



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

From the DIRECTOR DESK



Dear Members,

Though the month of March is usually hectic due to the closing of financial operations, this time it was even more demanding, as a series of important events took place across southern, northern, and northeastern India that required my presence.

Let me begin with a landmark moment. Mr M.K. Yadav, IFS, Special Secretary, Forests and Environment, Assam, released five captive bred White-rumped Vultures (WRV) into the wild from the release aviary at Nalapara near Rani, Assam. However, this occasion was especially touching for a different reason that I would like to share with you.

As this was the first-ever release of captive bred vultures in Assam from the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC), established in Rani in 2007, local village –youth –both girls and boys – decided to sing the state anthem after the release, standing together in a circle. After the anthem, I felt compelled to say a few words about the remarkable 17-year contribution of Belguri village, which has successfully bred 134 WRVs and 58 Slender-billed Vultures, bringing the centre to a stage where it can now release 20 to 25 vultures annually.

Following my remarks, which aimed to instil a sense of pride and responsibility among the villagers, especially as more visitors from across the country are expected to come and learn from their work, a 25-year-old woman spontaneously asked for permission to speak. She said: “When I was five or six years old, I started visiting this centre. It had just been established, and the birds were housed in aviaries. Sachin Ranade Sir began engaging us through drawing and painting. I started painting birds. As I grew up alongside these birds and their increasing population, I came to understand the true importance of this centre. Sachin Sir, who dedicated 17 years of his life here, is our real hero. He connected with us through art and later even learned the Assamese language. Today, he has brought our entire village and our families closer to Jatayu. We are proud of our centre and our village.”

I had tears in my eyes, as did Sachin. We were both speechless. It was a deeply moving moment that filled me with pride for BNHS and our dedicated staff. I am sure you too will feel proud to be a member of this prestigious Society.

Another significant event was organised by BNHS along with its long-time partner, BirdLife International, where I spent four days in Delhi. Despite ongoing global conflicts, 45 BirdLife partners from 13 countries in the Central Asian Flyway region attended this capacity enhancement workshop from March 9–13, 2026. It was an insightful initiative focused on protecting migratory birds and their habitats, as well as mobilizing resources using TESSA – the Ecosystem Services Assessment Toolkit. Important bird habitats can be better managed through site-specific, nature-based solutions, including the development of nature-safe energy infrastructure to reduce hunting and poaching.

I was particularly inspired by the insights shared by Mr Rajeev Mital, Director General of the National Mission for Clean Ganga; Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi, Chief Economic Advisor to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and CEO of MITRA (also President, BNHS); Mr Anand Mohan, CEO of National CAMPA; and Mr Clement Ben, Member Secretary of CZA and Additional IG (Forest). Their contributions to avifaunal conservation through their respective roles offered valuable lessons to all participants.

This month also brought encouraging news: the Ministry of Jal Shakti approved our project on the Indian Skimmer in the Chambal and lower Ganga rivers under Namami Gange Mission-II, during the 68th meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG). We are grateful to the Honourable Minister for Jal Shakti for making this announcement in Dehradun. While several states invest significantly in organizing bird festivals, relatively little attention is given to habitat conservation. We hope this initiative will inspire greater focus on river ecosystems, including sandbar habitats crucial for nesting birds. BNHS has previously contributed significantly to the conservation of Kolleru Lake in Andhra Pradesh, an issue that has now reached the Supreme Court.

Before heading to Delhi, I attended the annual meeting in Chennai organized by our funding partner, The Habitat Trust. Conservation partners working on various species and habitats gathered for a two-day seminar. Alongside presentations, a thought-provoking brainstorming exercise encouraged participants to reflect on the most pressing challenges and the most hopeful opportunities within their respective landscapes. I was especially pleased to engage in discussions on grasslands in India—an issue of priority for BNHS.

I would also like to share some updates on our vulture monitoring efforts. Of the 15 Long-billed Vultures (LBV) released in Melghat, ten are currently scavenging within the Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR). One White-rumped Vulture (WRV), released in Pench (J102), has joined this group after being rescued near Melghat. Notably, a migratory wild Himalayan Griffon Vulture (HGV) was observed on February 3, 2026 in MTR, scavenging alongside our flock near the aviary.

Among the remaining LBVs, one individual (X94) travelled 200 km across Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh before returning to MTR. Another (F12) travelled 36 km to Chikhaldara and returned. LBV Z29 was observed feeding on a jackal carcass in Nashik for two days.

Out of the nine WRVs and five LBVs released in Pench Tiger Reserve, seven WRVs and four LBVs are currently scavenging within the reserve. One WRV (J102) has moved to Melghat, while another LBV (J132) has joined a wild flock in Nashik. WRV Z33 and LBV XX82 have been regularly observed near the aviary by the BNHS team since December 11, 2025.

We also received updates from Haryana, where 25 WRVs were released on December 17, 2024. Of these, 12 individuals have survived after 15 months, although seven were lost due to electrocution. Power lines continue to pose a significant threat to these large raptors, highlighting the urgent need for collaboration with other stakeholders.

Academic institutions, particularly geography departments, have an important role to play in advancing biodiversity conservation through innovative approaches. I was pleased to attend a conference organized by the Geography Department of Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil College in Vashi, Navi Mumbai. I hope more such institutions will collaborate closely with BNHS.

If you are not already following us on social media, I encourage you to do so for daily updates from BNHS.

