, comprising 75 participants, visited the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC), Pinjore on January 25 and 29 as part of their course tour programme to gain practical exposure to vulture conservation and species recovery efforts.

During the visit, Shri Hemant Bajpai, Centre Manager, JCBC Pinjore, briefed the trainees on the status of vulture conservation in India and the role of JCBC in captive breeding, health monitoring, and reintroduction programmes, highlighting collaborative efforts with BNHS and the Haryana Forest and Wildlife Department.

The trainees participated actively in discussions, enhancing their understanding of conservation practices for critically endangered vulture species. ■

Nature, Creativity, and Community Converge at BlackRock

On January 28, the BNHS Conservation Education Centre (CEC) conducted a nature education and creative engagement programme at BlackRock, bringing together 75 participants for a day of learning and hands-on exploration. Conceptualised and led by Aqsa Majgaonkar, Senior Education Officer, the programme blended environmental awareness with creative expression in BlackRock's biodiverse natural setting. Participants engaged in guided interactions to appreciate local biodiversity, followed by a bookmark-making activity inspired by nature, encouraging observation and imagination, especially among younger participants.

The event was supported by Dilip Giri (Field Assistant) in programme coordination, Education Officers Kimaya Gajar and Pritam Kadam in participant engagement, and Rupesh Giri (Housekeeping Assistant), who managed on-ground logistics. The programme demonstrated the role of creativity in fostering environmental awareness. ■



JCBC Pinjore Conducts School Awareness Programme on Vulture Conservation

The JCBC-Pinjore, conducted an awareness programme on vulture conservation on January 31, 2026 for Class V students of St. Teresa Convent School, Panchkula.

The interactive session introduced students to the ecological importance of vultures, reasons for their population decline in India, and conservation efforts undertaken by JCBC. Activities included a presentation, storytelling, brochures, and quizzes to encourage participation.

A total of 37 students took part and showed keen interest through active engagement and questions, making the programme effective in promoting awareness of vulture conservation and biodiversity. ■



Community and School Outreach for Vulture Conservation by VCBC Rani, Assam

Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) Rani conducted a series of awareness and participatory meetings across Kamrup and Biswanath districts to promote community engagement in vulture conservation and reintroduction programmes. The outreach included eight school awareness sessions, four community meetings, and one participatory workshop.

A total of 481 students participated in school programmes, while 124 community members attended the awareness meetings focused on local involvement in conservation efforts. VCBC Rani staff also participated in a wetland restoration workshop, the Asian Waterfowl Census, and 7Weave's Winter Birding Festival at Deepor Beel. Overall, the programme engaged 665 participants and contributed significantly to strengthening awareness and community participation in vulture conservation initiatives.

As part of broader engagement efforts, Ms Aneena and Mr Jayanta Kumar Rabha participated in a workshop on Wetland Restoration organised by the NEWS organisation, attended by 60 participants. The workshop facilitated knowledge sharing and discussions around the Beel Watch Report Card.

Date	School/College	Attendees	District
30-12-2025	Dalibari High School	54	Kamrup
30-12-2025	Chariali MV School	54	Biswanath
01-01-2026	Biswanath HS School	79	Biswanath
09-01-2026	FA Ahmed HS School	90	Biswanath
12-01-2026	Sanskriti-The Gurukul	22	Kamrup
20-01-2026	Parijat Academy	82	Biswanath
21-01-2026	West Jamuguri HS School	72	Biswanath
21-01-2026	St Joseph Highschool	60	Kamrup
28-1-2026	St Xavier's School	50	Biswanath
30-10-2026	Chengamari HighSchool	50	Biswanath

Date	Community awareness meetings	Attendees	District
29-12-2025	Village Sarpanchs meeting at VCBC	14	Kamrup
09-01-2026	Wetland Workshop, Cotton University	60	Kamrup
16-01-2026	Jharkhand Forest Training School	80	Kamrup
24-01-2026	Stakeholders meeting at Veterinary college, Guwahati	30	Kamrup
30-01-2026	Hanapara Village Panchayat	35	Kamrup



