



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NOVEMBER, 2024

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER



Dear Members,

Every November is typically a busy month for all of us at Hornbill House as we celebrate 'Bird Week' from November 5–12. Launched in 2020 by the Government of Maharashtra, Bird Week commemorates the birth anniversaries of two renowned ornithologists: Shri Maruti Chitampalli, an esteemed naturalist, Marathi writer, and forest officer from Maharashtra, (November 5th), and the late Dr Sálím Ali (November 12th), who pioneered comprehensive bird surveys in India. This eight-day event honours their immense contributions to Indian ornithology.

Due to ongoing major repairs at Hornbill House and the temporary use of the auditorium space for collections, we opted for a smaller celebration here while organizing additional events at the CEC-Mumbai and various field locations across India. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our staff and partner organizations for their dedication in organizing these events and for remembering the invaluable contributions of these great ornithologists.

This month, we received a request from the Rajasthan Forest Department to investigate the recent mass mortality of birds at Sambhar Lake in Jaipur District. The Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) has identified avian botulism, a neuromuscular disease caused by the toxin from *Clostridium botulinum*, as the probable cause, confirmed through mouse bioassay results. This condition often arises due to sudden changes in water salinity or the presence of decaying vegetation. Based on experiences in the USA and Australia, most outbreaks occur during summer and autumn and often recur in the same environments.

Another concerning issue came to our attention from the Jorbeed Conservation Reserve in Rajasthan, a haven for raptors. Media reports have highlighted the increasing threat posed by free-ranging dogs (FRDs) in the reserve. Mitigating this issue, particularly by removing dogs from the carcass dumping areas, is essential to protect the wildlife.

To address a similar concern in the Union Territory of Ladakh, we conducted a workshop to devise a strategy. Veterinary officers, representatives from the Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC), WWF, NCF, WCBCL, HEAL, the University of Ladakh, the Wildlife Protection Department, the Animal Husbandry Department, and Army officers from Leh and Hanley discussed the situation in depth. They reviewed the impact of free-ranging dogs in Ladakh, especially through the BNHS-THT Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme. Villagers from Hanley shared their concerns about the negative impact on tourism due to FRDs preying on Pallas's cats and black-necked cranes.

On a positive note, the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve recently reported the sighting of a tiger, STR T-2. This is a testament to the successful efforts led by the BNHS President and the then Forest Secretary of Maharashtra, who played a pivotal role in relocating villages from the core area between 2011 and 2016.

In literary news, former BNHS Director Dr Asad Rahmani launched his memoir, *LIVING WITH BIRDS*, in New Delhi. This inspiring book encourages birders to go beyond birdwatching and actively engage in habitat conservation. I highly recommend reading about Dr Rahmani's dedicated life and contributions.

Our gratitude to Ms Deepa Navin for donating seven books to our Library.

Mumbai also had the privilege of hosting the legendary Dr Jane Goodall in mid-November during her *Reasons for Hope* global tour celebrating her 90th birthday. She participated in India's first Ocean Literacy Dialogues (OLD), organized by the Jane Goodall Institute India (JGII), UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), the British Council, and CSMVS Museum. Her keynote speech was truly inspiring.

I am pleased to share that our BNHS team successfully tagged the first sarus crane in Gondia District. This initiative will provide valuable insights into sarus crane migration patterns within the Vidarbha landscape.

On the academic front, BNHS has signed an MoU with SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, to offer 16 certificate courses at BNHS research stations and facilities. Students will benefit from access to the BNHS journal, library, and research publications. Additionally, we had the honour of hosting National Geographic Society team, at Hornbill House, to discuss potential future collaborations.

The BNHS CEC is regaining its vibrancy by organizing various courses and events for diverse stakeholders. The Naturalist Training and Leadership Course featured several insightful evening sessions. Please check the *Systema Naturae* section in the latest *Hornbill*, and consider contributing your observations to the BNHS 150 Years Omnibus collection.

Lastly, if you have not yet completed the online form for the publication of the *Yearbook for Life Members* click here to complete your submission <https://forms.gle/12gPTSYTs9P2khue7>. For assistance, please contact BNHS Central Marketing (cmd@bnhs.org), Membership (membership@bnhs.org), Programmes (programmes@bnhs.org), or Conservation Education Centre (cec-mumbai@bnhs.org). For event reservations or submissions, feel free to reach out via email, and don't forget to send event photos and brief write-ups to Mr Gopi Naidu (g.naidu@bnhs.org).

Thank you for staying connected. I am always reachable at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe
Director
Bombay Natural History Society

Lecture on Bird Migration at Sanjay Gandhi National Park: On November 12, 2024, Dr Sálím Ali's 128th birth anniversary and as part of the BNHS Bird Week celebrations, Mr Asif Khan from the Programmes Department delivered an insightful lecture on bird migration at Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP). The session provided attendees with valuable knowledge about bird migration patterns and highlighted the significant contributions of the BNHS to bird migration research in India.

BNHS pioneered bird migration studies in India as early as 1927, becoming the first organization in the country to formally investigate migratory patterns. Under Dr Sálím Ali's leadership, the BNHS launched India's first organized bird-banding and migration study programme in 1959. This initiative, inspired by Dr Ali's visit to the Heligoland Ornithological Observatory in 1929, laid the foundation for systematic ornithological research in India.

In 2007, BNHS further strengthened its commitment by establishing the Bird Migration Study Centre at Point Calimere in Tamil Nadu. This facility remains the primary hub for ongoing research, continuing to conduct groundbreaking work in understanding and conserving migratory bird species.

The Bird Week celebrations and the lecture served as a testament to BNHS's unwavering commitment to studying and protecting India's avian biodiversity. ■

For more information about bird-banding camps and courses conducted at Point Calimere, please visit www.bnhs.org.

