



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



MARCH, 2025

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER



Dear Members,

Our Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, is widely recognized for his deep commitment to wildlife conservation. Earlier this month, he chaired a meeting of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) – India's highest wildlife policymaking body – held in Gujarat. During the meeting, he provided guidance on a range of critical issues, including curbing poaching and wildlife trade, conserving our wetlands and grasslands, and fulfilling India's commitments to the CMS COP. In essence, he urged NBWL members to ensure that India remains a global leader in wildlife conservation. We are proud to share that the Bombay Natural History Society's (BNHS) efforts to save the endangered Jatayu (vultures) and its work on the Central Asian Flyway were acknowledged and appreciated during this important meeting.

The first phase of our proposed BNHS Centre, with financial assistance from the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is progressing well on the 19-acre land acquired in July 2018 at Navegaon Brahman village in Chimur Taluka, Chandrapur District. We are hopeful the building will be fully operational by the end of 2025.

As one of India's oldest conservation institutions, BNHS strongly believes in collaboration with like-minded organizations. One such partner is EcoSikh, a dedicated non-profit working on forest and environmental protection. EcoSikh represents a faith-based response from the Sikh community to the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation, linking Sikh values and institutions with pressing global ecological issues. BNHS has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with EcoSikh for the conservation breeding of the northern goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, locally known as 'Baaj', in the Punjab-Haryana landscape. This majestic bird has deep cultural and spiritual significance in Sikh history and has been associated with several Sikh Gurus, especially Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who revered the goshawk as a symbol of strength and nobility. Falconry was practiced and enjoyed by four Sikh Gurus – Guru Hargobind Ji, Guru Har Rai Ji, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, and Guru Gobind Singh Ji – making the Baaj a powerful emblem of leadership and valour.

Recognizing its cultural importance, the Government of Punjab declared the northern goshawk the State Bird on September 18, 2015. While the BNHS Journal has reported sightings of this winter visitor raptor in Sindh (1911), Bhavnagar, Gujarat (1940, 1953), Gir (1948), Khadakwasla, Pune (1981), Hingolgaad, Gujarat (1985, 1986), Mysore and Bangalore, Karnataka (1993), Wayanad, Kerala (2000), and Kaziranga, Assam (2023), its wintering in Punjab and Haryana has diminished, likely due to habitat loss, degradation of grasslands, and excessive pesticide use. This month, BNHS ornithologists and EcoSikh representatives visited both states and engaged with a wide range of stakeholders – from political and religious leaders to forest officials – to discuss this conservation initiative. I look forward to sharing more updates on this inspiring project.

Meanwhile, our BNHS team at Pinjore (Haryana) is diligently working on drug safety testing for vultures and preparing for the next phase of vulture releases in Melghat, Pench, and Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserves in Maharashtra. Our teams in Bhopal and Assam are also preparing for upcoming bird releases in the coming months.

A major concern remains the threat posed by transmission lines to large birds. Despite our best efforts, some released vultures continue to perish due to collisions and electrocution. Tragically, a sarus crane ringed in Maharashtra's Gondia district also died from electrocution this month. This issue is deeply troubling, and BNHS is actively engaging with government bodies and corporate stakeholders, urging them to adopt and implement mitigation measures.

On a brighter note, BNHS celebrated March 13 with great enthusiasm at Hornbill House, marking 60 years at our historic headquarters on Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, opposite Lion Gate, in the Fort area of Mumbai. We launched a commemorative coffee mug featuring the great pied hornbill – our beloved mascot, inspired by 'William', the bird that once resided at BNHS – along with a few other special products for our members. Hornbill House has become a landmark not just for Indian nature lovers, but for enthusiasts from across South Asia – including Pakistan, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Myanmar (Burma), Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh.

Coincidentally, this year Hornbill House will undergo a much-needed transformation, with a new look and expanded storage facilities to accommodate our growing specimen collection.

We also fondly remember Mr H.M. Phipson, who initially provided a large and more suitable accommodation for BNHS at his office in 1886, at 6 Apollo Street for the meetings of the Society, and for the display of the collection. It was Dr Sálím Ali who helped shift BNHS to our current home at Hornbill House, with support from the Prince of Wales Museum (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya), where the new building was formally inaugurated on March 13, 1965 by then Union Education Minister Mr M.C. Chagla, in the presence of Dr Sálím Ali and Mr Karl Khandalawala, Trustee of the Museum.

In recognition of Hornbill House's significance, then Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi visited the building on September 15, 1983 during BNHS's centenary celebrations. She released a special commemorative stamp featuring 'William' in full colour and spent a significant amount of time learning about the natural history of the Indian subcontinent.

We are celebrating this Diamond Jubilee year by inviting more nature lovers and institutions to become part of the BNHS family. A special membership campaign has been launched, including offers for other organizations and corporate partners. We request your support in spreading the word and encouraging others to join BNHS.

I also invite you to explore the "Systema naturae" section in the latest issue of Hornbill magazine and contribute your observations to the BNHS 150-Year Omnibus Collection.

Lastly, if you have not yet completed the online form for the Yearbook for Life Members, please do so here: <https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>. For any assistance, please contact:

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

Conservation Education Centre: cec-mumbai@bnhs.org

For event reservations and submissions, feel free to reach out via email, and do not forget to send your event photos and write-ups to Mr Gopi Naidu at g.naidu@bnhs.org.