Students of Biswanath HS School



Students of Dalibari High School



Jharkhand Forest Training School trainees



Village Sarpanchs meeting at VCBC

VCBC Rani Hosts Multi-Stakeholder Meet on Vulture Conservation

The VCBC-Rani, organised a multi-stakeholder meeting on the Vulture Reintroduction Programme at the Veterinary College, Guwahati, with support from the Balipara Foundation. The meeting aimed to strengthen inter-departmental coordination for vulture conservation and reintroduction efforts in Assam.

Veterinary doctors from five districts and Range Officers from Kamrup, Biswanath, and Kokrajhar participated, highlighting the importance of a multi-sectoral approach. The programme was chaired by Mr B.N. Saikia, Dean of the Veterinary College, and attended by Mrs Dimpi Borah, Director, Assam Forest School.

Technical sessions by VCBC staff focused on conservation initiatives, the importance of NSAID bans, and vulture release and telemetry protocols. The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to strengthening coordinated efforts for the long-term success of the vulture reintroduction programme. ■





Building Environmental Awareness through School Bird Clubs in Point Calimere

Under BNHS's 'Establishing School Bird Clubs to Create Environmental Awareness and Cadre Building' initiative, supported by the Buimerc India Foundation, students from ten government and aided schools around the Point Calimere Wetland Complex, of which eight schools are being introduced to birds and biodiversity conservation in January while the remaining two schools will be covered in February.

Through five interactive classroom sessions, students learn about bird diversity, ecological roles, and conservation challenges, while engaging in hands-on activities such as building nest boxes from recycled materials and practising birdwatching on their school campuses.

The 2025–26 programme will conclude with field visits to the Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary and the BNHS–BMSC Centre during the peak migratory season in January and February, offering students direct exposure to wetland habitats and migratory birds.

The initiative aims to nurture long-term interest in conservation and inspire future environmental leaders. Continued support will help expand the programme to more schools and sustain engagement with young learners. ■

Details of the Participating Schools

SN	Date	School
1	6 Jan 2026	R. Natesanar Government Higher Secondary School, Aayakaranpulam, Vedaranyam
2	8 Jan 2026	SKS Government Higher Secondary School (GHSS), Vedaranyam
3	20 Jan 2026	Government Higher Secondary Model School, Thopputhurai, Vedaranyam
4	21 Jan 2026	Anantharasu Aided Middle School, Maraignayanallur, Vedaranyam
5	22 Jan 2026	Government Higher Secondary School (GHSS), Kadinalvayal, Vedaranyam
6	27 Jan 2026	Government Higher Secondary School (GHSS), Kodyakarai
7	29 Jan 2026	Kasthrubha Gandhi Kanya Kurukulam School, Vedaranyam
8	30 Jan 2026	Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Aayakaranpulam



Training Future Bird Monitors at Point Calimere

Two batches of the Basic Course in Field Ornithology and Bird Migration Studies were successfully conducted at the BNHS Point Calimere Centre, Tamil Nadu. The three-day programme provided hands-on training in bird population monitoring, marking and ringing, and key techniques used in migration studies.

With the completion of these batches, the camps for the current migratory season have concluded. The next series is scheduled to begin in October 2026.

The course is part of BNHS’s efforts to build a skilled volunteer network to support long-term bird monitoring across India. As landscapes and habitats continue to change rapidly, the need for consistent and high-quality data has become increasingly important. By providing scientific training and practical field experience, BNHS empowers interested citizens to contribute reliable data to national and regional research initiatives.

In addition, the Point Calimere Centre hosted three educational and training visits in January 2026, offering students and professionals exposure to bird habitats and conservation work.

