



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



JULY, 2022

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Dear Members,

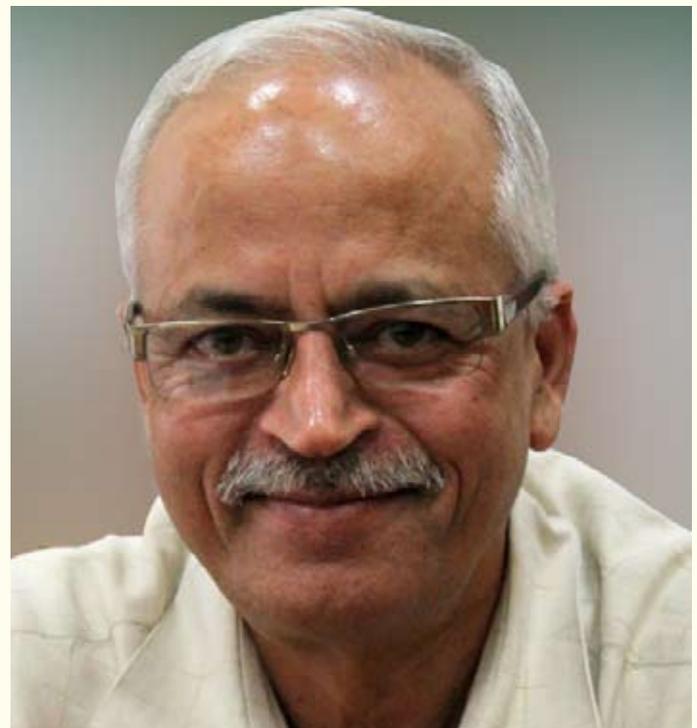
This e-newsletter of the BNHS is packed with updates from our field work and the events we hold for nature conservation. This is our attempt to make sure you get to know about the work of your Society in real time and to ensure that you are with us on this journey!

A Tribute to Dr R.D. Jakati – A true friend of Vultures

Vultures and BNHS lost a true friend with the passing away of Dr Ram Dharendra Rao Jakati, on June 15, 2022, at the age of 70. An upright and dedicated Indian Forest Service Officer and conservationist, Dr Jakati supported the cause of vulture conservation in India as early as 2001 when most people did not believe that vulture populations were at a serious risk of extinction.

As Chief Wildlife Warden of Haryana, Dr Jakati allotted land and got all the necessary permissions for establishing the vulture care facility in Haryana, within a month of BNHS's request. He had anticipated the concerns that could arise when a Government department and a Non-Governmental Organization work together. He therefore signed a long-term Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Haryana and BNHS for the Vulture Conservation Breeding Programme. He also helped to establish a Governing Council, headed by the Secretary, Forests, Government of Haryana, which provides vital support for the functioning of the Centre. The huge success of the BNHS Vulture Conservation Breeding Programme could largely be attributed to the solid administrative support and guidance provided by Dr Jakati.

As Director, Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy, he ensured that the Indian Forest Service (IFS) probationers of the India Forest Service (IFS), visited the Vulture Conservation



Breeding Centre at Pinjore to understand the Conservation Breeding Programme. This helped raise awareness about vulture conservation efforts; and as future managers of wilderness, the IFS probationers took positive steps towards vulture conservation. We pay tribute to Dr Jakati for his honesty, simplicity, and dedication. ■

Vulture Conservationist – Shri Manohar Lal Khattar

Shri Mahohar Lal Khattar, the Chief Minister of Haryana, has been a big supporter of the BNHS Vulture Conservation Breeding Programme in Haryana. In November 2015, he initiated the release programme of eight Oriental White-backed Vulture and two Himalayan Griffon in the pre-release aviary (an open aviary with nylon netting to acclimatize the birds to elements surrounding the area of release).

In June 2016, the Chief Minister released two more Himalayan Griffon in the presence of Mr Prakash Javadekar, Union Minister of Forest, Environment and Climate Change. One of the griffons was physically tracked for 45 days, in the absence of any tracking device. We were cheering when we found that during these 45 days, the Griffon gradually

increased its territory, successfully found food and water, evaded mobbing by crows and other raptors while soaring, and prevented collisions with man-made structures like electric pylons. This success encouraged us to release other Critically Endangered White-backed Vultures into the wild!

In 2022, the Jatayu Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre faced acute shortage of funds and we approached Shri Khattar. Needless to say, he extended his support once again and instructed his Finance Department to immediately sanction a financial grant.