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

Kishor Rithe

Director, Bombay Natural History Society

Prime Minister Modi Reaffirms India's Leadership in Wildlife Conservation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, widely respected for his unwavering commitment to environmental protection, chaired the 7th meeting of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) in Sasan-Gir, Gujarat. As India's apex wildlife policymaking body, the NBWL discussed a wide range of critical conservation issues under his leadership.

During the meeting, the Prime Minister emphasized the need to strengthen efforts to combat poaching and illegal wildlife trade,

enhance wetland and grassland conservation, and uphold India's commitments under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS COP). He encouraged all NBWL members to work collaboratively to ensure that India continues to lead globally in wildlife protection.

The contributions of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) were highlighted, particularly its vital initiatives to save the endangered Jatayu (vultures) and its work on the Central Asian Flyway – a critical migratory route for numerous bird species. ■



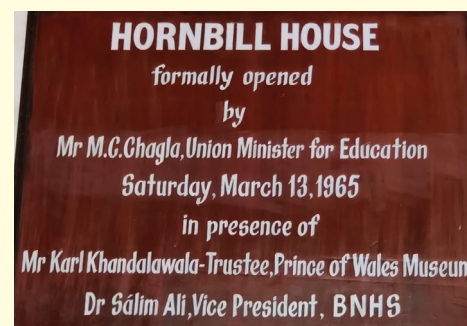
Celebrating a Historic Milestone: 60 Years at Hornbill House

In 1883, eight passionate nature enthusiasts came together to establish the Bombay Natural History Society, united by their curiosity about the natural world. They resolved to meet monthly to share observations, display specimens, and support each other's efforts in the study of natural history. The Society's inaugural meeting took place at the Victoria and Albert Museum (now Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum). Subsequent gatherings were hosted at the wine shop of Mr H.M. Phipson, the Society's second honorary secretary, who generously allocated a section of his premises at 18 Forbes Street to serve as BNHS's first office.

Following the closure of Phipson & Co., BNHS shifted its base to the White House at Malabar Hill in 1957. Eight years later, in 1965, the Society moved to its current headquarters, Hornbill House, situated on the grounds of the Prince of Wales Museum (now the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya). The new building was officially inaugurated on March 13, 1965, by then Union Minister for Education, Mr M.C. Chagla, in the presence of Dr Sálím Ali, Vice President of BNHS, and Mr Karl Khandalawala, Trustee of the Museum. Hornbill House has since become much more than a landmark – it stands as a symbol of the region's enduring commitment to biodiversity and conservation. As BNHS marks the Diamond Jubilee of this historic building, the Society reaffirms its mission to expand its network of nature lovers and strengthen collaborations across South Asia.

To commemorate the 60th anniversary, BNHS unveiled a special-edition coffee mug featuring 'William', the Society's mascot. A dedicated membership campaign was also launched, inviting individuals, institutions, and corporate partners to become part of BNHS's growing conservation community. Those who joined before the March 31 deadline received the limited-edition mug as a token of appreciation. ■

BNHS encourages everyone to spread the word and help grow the Society's community. Whether you are a lifelong naturalist or new to the cause, your support strengthens India's legacy of conservation. To book your commemorative memento or learn more about membership, contact the BNHS marketing team at cmd@bnhs.org and membership team on membership@bnhs.org.



BNHS and EcoSikh Partner to Conserve the Northern Goshawk in Punjab-Haryana Region

In a significant step toward species conservation, the BNHS has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with EcoSikh to initiate a breeding and conservation programme for the northern goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, locally known as the 'Baaj', in the Punjab-Haryana landscape.

The Baaj holds deep cultural and spiritual significance in Sikh heritage. It is famously associated with Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who revered the goshawk as a symbol of courage, dignity, and strength. Historically, falconry was practiced by several Sikh Gurus – Guru Hargobind Ji, Guru Har Rai Ji, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, and Guru Gobind Singh Ji – further embedding the bird as a symbol of leadership and valour in Sikh tradition.

As part of this initiative, BNHS ornithologists and EcoSikh representatives conducted field visits across both states, meeting with diverse stakeholders including political leaders, religious organizations, forest department officials, and conservation partners to build momentum and support for the project. ■



BNHS Launches Documentary 'Mercy Feeding: Pigeon Menace in Urban Areas'

The BNHS, with the support of the JSW Foundation, launched its documentary, *Mercy Feeding: Pigeon Menace in Urban Areas* on March 4, 2025. The film sheds light on the environmental and public health challenges posed by the uncontrolled growth of blue rock pigeon populations due to indiscriminate feeding in urban areas.

Unregulated pigeon feeding, commonly referred to as 'mercy feeding,' has led to a sharp rise in pigeon populations in cities. While feeding pigeons is often seen as an act of compassion, it has unintended consequences, including disruptions to local biodiversity and serious public health risks. Pigeons are known carriers of airborne diseases, and their droppings contribute to structural damage and unclean public spaces. This growing issue calls for increased awareness and responsible urban wildlife management. Produced with the support of the JSW Foundation, *Mercy Feeding: Pigeon Menace in Urban Areas* explores the harmful effects of indiscriminate pigeon feeding through expert insights and scientific analysis. The documentary highlights the ecological and health impacts of pigeon overpopulation, the role of excessive feeding in disrupting urban biodiversity, the need to stop mercy feeding practices, and the promotion of balanced urban avifauna management.

