



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



OCTOBER, 2024

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER



Dear Members,

Every year, we celebrate Wildlife Week from October 1 to 7, a cherished tradition for wildlife enthusiasts across the nation. During this week, our entire staff actively engages in promoting the message of wildlife conservation to the public in various ways. This year, the BNHS Bengaluru chapter organized a birding trek in Bengaluru; and a special film screening was held, featuring a documentary by renowned wildlife filmmaker Shekar Dattatri on the Indian skimmer. The film highlights the important work of BNHS scientist Parveen Shaikh in conserving the Indian skimmer, with the hope that it will help raise funds to extend her conservation efforts to other rivers to protect this species.

We also received some exciting news during the first week. The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has funded the establishment of a research and training centre in Chimur, Chandrapur District, Maharashtra, where we have already acquired 19 acres of land.

This month saw significant international collaboration as well. Our partner, BirdLife International, organized an Asia Partner Meeting in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. Additionally, a separate session on SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction) brought together partners from countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Myanmar to discuss vulture conservation challenges. Dr P. Sathiyaselvam presented BNHS's efforts within the Central Asian Flyway initiative. This BirdLife partnership meeting will enable BNHS to collaborate more closely with Asian counterparts on the conservation of important species, including the black-necked crane, vultures, migratory birds, and seabirds.

October is also a month of major Hindu festivals, from Dussehra to Diwali. However, it is troubling that many bird species are still used in religious practices during this season, despite their protected status under the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Based on a recent rapid survey across select cities in West Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, I urge the public to help end illegal practices involving bird-derived products for rituals. For instance, intermediate and great egrets are often killed in significant numbers for their flight feathers, especially during their breeding season when they gather in large colonies.

The Indian roller (Neelkanth) is also captured in large numbers in October, especially before Dussehra, as it is believed that sighting a Neelkanth brings good luck. A BNHS ornithologist recently recorded over 100 Indian rollers for sale in specific markets in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, alongside white-throated kingfishers, a day before Dussehra.

Similarly, Diwali brings additional challenges for owl species, as they are targeted by occult practitioners for use in black magic. Studies on owl trafficking by TRAFFIC India and WWF-India have documented an underground market for owls around Diwali.

To protect these birds, especially during the festive season, we must all raise awareness and take action. Let us work together to end these harmful practices and celebrate in ways that respect and conserve our nation's wildlife.

The Delhi Public School (DPS) lake is a crucial high-tide roosting site for migratory and non-migratory bird species from September to May. Around 9,500 birds, including near-threatened species like the lesser flamingo, curlew sandpiper, black-tailed godwit, and painted stork, are recorded here each year. Migratory birds benefit from the low disturbance levels at DPS lake, which is close to Thane Creek, thus minimizing the distance between feeding and roosting sites and helping birds conserve energy. To maintain this as an ideal roosting habitat, effective water level management is necessary. BNHS has requested that the government designate it as a conservation reserve.

Our marine conservation programme is also actively engaging coastal communities along with other stakeholders in Maharashtra. As part of this initiative, we recently launched the JALCHAR app, designed to help record sightings of marine megafauna in Maharashtra's coastal waters.

At the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC) in Pinjore, Haryana, our vulture conservation team, guided by Mr Vineet Garg, IFS, Chief Wildlife Warden of Haryana, successfully tagged 25 vultures. Meanwhile, the Bird Migration Study Centre (BMSC) at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu, continues to serve as a premier training centre for forest staff from various state academies. This month, staff from the Forest Academy in Kundal, Maharashtra, visited BMSC for field training.

In publishing news, BNHS and HarperCollins Publishers India Pvt. Ltd signed an agreement to release *MAMMALS OF INDIA*, a comprehensive guide by Drs A.J.T. Johnsingh and P.O. Nameer. This will be the first complete reference guide covering all 428 recognized species of Indian mammals, with details on taxonomy, conservation status (IUCN Red List, CITES Appendix, and Indian Wild Life Protection Act schedules), distribution maps, habitat information, population data, and English names. This beautifully illustrated book honours the late Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh and promises to be a valuable addition to any collection.

We were delighted to welcome Dr Reylene Cooke, a raptor researcher, Dr John White, a rodent ecologist, and Dr Michael Weston from Deakin University, Australia, to Hornbill House. Their talk on the impact of rodenticides on native wildlife and human health provided invaluable insights for our scientists.

This month, we also mourn the passing of Mr Uma Pratap Singh, who dedicated over four decades, even post his superannuation, of service to Hornbill House. His commitment and integrity will be deeply missed and fondly remembered.

