



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



FEBRUARY, 2023

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

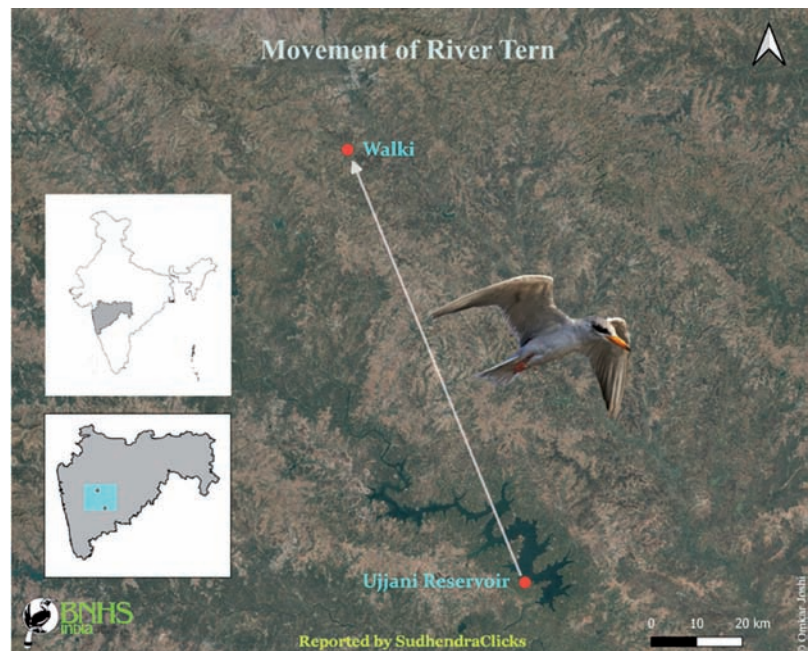
FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Each month, BNHS will bring you, our valuable member, a conservation newsletter which is packed with updates from our field work, publications and the events we hold for nature conservation.

This is our attempt to make sure you get to know about our work in real time, and to keep you with us on our journey!

Movement of River Tern 3S8

Located on the border of Pune and Solapur districts in Maharashtra, Ujjani Dam is an Important Bird Area (IBA) that attracts a lot of ducks and waders every winter. However, as the water level drops in summer, several islands get exposed, providing favourable nesting habitat for riverine birds. In May and June 2022, the BNHS team conducted a breeding riverine bird survey, during which we came across 236 River Tern nests. 130 River Tern chicks were marked with a metal ring and a colour flag during the survey. One of the tagged chicks has established itself in a waterbody near Walki village in the neighbourhood of Ahmednagar, almost 100 kilometres away from its natal area. Once in December 2022 and once in January 2023, this young bird was resighted here. Such resighting records provide insightful data about the wetland connectivity and importance of every single wetland. BNHS is conducting a long term monitoring and migration study in Ujjani. A total of 287 birds from 30 different species have been ringed as part of this research till date. ■



Ten years of holistic Amur falcon conservation in Nagaland

We have been working on Amur Falcon conservation for ten exciting years. In 2013, responding to massive, large-scale hunting of Amur falcons (*Falco amurensis*) in Doyang, Nagaland, we started an outreach and advocacy program in Nagaland. The focus of the project was to identify focus groups, and then reach out to them to minimize hunting of all wild birds.

We have been operating eco clubs in many parts of Nagaland to build a new

generation that values free birds in the sky, providing limited employment to educators who are local villagers trained by us. We also helped start eco-tourism in Pangti village to supplement income. The forest department of Nagaland has been instrumental in raising the profile of the bird and making sure other departments also get co-opted in creating a mascot out of the Amur falcon. Over the past decade, hunting of Amur falcons has ceased and the bird is seen as a positive ambassador

in the state. We are thankful to the youth groups and village councils for being open to the new idea of conservation in a former hunting community.

We have been witnessing to incredible ecological insights during the whole process. Amur falcons rise in gyre-like formations at dawn, spending most of the day flying and hunting for insects. When taking breaks, they are seen resting on

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Our Eco club collects information for Butterfly month, a national citizen science survey, in Pangti village



Amur Falcons at Doyang reservoir. Photo by Dhritiman Mukherjee

wires or tall trees. At dusk, they make huge flocks of thousands of birds, and return to roosting sites, which comprise thick canopies or grassy areas. In the last two years, we have observed that the falcons

have chosen a new site for foraging. Other than Doyang reservoir banks, they also visit a village called Aree on the banks of the river Doyang. The villagers of Aree very proudly host these birds. We are thankful

to BirdLife international for their support to this conservation project. We are grateful to the Pangti village community, now globally recognized as protectors of Amur Falcons. ■