Details of the Participating Institutions

Date	Institution	No. of Participants	Remarks
22/01/2026	School Education Department, Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu	75	Students and Teachers
24/01/2026	Government College for Women, Kumbakonam	106	Zoology Department
24/01/2026	Kundal Forest Academy, Maharashtra	43	Forest Range Officer Trainees



Students Visit BNHS Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre, Bhopal

On January 24, 2026, 50 postgraduate students from the Wildlife Ecology and Conservation programme at Somaiya Vidyavihar University visited the BNHS–VCBC, Bhopal, as part of their field exploration activities. The visit was coordinated by Dr Shibajee Mitran and Dr Sandesh Waghmare.

The visit aimed to provide students with first-hand exposure to vulture conservation initiatives, captive breeding programmes, and applied conservation practices. Students were briefed on the vulture population crisis in the Indian subcontinent, particularly the role of diclofenac in population declines, and the subsequent advocacy leading to the adoption of safer alternatives such as meloxicam and the recent ban on nimesulide.

Sessions also covered the establishment and functioning of the VCBC, the role of Vulture Safe Zones, and release programmes supporting wild populations. Students were introduced to captive breeding protocols, rescue and rehabilitation procedures, and biosecurity measures, followed by a guided tour of the centre's aviaries and monitoring systems.

All sessions were conducted by Dr Arockianathan Samson, Centre Manager, BNHS–VCBC Bhopal. The visit concluded with active student interactions and provided valuable insights into science-based conservation and endangered species management. ■



BNHS Conducts Ornithology Course at Nandur-Madhmeshwar WLS

The BNHS conducted a three-day Ornithology Course at Nandur-Madhmeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra, from January 16 to 18, 2026. Around 15 participants, including birdwatchers, students, and nature enthusiasts, took part in the programme at one of the state's most important wetlands and a designated Ramsar site.

The course combined classroom sessions and fieldwork to introduce participants to bird identification, estimation techniques, migration studies, and bird ringing. The inaugural session, hosted by the Range Forest Officer of Nandur-Madhmeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, Hiralal Chaudhari, highlighted the ecological significance of the sanctuary, which supports large numbers of migratory birds during winter.

Field sessions recorded notable sightings such as Eurasian curlew, common cranes, and harrier roosting sites, along with a breeding colony of painted stork and grey heron. eleven birds, including a Eurasian wryneck, were ringed during the programme. Participants also reported a Leopard sighting during field activities.

The importance of long-term monitoring initiatives such as the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) was discussed in detail, and participants were given the opportunity to actively participate in the census. Discussions emphasised the significance of bird ringing in both wetland and urban landscapes and explored broader conservation approaches. The course was well received, with participants expressing interest in advanced ornithology and avian research programmes. ■



BNHS Members Experience Memorable Wildlife Sightings at Melghat Tiger Reserve

Members of the BNHS participated in a four-day wildlife camp at the Melghat Tiger Reserve from January 15–18 2026, organised in collaboration with the Nature Conservation Society, Amravati (NCSA). A key highlight of the camp was a rare Leopard sighting lasting nearly 30 minutes during a jungle safari in the Shahnoor forest range. The programme offered participants immersive field experiences, including safaris in the Semadoh and Shahnoor ranges, a nature walk and sunset safari at Chikhaldara, and a visit to the historic Narnala Fort. A morning birding session along the Sipna River recorded over 50 bird species. Participants observed a range of wildlife, including sloth bear and the Endangered forest owl, a species rediscovered in Melghat in 1997. Expert sessions by Dr Nishikant Kale (NCSA) and Saurabh Dande (BNHS) highlighted Melghat's biodiversity, conservation challenges, and the importance of community participation. The camp reinforced BNHS's commitment to nature education and hands-on conservation experiences. ■

Inaugural Bhopal Bird Festival Promotes Bird Conservation Awareness

The First Bhopal Bird Festival was jointly organized by VNS Nature Saviours, Bhopal Birds, the Madhya Pradesh State Biodiversity Board, and the Regional Museum of Natural History, and held from January 9–11 2026. The festival featured a variety of engaging activities such as a photo exhibition, poster competition, Nukkad Natak (street play), and expert talks aimed at promoting bird conservation and awareness.