Celebrating Dr Sálím Ali's 128th Birth Anniversary



@ Hornbill House

The staff at Hornbill House gathered in the Natural History Collections Department to celebrate the 128th birth anniversary of Dr Sálím Ali. Rahul Khot, Deputy Director of the Natural History Collections, welcomed attendees and shared a brief history of the Society, highlighting Dr Ali's pioneering work and legacy.

The celebration featured a showcase of fascinating specimens, including birds, mammals, and butterflies, emphasizing the diversity of the natural world that Dr Ali passionately studied and protected. Mr Vithoba Hegde shared personal memories of Dr Ali, sparking an engaging discussion among the staff.

New staff members found the session both inspiring and educational, gaining a



deeper understanding of BNHS's mission and Dr Ali's contributions to conservation and ornithology.

Senior staff and new staff members

enthusiastically participated in the session. The session concluded with a heartfelt tribute to Dr Sálím Ali's remarkable life and work. ■

@ Sharnbasveshwar Lake, Karnataka

BNHS organized a bird-watching event at Sharnbasveshwar Lake in Kalaburagi for students of Sharnbasveshwar College of Science. Participants learned about the rich avian biodiversity of the lake and the crucial role birds play in ecosystem restoration. The event emphasized the significance of wetlands in maintaining ecological balance and conserving biodiversity, inspiring students to take an active interest in avian conservation. ■

@ CEC-Mumbai

The team at the Conservation Education Centre gathered to pay tribute to Dr Sálím Ali. Among his many remarkable achievements, his invaluable contribution to the establishment of the CEC will always be cherished. ■



Vulture Conservation Symposium in Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh

On November 15, Dr Kazveen Umrigar, Conservation Breeding Specialist, represented BNHS at the Vulture Conservation Symposium organized by the Chhattisgarh Forest Department in Naya Raipur. The inauguration ceremony featured senior officials, including APCCF (Wildlife) Mr Prem Kumar (IFS), APCCF (Development & Planning) Mr Arun Kumar (IFS), and CCF Wildlife Ms Satovisha Samajdar (IFS).

Presentations by experts such as Dr Vibhu Prakash (former BNHS Scientist), Dr R. Suresh Kumar (WII), and Mr Chris Bowden (RSPB) were followed by a panel discussion outlining the roadmap for vulture conservation in Chhattisgarh. Notable topics included



policy frameworks, community engagement, research initiatives, capacity building, and inter-agency collaboration. The symposium concluded with a commitment from the Chhattisgarh Forest Department to initiate a vulture-safe zone project in Bijapur and Achanakmar. ■



Training at School of Wildlife Health and Forensics, Jabalpur

From November 11 to 13, the School of Wildlife Health and Forensics at Nanaji Deshmukh Veterinary Sciences University, Jabalpur, hosted a training programme titled "Methods in Wild Animal Health Care and Forensic Investigation." Dr Kazveen Umrigar,

Conservation Breeding Specialist, BNHS was invited as a resource person and delivered a talk on "The Role of Veterinarians in the Conservation of Endangered Avian Species."

The presentation highlighted key areas where veterinarians contribute to avian

conservation, including health monitoring, disease control, diagnostics, rehabilitation, conservation breeding, public education, and cross-agency collaboration. Each topic was illustrated with detailed case studies. ■



ISVPT Conference in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

On November 18 and 19, Dr Kazveen Umrigar, Conservation Breeding Specialist, represented BNHS and SAVE at the 24th Annual Conference of the Indian Society for Veterinary Pharmacology and Toxicology (ISVPT) at the College of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry, Mathura. Alongside Chris Bowden (RSPB) and Dr Percy Avari (The Eye Vet and Vets for Vultures), she presented in the “Toxicology of Xenobiotics” technical session.

Her presentation, “Reversing the Declines: Protecting Vultures with Safer NSAIDs,” emphasized the need to ban harmful NSAIDs like Nimesulide and advocated for mandatory safety testing on vultures before licensing veterinary drugs.

The conference, attended by 160 registered delegates, concluded with resolutions reflecting our recommendations, marking a significant step forward in vulture conservation efforts. ■



Raising Awareness for Indian Skimmer Conservation Along the Chambal River

As part of the BNHS community-based project, ‘Guardians of the Skimmer,’ an engaging awareness programme was conducted in four villages along the Chambal River: Kuraitha and Nadgawan in Uttar Pradesh, Chuslai in Madhya Pradesh, and Nagar in Rajasthan. This initiative aimed to educate local communities near nesting sites about the endangered Indian skimmer, which relies on the Chambal River for nesting and survival.

Villagers, who frequently visit the river for daily activities, learned about the Indian skimmer’s unique nesting habits and the importance of protecting their breeding habitats. The sessions highlighted the global significance of the Chambal River and BNHS’s efforts to safeguard its fragile ecosystem. Key topics included preventing disturbances, avoiding cattle grazing near nesting sites, and maintaining a safe distance to reduce stress on the birds during hot weather. In Kuraitha, a special session for children included a skimmer painting activity, where they painted wooden bird decoys, making learning interactive and memorable.

The program reached around 300 locals, who expressed their commitment to protecting Indian skimmer habitats. Villagers’ questions about the species and river ecosystem were addressed during the sessions.

We extend our gratitude to the General Insurance Corporation of India and The Habitat Trust for their financial support, and to the Forest Departments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh for logistical assistance. This initiative marks a significant step toward fostering community involvement in conserving the Indian skimmer in the Chambal region. ■



Addressing the Impact of Free-Ranging Dogs in Ladakh



The BNHS is actively addressing the issue of free-ranging dogs and their impact on endangered wildlife and local communities in Ladakh. The growing population of free-ranging dogs poses a significant threat to ground-nesting birds, such as the black-necked crane *Grus nigricollis* and the bar-headed goose *Anser indicus*, and raises concerns about human safety.