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

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

For assistance, feel free to reach out: Central Marketing: cmd@bnhs.org; Membership: membership@bnhs.org;

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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



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Assam's Captive-Bred Vultures Return to the Wild

March 19th marked a significant milestone for wildlife conservation in India, as ten White-rumped vultures from VCBC Rani were successfully released into the wild at Nalapara, under the Rani Range of Kamrup East Division, Assam, marking the first-ever successful release of White-rumped Vultures in Northeast India. The release was led by Mr M.K. Yadav, IFS, Special Secretary of Forests and Climate Change, Assam, who was joined by a distinguished group of conservationists including Dr Vinay Gupta (PCCF (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden, Assam), Mrs Roji Barman (RFO, Rani Range) and representatives from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) – Dr Chris Bowden (Asia Manager - Vulture Programme) – and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) – Mr Kishor Rithe (Director, BNHS), Dr Sachin Ranade (Asst Director, BNHS & Head VCBC, Rani, Assam). To ensure minimal disturbance, the team operated from a concealed hide about 100 meters away, using a pulley system to gently open the aviary gates, allowing the vultures to take their first flight into the wild while cameras documented the moment unobtrusively. This release, the first of its kind in Assam for captive bred vultures, represents the culmination of nearly two decades of sustained effort.

Since its establishment in 2007, the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre at Rani has expanded steadily and now houses 138 White-rumped and 54 Slender-billed vultures. With a total population of 194 birds, the programme has reached a stage where the Forest Department can begin releasing 20 to 25 vultures annually into their natural habitat.

The release took place at Nalapara within the Rani range, where the birds had undergone a carefully managed acclimatization period. Of the released group, six were bred at the centre, while four were rescued and rehabilitated individuals that have been cleared by veterinary doctors as fit for survival. Each bird has been equipped with solar-powered satellite tags and identification rings to enable close monitoring of their movements and adaptation in the wild. These tags will provide vital data on their movements as they begin to explore neighbouring states like West Bengal and Meghalaya, and potentially cross borders into Bangladesh,

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Nepal, or Bhutan. The coming six months will be especially critical, serving as an important indicator of both the birds' survival and the safety of the surrounding ecosystem. These subadult birds, aged three to four years, have already spent time in a pre-release aviary interacting with wild vultures through protective mesh. This preparation is expected to help them integrate smoothly into wild populations, with supplementary feeding support from the centre easing their transition during the initial phase.

This milestone has been made possible through the sustained commitment of partners and the strong support of local communities. We extend our sincere appreciation to the RSPB: for its long-term financial backing and to Adani LGBI for its crucial support during 2025–26. Over the past nineteen years, the initiative has also benefited from contributions by the Centre for Wildlife Studies, the Oriental Bird Club, the Darwin Initiative, the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation, and Vetwork. Above all, we acknowledge with gratitude the residents of Belguri village and the people of Assam, whose continued trust and cooperation have been central to this effort. Together, these collective actions are helping ensure that these remarkable birds once again thrive in our skies for generations to come. ■



Slender-billed Vultures Move Toward Wild Release in Assam

On March 20, 2026, a momentous chapter in Indian wildlife conservation unfolded as the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve (KTR), in partnership with the BNHS, released five Slender-billed Vultures into a newly constructed soft-release aviary at Biswanath. This landmark initiative marks the first-ever release of captive bred Slender-billed Vultures in India and represents a major step forward in the Assam Forest Department's efforts to revive this critically endangered species. The occasion was attended by distinguished leaders including BNHS President Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi, Chief Wildlife Warden of Assam Dr Vinay Gupta, BNHS Director Mr Kishor Rithe, and KTR Field Director Dr Sonali Ghosh, along with local officials and dedicated forest staff. This achievement reflects nearly two decades of sustained effort at the Rani Vulture Breeding Centre, established in 2007, which has successfully bred 56 Slender-billed Vultures to date. The programme has now reached a stage of maturity that allows for the planned release of five to ten birds each year, with additional support anticipated from the BNHS breeding centre in Haryana.

The five vultures were carefully transported from Rani to Biswanath, where they will spend several months acclimatizing to their new surroundings before full release into the wild. As part of ongoing monitoring and conservation efforts, each bird has been fitted with an identification ring and a solar-powered satellite tag, enabling researchers to track their movement, behaviour, and overall health. During the event, Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi highlighted the importance of involving local communities in conservation initiatives, while Mr Vinay Gupta noted that such efforts contribute to sustainable tourism and create livelihood opportunities for local youth. Dr Sonali Ghosh reaffirmed Kaziranga Tiger Reserve's commitment to conserving lesser-known species, emphasizing that while wild Slender-billed Vultures continue to breed in the Reserve, these targeted releases are vital for strengthening population numbers and maintaining genetic diversity. With the support of local communities, including residents of Tewaripal, and the dedication of conservation partners, this initiative stands as a strong example of what long-term collaboration and scientific commitment can achieve for the future of India's wildlife. ■





Successful Rescue and Release of a Cinereous Vulture in Madhya Pradesh

On January 22, 2026, a Cinereous Vulture was rescued in an injured condition from the Susner Range of Shajapur Forest Division, Madhya Pradesh. Recognizing the severity of its condition, field staff facilitated its transfer to the BNHS–Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Bhopal on February 20, 2026 for specialized care. Upon arrival, a thorough clinical examination revealed a significant leg injury that required immediate intervention. Under expert supervision, the vulture underwent a rigorous stabilization and treatment protocol, during which it was closely monitored for improvements in strength, feeding behaviour, and the natural responses essential for survival in the wild.

After weeks of careful rehabilitation, the vulture showed a remarkable recovery and was officially deemed fit for release. On the morning of March 30, 2026, at the Halali Dam, Madhya Pradesh, the bird was returned to its natural habitat in the presence of Shri Vijaykumar Sunda, IFS, Field Director of Van Vihar National Park, along with representatives from WWF-India. Upon its release, the vulture exhibited strong, steady flight and immediately took to the skies, a heartening sight that confirmed its readiness to reintegrate into the wild. To support post-release monitoring, the bird was fitted with a GPS-GSM tracking device by WWF-India, allowing continuous tracking of its movement, habitat use, and survival in the wild.