By presenting factual information and expert opinions, the film aims to educate the public on the consequences of mercy feeding and encourage informed decision-making. It advocates for alternative, responsible approaches to managing urban wildlife and urges citizens, policymakers, and urban planners to take action against the practice. The documentary calls on communities to rethink their interactions with pigeons and find a balance between compassion and ecological responsibility.



The documentary was unveiled at Hornbill House by Mrs Sangita Jindal, Chairperson of the JSW Foundation, in the presence of Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi, IAS (Retd.), President, BNHS, along with Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, BNHS, and Dr Bharat Bhushan, Honorary Secretary, BNHS. Speaking at the launch, Sangita Jindal emphasized that while feeding pigeons in urban spaces may seem like an act of kindness, it poses serious health risks. She stressed that true care means protecting both people and wildlife,

expressing her strong support for BNHS's 'Stop Mercy Feeding of Pigeons' initiative and encouraging responsible ways to maintain a healthy environment.

The documentary serves as a crucial step toward fostering a sustainable and healthier urban environment by addressing the long-term consequences of mercy feeding and advocating for responsible wildlife management. We hope that once people see the film, they will reconsider their actions and stop feeding pigeons irresponsibly. ■

Transmission Lines Endanger India's Large Birds

The threat posed by transmission lines to large birds is becoming increasingly serious. Despite our best efforts, some released vultures continue to die due to collisions and electrocution. Tragically, a Sarus Crane that had been ringed in Maharashtra's Gondia district also succumbed to electrocution earlier this month. This ongoing issue is deeply concerning. The BNHS is actively engaging with government agencies and corporate stakeholders, advocating for the urgent adoption and implementation of effective mitigation measures. ■



Sea Turtle Hatchling Release – A Conservation Milestone in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

This March, in a major success for marine conservation, the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department, in partnership with the BNHS, has released hundreds of sea turtle hatchlings into the sea, marking a significant step toward the protection of endangered marine life in the archipelago.

The event, held at the Cuthbert Bay Wildlife Sanctuary – an important nesting site for marine turtles – highlighted the region's role in safeguarding vulnerable species such as the olive ridley, leatherback, green, and hawksbill turtles. These species, all facing threats including habitat loss, fishing-related fatalities, and predation, rely on protected coastal areas for successful nesting and hatchling survival.

Despite its modest size, Cuthbert Bay Sanctuary plays a crucial role in marine turtle conservation. Dedicated forest staff and volunteers have been actively involved in nest monitoring, protection, and ensuring the safe emergence of hatchlings.

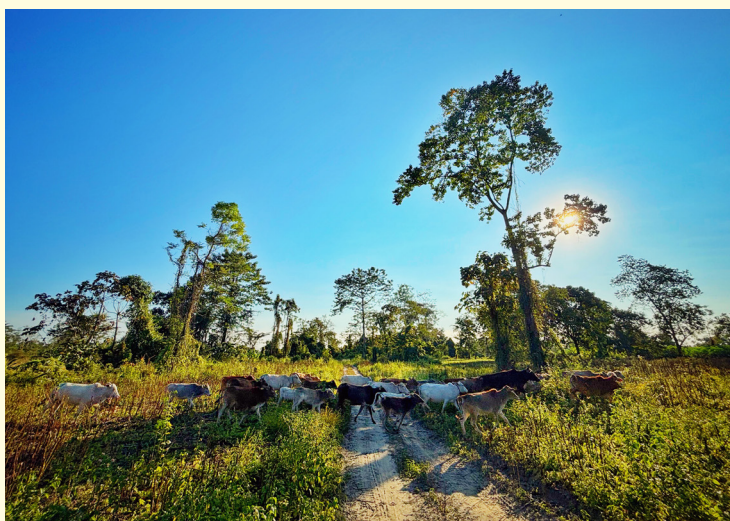
Community involvement has been a cornerstone of the initiative's success. Local fishermen and residents have played a key role in tracking nesting activity and reporting turtle sightings, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and conservation awareness among coastal communities.

As the tiny hatchlings made their way into the open ocean, the event served as a powerful reminder of the fragile equilibrium within marine ecosystems. Sustained collaboration between local communities, conservation organizations, and government bodies remains essential to ensure these majestic creatures continue to return to the shores of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for generations to come. ■



Bengal Florican Habitat Under Threat

The grasslands of the Brahmaputra floodplain, including the Amarpur site on the Assam-Arunachal border, are critical habitats for the critically endangered Bengal florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*. However, these biodiverse ecosystems are under



increasing pressure due to agricultural expansion, overgrazing, and unchecked burning practices. Such land-use changes are fragmenting habitats and threatening the survival of grassland bird species. Urgent conservation efforts and sustainable land management strategies are needed to protect this vital ecosystem and its rich avian diversity.