On November 17, 2024, a team led by BNHS President Pravinsingh Pardeshi and Mr Rushikesh A. Chavan, Head of The Habitat Trust, visited Ladakh to assess the "On a War Footing: Biodiversity Monitoring and Conservation with the Indian Army" project.

The team engaged in discussions with General Hitesh Bhalla of the 14 Corps, focusing on ongoing conservation activities and

potential collaborations between BNHS and the Indian Army. They also met with Shri B.M. Sharma, Chief Wildlife Warden of Ladakh, to address the impact of free-ranging dogs on wildlife.

Between November 19 and 21, the team inspected field sites. During this period, a concurrent sterilization program resulted in the sterilization of 23 free-ranging dogs. On November 22, visits to the Uley and Shang valleys highlighted the region's critical conservation needs.

The visit concluded with a workshop on November 23 in Leh, which addressed the impacts of free-ranging dogs on wildlife. Various stakeholders participated, focusing on collaborative conservation strategies, effective Animal Birth Control (ABC) programmes, and community engagement initiatives. ■



Vulture Conservation Awareness in Barpeta, Assam

On November 25, 2024, the BNHS Vulture Conservation Team and Mr Rohan Jha, District Commissioner of Barpeta, organized an awareness meeting at the District Agricultural Office. Key stakeholders, including agriculture and veterinary officials, sub-divisional agriculture officers, People's Plan Campaign managers, members of the Barpeta District Chemist & Druggist Association, the Inspector of Drugs, and representatives from the Divisional Forest Department and local pharmacies, gathered to discuss establishing a Vulture Safe Zone.

Chaired by Additional District Magistrate Mr Jayanta Bora and hosted by District Agriculture Officer Mr Ashok Kr Das, the meeting emphasized collaborative efforts in vulture conservation. Mr Sachin Ranade, Assistant Director, BNHS, highlighted the dangers of harmful NSAIDs in cattle carcasses and stressed the importance of collective action to create a Vulture Safe Zone.



Mr Manash Borgohain, Drugs Inspector, pledged to strengthen enforcement of policies restricting harmful NSAIDs, committing to making Barpeta free from these substances. Local pharmacists and drug inspectors echoed this commitment. District Veterinary Officer Dr Prabin Kr Das proposed future meetings to involve more veterinarians, while Divisional Forest Department representatives discussed tree-planting initiatives to enhance vulture habitats.

The active participation of sub-divisional agriculture officers and assistant development officers highlighted growing awareness of vultures' ecological importance. Their interest in contributing to conservation efforts demonstrated a shared commitment to protecting these critical scavengers.

Overall, the meeting fostered a strong sense of collective responsibility and marked an important step toward establishing a Vulture Safe Zone in Western Assam, promoting long-term conservation efforts. ■

BNHS Conducts Conservation Awareness Programmes for Schools in Sarus Crane habitats of Vidarbha, Maharashtra

The BNHS conducted conservation awareness programmes on October 28 and 29 at local schools in Dasgaon. At the Gondia Education Society (GES) School, Headmaster Mr D.L. Paradhi supported the initiative, which saw 124 students participating. The workshop, highlighting BNHS's efforts in species conservation and its role in preserving sarus cranes in Vidarbha. He also shared insights about the birds' habitats in the Gondia District.

The following day, a similar programme took place at Smt. Anusayabai Pashine High School and Sou. Archana Pashine Junior College, engaging 129 students from grades 10 to 12. Mr Dhurve again led the session, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder collaboration in sarus crane conservation. Principal Ms P. Vandhana Bisen expressed appreciation and invited BNHS to extend their awareness initiatives to college students. ■



BNHS Tags First Sarus Crane in Gondia for Conservation Study



On November 16, 2024, the BNHS achieved a significant milestone by tagging its first sarus crane *Grus antigone* in Gondia District, Maharashtra with a GPS-GSM transmitter. This effort follows timely approvals from the Chief Wildlife Warden and the Ministry of Environment,

Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). The adult crane was captured, thoroughly assessed, and released after detailed morphometric measurements. It has already begun transmitting crucial movement data, offering new insights into the crane's behaviour and habitat use in Vidarbha, where their distribution is sporadic and roosting patterns vary.

An extensive assessment to locate suitable capture sites was conducted from November 12–15. The team was led by Dr P. Sathiyaselvam, Deputy Director, BNHS Wetlands and Flyways Programme, with guidance from BNHS Director Mr Kishor Rithe and Chief Wildlife Warden Mr Vivek Khandekar. Key contributors included researchers Mr Barath and Mr Mukund Dhurve, along with trappers Mr Sivakumar, Mr Kannadasan and Mr Saras Kumar Behera, and field assistant Mr Rameshware. Local forest officials, including Deputy Conservator of Forests Mr Pramod Panchbhai and RFO Mr Dilip Kowshik, provided vital support.

This tagging is part of a comprehensive sarus crane study in Vidarbha, mandated by the Bombay High Court's Nagpur Bench. ■

Parenting in Great Indian Bustard: New Findings

The BNHS has been actively working in Khetolai, a village in the Pokhran tehsil of Jaisalmer district, to help preserve the critically endangered great Indian bustard (GIB). BNHS has established strong networks with local communities, which have been instrumental in providing more space and suitable habitat for the GIB in Khetolai.

In collaboration with the residents, BNHS has acquired approximately 20 acres of land and fenced 35 ha of land belonging to the Bishnoi community in and around Khetolai to develop a safe habitat by creating a model grassland reserve for the bustard, free

from external pressures. These efforts are now showing promising results. During a routine field survey in the Khetolai area, the BNHS bustard team made intriguing observations about the social behavior of the critically endangered GIB.