This successful rescue, rehabilitation, and release of a Cinereous Vulture in Madhya Pradesh highlights the value of coordinated efforts between forest departments, conservation organisations, and veterinary teams in protecting threatened scavengers such as vultures. It also emphasises the important role played by rehabilitation centres like VCBC Bhopal in advancing vulture conservation. During the 2025–2026 period alone, VCBC Bhopal has successfully rehabilitated and released six rescued vultures, including two Cinereous and four Long-billed vultures. These efforts are critical not just for species recovery, but for maintaining the ecological balance, as these essential scavengers provide a vital service in disease regulation and carcass disposal across the landscape. ■



Strengthening Global Partnerships for Migratory Bird Conservation

In a significant step toward securing the future of migratory birds, the BNHS, in collaboration with BirdLife International, hosted a high-level capacity enhancement workshop in New Delhi from March 9–13, 2026. The workshop brought together over 45 conservationists from 13 different nations across the Central Asian Flyway region, creating a valuable platform for knowledge exchange and collaborative planning. Over the course of the week, participants engaged in discussions on assessing the ecosystem services provided by bird habitats, implementing nature-based solutions for effective site management, and promoting energy infrastructure that minimizes risks to migratory birds. A key focus of the workshop was to strengthen the ability of partner organizations to support their governments in enforcing wildlife protection laws and addressing the ongoing threat of illegal poaching.

The event featured perspectives from prominent leaders, including Mr Rajeev Mital, Director General of the National Mission for Clean Ganga, and BNHS President Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi. Mr Pardeshi interacted with the delegates to explain how the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Govt of India, and the Maharashtra State Government have launched specialized projects to protect indicator bird species and their habitats. Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, BNHS, shared insights from the Society's 142-year legacy in bird migration research, while Mr Vinayagan Dharmarajah of BirdLife Asia emphasized the broader vision of this collaboration, which aims to drive conservation outcomes across all 30 countries of the flyway, spanning from the Maldives to Siberia. This initiative aligns with India's leadership on the global stage; during the CMS COP14 in Uzbekistan, India championed the Initiative for the Central Asian Flyway (ICAF) and was honoured with 'Champion Plus' status for its proactive role in bird conservation.

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The outcomes of the workshop are expected to have a lasting impact on biodiversity conservation across the region. By enhancing the capacity of organizations to monitor migratory birds through advanced tagging techniques and to restore critical wetland habitats, the programme supports both ecological sustainability and community well-being. Participants also gained practical insights into balancing energy needs with nature-sensitive development and explored ways to adapt successful conservation models from India within their own national contexts. As delegates return to their respective countries, they carry forward a shared commitment and a set of practical, collaborative solutions that address conservation challenges while supporting food security, climate resilience, and the safe passage of millions of birds along the Central Asian Flyway each year. ■

BNHS–BirdLife Initiative for Riverine Bird Conservation at Mahanadi

The BNHS, in collaboration with BirdLife International, has initiated the next phase of its project to conserve the Indian Skimmer and Black-bellied Tern along the Mahanadi River. The Memorandum of Understanding for this initiative was signed during the Capacity Enhancement Workshop to Strengthen BirdLife Partnership’s Ability to Implement Migratory Bird Conservation in the Central Asian Flyway, held in New Delhi.



Planned as a three-year effort from 2026 to 2028, the project focuses on strengthening community-led monitoring and enhancing stakeholder engagement across key stretches of the river. By actively involving local communities, particularly fisherfolk, and working in close coordination with government agencies, the initiative seeks to address critical challenges such as nest flooding, habitat disturbance, and the declining breeding success of these globally threatened species. Through an integrated approach that combines scientific monitoring, awareness programmes, and institutional collaboration, the project aims to support the long-term conservation of riverine birds and the fragile ecosystems they depend on. ■



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A Renewed Hope for Native Fish at Ujani Reservoir in Maharashtra

Mid-March brought encouraging news from the waters of the Ujani Reservoir, as local fishermen from Takali Bhima in Pune discovered thriving schools of native fish species, including *Labeo kawrus* and *Hypseobarbus kolus*. This finding marks another important breakthrough in the Wetland Eco-restoration and Climate Resilient Fisheries Development Programme led by Unmesh Katwate and his team at the BNHS. On March 17, 2026, the team successfully collected over 100 kg of *Labeo kawrus* and 6 kg of *Hypseobarbus kolus*, ensuring their safe transfer to the Bhigwan Hatchery for conservation breeding. Through careful handling, the use of liquid oxygen-aerated transport tanks, and strong coordination, the team achieved survival rates exceeding 98 percent, reflecting a high level of precision and commitment.

This effort was made possible through the invaluable support of Bharat Mallav, CEO of Bhigwan Carp Fish Seedling Production and Chairman of the Ambika Fisheries Co-operative Society, who alerted the BNHS team as soon as the species were found in abundance. Beyond the numbers, this initiative represents a message of hope, demonstrating how strengthening captive breeding today can help build healthier and more resilient freshwater ecosystems in the future. The Ujani project goes beyond scientific achievement, highlighting the importance of partnership, careful planning, and shared commitment in giving native species a renewed opportunity to thrive in their natural habitats. ■



BNHS' Ujani team Celebrates International Women's Day at Bhigwan Fish Hatchery

At the Bhigwan Major Carp Hatchery, International Women's Day was marked not just through celebration, but through meaningful action in the field. In an area traditionally dominated by men, Devi Waingankar, along with interns Shraddha Yadav, Shaileja Gundu, and Sneha Jadhav from the BNHS, stepped beyond conventional roles to actively lead hatchery operations. Trading office work for hands-on engagement, the team entered the ponds using sieve nets to carry out essential health assessments of broodstock, demonstrating both skill and commitment in a demanding environment.