The programme was inaugurated by Mr Shubhranjan Sen, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), and Mr Ajay Yadav, Member Secretary, Madhya Pradesh State Biodiversity Board. Mr. Nandkishor Dudhe, Programme Officer, BNHS–EIACP, delivered an interactive talk titled 'Birds Around Us'. The session attracted over 150 participants and saw enthusiastic engagement during the question-and-answer segment. Participants who provided correct responses were awarded BNHS–EIACP BUCEROS newsletters and bird posters. The programme was anchored by Mr Mohd. Khaliq, Coordinator, Bhopal Bird Festival. ■





BNHS Hosts ‘Sketching in the Forest’ Programme at Goregaon Reserve

Visual art has long played an important role in natural history and wildlife studies, serving as a valuable medium for recording species, landscapes, and ecological interactions. From early cave art to the detailed natural history illustrations of artists such as John Gould, Ustad Mansur, and Rungia Raju, artistic documentation has shaped our understanding of biodiversity.

Continuing this tradition, the BNHS organised its annual ‘Sketching in the Forest’ programme on January 11, 2026 at the BNHS Reserve in Goregaon. The programme aimed to encourage participants to engage with nature through observation and creative expression.

The session was facilitated by Ashvini Menon, wildlife illustrator and BNHS Life Member, who introduced participants to the fundamentals of field sketching and visual observation. As members walked along a short forest trail, they were encouraged to pause, observe their surroundings closely, and translate these observations onto paper using pencil and ink. The emphasis was on mindful observation rather than artistic perfection.

The programme provided a reflective and immersive experience, enabling participants to connect with the forest in a creative and meaningful way. By integrating art with nature education, the session highlighted sketching as a valuable tool for learning and conservation, while reinforcing BNHS’s commitment to innovative approaches to nature appreciation and environmental awareness. ■

ACTIVITIES @ CEC

Biodiversity Walk for Oberoi International School Mumbai

On January 7, 2026, BNHS Conservation Education Centre (CEC) hosted 107 Grade 2 students and 15 teachers from Oberoi International School for a Biodiversity Walk focused on Patterns in Nature. Through guided exploration, students learned to observe natural forms and designs, encouraging curiosity-driven learning. The programme was coordinated by Aqsa Majgaonkar and conducted by BNHS naturalists. ■



Field Visit by College of Horticulture and Landscaping, Himachal Pradesh

On January 9, 2026, BNHS-CEC welcomed 85 students from the College of Horticulture and Landscaping, Himachal Pradesh, for a field-based learning visit. The session focused on urban biodiversity, native flora, and conservation practices within protected green spaces. The visit was coordinated by Aqsa Majgaonkar with support from BNHS naturalists. ■



Nature Club Visit by VIBGYOR School, Mumbai

On January 10, 2026, BNHS-CEC hosted a Nature Club visit by VIBGYOR School featuring an interactive session on climate change and individual action. Students discussed climate impacts, sustainable practices, and the role of youth in environmental stewardship. The session was conducted by BNHS naturalist Meehir Pawar. ■



Biodiversity Awareness Session for Teachers

On January 14, 2026, BNHS-CEC conducted a Biodiversity Awareness Session for teachers from John Cannon and Cathedral School, focusing on integrating biodiversity and experiential learning into classroom education. The session was led by BNHS naturalists Meehir Pawar and Hrishikesh Ghogare. ■



Forest Trail for French Exchange Students

On January 21, 2026, BNHS-CEC hosted 21 French exchange students and four teachers for a forest trail exploring local biodiversity, tree species, and associated fauna. The programme was coordinated by Kimaya Gajare and conducted by BNHS naturalists. ■



Nature Trail for SIES High School Students

On January 22, 2026, BNHS-CEC welcomed 56 students and four teachers from SIES High School for a nature trail highlighting biodiversity, patterns in nature, and wildlife observation. The programme was conducted by BNHS naturalists. ■