Contrary to conventional understanding, where juvenile birds are typically believed to learn life skills primarily from their mothers, the team documented a young GIB acquiring essential survival skills from a group of adult males. This finding highlights the complexity of social learning within this endangered species, emphasizing the importance of safe spaces to facilitate such interactions. ■



Avian Botulism Outbreak Threatens Birdlife at Rajasthan’s Sambhar Lake

Sambhar Lake in Rajasthan, India, has faced significant bird mortality due to avian botulism, a neuromuscular disease caused by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*. This bacterium produces a potent toxin that attacks birds' nervous systems, leading to paralysis and death. The disease often spreads when birds consume maggot-infested carcasses, as maggots thrive in decaying organic matter.

In 2019, over 20,000 birds tragically succumbed to avian botulism in the region. This alarming trend resurfaced in October 2024, following a sudden increase in bird deaths that prompted a thorough investigation by wildlife officials. By early November, the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) confirmed that the current fatalities were also due to avian botulism linked to *Clostridium botulinum*.

Sambhar Lake, a unique saltwater wetland, experiences fluctuating salinity levels during the monsoon season, creating an ideal environment for bacterial proliferation. Bird deaths raise serious concerns about potential botulism outbreaks that could devastate local wildlife. In response, the BNHS conducted an urgent



site visit on October 27, followed by a bird census on November 14, 2024. A detailed report was submitted to the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) in Ajmer, aiming to guide future conservation and management efforts to mitigate the growing threat to Sambhar Lake's bird populations. ■

Management Plan for Kurja Conservation Reserve, Rajasthan

BNHS has been entrusted with developing a management plan for the newly established Kurja Conservation Reserve in Phalodi district, Rajasthan. This reserve is a key wintering site for demoiselle cranes, which visit the village of Khichan annually in large numbers. To gather updated data, the BNHS team conducted a population distribution and status survey across Khichan and its surrounding landscapes on November 19, 2024. ■



Strengthening Conservation Efforts in Bihar

On November 27, 2024, the BNHS team, including Dr P. Sathiyaselvam and Ms Khushboo Rani, held two key meetings to promote biodiversity conservation in Bihar.

The team met with Mr Bharat Jyoti, IFS (Retd), Head of the Bihar State Biodiversity Board, to discuss strategies for promoting ecosystem services. They emphasized integrating these services into policy frameworks, focusing on their ecological and economic benefits. Joint initiatives were proposed to assess and enhance the value of Bihar’s rich biodiversity landscapes.

At the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Patna, the team met with Dr Anurag Sahay, Head of the Physics Department, to explore internship opportunities for students in bird migration studies. The proposed programme aims to offer hands-on fieldwork experience, data analysis, and training in bird ringing and GIS mapping. The discussions highlighted the need for advanced trapping and tracking technologies to fill existing knowledge gaps. ■



Maguri Beel Wetland Survey, Assam

Tinsukia, 2024: The BNHS Bengal florican team conducted an extensive survey of the Maguri Beel Wetland in Tinsukia, Assam, as part of their research in the Brahmaputra floodplains. This survey aimed to understand how different bird species adapt to specific habitat niches within this biodiverse wetland. The team documented a wide variety of bird species, each displaying unique behaviours and ecological interactions. This ongoing study seeks to enhance understanding of avian ecology and underscores the critical importance of wetland conservation. ■



SNDT Women's University Signs MoU with BNHS

On November 21, 2024, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, and BNHS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the university's Churchgate campus. The collaboration aims to enhance academic infrastructure, conduct joint research, and publish high-quality research papers. Vice Chancellor Prof. Ujjwala Chakradeo and BNHS Director Mr Kishor Rithe led the signing ceremony, marking a significant step in fostering academic and conservation partnerships. ■



National Geographic Society Delegation Visits BNHS



On November 19, 2024, a delegation from the National Geographic Society (NGS), including top officials Ian Miller and Alex Moen, visited BNHS headquarters in Mumbai. Hosted by BNHS Deputy Director Rahul Khot and other senior scientists, the visit featured presentations on BNHS's history and projects. Discussions centered on potential collaborations between BNHS and NGS, highlighting shared interests in conservation and exploration. The delegation concluded their visit with a tour of the BNHS collections at Hornbill House.

Watch this space to learn about and join collaborative programmes hosted by BNHS and NGS. ■

Career Counselling at the Meerut Nature Festival

On November 26, 2024, the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department and District Ganga Committee organized a career counselling programme at Raghunath Girls Postgraduate College, Meerut. Themed "Career Counselling on Forest Service, Wildlife, Ganga Biodiversity, Birds, and Other Forest Aspects", the event was coordinated by Mr Rajesh Kumar (IFS), DFO, Social Forestry Department. He highlighted the benefits of a forest officer career, including examination and coaching details.

Dr Rajat Bhargava, Assistant Director at BNHS, spoke about technical courses and career prospects in wildlife biology, ornithology, herpetology, and entomology. Experts from WWF-India, Hastinapur, and renowned zoo veterinarian Dr R.K. Singh also participated. Over 300 students, along with principals and biology teachers from eight Meerut district colleges, attended the interactive session. For many, it was their first introduction to careers in wildlife and forestry and the educational pathways available. ■



1st Amur Falcon Bird Festival at Jalukie in Nagaland

The BNHS-Zycus Infotech, in collaboration with St. Xavier College Jalukie, organized the 1st Amur Falcon Bird Festival at St. Xavier College, Jalukie, on November 23, 2024. The event was chaired by Ms Chagaliu Pamai, with Dr Francis S. Cheerangel delivering the welcome address. Dr Francis emphasized the importance of community and stakeholder support in protecting Amur Falcons, highlighting that the college campus serves as a crucial roosting site for thousands of these birds annually.