The BNHS, through its Threatened Grassland Species Recovery Project, is actively working to conserve the Bengal florican, a flagship species, along with nine other grassland bird species across the Brahmaputra floodplains in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The project focuses on ecological research, habitat restoration, and strategic conservation initiatives to safeguard these fragile and ecologically significant grassland ecosystems.

Additionally, BNHS plans to collaborate closely with local communities and stakeholders to promote sustainable practices, ensuring the long-term protection of these ecosystems and their diverse species. ■

BNHS Undertakes Fieldwork and Community Engagement Initiatives Across India



Bidar and Ballari, Karnataka: Between February 26 and March 24, 2025, the BNHS team comprising Rushikesh Pawar, Senior Project Fellow and Minal Pawar, volunteer conducted landscape surveys across Bidar district to monitor grassland ecosystems and identify potential sites for future conservation efforts.

From March 6–14, BNHS team members – Rushikesh Pawar, Vithoba Hegde, Minal Pawar, and Supriya Hangal – in collaboration with the GreenHBH team – comprising

Mr Anandbabu, Mr. Vijay Ittigi, and Mr. Rajendra (Forest Department Watcher) – carried out project assessments at the Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve and Tungabhadra backwaters in Ballari district. The surveys aimed to document avian diversity and evaluate conservation outcomes. The survey recorded nesting bird colonies at Ankasamudra and documented several migratory and resident bird species in the Tungabhadra backwater region. These findings will contribute to a broader understanding of the region's avifaunal biodiversity.

Vulture and Raptor Survey in Kaziranga: Mr Sachin Ranade conducted a Vulture and Raptor Survey in Kaziranga National Park to assess the current vulture population ahead of a planned reintroduction by BNHS and the Forest Department. The team observed three nests of the endangered slender-billed vulture and recorded multiple sightings of feeding and soaring vultures. Notably, a Pallas's fish-eagle, previously ringed in Mongolia, was photographed – an exciting discovery for both the Forest Department and Dr Batmunkh, the Mongolian ornithologist who ringed the bird.



Community Documentary: An ongoing documentary project in Rajasthan with Green Hub is capturing local perspectives on wildlife conservation. By amplifying community voices, the project seeks to document grassroots conservation stories and highlight challenges faced by those living close to wildlife habitats. ■

Citizen Science Initiative: Bird Survey Launched in Bundi, Rajasthan

On the occasion of World Wildlife Day, March 3, 2025, a Citizen Science Programme focusing on a bird survey was launched in the Bundi district of Rajasthan. The initiative was organized by the BNHS and the Environmental Information, Awareness, Capacity Building and Livelihood Programme (EIACP) Centre, in collaboration with the Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve (RVTR).

Aimed at engaging local communities in bird conservation and awareness efforts, the two-day event began with educational presentations. Dr Sujit Narwade, EIACP Coordinator and Deputy Director at BNHS, introduced participants to bird ecology and counting methodologies. Attendees, including RVTR frontline staff and local citizens, were trained in using 'eBird' – a global bird documentation platform. A detailed walkthrough on the platform was presented by Ms Natasha Girkar, Information Officer at BNHS-EIACP.



Shri Arbind Jha, Deputy Conservator of Forests (DyCF), RVTR, welcomed participants and outlined the objectives of the initiative. The sessions were made accessible online to ensure broader participation. On March 4, the second day of the programme, participants were given hands-on training in bird watching within the core zone of RVTR. ■

Habitat Restoration in Pokhran

In Rajasthan, BNHS continues to scale up its efforts in both conservation science and community outreach. BNHS, in collaboration with the ICICI Foundation, is working to restore the Nadi (waterbody) and its surrounding habitats within the Indian Army's Pokhran Field Firing Range (PFFR). The initiative aims to improve local biodiversity and water security. ■



Ladakh Celebrates World Wetlands Day 2025 with Asian Waterbird Census Launch

The BNHS, in collaboration with the Wildlife Protection Department, Ladakh, and Wetlands International, marked World Wetlands Day 2025 with a special event at Sindhu Ghat, Leh. The event, held on February 1, was graced by Regional Wildlife Warden Sajjad H. Mufti (IFS) and featured a range of activities aimed at promoting wetland conservation. A key highlight of the celebration was a quiz competition designed to raise awareness about Ladakh's wetlands and their unique wildlife. The competition witnessed enthusiastic participation from various NGOs and stakeholders, reinforcing the importance of wetland ecosystems.

The event also marked the official flag-off of the Asian Waterbird Census 2025, which was conducted from February 3 to 7 across protected areas, including Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary, Karakoram Wildlife Sanctuary, and Leh. The primary objective of the census was to assess the diversity, abundance, and distribution of avian species in Ladakh, contributing to long-term monitoring and conservation planning. More than 100 bird species were documented during the survey, providing crucial data for conservation efforts.



The findings from the census have been compiled into an official report by Wetlands International for further analysis. Additionally, a comprehensive bird checklist has been uploaded to the eBird app for long-term record-keeping. ■

BNHS and Chandrapur Forest Academy Conduct Training on Wildlife Laws



The BNHS, in collaboration with the Chandrapur Forest Academy (CFA), successfully conducted a three-day training workshop titled 'Wildlife, Laws and People' from March 18–20, 2025. Held at the Chandrapur Forest Academy of Administration, Development and Management, the workshop was supported by the Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation of Maharashtra.