This is a positive development and will go a long way in saving vultures. ■

Studying birds to save them – Breeding waterbirds at Ujjani Reservoir

The Ujjani reservoir in Maharashtra attracts many migratory waterbirds in winter. In summer, the exposed islands (due to receding water) make an ideal habitat for ground-nesting waterbirds.

BNHS has been surveying the area to understand its importance for birds. Three surveys were carried out in the month of May and June 2022 to document breeding species and numbers of nests.

A total of 817 nests were counted on three islands. Species found to be nesting predominantly were Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* (317 nests), River Tern *Sterna aurantia* (236 nests), Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (154 nests), and Little Pratincole *Glareola lactea* (104 nests). Major threats observed were trampling of nests by livestock and tourists, free-ranging dogs, and ghost nets. We also tagged 242 chicks with metal rings and colour flags to understand their movements. ■

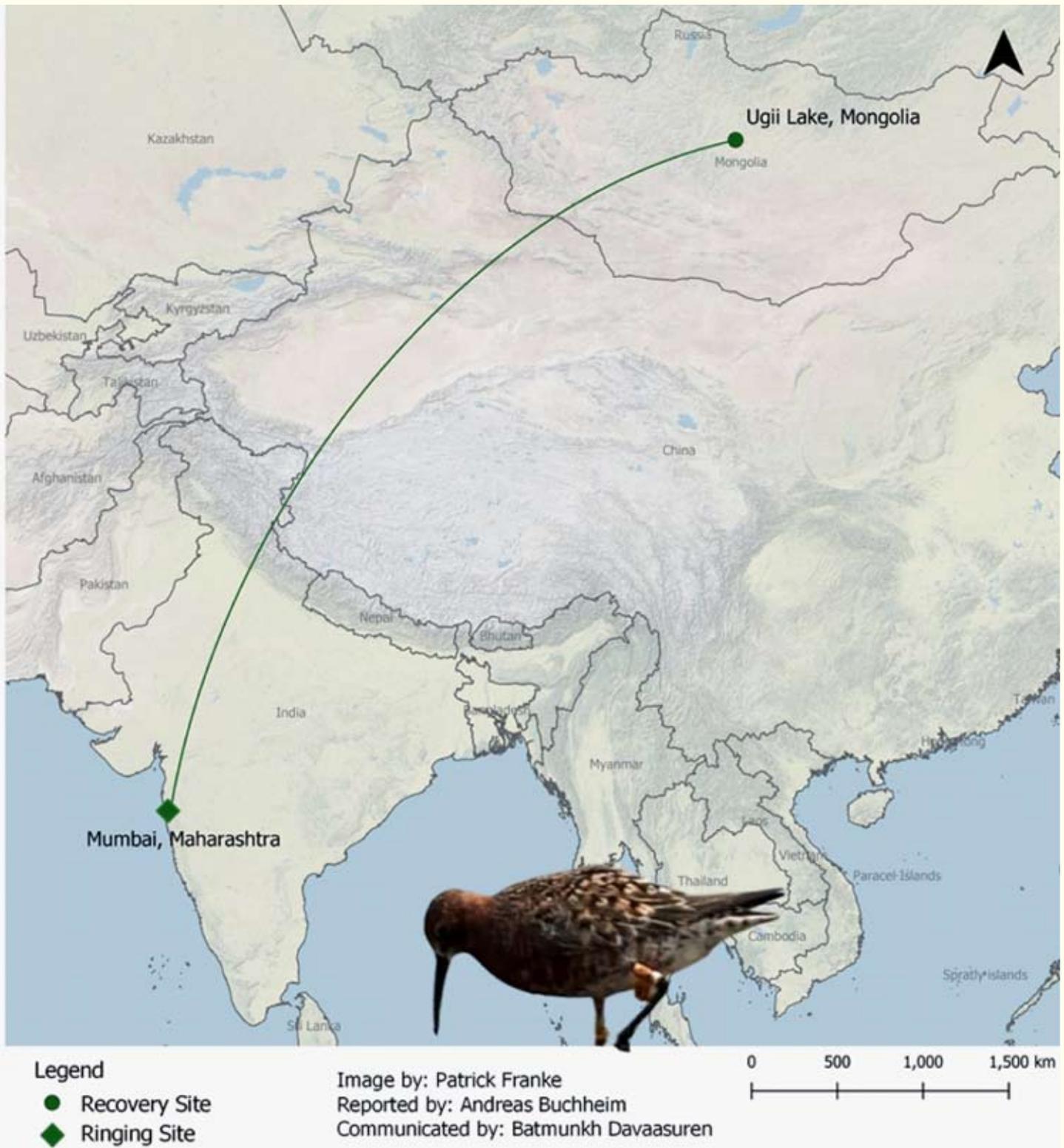


We tag birds to understand their movement, and ultimately, their conservation needs

From Mumbai to Mongolia – Re-sighting of a Curlew Sandpiper

BNHS has been ringing birds on the Mumbai coast and its adjoining areas since 2018. This is our attempt to understand migration patterns, movement, and important sites for migratory birds. Thane creek in Mumbai hosts lakhs of migratory birds during the wintering season and is a crucial site for bird migration study.