Students from St. Xavier College presented a vibrant cultural dance, followed by a musical performance by students from the Veterinary Sciences and Animal Husbandry Department, Jalukie. Mr H. Sulanthung Humtsoe, Education Officer, BNHS, spoke about ongoing Amur Falcon conservation efforts and the bird's status in Nagaland. He stressed the need for sustained government support, continued collaboration with local organizations, and active community engagement for long-term conservation success.

Mr Kenlumtatei, Range Officer of the Forest Department, Jalukie Town, commended the community's past conservation efforts and highlighted the economic importance of bird conservation. He urged stakeholders to protect birds and extend their efforts



to conserve other wildlife. Additionally, representatives from the Jalukie Town Municipal Council and the Zeliangrong Youth Organization spoke about the threats of hunting and the importance of conservation.

The festival, held at St. Xavier College's Botanical Garden, attracted over 410 attendees, including students, NGOs, forest officials, and bird enthusiasts. Activities included workshops on amur falcon conservation, waste disposal, and butterfly eco-tourism, along with a painting competition and bird-watching activity. Prizes were awarded to competition winners, making the event both educational and engaging. ■

NIT Patna Hosts Bird Migration and Conservation Workshop

On November 14–15, 2024, the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Patna hosted a workshop on avian conservation, attended by 68 students and research scholars. The event aimed to deepen participants' understanding of bird ecology and conservation science.

Ms Khushboo Rani, Senior Researcher at BNHS, delivered a key session on bird migration and study techniques. She detailed the remarkable journeys of migratory birds and explained tracking methods used in avian research. The workshop emphasized the ecological importance of birds and highlighted the role of scientific research in conservation. Such initiatives inspire future researchers and strengthen collaboration between academia and wildlife experts. ■



Workshop on Bird Identification and Basic Ornithology

BNHS-EIACP and Vidyasan Educational Foundation held a two-day "Bird Identification and Basic Ornithology Workshop" in Akshi, Alibaug, on November 9–10, 2024, under the Mission LiFE initiative. Sixteen participants, including students, locals, and birdwatchers, joined to enhance their birdwatching skills and avian ecology knowledge. Led by Programme Officer Mr Nandkishor Dudhe, sessions covered bird identification, migratory patterns, wader recognition, and eBird use.

Interactive activities like "Know Your Birds" quiz, sparked lively discussions. A birdwatching session at Akshi Beach allowed participants to observe shorebirds like sand plovers, ruddy turnstones, great knots, terek sandpipers, gulls, and terns while practicing eBird recordings.



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Supported by Information Officer Ms Natasha Girkar and IT Officer Mr Niraj Patel, the event was organized by Ms Vidya Patil and Ms Prachi Deshmukh. Participants expressed enthusiasm for ongoing conservation efforts, highlighting the workshop's success in fostering a deeper connection with nature and promoting biodiversity conservation at regional and national levels. ■



Basic Course in Ornithology: last session of 2024

The wrap-up session for the 2023–24 Basic Course in Ornithology held on November 9, 2024, drew participants from Mumbai, Bengaluru, and even West Bengal, reflecting the course's wide appeal.

The day commenced with a nature trail led by Ms Priyadarshini Supekar at the BNHS Nature Reserve, in Mumbai where the participants spotted species such as the black-naped monarch, puff-throated babbler, black drongo, and winter migrants like the greenish warbler. Mr Asif Khan delivered an insightful expert talk on the "Biogeography of Birds of the Indian Subcontinent" explaining how birds can be classified by geographical distributions.

After a short break, participants presented their projects, sharing their learning experiences. "Matching the Bird Beak", added an engaging, interactive element to the session. Attendees



also watched a documentary on BNHS's work related to the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link.

Reflecting on the course, participant Ms Sneha Agharkar remarked, "The course is worth it. It helps amateur birders mature into ornithologists. I am grateful to BNHS for their support." ■

BNHS Naturalist Training and Leadership Programme at CEC

The third cohort of the BNHS Naturalist Training and Leadership Course commenced at the BNHS Nature Reserve, bringing together 20 participants eager to explore the natural world. The opening session, led by Mr Virendra from "Mumbaikars for SGNP", introduced the group to camera trapping for conservation. This was followed by a field activity where participants, divided into five groups, set up their own camera traps.

Dr Sunayana Barua, an accomplished geologist, engaged participants with insights on geology's role in shaping ecosystems, encouraging them to discover stories within stones. In the evening, naturalists Mihir Pawar and Gaurang Tawde guided participants in setting up insect stations, followed by an entomology basics session. A night walk to inspect the insect stations revealed exciting encounters, including a bamboo pit viper and a sleeping paradise flycatcher.

The next morning focused on birdwatching, with Dr Parvish Pandya leading an exploratory walk through the Reserve, followed by a captivating presentation on bird behaviour. The day concluded with Mr Shardul Bajikar, Education Officer, CEC-Mumbai addressing conservation issues, setting the stage for the workshop's second part in a fortnight. ■



Birding at Bhandup Pumping Station, Mumbai

CEC-Mumbai organized a field visit to Bhandup Pumping Station (BPS) for the 2024–2025 Basic Course in Ornithology. The participants explored the unique habitat, guided by Mr Nandkishor Dudhe Programme Officer at EIACP, BNHS, introduced by course coordinator Ms Priyadarshini Supekar. Mr Dudhe explained seasonal variations and their impact on birdlife. New birdwatchers gained practical observation skills. The thirteen participants present observed species such as river terns, large flocks of whiskered terns, painted storks, black-headed ibis, and black-winged stilts. ■



Interactions with Plants and Butterflies

CEC-Mumbai organized a field visit to Maharashtra Nature Park in Mumbai on November 24, 2024, for participants of the Basic Course in Butterfly Studies, Leadership Course in Biodiversity Conservation, and Basic Course in Botany. The session by Ms Kiran Thumma and entomologist Mr Gaurang Tawde, explored plant-butterfly interactions. Participants learned about butterfly morphology, host and nectar plants, and ecological roles.