Working closely with local fishermen and hatchery staff, the team collected important morpho-meristic data on several species, including the vulnerable *Hypselobarbus kolus*. This effort forms a critical part of a larger rewilding programme planned for the upcoming monsoon season. At the same time, the team is focused on securing broodstock for twelve native and endemic species of the Krishna River system, with the aim of restoring these species to the Ujani Reservoir and revitalizing the ecological balance of the upper Bhima river basin. The day served as a meaningful reminder that conservation is not only about protecting ecosystems, but also about fostering inclusivity, encouraging leadership, and inspiring the next generation of women to take an active role in shaping the future of environmental stewardship. ■

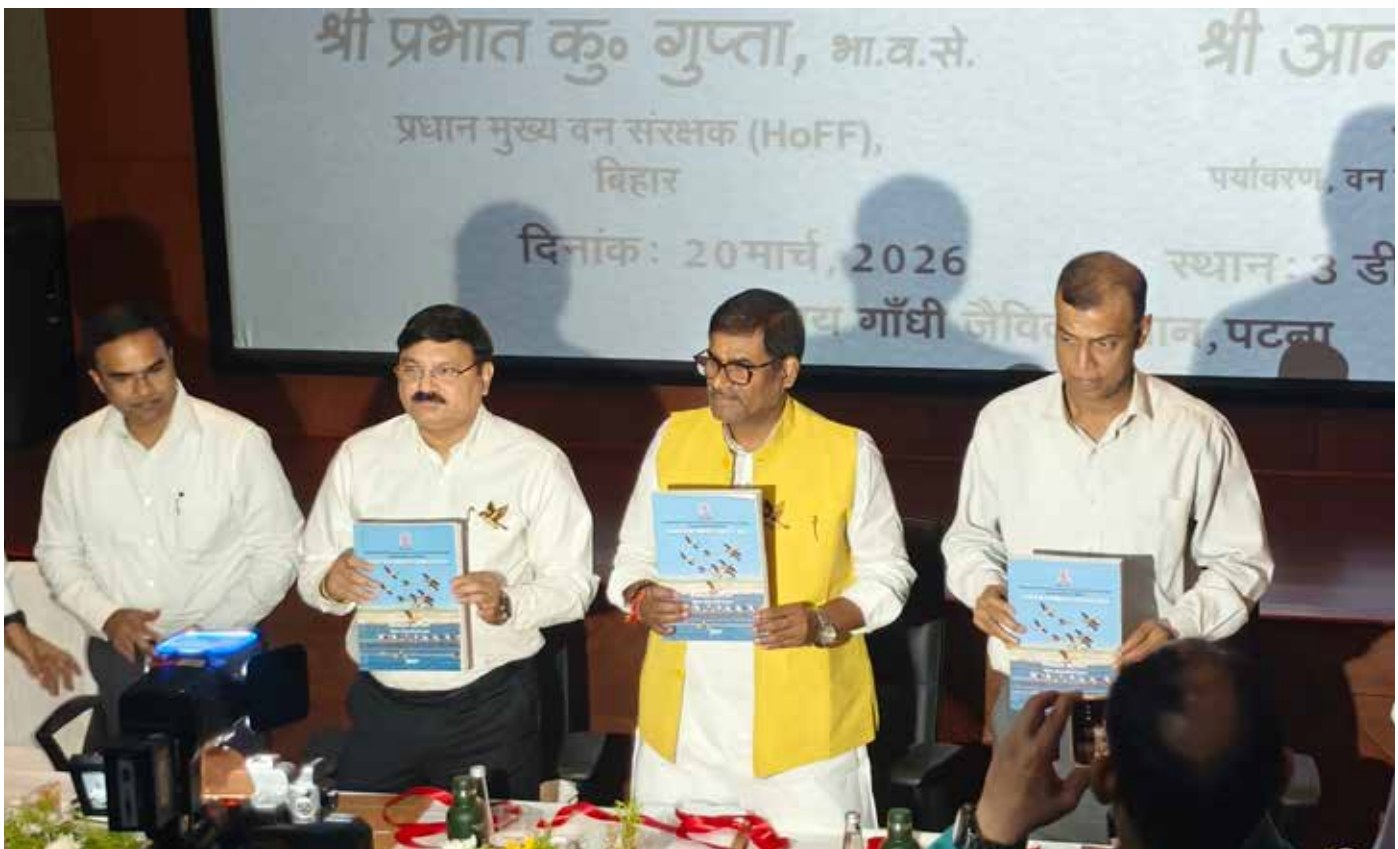


Nurturing Future Conservationists through Hands-on Learning at Ujani, Maharashtra

March 2026 marked an important step forward for the Wetland Eco-restoration and Fisheries Development Programme with the launch of its internship initiative, designed to bridge academic learning with real-world conservation practice. Developed to provide immersive, hands-on scientific training, the programme enabled participants to actively engage in field-based research and contribute meaningfully to ongoing ecological restoration efforts. Three master's students, Shraddha Yadav, Shaileja Gundu, and Sneha Jadhav from the Institute of Science Dr Homi Bhabha State University, successfully completed their internship with the BNHS during this period, gaining valuable exposure to applied conservation science.

Throughout the programme, the interns developed practical skills across a wide range of activities, including fish population studies and bathymetric assessments that helped map underwater habitats and understand species distribution, as well as regular monitoring of water quality parameters to assess ecosystem health and suitability for native and reintroduced species. They also worked with advanced side sonar scanning techniques to generate detailed insights into fish abundance and population patterns, while field visits to hatcheries provided firsthand experience in broodstock collection and conservation breeding of native fish species. In addition, the interns contributed to the curation and cataloguing of freshwater fish specimens from the Krishna River basin at the BNHS Museum, strengthening their understanding of biodiversity documentation and conservation heritage.