The workshop aimed to strengthen wildlife law enforcement by enhancing the capacity of officers from the Police, Customs, and Forest Departments. Experts provided in-depth training on advanced crime investigation techniques, wildlife trafficking networks, and the legal frameworks governing conservation efforts.

Twenty officers from Maharashtra participated, engaging in interactive lectures, case study analyses, and field visits. A key highlight was a visit to Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, where participants had the rare opportunity to observe three tigers in the wild.

The workshop was inaugurated by Shri M. Srinivas Reddy (IFS), Director of CFA, who emphasized the role of Call Detail Records (CDRs) in wildlife crime investigations. BNHS Director Kishor Rithe followed with an address on the importance of enforcing the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Key technical sessions over the three days included:

- Shri Rakesh Burman, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau: "An Overview of the Wildlife Crime Scenario in India: Role of Enforcement Agencies"
- Shri Hasnain Jafferri, Superintendent of Customs (Preventive), Mumbai: "Combating Wildlife Crime – The Power of Multi-Agency Collaboration"
- Shri Rajendra Dhongde: "Crime Scene Investigation: Conviction and Techniques for Evidence Gathering in Wildlife Crimes"
- Shri Kishor Mishrikotkar and Shri Narendra Chandewar, Maharashtra Forest Department: "Panchanama – An Essential Process"
- Shri Girish Vashishtha, Officer on Special Duty, Maharashtra Forest Department: "Amendments to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and the Role of States in CITES Implementation"
- Shri Nitin Desai, Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI): "Overview of Illegal Wildlife Trade"
- Advocate Rahul Choudhury, Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE), Delhi: "Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and Interpretations by Higher Courts"

BNHS experts also presented case studies on the growing pet trade involving reptiles, birds, and pangolins. CFA faculty member Shri Narendra Chetule coordinated the event and introduced 50 forest trainees from Arunachal Pradesh to wildlife enforcement strategies. Shri Saurabh Dande from BNHS managed workshop logistics, Q&A sessions, and delivered the vote of thanks. ■

National Workshop on Wildlife Management in India: A Vision for the Future



The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) hosted the National Workshop on 'Wildlife Management in India: Visioning Ahead' on March 22, 2025, at Indira Paryavaran Bhawan, New Delhi. The event was inaugurated by senior officials, including Secretary Shri Tanmay Kumar, the Director General of Forests & Special Secretary, the Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife), and the Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife). The workshop featured thematic breakout sessions, led by IGF (Wildlife) Shri Raghu Prasad, where representatives and experts were divided into seven groups, each tasked with addressing critical wildlife management themes. Mr Nandkishor Dudhe, Programme Officer at BNHS-EIACP, contributed to discussions on engaging local youth in wildlife conservation. He proposed integrating wildlife studies into school curricula, expanding bird-watching and nature clubs nationwide, and involving young people in ecological surveys and monitoring efforts. ■

Workshop on Leopard Tourism in Jawai, Pali, Rajasthan

A workshop on sustainable leopard tourism was conducted in Jawai, Pali, organized by the DJED Foundation with BNHS as the knowledge partner. Discussions centred on balancing eco-tourism with conservation. Plans are underway for a potential long-term collaborative project in the region involving local stakeholders. ■



AI for Sustainability – Epistemico 2025



Dr Sujit Narwade, Deputy Director, BNHS, was invited to participate in the "IdeaThon" at Epistemico 2025 on March 22, hosted by the Artificial Intelligence Research and Development Lab and Government Mahila Engineering College, Ajmer. The event aimed to explore how artificial intelligence can support sustainable living. Dr Narwade discussed the threats facing grassland birds such as the lesser florican and encouraged further dialogue through a proposed half-day workshop. ■

NSAID Safety Testing in Collaboration with IVRI



In addition to outreach, Mr Sachin Ranade joined a team from the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) from March 22–27, 2025, for ongoing safety testing of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), particularly paracetamol, to assess their effects on Gyps vultures. This research is vital for ensuring the safety of vulture populations in the wild. ■

Symposium on India 2047: Building a Climate Resilient Future



On March 19, 2025, Mr Nandkishor Dudhe, Programme Officer at BNHS-EIACP, attended the inaugural session of the Symposium on India 2047 – Building a Climate Resilient Future, held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

Organized by the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute and the Salata Institute for Climate and Sustainability at Harvard University, in partnership with MoEF&CC and NITI Aayog, the symposium focused on advancing interdisciplinary dialogue and formulating actionable strategies to strengthen climate resilience as India approaches its centenary of independence in 2047. ■

Poster Campaign Launched to Support Sparrow Conservation

Marking World Sparrow Day on March 20, 2025, the BNHS-EIACP Programme Centre (PC) and Resource Partner (RP) on Avian Ecology launched a poster titled “Support Efforts for Sparrow Conservation.” This awareness initiative aims to highlight the alarming decline in sparrow populations and encourage public involvement in their protection.

Reviving the Chirp
A home for every sparrow

World Sparrow Day, March 20th 2025

Along with setting up nestboxes, adopt sustainable living by creating green spaces and planting native plants. These actions provide natural shelter for birds while enriching our living spaces.