During the trail, attendees identified species, like the Commander, Common Castor, Striped Tiger, Blue Tiger, and



Tailed Jay, alongside plants such as *Artabotrys odoratissimus*, *Ficus benjamina*, and *Mitragyna parvifolia*. Sixteen participants enjoyed this enriching experience. ■

Children's Day Celebrations

As part of the Children's Day celebrations, CEC-Mumbai hosted 575 students and 32 teachers from Sane Guruji Vidyalyaya, Dadar, and Shree BAK Swadhyay Bhavan School, Matunga, from November 13–15, 2024.

The events began with a warm welcome to the Centre, where students and teachers experienced the rich biodiversity of the forest. Participants embarked on guided nature walks through various trails within the 33-acre BNHS Nature Reserve. During the walk, they observed wildflowers, listened to bird calls, learned about insects, and watched butterflies fluttering around. Prior to the trail, students were briefed on forest conduct rules and divided into groups of 15 for a more personalized experience.

After the trail, students attended an engaging presentation and watched educational videos showcasing the biodiversity of the CEC. The session concluded with a Q&A, where Education Officers addressed the students' curious questions.

Ms Anushka Joshi, a teacher from Shree BAK Swadhyay Bhavan School, Matunga, remarked, "The trail was very informative, and the children particularly enjoyed the video of the tigress and her cub." The program was managed and coordinated by Education Officers Ms Priyadarshini Supekar and Ms Kiran Thumma, along with Field Assistant Mr Dilip Giri and CEC Naturalists. ■



For information on upcoming programmes, please email to cec-mumbai@bnhs.org.



SGNP Bird Count Highlights Biodiversity Monitoring Efforts

On November 24, 2024, the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) Bird Count showcased the impact of citizen science, drawing over 47 enthusiastic volunteers. In just a few hours, participants recorded an impressive 72 bird species, reflecting the rich biodiversity of the region. Notable sightings included six species of flycatchers, five warbler species, three orioles, and three woodpeckers. The elusive forest wagtail added to the excitement, delighting the volunteers and underscoring SGNP's ecological significance. ■

Bird Walk at TS Chanakya Wetland

On November 5, 2024 BNHS conducted its first Migrant Walk of the season at the TS Chanakya wetland near the Maritime Institute in Navi Mumbai.

BNHS members explored the wetlands, observing the initial bird arrivals. Although lesser and greater flamingos were not present in large numbers, participants enjoyed sightings of resident birds such as the ashy prinia, painted stork, Indian cormorant, little cormorant, and median egret. The highlight of the walk was the sighting of two passage migrants – the blue-tailed bee-eater and the blue-cheeked bee-eater.

This event was more than just an opportunity for birdwatching; it provided a platform to discuss the importance of bird conservation and the crucial role wetlands play in maintaining ecological balance. Participants left with a renewed sense of responsibility to protect natural habitats for future generations. ■

For information about upcoming nature walks, visit www.bnhs.org



Marine Walk at Carter Road

The BNHS Programmes Department inaugurated its first Marine Walk of the season on November 17, 2024, at Carter Road, Bandra, highlighting Mumbai's rich intertidal biodiversity.

Participants explored the fascinating underwater world, encountering marine species such as gastropods, squid egg cases, and delicate anemones. This immersive experience fostered a deeper appreciation for these fragile ecosystems and emphasized the importance of marine conservation.

BNHS plans to conduct similar walks along Mumbai's coastline, aiming to raise awareness about the diverse marine life on our doorstep and inspire efforts to protect these precious habitats. ■

For information about upcoming marine walks, visit www.bnhs.org.

Dr Asad Rahmani's Memoir **LIVING WITH BIRDS** Launched by Jairam Ramesh

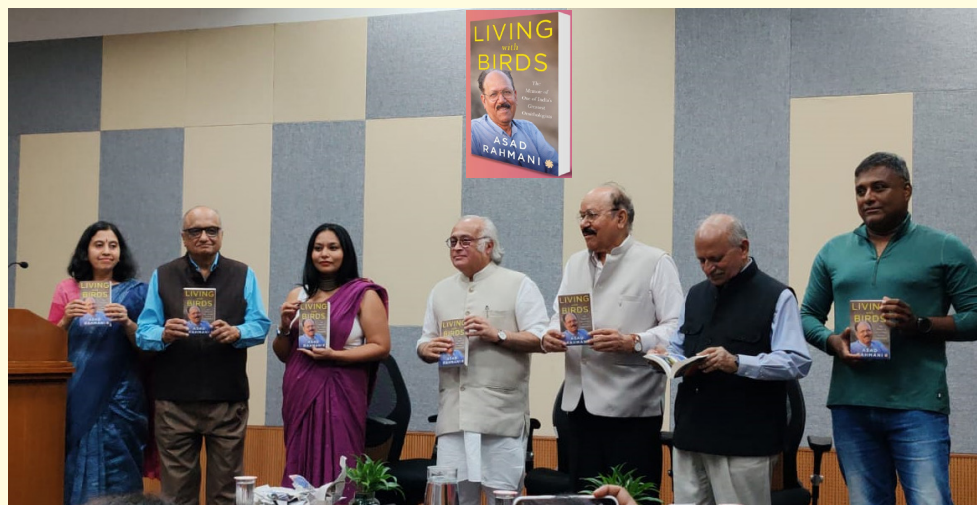
LIVING WITH BIRDS, the memoirs of Dr Asad Rahmani, was launched by Mr Jairam Ramesh on November 13, 2024, at a distinguished event held at the WWF-India auditorium. In this captivating book, Dr Rahmani recounts his extraordinary journey in the field of ornithology and conservation. From working alongside legends like Dr Sálím Ali, Mr J.C. Daniel, and Mr Humayun Abdulali to collaborating with a new generation of biologists and conservationists, Dr Rahmani offers readers a fascinating glimpse into his life's work.