In January 2022, a Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, a medium sized wader, was tagged in the salt pans of Mankhurd, adjacent to Thane creek, Mumbai. This was re-sighted at Uggi Lake in Mongolia on May 26, 2022 (see map below for details). This observation is a valuable addition to our knowledge on the migration of this species, and it is exciting to see the long journey migratory birds make! ■



Our tagged Curlew Sandpiper sighted in Mongolia by Patrick Franke

Green Avadavat Project in Rajasthan

The beautiful and endemic Green Avadavat *Amandava formosa* is a Vulnerable species with a rapidly declining and fragmented population in Central India. This bird was never included in conservation plans; we hope to change this.

BNHS has been successful in starting a Conservation Breeding Centre at Gulab Bagh Bird Park in Udaipur, Rajasthan, for the Green Avadavat. On May 12, Shri Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister of Rajasthan, inaugurated the Park. BNHS is the official knowledge partner in developing this bird park. This is the first official attempt in the world for the conservation breeding of this little dainty beauty, although it has been formerly bred by some aviculture groups in Australia. We are excited and honoured to be part of this significant venture! ■



Shri Ashok Gehlot, Chief Minister, Rajasthan, at the Park

Green Avadavat Conservation Breeding Centre at Gulab Bagh Bird Park, Udaipur

Photo by Dr. Rajat Bhargava

Gulab Bagh Bird Park is proud to host "Green Avadavat Conservation Breeding Centre" in partnership with the prestigious Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). This will probably be the first official attempt to captive-breed this 'Vulnerable' little endemic bird of India.



Finn's Weaver Project

BNHS has been spearheading the conservation movement of Finn's Weaver since we published the status report highlighting the plight of this threatened bird five years ago.

IUCN and BirdLife International 'uplisted' the conservation status of this bird from Vulnerable to Endangered category in December 2021.

Now, the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department through Sarus Sanrakshan Samiti has funded a project for the conservation of Finn's Weaver. On May 9, 2022, BNHS along with Meerut Forest Department released posters and stickers in regional languages and we are now working on initiating a conservation breeding centre at the Forest Training Institute at Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary. ■

Building Capacity – Stakeholder Workshop in Dzuluk, Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary

We are climbing mountain slopes to understand and assess conservation needs. In the Himalaya, we are working along with National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS), Government of India, for the conservation and wise use of five wetlands in three Himalayan States (Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, and Ladakh), to secure habitats of birds migrating within the Central Asian Flyway.

We conducted a workshop in Dzuluk village on June 12, 2022, where twenty villagers of different age groups participated.

The objectives of the project and involvement of locals in the biodiversity conservation was explained to the participants. The socio-economic status of the villagers living in and around the Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary-Dzuluk-Bedang Tso-Nathula complex, Sikkim, was obtained through questionnaires. BNHS is conducting similar workshops with different stakeholders in and around the Sanctuary (1,300–4,000 msl). We hope this is the beginning of a deep understanding of the beautiful Himalaya, its ecosystems, and its people. ■