Support Efforts for Sparrow Conservation

© MADHURI DESHMUKH

The campaign seeks to reconnect people with nature and promote the creation of safe habitats where sparrows can once again thrive. Through this outreach, BNHS-EIACP hopes to inspire small, everyday changes, like installing nest boxes and maintaining green spaces, while educating the

Sparrows of India

On the occasion of 'World Sparrow Day March 20, 2025', EIACP Resource Partner on Avian Ecology at the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS-EIACP) is releasing a poster on 'Sparrows of India'. This poster features the seven sparrow species found in India.

- Sind Sparrow** *Passer pyrrhonotus*
© Pratyaj S. Sankia
Distribution: Resident in Northwest India (Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi)
- Russet Sparrow** *Passer cinnamomeus*
© Uday Agashe
Distribution: Resident in Himalayas and North East Indian hills
- House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*
© Shweta Vargiya
Distribution: Almost across India. A summer visitor in Jammu and Kashmir (except high altitude Himalayas)
- Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*
© Francesco Canu/Creative Commons
Distribution: Winter Visitor in Northwest India
- Chestnut-shouldered Bush-sparrow (Yellow-throated Sparrow)** *Gymnoris xanthocollis*
© Uday Agashe
Distribution: Resident in Indian peninsula, also a summer and passage visitor to some parts of Northwest India
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*
© Mohit Poddar
Distribution: Resident in Himalayas, North East India, and Eastern Ghats
- Pale Sparrow (Pale Rockfinch)** *Carpospiza brachydactyla*
© Durant Evans/Creative Commons
Distribution: Occasional published records in India from Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Kerala

Note: The nomenclature is as per the Birdlife International and distribution is as per Grimmett et. al 2011

public about the challenges faced by House Sparrows. The emphasizes community-driven efforts to restore and preserve habitats for sparrows.

In addition, BNHS-EIACP released another poster titled “Sparrows of India”, which highlights seven sparrow species found across the country. This poster aims to raise awareness about the rich diversity of sparrows in India and to emphasize their ecological significance within the nation’s avifauna. ■

Royal Global University Films Documentary on Vulture Conservation

On March 21, 2025, students from the Royal Global University, Zoology Department, Guwahati, led by Ms Aziza Yasmin and guided by Professor Dr Anurudh Chakraborty, visited VCBC to film a documentary on vulture conservation. The documentary aims to highlight the challenges vultures face post-reintroduction and the vital role of conservation programs in their survival. ■



Vulture Conservation: Training and Outreach at VCBC

The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Assam has been actively engaging with various groups to raise awareness about vulture conservation. Throughout March 2025, the centre welcomed forest trainees, university students, and conservation enthusiasts, offering them insights into the crucial role of vultures in the ecosystem and ongoing conservation efforts.

On March 7, students from the University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya (USTM), attended an awareness session led by Mr Sachin Ranade, Mr Aniket Pawar, and Ms Aneena Lakshmanan. The session emphasized the ecological importance of vultures and included a Q&A segment to engage students in conservation discussions.



Centre, Mizoram, led by Mr Zorema, Range Officer participated in an educational session. Mr Ranade provided insights into vulture species identification, population trends, and threats, while Ms Lakshmanan focused on community-based awareness strategies.

On March 22, VCBC hosted 44 forest trainees from Karnataka, who were on an exposure tour from Chhattisgarh. Mr Ranade presented an in-depth overview of vulture ecology and BNHS's role in conservation, while Ms Lakshmanan elaborated on community engagement initiatives.

On March 28, 2025, the tenth batch of 38 forest trainees from the Karnataka Forest Academy visited the Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centre (VCBC) for an exposure visit. Mr Sachin Ranade provided a detailed lecture on the BNHS's pioneering role in vulture conservation and ongoing recovery efforts, such as the Captive-breeding Programme. Biologist Mr. Aniket Pawar then briefed the trainees on the upcoming Release Programme, explaining the protocols for soft-release, monitoring of released vultures, and the vital role of community involvement in ensuring the survival of captive-bred vultures in the wild.

These visits prove to be an enriching experience for the trainees, offering valuable exposure to practical conservation strategies and reinforcing the importance of collaborative efforts in protecting endangered species. ■



Forest trainees from Maharashtra visited VCBC on March 12 to learn about vulture conservation strategies and breeding initiatives. Similarly, on March 21, trainees from the Nature Learning

Conservation Awareness Initiatives for Wildlife and Habitat Protection

BNHS conducted several awareness programmes and outreach initiatives across India to promote conservation. These efforts focused on habitat protection, species conservation, and community engagement.



Great Indian Bustard (GIB), Rajasthan: Informational boards about the critically endangered great Indian bustard have been installed at Pokhran Field Firing Range (PFFR) headquarters, to raise awareness among army personnel and the surrounding communities. The initiative reinforces the urgent need for GIB habitat conservation.



Biswanath, Kaziranga: On March 1 2025, Mr Sachin Ranade visited Biswanath as part of the 'Nature Orientation Initiative' organized by the Kaziranga National Park Authority. The initiative aims to foster dialogue between conservation experts and local communities. Mr Ranade delivered a presentation on vulture conservation, which generated significant excitement among students, particularly with the announcement of the upcoming vulture reintroduction programme in the region.