The book highlights his dedication to species such as the great Indian bustard (GIB) and the floricans, blending natural history with personal anecdotes. Through vivid descriptions, engaging

encounters in the wild, and reflections on his collaborations with governments and institutions, Dr Rahmani shares his passion with meticulous detail and gentle humour.

More than just a memoir, **LIVING WITH BIRDS** is a compelling narrative of a personal,

scientific, and ecological journey. It chronicles the experiences of one of India's most renowned ornithologists and the longest-serving director of the BNHS, who has dedicated his life to preserving the natural world he holds so dear. ■



No Smoking Area



We are pleased to inform you that the area outside the Hornbill House precincts has been declared a No smoking zone.

UPCOMING EVENTS

10th Rare Books Exhibition on December 17–22: “Hidden Hands in Colonial Natural Histories”

We are excited to announce the 10th Rare Books Exhibition, taking place from December 17–December 22, 2024, at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai. This event celebrates the rich legacy of literature and rare illustrations in colonial natural histories and emphasizes the importance of preserving unique books on India's natural history. The exhibition will showcase an impressive collection of literary treasures, historical texts, and lithographic drawings.

Dr Ashok Kothari, Chairman of the Library Committee and editor of four coffee table books, will be coordinating the event.

Please save the dates – further details will be shared soon!

Ajay Desai – Enduring Legacy in Elephant Conservation

Swapneel Desai reflects on his father's legacy, following his posthumous recognition at the 2024 International Elephant-Human Mitigation Conference, four years after his passing.

The International Conference on Human-Elephant Conflict Management 2024, held on World Elephant Day in Bengaluru, brought together conservationists, dignitaries, and policymakers, including the Chief Minister of Karnataka, the Minister of Forest and Ecology, and forest ministers from various states. Amid the gathering, a heartfelt tribute was paid to a man who dedicated his life to conserving the Asian elephant: Mr Ajay Desai.

Affectionately known as the “Elephant Man”, Ajay Desai’s contributions left an indelible mark on wildlife conservation. His family accepted a posthumous award in his honour, recognizing his tireless efforts to protect these gentle giants. As The Indian Express once noted, “The elephants may forget all except this human”. These words encapsulate Ajay’s deep connection with the elephants he spent his life studying and protecting. His understanding of their complex behaviour was as profound as his knowledge of his own family.

Pioneering Conservationist

Born in 1957, Ajay Desai began his journey with a degree in marine biology from Karnataka University. His passion for wildlife soon led him to work with esteemed organizations such as the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Specializing in human-elephant conflict management, he became a global expert on elephant ecology. Ajay eventually served as the co-chair of the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group, a role that allowed him to contribute to conservation efforts not only in India but across Southeast Asia.

His expertise was rooted in extensive fieldwork, from tracking elephants in the forests of southern India and Asia to using radio collars to study their movements. His pioneering research illuminated



the impact of habitat loss on elephant behaviour and informed strategies to reduce human-elephant conflicts. Ajay mentored countless students and conservationists, many of whom have gone on to lead significant conservation initiatives globally.

Legacy Etched in the Forests

Ajay Desai’s work earned him the respect of all who knew him. In recognition of his contributions, the Karnataka Forest Department named two roads after him — one in Kali Tiger Reserve and another in Bandipur National Park. This tribute stands as a testament to his lasting legacy in wildlife conservation in India.

Ajay was not only a respected scientist but also a compassionate individual

who treated everyone with kindness and respect. Tribals, mahouts, and trackers, with whom he worked closely, deeply admired him for his sincere commitment to wildlife and the people who coexist with it. He was never afraid to challenge powerful entities when defending the causes he believed in.

Unparalleled Connection with Elephants

Ajay’s commitment to conservation was more than a career; it was his life’s mission. His bond with elephants was extraordinary, as if he knew each one personally. Combining scientific knowledge with hands-on field experience, he possessed an unmatched ability to understand the complexities of human-elephant interactions. He wasn’t just a conservationist; he was a bridge between humans and wildlife, dedicated to fostering harmony between the two.

Carrying Forward the Legacy

Although Ajay Desai passed away in November 2020 at the age of 63, his legacy continues through the lives he touched and the projects he inspired. His family, students, and the global conservation community



carry forward his mission of protecting elephants and promoting sustainable coexistence between humans and wildlife. The posthumous recognition he received at the 2024 conference serves as a reminder of his unwavering dedication and a call to continue the crucial work of conservation.

Ajay Desai's life is a powerful reminder that one person's passion and commitment can inspire change on a global scale. His spirit lives on in the forests he once roamed, the projects he helped shape, and in the hearts of those who continue his work. Today, the "Elephant Man" remains a legend, leaving an enduring legacy that will guide future generations in the fight for wildlife conservation.

***"It's not about saving a single animal;
it's about saving an entire species, an ecosystem."***

— Ajay Desai



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Help us Preserve a Literary Treasure: Adopt a Rare Book

Introduction and Background

The BNHS Library holds a remarkable collection of rare books—treasures that house the wisdom of great thinkers from the past. These rare books are not just relics; they are a priceless heritage for humankind, preserving facts, ideas, and evidence on Natural History. These valuable resources are indispensable for present and future generations. Unfortunately, these literary gems face threats of deterioration due to climatic, physical, chemical, and biological factors. The loss of such irreplaceable materials would be devastating.