More than a training opportunity, this internship served as a transformative experience that integrated fieldwork, scientific analysis, and conservation practice. By participating directly in research and restoration activities, the interns not only enhanced their technical knowledge but also gained a deeper appreciation of the challenges and opportunities in wetland conservation. Initiatives like this play a vital role in building the next generation of conservation professionals, equipping them with the skills and motivation needed to address the complex issues facing freshwater ecosystems in India and beyond. ■



L-R: Sri Anand Kishor, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, DEF&CC, Bihar, Dr Pramod Kumar, Hon'ble Minister, DEF&CC, Bihar, Mr Arvinder Singh, IFS - PCCF (CAMPA), and Mr Hemant Patil, IFS, Director Patna ZOO

Bihar AWC 2025 Report Released on World Sparrow Day

On March 20, 2026, the Bihar Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2025 Report was released at Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park, Patna, by the Hon'ble Minister of the Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of Bihar, on the occasion of World Sparrow Day, in the presence of senior forest officials and conservation partners. The AWC is being conducted in the state with technical support from BNHS. The AWC provides valuable insights into the diversity and abundance of waterbirds from wetlands in Bihar. The AWC data support the conservation and management of the waterbirds and their habitats in the state. Also, creating awareness among the general public. ■



Securing Safe Spaces: Community Enclosures Strengthen Great Indian Bustard Conservation in Rajasthan

The Pokhran Tehsil remains one of the last vital strongholds for the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard outside of officially protected government networks. This landscape, a delicate mosaic of grasslands, farmlands, and scrubby dunes, serves as a crucial corridor for the birds, particularly the roosting sites near Khetolai where adults often lead their young in search of food and safety. Long-term field studies have highlighted the importance of this region as one of the three key roosting sites for the species, alongside the Field Firing Range and the Desert National Park satellite enclosures at Ramdevra. Bustards roosting near Khetolai frequently move across the landscape with their young in search of food, water, and safety. However, because much of this land is privately owned, the habitat faces increasing pressure from changing land-use patterns and heavy livestock grazing. To address these vulnerabilities, the BNHS has pioneered a conservation approach centred on community-driven protection. Recognizing that long-term survival depends on local partnership, the BNHS Bustard Team developed a strategy to secure critical land patches through the creation of specialized 'Community Enclosures'.

This vision was made possible through collaboration with the ICICI Foundation, whose support was instrumental in implementing the initiative on the ground. Together with local stakeholders, this partnership has successfully established two significant fenced enclosures: a 68-bigha site at Chanani and a 175-bigha expanse at Khetolai. These areas feature predator-proof fencing designed to shield the bustards from threats such as free-ranging dogs, wild boars, and foxes. By reducing external pressures and preventing habitat degradation, these enclosures provide a sanctuary where young birds can safely learn essential survival skills and adults can roost undisturbed. This initiative represents a major step forward in community-based conservation, proving that when organizations and local residents unite, they can create a secure future for one of India's most iconic and threatened bird species. ■



BNHS Showcases Innovation and Outreach at National EIACP Workshop

The Environmental Information, Awareness, Capacity Building, and Livelihood Programme (EIACP) Secretariat, under the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), convened its National Evaluation Workshop from March 14–17, 2026 at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. The workshop brought together 54 EIACP Centres from across the country to review progress and exchange ideas on innovative conservation strategies. Representing the BNHS-EIACP Centre were Dr Sujit Narwade, Deputy Director and Project Coordinator, and Mr Nandkishor Dudhe, Senior Programme Officer. A key highlight of the inaugural session was the launch of a specialised mobile application developed by the BNHS-EIACP team to streamline vulture data collection and strengthen field-based research efforts.

Following the launch, the BNHS team presented an overview of their recent work, highlighting the organisation's focus on outreach and capacity-building initiatives. The presentation also emphasised the integration of EIACP activities with "Mission LIFE" (Lifestyle for Environment), a Government of India initiative promoting sustainable living and environmentally responsible choices. By demonstrating how scientific data collection can be effectively combined with community engagement, the BNHS-EIACP Centre reinforced its commitment to delivering reliable environmental information while contributing to national priorities for sustainability and climate resilience. The workshop provided an important platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration, ensuring that the data and insights generated continue to support informed conservation action and public awareness across the country. ■

BNHS Visit to Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary

On March 15, 2026, Dr Sujit Narwade, Deputy Director of BNHS, visited the Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary in Sangareddy, a site celebrated for its vital Mugger Crocodile population and its rich diversity of birdlife. Beyond its ecological importance, the sanctuary serves as a lifeline for the region, acting as a primary water source for the city of Hyderabad. During the visit, BNHS highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive habitat restoration to ensure the long-term health of the sanctuary's nine islands.



Key discussions focused on addressing the challenges of siltation and the spread of invasive flora, both of which threaten the delicate balance of the local ecosystem. To enhance conservation efforts, the team emphasized the adoption of modern monitoring tools for more precise bird and crocodile censuses, ensuring that management decisions are backed by the latest data. Emphasis was placed on integrating ecological priorities with the needs of local communities to ensure sustainable management of the site. The visit reinforced BNHS's role in guiding a forward-looking conservation approach for Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary, balancing biodiversity protection with human requirements. ■

Promoting Conservation Through Collaboration and Creativity in Hyderabad

On March 14, 2026, Dr Sujit Narwade, Deputy Director of BNHS, served as a jury member for the Hyderabad Photography Contest, an event that showcased the powerful connection between art and conservation by highlighting ecological themes through photography. The contest provided a platform to raise awareness about biodiversity and environmental issues through creative expression. Following the jury deliberations, Dr Narwade participated in a strategic roundtable hosted by the Neuland Foundation,



where he joined a group of conservation leaders to discuss approaches for strengthening conservation efforts in Hyderabad and Telangana. The discussions focused on bridging traditional management practices with modern ecological science, with particular emphasis on habitat restoration, the use of technology for monitoring, and aligning policies for more effective conservation outcomes. BNHS's participation in both the contest and the roundtable reflects its continued commitment to collaborative efforts that bring together science, community engagement, and management priorities to support long-term conservation goals. ■



Building Young Conservation Champions Around Ankasamudra Wetland, Karnataka

A conservation-oriented educational awareness programme was conducted in and around Ankasamudra Lake in Hagaribommanahalli, Karnataka, reaching students from five government schools. The initiative aimed to build a scientific understanding of the ecological importance of birds and wetlands within the local landscape. Through interactive sessions, students were introduced to the role of birds as essential components of ecosystems and their contribution to maintaining ecological balance. The concept of birds as keystone species was also explained to help students understand their critical influence on ecosystem stability. Equal emphasis was placed on the importance of wetlands in supporting biodiversity and sustaining vital ecological processes.