Ankasamudra, Karnataka: On March 13, BNHS-EIACP and GreenHBH jointly organized a bird conservation awareness programme at the Government Higher Primary School, Ankasamudra. The event engaged 52 students and faculty members, focusing on issues such as habitat loss, climate change, and the importance of ecological stewardship. The initiative aligned with the national LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) mission. During the event, Mr Maheshwar H., a high school teacher known for his dedication to wildlife conservation, was felicitated with a memento and a BNHS calendar.



Assam: The Vulture Conservation Project team hosted a successful awareness programme on March 29, 2025 at Tridhara Anchalik Kala Sangha in Borihat, bringing together retired forest officers, members of local self-help groups, school teachers, and community residents for an informative session on vulture conservation. Mr Sachin Ranade, Assistant Director, BNHS, highlighted the organization's significant contributions to vulture conservation. He elaborated on the critical ecological role vultures play and outlined practical strategies for protecting these endangered birds in Assam. Retired forest officers Mr D.D. Bora (former DCF) and Mr Ananda Das (former RFO, Nalbari) shared insights with the attendees about the importance of vultures to the local community.

A particularly inspiring moment occurred when 11 women from self-help groups discussed how vulture conservation directly impacts their communities. Mr Jayanta Rabha from the Vulture Conservation and Breeding Centre (VCBC) enriched the session with a short documentary on vulture conservation efforts in Assam. The event concluded on a positive note, with all participants taking a collective pledge to support vulture conservation in their respective capacities, demonstrating a strong community commitment to protecting these critically endangered species.

Haryana and Punjab: Mr Sachin Ranade participated in a series of high-level meetings in Haryana and Punjab, accompanied by BNHS partner EcoSikh from March 22–27, 2025. Key engagements included discussions with the Education Minister of Punjab, and senior forest officials including the PCCF and CWLW of both states. Updates were shared on the progress of the VCBC, Pinjore, and the status of released vultures in the wild. ■

SACON Ornithology Students Visit BNHS Bird Migration Study Centre at Point Calimere

Fifteen postgraduate students from the M.Sc. Wildlife Science – Ornithology programme at the Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History (SACON), Coimbatore, visited the BNHS Bird Migration Study Centre (BMSC) at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu, on March 11, 2025, for an immersive learning experience in bird migration and conservation. The academic visit was conducted under the guidance of Dr Goldin Quadros, Principal Scientist at SACON.

The BNHS team, led by Scientist D, S. Sivakumar, delivered an insightful session on the organization's research-led contributions to avian conservation. Key topics included bird migration patterns, bird marking and ringing techniques, and the global significance of Point Calimere as a critical stopover site for migratory shorebirds.

Senior Researcher Paul Antony B. provided a detailed introduction to bird ringing and colour-flagging methodologies, outlining the various biological and ecological parameters



recorded during the process. He also showcased the specialized tools and materials used in bird migration studies.

The classroom session was followed by a guided field visit to the Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, where students observed both migratory and resident bird species in their natural habitat. The visit also offered a rare opportunity to see the blackbuck, the sanctuary's flagship species, in the wild. ■

Educational Outreach and Awareness Initiatives by CEC-Mumbai

CEC Mumbai organized its popular "Walk in the Woods" nature trail for BNHS members and nature enthusiasts on March 23, 2025. Held within BNHS's 33-acre Nature Reserve, the trail offered participants a refreshing escape into the heart of Mumbai's green oasis. The event showcased the seasonal transition of the forest landscape, offering a unique opportunity to observe the subtle changes in flora and fauna as summer approaches.

Participants began their walk in the cool morning breeze and concluded under the warmth of the late morning sun, experiencing the dynamic shifts in the environment over the course of the two-and-a-half-hour trail. The immersive experience encouraged appreciation for urban biodiversity and highlighted the importance of green spaces in city life. The nature trail received enthusiastic feedback from participants, many of whom expressed appreciation for the opportunity to connect with nature and deepen their understanding of local ecology.

In a separate initiative, the Centre hosted 270 students and their teachers today. The students, visiting from Delhi as part of an educational tour to Mumbai, were supported by the HCL Shiv Nadar Foundation. Led by BNHS naturalists, the students explored the forest area on a trail, followed by a presentation on Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) by education officer Shardul Bajikar. The interactive discussions covered topics ranging from insect-plant relationships to geology and conservation issues. As a gesture of appreciation, the Shiv Nadar Foundation presented the students with BNHS Lapel Pins and a copy of the *Hornbill*. ■



Art Meets Conservation: BNHS Hosts 'Sketching in the Forest' at Goregaon Reserve



From ancient cave art to the masterpieces of John Gould, Ustad Mansur, and Rungia Raju, art has played a pivotal role in documenting wildlife and inspiring conservation. Honouring this tradition, the Programmes Department of the BNHS organized its first-ever “Sketching in the Forest” event at the BNHS Reserve, Goregaon, March 2, 2025.