These rare books also contain crucial information about endangered flora and fauna, making them an important resource for students conducting research. The beautifully illustrated plates can be used for exhibitions in schools and colleges, and the wild stories in these books are excellent teaching aids for educators. By digitising these rare resources, we can make them more accessible for educational purposes and conservation awareness.

Why Your Support Matters

- Preservation:** Rare books are delicate and require expert conservation to prevent deterioration. Your donation will fund state-of-the-art techniques to preserve these literary treasures.
- Accessibility:** By adopting a rare book, you help make it accessible to scholars, students, and the public, ensuring its knowledge continues to inspire and educate.
- Legacy:** Your support ensures that these irreplaceable works will be preserved for future generations, keeping their historical and cultural significance alive.

How You Can Help

- Adopt a Book:** By contributing ₹1 lakh (for five years), you can adopt one of our rare books and support its preservation. Your donation will directly fund conservation efforts and ensure these books remain accessible for years to come.
- Acknowledgement:** Donors will receive an 80G tax-saving certificate, acknowledgement in our annual report, and recognition on the inner page of the book's front cover.

Books Available for Adoption

1.

Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds (Vol. I, II, & III) by Allan O. Hume (1889–1908)

This invaluable work, authored by Allan Hume, a pioneer in Indian ornithology, is a rare gem, especially significant because the BNHS houses a unique collection of bird eggs.
2.

Indian Ducks & Their Allies by E.C. Stuart Baker (1908)

This first publication of the BNHS features beautiful illustrations and holds great historical significance. It's essential to preserve this foundational book of our institution.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to make a meaningful impact.
For more information on how you can contribute to preserving these literary treasures,
please feel free to contact us at library@bnhs.org



Located at the southeastern tip of India in Tamil Nadu, Point Calimere is a crucial site for migratory shorebirds and landbirds.

Shorebird Migration: Shorebirds are remarkable birds that rely on wetlands, coastal mudflats, and marshy areas during their migration. Point Calimere's salt pans, mudflats, and shallow lagoons create the perfect habitat for these birds to rest and refuel. Some notable shorebirds found here include endangered (EN) species like the great knot and near-threatened (NT) species such as the eurasian curlew, bar-tailed godwit, black-tailed godwit, red knot, and curlew sandpiper. Rare sightings of species like the sanderling, dunlin, whimbrel, pacific golden plover and oriental pratincole further highlight the site's importance for shorebird migration. One won't miss the glitz of the greater flamingos and congregation of other larger wading birds like eurasian spoonbills, painted storks (NT), spot-billed pelicans (NT),

cormorants, egrets and more. The abundance of these species only adds to the rich birdwatching experience.

Landbird Migration: Besides shorebirds, Point Calimere also serves as a stopover for various landbird species during migration. These birds, which are mainly terrestrial, pass through or stop over at Point Calimere's tropical dry evergreen forests and scrublands during their migration. Common migratory land bird species seen here include the asian brown flycatcher, brown-breasted flycatcher, blue-throated flycatcher, Indian paradise flycatcher, Indian pitta, forest wagtail, large-billed leaf warbler, and grey-bellied cuckoo.

BNHS is excited to announce seven batches of the Basic Course in Field Ornithology and Bird Migration Studies in December 2024 and January 2025, hosted at the BNHS Bird Migration Study Centre, Point Calimere (Kodiyakarai), Tamil Nadu.

About the Course

This course aims to establish a network of birders and ringers to support bird monitoring and conservation along the **Central Asian Flyway**, focusing on hands-on training in **bird population monitoring**, including bird count. Classroom sessions on **bird migration study techniques** to enhance participants' understanding of migration patterns and monitoring methods.

Venue: BNHS Bird Migration Study Centre, Point Calimere (Kodiyakarai), Tamil Nadu

Resource Persons: Dr S. Balachandran, Dr P. Sathiyaselvam, Mr S. Sivakumar, Mr Paul Antony B and Ms Rose Francis

Topics Covered: Bird Identification; Counting Techniques; Migration and Flyways; Global Importance of Bird Marking Studies

Case Study: Indian skimmer Conservation, Hands-on Demonstration of Bird Ringing

Field Trips: Great Vedaranyam Swamp, Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, Siruthalaikadu Mudflats and Beach

Contact Us: Mr S. Sivakumar: s.swaminathan@bnhs.org | 91-94088 72745; Mr Paul Antony B: p.antony@bnhs.org

REGISTRATION DETAILS:

Course Schedule: 2024

Batch VII : December 13 – 15

Batch VIII : December 20 – 22

2025

Batch IX : January 10 – 12

Batch X : January 18 – 20

Batch XI : January 24 – 26

Fee

: ₹ 10,000 (₹ 9,000 for existing BNHS members)
Includes tent accommodation (two people per tent) with cots, fans, charging points, pillows, food, field visits, entry fees, etc

Eligibility

: Open to all, no age limit. Anyone with an interest is welcome to participate.

Registration Deadline :

Closes 7 days before the start of each batch
To join us, please fill out the Enquiry Form.
Payment details will be provided upon confirmation of registration.

Join us for this incredible opportunity to engage in bird conservation and gain hands-on experience in ornithology!

Give the Gift of Membership!

Share your love for natural history with your family and friends. Explore the woods together! Your gift of a BNHS membership will help us continue our important work to conserve our natural environment through research and education.

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

Annual Membership	₹ 1,416/-
Three-year Membership	₹ 3,748/-
Five-year Membership	₹ 6,080/-
Life Membership	₹ 17,700/-
Student Membership (below 25 years; College ID Proof compulsory)	₹ 450/-



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BNHS MISSION

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

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

CONTACT US

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