Field Visit to TS Chanakya Wetlands

On January 25, 2026, As part of the BNHS Ornithology Course 2025–26, BNHS-CEC organised a field visit to the TS Chanakya Wetlands for 13 participants. The session focused on bird identification and migration, with sightings of several resident and migratory species. The visit was conducted by BNHS expert Nandkishor S. Dudhe. ■



Former BNHS Director and Experts Visit VCBC, Bhopal

Dr Asad Rahmani, Governing Council Member and former Director of the BNHS, visited the BNHS–Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC), Bhopal, on January 18, 2025, along with a group of experts.

The delegation included Dr Rajat Bhargava; Dr J. S. Parihar, retired scientist, ISRO; and Dr Saurabh Popli, Landscape Ecologist, IISER, and Member of the Madhya Pradesh State Wetland Authority.

During the visit, the BNHS–VCBC team presented an overview of the centre’s work, including vulture husbandry and healthcare protocols, monitoring systems, artificial incubation and chick-rearing techniques, and the objectives of the Vulture Conservation Breeding Programme. A guided tour of the facility highlighted daily management practices and biosecurity measures.

Dr Rahmani also shared insights on the evolution of vulture conservation efforts in India and key lessons from captive breeding and conservation planning, reinforcing the long-term commitment required for successful vulture recovery programmes. ■





BNHS Marketing Outreach through Exhibitions in January 2026

The Marketing Department of the BNHS actively participated in several exhibitions and events across Maharashtra and Rajasthan during January 2026, strengthening public outreach and engagement.

During the month, BNHS set up promotional stalls at Tata Consultancy Services, Olympus A, Hiranandani Estate, Thane (January 9); Axis Bank, Airoli (January 13); the Udaipur Bird Festival at the Ramsar site of Menar, Udaipur (January 16–18); Van Mela at Sajjangarh, Udaipur (January 17–18); and the International Conference on Applied Zoology (iCAZ'26) held at B.N. Bandodkar College of Science, Thane (January 23–24).

In addition, BNHS conducted an exhibition at Sir Parashurambhau College, Pune, on January 30, 2026, during the International Conference on Water, Land and Life: Geographical Perspectives on Sustainability, organised in collaboration with BNHS.

At each venue, the Marketing Department showcased and promoted BNHS's conservation initiatives, publications, and outreach programmes, while also offering BNHS merchandise for sale. These exhibitions enabled the organisation to connect with thousands of visitors, including students, professionals, and members of the public.

As part of its outreach efforts, BNHS encourages members and supporters to purchase BNHS desk calendars through the Marketing Department. The calendars are available online at the BNHS shop; buy and support the Society's ongoing conservation and education activities. ■



BNHS and Cisco Engage Volunteers in Conservation Activities in Bengaluru

In November 2025, BNHS partnered with Cisco, Bengaluru, to undertake a series of conservation initiatives. The collaboration began with a digitisation drive in which 80 volunteers transcribed archival resighting data from the BNHS bird ringing project, converting paper records into digital resources for migration research.

The engagement later moved outdoors with a guided nature walk at Saul Kere, where around 30 participants, along with friends and family members, explored the lake's diverse birdlife, connecting desk-based data work with on-ground observation. As part of Nature Month, a photography contest received nearly 150 entries showcasing Karnataka's biodiversity and cultural landscapes, with three winners selected for their creativity and storytelling.

BNHS thanks Cisco and its volunteers for their enthusiastic participation and continued support, and hopes the initiative inspires long-term interest in conservation. ■

ANNOUNCEMENT

You can give the name for a new BNHS Magazine

BNHS is launching a new natural history magazine for young naturalists.

This magazine is created to inspire young minds and those young at heart to explore, understand, and learn about the natural world and its conservation.