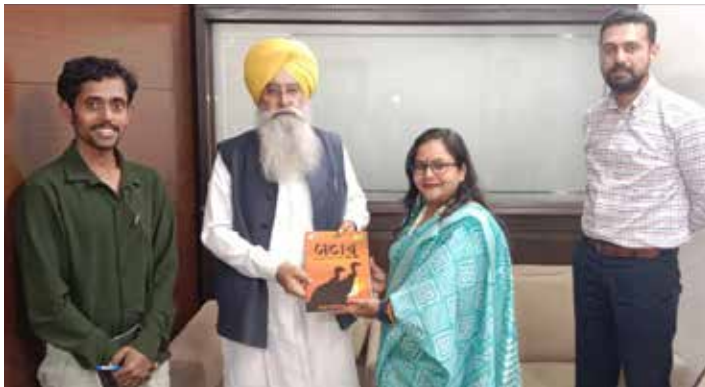
The programme also addressed the growing concern of plastic pollution and its impact on the environment, particularly on birds, animals, and human health. Students learned how plastic waste disrupts natural habitats and food chains, and were encouraged to adopt simple, practical measures to reduce plastic use in their daily lives. By promoting responsible environmental behaviour and sustainable practices, the initiative sought to inspire students to actively participate in local conservation efforts. Overall, the programme helped strengthen grassroots awareness and foster a sense of environmental responsibility among young learners, contributing to long-term conservation outcomes. ■

Strengthening Vulture Conservation Through High-Level Engagements in Punjab and Haryana

A series of high-level meetings were held across Punjab and Haryana to strengthen the Vulture Conservation Project, with active participation from senior government officials and departments. The meetings in Punjab were led by Ms Alka Dubey, Mr Hemant Bajpai, and Mr Arindam Aditya, with overall guidance and support from Mr Kishore Rithe, Director, BNHS. The discussions brought together key stakeholders, including

- the Hon'ble Cabinet Minister, Animal Husbandry, Punjab – Mr Gurmeet Singh Kudian
- Gau Seva Commission, Punjab – Mr Rajesh Narang
- Animal Husbandry Department, Punjab – Mr Paramjit Singh Walia (Director)
- Higher Education Department, Punjab – Mr Jatinder Pal Singh (Deputy Director)
- Drug Control Department, Punjab – Mr Gurvinder Singh (Assistant Commissioner), Mr. Sanjay Garg (Drug Controller)
- Forest Department, Punjab – Mr Dharmendra Sharma (Head of Forest Force)
- Drug Control Department, Haryana – Mr Lalit Goyal (Drug Controller)
- Higher Education Department, Haryana – Mr S. Narayanan (Director General)

The meetings focused on critical aspects of vulture conservation, including the regulation of harmful veterinary drugs, promotion of vulture-safe alternatives, the establishment of Vulture Safe Zones (VSZ), and the need to strengthen awareness and outreach initiatives. The participation of senior leadership, particularly at the ministerial level, reflects strong policy support and a shared commitment to advancing effective conservation measures. These engagements highlight the importance of coordinated action across departments and states to ensure the long-term survival of vultures and the success of ongoing conservation efforts. ■



Cabinet Minister, Animal Husbandry, Punjab – Mr Gurmeet Singh Kudian



Drug Control Department, Punjab – Mr. Gurvinder Singh (Assistant Commissioner), Mr Sanjay Garg (Drug Controller)



Forest Department, Punjab – Mr Dharmendra Sharma (Head of Forest Force)



Drug Control Department, Haryana – Mr Lalit Goyal (Drug Controller)

Expanding Awareness for Vulture Conservation Across Northeast India

A series of vulture awareness programmes were conducted across Assam and Meghalaya to strengthen outreach and promote conservation action at both institutional and community levels.

VCBC, Rani: In connection with the vulture release programme by the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC), Assam, advocacy meetings were held on March 11, 2026 across four schools in Meghalaya, including Suryodaya Secondary School, Little Star Senior Secondary School, Savio Higher Secondary School, and Montfort School. The initiative was carried out by Ms Aneena Lakshmanan, Biologist, along with Mr Jayanta Rabha, Office Assistant, with a focus on engaging school authorities and sensitising them to the ecological importance of vultures. The meetings received a positive response, with school staff expressing strong interest in future collaboration and supporting conservation awareness efforts, marking an important step in expanding outreach in the region.

VSZ, Biswanath: Further strengthening these efforts, the Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ) Assam team conducted two awareness programmes on March 5, 2026 at Baghmari High School, Behali, and on March 14, 2026 at Anandaram Dhekial Phookan College, Nagaon. During these sessions, Biologist Mr Gitartha Borah delivered presentations highlighting the ecological role of vultures, the services they provide, and the threats they face, particularly poisoning from contaminated carcasses. The programmes saw active participation and engaging discussions, with a combined attendance of 109 participants, reflecting growing interest in vulture conservation.

VSZ, Sivasagar: The outreach efforts extended directly into local communities through door-to-door awareness programmes conducted by Mr Sthitapragyan Mallick, Biologist, along with Mr Hemanta, Field Assistant. These interactions took place across several villages, including Disangmukh, Kokilamari, Akhaiphutia, Afol, Ajanpir, and Dihingmukh throughout March 2026. By engaging with residents at their doorsteps, the team was able to create more personal and meaningful conversations around the importance of vultures, the risks posed by poisoning, and the need for community participation in conservation. The initiative received encouraging responses from villagers and played a key role in strengthening grassroots awareness and support for vulture conservation across the region. ■



Mr Gitartha Borah with the students of Baghmari High School

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Community outreach through door-to-door advocacy in Sivasagar



Mr Gitartha Borah taking awareness session at Anandaram Dhekial Phookan College

BNHS to Expand Environmental Learning Through Nature Clubs in Maharashtra

The BNHS has initiated the programme titled 'Strengthening Environmental Education Among Maharashtra's Students', with the aim of promoting and strengthening Nature Clubs, or Eco-Clubs, in schools and colleges across the state. This initiative seeks to enhance environmental awareness while encouraging active student participation in conservation-related activities. As part of the programme, from March 24–27, 2026, BNHS Project Associate Mr Rohan Chavan visited several schools and colleges in Karad, Satara district, to promote the initiative and encourage institutions to join the programme. The visit was supported by Governing Council Member Mr Rohan Bhate-Shah.