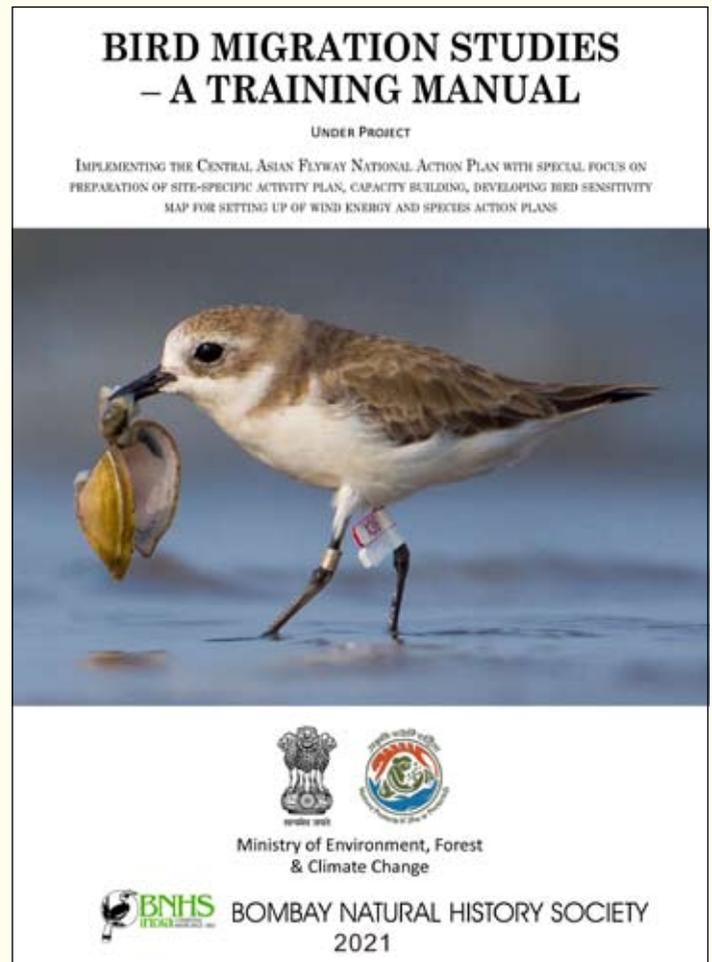


Capacity development workshop for frontline forest Staff in Bird Migration, Bird Migration Study Techniques, Flyways, and wild bird Disease Surveillance

Conserving migratory birds entails working at multiple levels. We need to work on ground conservation, surveillance, and inter-state and inter-country cooperation. BNHS is constantly working at increasing the capacity of forest staff on these fronts.

So far, 115 staff from five states – Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha – have been trained in migration study techniques, flyways, wild bird disease surveillance, global biodiversity Conventions and India’s commitments, flyway conservation action plans, and role of State Governments, and Role in India’s commitments to flyway level conservation by BNHS.

To support the training programmes, a training manual has been developed as a resource material (see below). The 68-page manual in English has been prepared and translated into Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Odiya, Tamil, and Telugu. Training programmes for other states, with sites prioritised in Central Asian Flyway National action plan, will also be organised in the coming months. ■



Restoring Asola

Asola Bhatti is Delhi's only wildlife sanctuary. BNHS's Conservation Education Centre at the Sanctuary conducts a range of educational activities. We have also been working to restore the scrub and forest habitat at Asola. In the last newsletter, we told you about hyenas and leopards that are now living in Asola, but like much of Delhi's forest cover, Asola is overrun by *Lantana camara*, an invasive species that prevents the growth of native vegetation. The Forest Department has initiated scientific removal of Lantana to restore Asola to its original state. The 'cut-root stock method' – involves uprooting the main stem and keeping the plant upside down – is being followed to clear the area of Lantana. So far, 50 acres have been cleared of Lantana – and there are many more to go. We hope to recolonise the native vegetation in all its glory in the Sanctuary. ■



Lantana removal at Asola. Picture: Lakhan Kohli

Events for you

We take our outreach to members very seriously. On June 5, World Environment Day, we conducted a free nature trail at the BNHS Conservation Education Centre, Goregaon, Mumbai. Trails were guided by experts along the various nature trails at the BNHS Nature Reserve. Dr Bivash Pandav, Director, delivered an illustrated talk on the research and conservation work of the Society across the country.



A documentary "Treasures of Grasslands" on Indian Grey Wolf, its habitat, cohabitants, and conservation in Pune was screened. Mr Mihir Godbole – founder of the Grasslands Trust, Pune, and Director of the documentary – interacted with the participants and answered their queries. More than 80 people participated in the event.

We hosted a summer camp for kids at CEC-Mumbai from May 28–29, 2022; nineteen enthusiastic kids participated in the outdoor and indoor activities, nature trails, interactive talks on birds and butterflies, animal dumb charades, session on wild fruits, and learnt to make bowls from Palash leaves, create clay artefacts, pebble painting, nature journaling, and nail decor using Gulmohar flowers!

CEC-Mumbai organised free trails for students of Army School on June 20 and 21 and celebrated International Yoga Day was on June 21, 2022, with 90 students, including 10 staff members of Army School. The yoga session was conducted by Ms Priyanka Jundare (Education Officer).

BNHS ENVIS (more on this below) also conducted a bird watching trail at Bhandup Station, Mumbai, on June 4. ■

BNHS ENVIS (more on this below) also conducted a bird watching trail at Bhandup station on 4 June. (To know more about activities at our Conservation Education Centres, please contact cec-mumbai@bnhs.org for Mumbai, cecbnhsdelhi@bnhs.org for Delhi and s.karkare@bnhs.org for Nagpur)

@BNHS-ENVIS

BNHS is the resource partner for Environmental Information System Resource Partner (ENVIS) on Avian Ecology. ENVIS conducts many activities for nature outreach. Some of our recent activities are below.