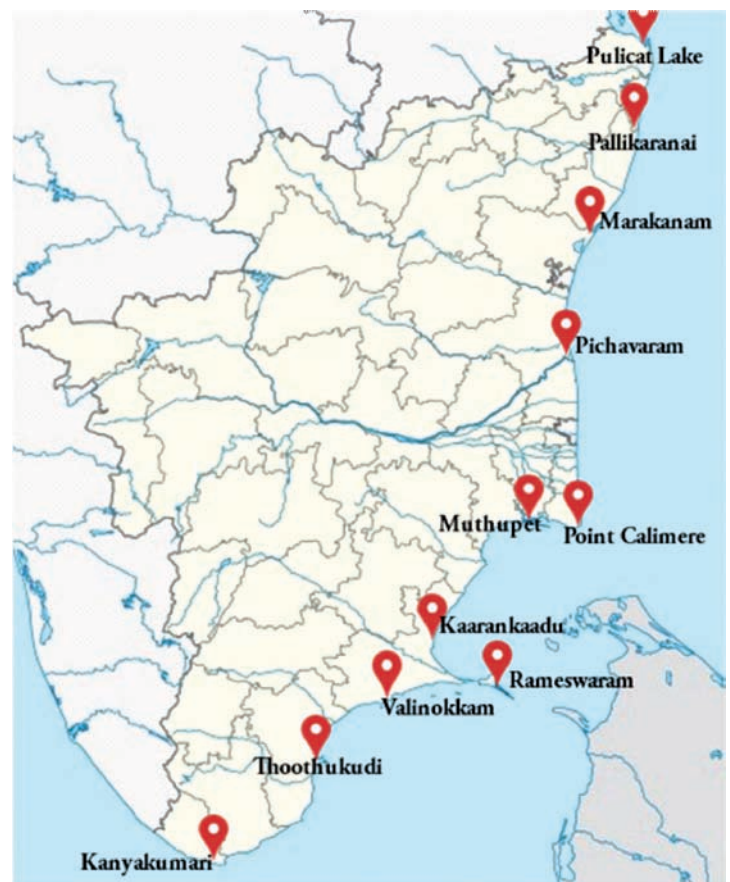
Coastal bird survey along the east coast of Southern India by BNHS Point Calimere bird migration study centre team

BNHS Bird Migration Study Centre at Point Calimere carried out a bird survey on the South Eastern coast of India from 6-20 January, as a follow-up of a similar survey done last year. Various coastal habitats such as sandy beaches, dunes, mangrove forests, mudflats, salt marshes, backwaters, creeks and saltpans were surveyed.

The overall population of most species in 2023 were less compared to that of the previous year except for a few species like, Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringaglareola*. A conspicuous decline was observed in Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* population (ca. 70,000 in 2022 to less than 15,000 this year). This decline in the population of Greater Flamingo and other waders can be attributed to the prevailing dry conditions in many wetlands in southern Tamil Nadu due to poor rainfall, and highwater conditions in the coastal wetlands of northern Tamil Nadu.

A few highlights from the survey:

- Intertidal zones of Pichavaram Mangrove Forest of Cuddalore district, hosted around 15,000 Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* - a major congregation site for this species along the east coast of India.
- Around 600 individuals of Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* were recorded during the survey.
- A sharp decline among the long distant migratory duck species is that of Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*, which was about 28,000 in the previous year.



Coastal wetlands surveyed during 2022 & 2023 pre-census surveys by the BNHS team

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Congregation of Pacific Golden Plovers in the intertidal areas of Pichavaram Mangrove Forest

This survey was conducted exclusively by the BNHS team along with two volunteers from Kalpakkam Nuclear Power Corporation, with logistic support from forest department from Pichavaram, Kaliveli, Gulf of Mannar, Pulicat Lake and Tuticorin. Significant number of birds were observed in salt pans. Thus, optimizing salt pan management for shorebirds could provide a pragmatic, cost-effective and geographically extensive solution for bird conservation. Sea-mouths are also important habitats for marine terns and sand-flat preferring waders. The survey results emphasise the need for protection and conservation of coastal wetlands of Tamil Nadu which are important for conservation of migratory species from a global perspective. ■

Training of Forest Department Staff of Andhra Pradesh on Bird Migration, Monitoring and Wild Bird Disease Surveillance

A two-day training workshop for frontline staff of Andhra Pradesh Forest department was carried out on 6-7 January in Kakinada. Forty forest staff members participated in the workshop. Shri Sri Saravanan, I.F.S., Chief Conservator of Forest (Rajahmundry Circle) released the Telugu version of the training manual and inaugurated the programme on 6th January 2023. Three resource persons, Dr. P. sathiyaselvam, Dr. S. Ramesh Kumar, Mr. S. Sivakumar from BNHS and two external resource persons Mr. K. Mrutyunjaya Rao, Indian Bird Conservation Network A.P. state coordinator and Mr. D. Mahesh Babu, Wildlife Biologist, Kakinada Wildlife Management Division provided inputs in the workshop.