During this outreach, a total of 20 educational institutions were engaged, of which 15 expressed their willingness to establish BNHS Nature Clubs and collaborate with BNHS from the upcoming academic year. The positive response from these institutions reflects a growing interest in environmental education and sets the stage for strengthening conservation awareness among students through structured and sustained engagement. ■



BNHS Project Associate Mr Rohan Chavan reached out to Principals of various schools to strengthen the conservation awareness efforts among educational institutions

Engaging with Nature: Highlights from BNHS CEC Programmes

On February 28, 2026, CEC organised a nature trail for 157 employees of Ajanta Pharma Ltd. as part of a CSR initiative. Participants explored the campus through guided walks, discovering a range of birds, insects, and native trees while learning about biodiversity and conservation. The programme was conducted by Mr Gaurang Tawade, Mr Unmesh Paranjape, Mr Shakti Pakhare, Mr Rajneesh Sharma, Ms Priya Gupta, Ms Varsha Gore, and Mr Dilip Giri. The initiative provided participants with an opportunity to reconnect with nature and appreciate the importance of conservation. ■



On March 1, 2026, CEC hosted a Holi Special Natural Colour Making and Eco-Painting Workshop, where participants engaged in a hands-on session creating colours from leaves, fruits, and flowers. The session highlighted how natural pigments produce a wide range of colours and their environmental benefits. The programme concluded with a short nature trail across the campus, allowing participants to explore local biodiversity. The workshop was conducted by Ms Kimaya Gajare and Mr Dilip Giri. ■



On March 7, 2026, CEC conducted a Birthday Nature Trail for young participants aged 6 to 11 years, offering an eco-friendly way to celebrate special occasions. During the trail, children explored the campus and observed insects, butterflies, and birds in their natural habitats while learning to identify animal tracks and signs. The programme was conducted by Mr Dilip Giri, providing an engaging and educational outdoor experience for young nature enthusiasts. ■

On March 14, 2026, CEC conducted a refreshing nature trail for adults, offering participants an opportunity to explore the Karvi Trail and Leopard Trail while observing a rich diversity of plants, insects, birds, and butterflies. The serene morning walk provided a calming start to the weekend and helped participants reconnect with nature. The programme was conducted by BNHS naturalist Mr Vaibhav Haldipure. ■



On March 15, 2026, CEC organised a Slow Nature Sunday Trail, where participants spent their weekend exploring the forested campus and learning about forest birds and animal behaviour. Along the trail, they encountered a variety of insects, mammals, and butterflies, making it a meaningful experience focused on observation and connection with nature. The programme was conducted by BNHS naturalist Mr Shakti Pakhare. ■





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A Memorable Birding Camp in Goa

From February 27 to March 1, 2026, a group of 14 participants, led by Ms Aqsa Majgaonkar, Senior Education Officer, took part in an immersive birding experience in the biodiverse forests of Goa's Western Ghats, based at Nature's Nest near Tambdi Surla Temple. Surrounded by dense evergreen forest, the camp provided an ideal setting for both beginners and experienced birders. The experience began with early morning trails, where participants tuned into the rhythm of the forest, with bird calls echoing through the canopy and subtle movements revealing the presence of hidden species.



Among the most memorable sightings was the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, a well-camouflaged Sri Lanka Frogmouth, and raptors such as the White-bellied Sea Eagle and Booted Eagle. The forests also revealed several Western Ghats specialities, including the Malabar Grey Hornbill, Malabar Pied Hornbill, and the Great Hornbill. Colourful species such as the Indian Pitta, Asian Fairy Bluebird, and flocks of minivets added vibrancy to the experience, while forest specialists like the White-bellied Blue Flycatcher and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch delighted keen observers. Additional sightings, including the Malabar Woodshrike, Malabar Starling, Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo, and White-bellied Drongo, contributed to an impressive and diverse checklist.

Evenings were dedicated to interactive discussions, where participants revisited the day's observations, refined their identification skills, and explored the behaviour and ecology of the species encountered. These sessions added depth to the field experience, helping participants connect bird calls, behaviour, and identification in a more meaningful way. The Goa Birding Camp at Tambdi Surla proved to be a rewarding blend of exploration and learning, offering participants a deeper appreciation of the rich biodiversity of the Western Ghats. Participants returned with memorable experiences, and a stronger connection with the natural world. ■

Immersive Birding Experience at Sattal and Pangot

The BNHS—CEC, Mumbai, successfully conducted a five-day birding camp at Sattal and Pangot in Uttarakhand from March 23–27, 2026. Led by Ms. Aqsa Majgaonkar, Senior Education Officer, the camp was designed as an immersive learning experience for participants interested in birds, field ecology, and nature observation. The programme began with an early morning birding session in Kathgodam, followed by en route observations through forested landscapes leading to Sattal. Over the following days, participants explored a range of habitats, including oak-pine forests, scrublands, and lakeside ecosystems, each offering unique opportunities for birding.

The camp recorded a rich diversity of bird species, with notable sightings including Koklass Pheasant and Kalij Pheasant, along with raptors such as the Himalayan Griffon, Steppe Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, and Mountain Hawk-Eagle. Owl species, including the Asian Barred Owlet and Jungle Owlet, added to the experience, especially during early morning and evening sessions. Participants also observed a variety of woodland and tree-dwelling birds such as the Indian Grey Hornbill, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, several species of woodpeckers and barbets, Alexandrine and Plum-headed Parakeets, and colourful minivets and drongos, while kingfishers and doves further reflected the ecological diversity of the region.