Through stories, science and discovery, while keeping it fun and engaging, the magazine will:

- Introduce youngsters to India's incredible ecological richness and biodiversity
- Encourage curiosity, scientific thinking, and awareness of current environmental issues
- Spotlight real conservation heroes and champions
- Promote participation in conservation and citizen science
- Build strong reading habits, reflection, and learning

We are looking for a one-word title for the magazine that stands out on a bookshelf and resonates in the field. Send us your suggestions, and a line on why it fits.

Your suggested single-word name should be:

- Inspiring for young naturalists and their circle of friends and family
- Connected to nature
- Rooted in India's landscapes, nature, or culture
- Easy to write and adapt across Indian languages
- Preferably not a bird name as we already have the *Hornbill* and *Buceros*

Send your suggestion(s) | by: February 28, 2026 | to: publications@bnhs.org



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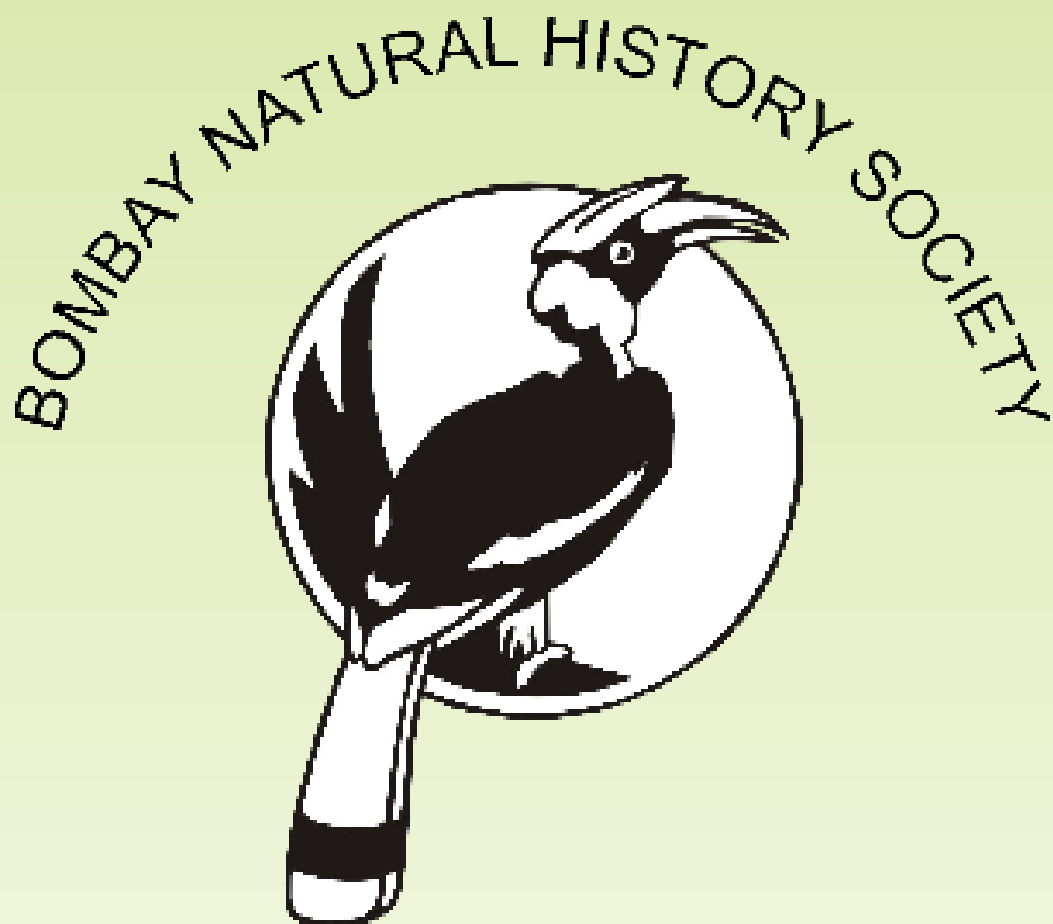
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