Online Photography Competition on World Environment Day

The ENVIS Department organised a photography competition on June 05 to provide an opportunity budding nature photographers and enthusiasts to display their skills. We hope that such competitions help to spread awareness about the importance of ecological balance and the different

habitats occupied by birds.

The photography competition was divided into four categories: Monsoon Migrants, Birds in Forest Habitat, Bird-plant Relationship, and Birds in Urban Habitat. A total of 141 entries were received; the winning entries are given below.

Our congratulations to the winners!

MONSOON MIGRANTS



1st

Rakesh Singha Dev



2nd

Kshitij Patle



3rd

Parag Balkrishna Nalavade

BIRDS IN FOREST HABITAT



1st

Ruhaan Das



2nd

Santosh Kumar Mahalik



3rd

Ashik C S

(contd. on next page)

BIRD-PLANT RELATIONSHIP



Sarbajit Ghosh



S. Hari Gopala Chary



Nazim Ali Manhas

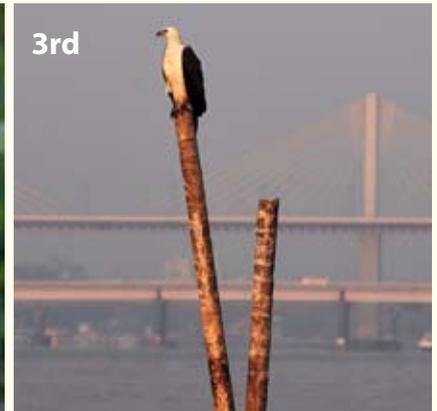
BIRDS IN URBAN HABITAT



Sarbajit Ghosh



Ajay Dhakad

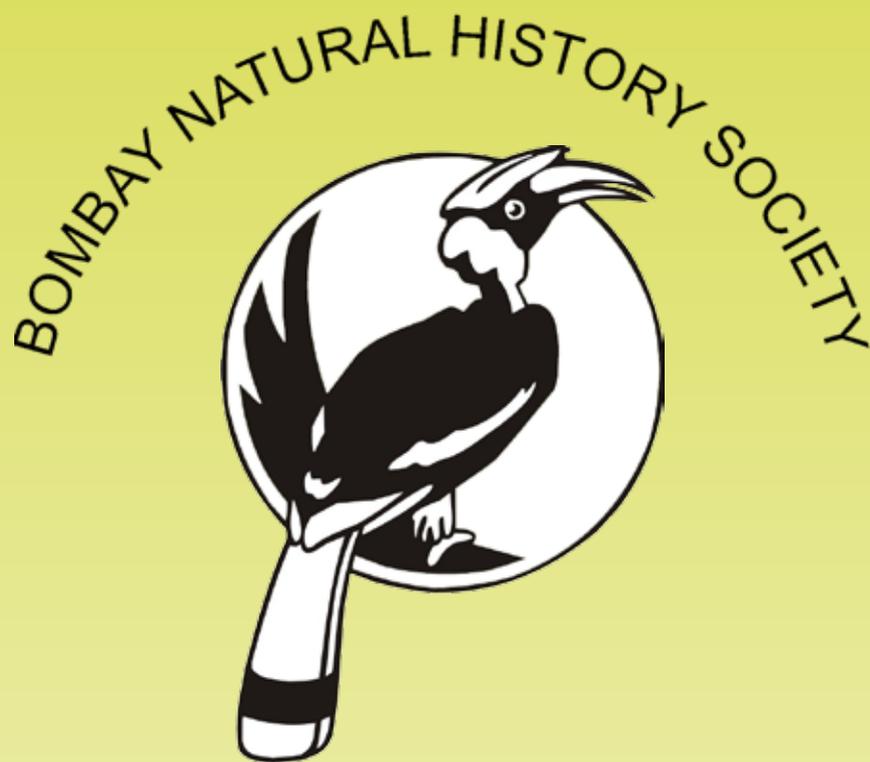


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Thank you for reading and for being with us on this conservation journey!

Bivash Pandav

Dr. Bivash Pandav, Director, BNHS



BNHS MISSION

Vision: Premier independent scientific organization with a broad-based constituency, excelling in the conservation of threatened species and habitats.

Mission: Conservation of nature, primarily biological diversity, through action based on research, education and public awareness.

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