Alongside field observations, the camp included interactive learning sessions that focused on bird identification using visual features, calls, and behaviour. Discussions on habitat ecology, ethical birding practices, and species interactions enriched the overall experience and provided valuable context to the sightings. The camp encouraged active participation, careful observation, and shared learning among participants, while also helping them build practical field skills and a deeper connection with nature. Overall, the Sattal–Pangot Birding Camp was a highly engaging and enriching initiative. ■

BNHS Members Explore Marine Life Along Juhu Coast

The BNHS Programmes Department recently organised an engaging Marine Walk along the Juhu coastline, offering participants a unique opportunity to explore the rich yet often overlooked marine biodiversity of Mumbai's intertidal zones. As part of BNHS's ongoing efforts to connect people with nature, the initiative aimed to build awareness about the diverse ecosystems found along the city's shores. Led by an expert, participants explored the sandy and rocky stretches revealed during low tide, where they observed a fascinating variety of marine life, including gastropods, hermit crabs, small shore crabs, bivalves, and other intertidal organisms specially adapted to this dynamic environment. These observations provided valuable insights into the resilience of marine species that continue to survive despite growing urban and environmental pressures.

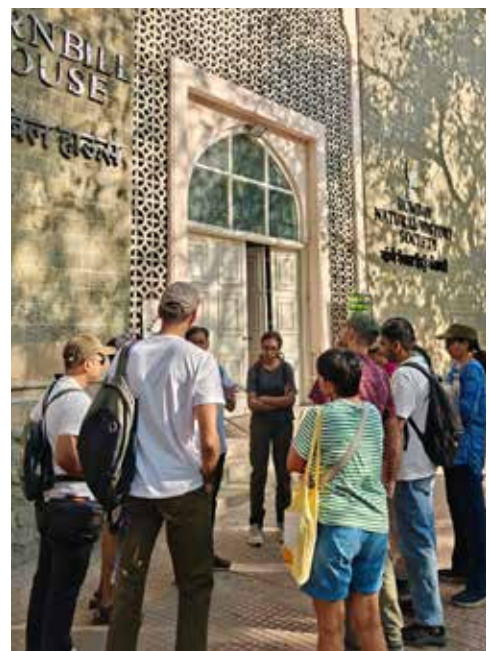
The walk also highlighted the ecological importance and vulnerability of coastal habitats, drawing attention to the need for conservation and responsible interaction with these fragile ecosystems. By the end of the session, participants gained a deeper appreciation for marine biodiversity and a better understanding of the importance of preserving Mumbai's coastal heritage. ■



BNHS Begins 2026 Summer Tree Walk Series at Kala Ghoda

BNHS Programmes commenced its Summer Tree Walk series with a Heritage Tree Walk conducted on March 22, 2026, in the Kala Ghoda precinct, offering members and participants an enriching exploration of Mumbai's urban green heritage. The initiative aimed to build awareness of the ecological and historical significance of trees within the city's built environment. Led by Dr Rajdeo Singh, Professor at St. Xavier's College, the walk guided participants through one of South Mumbai's most culturally significant neighbourhoods, where they were introduced to a variety of tree species that shape the area's landscape. Highlights included the Mahogany tree linked to the legacy of explorer David Livingstone and the striking Pink Tabebuia planted by the late J.C. Daniel, providing a meaningful connection between natural history and cultural heritage.

The programme showcased the biodiversity present in urban spaces while drawing attention to the need to preserve green cover amid rapid urbanisation. Through engaging discussions and on-ground observations, participants developed a deeper appreciation for the role of trees in maintaining ecological balance and enhancing urban life. This walk marked the formal launch of the BNHS Summer Tree Walk series, which aims to encourage greater public engagement with urban biodiversity and promote conservation awareness among diverse audiences. Those interested in upcoming Summer Tree Walks may write to programmes@bnhs.org or visit www.bnhs.org for more information. ■



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BNHS Marketing Department Expands Outreach Through March Exhibitions

The Marketing Department of the BNHS set up a stall at an exhibition arranged by Axis Bank at their Worli office on March 13, 2026, to showcase and promote BNHS activities, publications, and products for sale. ■



BNHS Director Honoured with Lokmat Sahitya Award 2026

Mr Kishor Rithe, Director of BNHS and a noted naturalist and wildlife expert, has been awarded the prestigious Lokmat Sahitya Award 2026 for his Marathi book *Satpudyacha Satbara*, a comprehensive 647-page work documenting the ecological richness of the Satpuda mountain ranges. Presented by the Lokmat Group in its seventh year, the award recognises outstanding contributions to Marathi literature. The award ceremony was held on March 24, 2026 at the Gadkari Rangayatan Auditorium in Thane, marking a significant achievement that highlights the importance of regional literature in promoting awareness about biodiversity and conservation. ■

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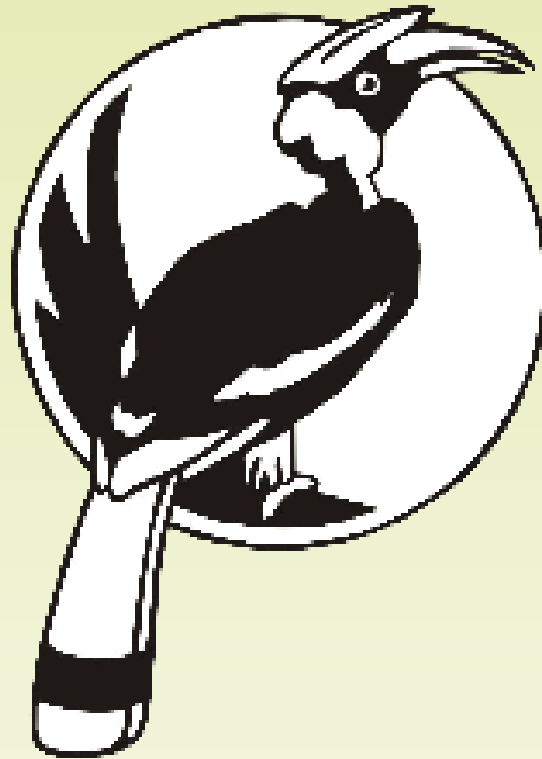
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