Topics such as bird identification, bird migration and study techniques, flyways and India's National Action Plan for Central Asian Flyway, bird monitoring techniques, Asian Waterbird Count, avian disease outbreak and bird handling safety



BNHS team briefing on the bird trapping gear to participants of the workshop

protocols, state forest department's role in implementation of CAF-NAP, bird migration studies in Andhra Pradesh, renewable energy and birds, overview of threats in Important Bird Areas of Andhra

Pradesh were covered.

BNHS team also extended technical support to the A.P. forest department to carry out the Asian Waterbird Census in January. ■

Bird Ringing by BNHS

Sikkim

Under a project on conservation and wise use of wetlands in Himalayan states, we carried out bird ringing in East Sikkim in early January 2023. This is part of our endeavor to understand bird migration and habitat use in key areas.

A total of 65 individuals comprising of 22 land bird species were ringed around the fringe areas of Fambonglho and Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuaries. Elevations ranging from 1250-3600 m, were covered during the ringing exercise. Migratory species like Little Bunting *Emberizapusilla*, and Common Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*; altitudinal migrants like Himalayan Bluetail *Tarsigerrufilatus* and Himalayan white-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus thura*; resident species like Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Trochalopteronerythrocephalum* and Grey-throated Babbler *Stachyrisnigricaps* were among the species which were ringed by the BNHS team. The project is funded by National Mission on Himalayan Studies (NMHS) under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).



Small Niltava ringed by us

Pulicat Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh



A Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* marked with metal ring and colour flag

Bird ringing programme was also carried out in Pulicat Wildlife Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh from 27 December 2022 to 3 January 2023 for understanding the significance of the wetlands for migratory waterbirds along the east coast of India. BNHS has been carrying out bird ringing activities in Pulicat intermittently since 1980s! In the past, 4,640 birds have been ringed during 1989 to 1991 and 1998-99 in Pulicat, including Sriharikota. Later, the Wetlands and Flyways Programme of BNHS has done short-term bird ringing here in 2019, 2021-22 and 2022-23.

A total of 137 birds, comprising of six waterbird species and nine land bird species were ringed. Of them, 115 individuals were migratory waterbirds, predominantly species such as Little Stint, Kentish Plover, Lesser Sand Plover and Common Redshank were ringed. White-browed Bulbul (eight birds) was predominant among the land birds followed by Red-whiskered Bulbul and Orange-headed Thrush (three each). All the waterbirds except Little Stints were marked with colour flags along with conventional metal rings; other birds were marked with metal rings. Morphometry data such as bill, wing and tarsus lengths were noted. Weight and moult details of each individuals captured were also taken. The ringing team included Mr. S. Sivakumar, Scientist, Mr. Md. Aashik and Mr. Md. Haidar Alee, Bird Trappers and Mr. R. Vasanth, Volunteer. We thank Andhra Pradesh Forest Department for providing permissions and support during the field work. ■

BNHS Conservation Education Centre (CEC) Mumbai activities

Central Asian Flyway workshop at Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary

A workshop was organized for the staff of Forest Department and bird guides working at NandurMadhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, Nashik district Maharashtra on 13-14 December 2022. NandurMadhmeshwar was recently declared as a Ramsar Site of global importance. Twenty participants attended the workshop, and the BNHS team, including Omkar Joshi and Raju Kasambe guided the participants. Mr. Shekhar Devkar, RFO at Nandur and Mr. Jayesh Vishwakarma from the Mangrove Cell were also present during the workshop. The workshop included various talks and hands on demonstrations on bird ringing and tagging techniques. ■

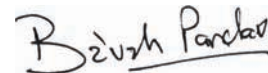
SGNP Bird Monitoring on 25 December 2022: A Citizen Science Initiative By BNHS

Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai (SGNP) conducted monthly bird monitoring in SGNP (including Tungareshwar wildlife sanctuary) on Christmas day, 25 December 2022. We had a wonderful turnout of 42 participants.

BNHS scientists, bird experts, BNHS member volunteers and Forest Department staff participated in the programme. Many migratory and rare birds were spotted during the bird monitoring programme, including Steppe Eagle, Alpine Swifts, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Forest Wagtail, Black-capped Kingfisher, Blue-capped Rock-thrush etc. Thanks to all volunteers and SGNP staff for making the bird monitoring successful! ■

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

Signed



Bivash Pandav, Director, BNHS



BNHS MISSION

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

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

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