The session was led by Ms Ashvini Menon, a wildlife illustrator and BNHS Life Member, who introduced participants to foundational sketching techniques while encouraging keen observation of natural surroundings. The group embarked on a 1–2 km nature trail, pausing to sketch the serene forest landscapes using ink and pencil. The event offered a unique opportunity for nature lovers to connect with the environment through artistic expression, fostering deeper awareness and appreciation of biodiversity. ■



BNHS Conducts Webinar and Nature Trail to Promote Ornithology and Conservation Awareness

Online Webinar for Ornithology and Biodiversity Leadership Courses on March 23, 2025, the Conservation Education Centre (CEC) Mumbai successfully hosted an online webinar for participants of the Basic Course in Ornithology and the Leadership Course in Biodiversity Conservation (2024–25 batch).

The session was introduced by Course Coordinator Ms Priyadarshini Supekar, who welcomed the participants and introduced the guest expert, Dr Sujit Narwade, Deputy Director at (BNHS). Dr Narwade delivered an engaging and insightful

presentation on the great Indian bustard, lesser florican, and the vital importance of their grassland habitats. He emphasized the ecological significance of grasslands and the urgent need for their conservation, drawing from ongoing scientific research and on-ground conservation efforts.

These webinars aim to bridge the gap between scientific research and public awareness by offering participants direct access to experts working in the field. More than 40 attendees benefited from the session, gaining valuable knowledge about species conservation and habitat protection. ■

SGNP Bird Count

The March Bird Count at Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) and Tungreshwar Wildlife Sanctuary was held on March 30, 2025, with enthusiastic participation from over 48 dedicated volunteers, including birders, naturalists, and nature enthusiasts. Together, they recorded an impressive 97 bird species across various habitats within the park and sanctuary. A notable highlight of the count was the sighting of the Common Grasshopper Warbler at Thakurpada – a new addition to SGNP’s bird checklist. ■



Flamingo Watch at TS Chanakya: A Celebration of Nature and Conservation



On March 9, BNHS organized a Flamingo Watch at the scenic TS Chanakya wetland, a vital refuge for migratory birds. Participants were greeted by a mesmerizing sight – flamingos wading gracefully across the water, their vibrant pink plumage casting reflections on the still surface. Bird enthusiasts were especially thrilled to spot the elusive bluethroat, a rare winter visitor to Mumbai. The event brought together photographers, birdwatchers, and conservation advocates for a memorable morning of observation and discussion. Conversations centred around wetland conservation and avian biodiversity, fostering a deeper appreciation for these fragile ecosystems. The event served as a reminder of the rich natural heritage within city limits and inspired participants to become stewards of wildlife conservation. ■

Summer Tree Walk at Kala Ghoda

The BNHS Programmes Department launched its Summer Tree Walks with a Heritage Tree Walk in the Kala Ghoda area, offering members an insightful exploration of the city’s urban greenery. Participants delved into the ecological and historical significance of Mumbai’s trees, learning about remarkable specimens such as the Mahogany Tree, planted by explorer David Livingstone, and the Pink Tabebuia, planted by the late J.C. Daniel. This walk marks the beginning of a BNHS-led initiative aimed at fostering awareness and appreciation of urban biodiversity. ■



About BNHS Conservation Education Centre (CEC Mumbai) / BNHS Nature Reserve CEC Mumbai is a 33-acre forest reserve that serves as a habitat for Mumbai’s leopards and diverse biodiversity. Situated between Sanjay Gandhi National Park and the urban forest of Film City, it is one of Mumbai’s pioneering environmental education centers. Since its inception, CEC Mumbai has played a crucial role in raising awareness about the city’s biodiversity through nature trails, workshops for educators, corporate CSR programmes, and various public outreach initiatives.

CEC Mumbai also plays a pivotal role in offering BNHS online-hybrid courses, allowing participants from across India to engage in structured biodiversity education. These courses provide valuable opportunities for individuals who may not have access to in-person training.

For more information on these courses, follow BNHS CEC Mumbai on Instagram: @bnhscec_mumbai

Connect with CEC Mumbai: cec-mumbai@bnhs.org



Online-cum-field Courses for Amateurs – 2025–26

Leadership Course in Biodiversity Conservation (LeadBio)
Duration: 11 months (July 2025 to May 2026)
***Fee:** ₹ 14,556/- (non-BNHS Member)
₹ 13,150/- (BNHS Member)

Basic Course in Herpetology
Duration: 4 months (July 2025 to October 2025)
***Fee:** ₹ 9,556/- (non-BNHS Member)
₹ 8,150/- (BNHS Member)

Basic Course in Botany
Duration: 6 months (July 2025 to December 2025)
***Fee:** ₹ 9,556/- (non-BNHS Member)
₹ 8,150/- (BNHS Member)

Basic Course in Butterfly Studies
Duration: 6 months (August 2025 to January 2026)
***Fee:** ₹ 9,556/- (non-BNHS Member)
₹ 8,150/- (BNHS Member)

Basic Course in Ornithology
Duration: 11 months (August 2025 to June 2026)
***Fee:** ₹ 14,556/- (non-BNHS Member)
₹ 13,150/- (BNHS Member)

Qualification required for all courses: Matriculation
Study Material and Medium of Instruction: English

Write to cec-mumbai@bnhs.org
Mobile: 095949 53425/095949 29107

REGISTRATION STARTED

For more information follow us on
instagram @bnhscec_mumbai
(BNHS-CEC, Mumbai)

*Course fee excludes camp fees.