If you have not yet completed the online form for the publication of the "Yearbook for Life Members," please do so at your earliest convenience. For any assistance, feel free to contact BNHS Central Marketing (cmd@bnhs.org), Membership (membership@bnhs.org), Programmes (programmes@bnhs.org), or Conservation Education Centres (cec-mumbai@bnhs.org). To reserve your event dates, you may also reach out via email. We encourage you to send event pictures and a brief write-up to Mr Gopi Naidu (g.naidu@bnhs.org) for our newsletter. Thank you for staying in touch with me at director@bnhs.org.

Kishor Rithe

Director

Bombay Natural History Society

BNHS and Mangrove Foundation Collaborate to Launch JALCHAR

In a significant move to enhance marine biodiversity monitoring, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), in collaboration with the Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation of Maharashtra, launched JALCHAR, a mobile application dedicated to documenting sightings and strandings of marine mammals, birds, and other megafauna along Maharashtra's coastline.

JALCHAR is available in both English and Marathi, supporting broader conservation goals by improving data collection, research, and management strategies. The app features geo-tagged reports, photographic evidence, and a user-friendly interface, making it accessible to professionals and the general public alike. Additionally, it provides vital insights for addressing stranding incidents, enabling swift rescue actions for at-risk species.

The app was launched by Mr Praveensingh Pardeshi, President, BNHS, in the presence of APCCF Ramarao, Director, Mangrove Foundation, Dr Bharat Bhushan, Hon Secretary, BNHS, and Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, BNHS. Mr Kishor Rithe emphasised that the app will help identify key marine megafauna hotspots and strengthen local networks, including fishermen, the Coast Guard, police, and forest department officers.

With the launch of JALCHAR, BNHS and the Mangrove Foundation have taken a significant step toward safeguarding Maharashtra's rich marine biodiversity and encouraging community participation in conservation efforts.

The application is available for free download on the Google Play Store. ■



Wildlife Week – 2024 Celebrations

India celebrates National Wildlife Week from October 2–8. This year's theme, "Safeguarding Our Natural Heritage", emphasises collaborative conservation efforts. Established in 1957, the week aims to raise awareness about wildlife conservation, featuring educational events, community engagement, and activities in national parks to promote the protection of India's diverse ecosystems and endangered species.

CEC-Mumbai's Karvi Trail

As part of Wildlife Week 2024 CEC-Mumbai organised a Karvi Trail for members and others to celebrate the rich biodiversity of Mumbai's forests.

Ms Kiran Thumma, Education Officer, CEC Mumbai, inaugurated the event with an introduction to the BNHS and an in-depth explanation of the Karvi plant's life cycle and ecological importance. This was followed by a documentary highlighting BNHS's ongoing work with the Mumbai Trans



Harbour Link (MTHL) project, an initiative of MMRDA. After the introduction, Ms Priyadarshini Supekar, also an Education Officer, addressed participants on biodiversity conservation and provided instructions on responsible behaviour inside the forest. The participants were then divided into groups, led by Ms Kiran, Mr Dilip Giri (Field Assistant), and Mr Gaurang Tawde (BNHS Naturalist), and introduced to the butterfly life cycle.

A total of 27 participants benefitted from this enriching experience on Saturday, October 5, 2024 followed by 68 participants on October 6, 2024. ■



BNHS VCBC's Engage School Children

BNHS's Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Bhopal, in partnership with Van Vihar National Park & Zoo, held a painting competition for school students and an awareness programme on vulture conservation for tourists, highlighting the importance of vultures in the ecosystem.

Additionally, a seminar on vulture conservation was conducted by Aniket Pawar and Jayanta Rabha at Sanpara Haropara High School in Assam, attended by over 180 participants. ■



Poster Release, Webinar and Competitions

The Environmental Information, Awareness, Capacity Building, and Livelihood Programme (EIACP), Programme Centre (PC), Resource Partner (RP) on Avian Ecology at the BNHS, released a poster on "Bee-eaters of India". This poster highlights six captivating species of bee-eaters, admired for their vibrant plumage and remarkable aerial acrobatics. A soft copy of the poster is available for download at: http://bnhsenviis.nic.in/Database/PostersReleasedbyBNHS-EIACP_19817.aspx

On October 2, 2024, BNHS-EIACP hosted an online webinar titled "The Story of the Vanishing Vultures". Led by Dr Kazveen Umrigar, Conservation Breeding Specialist at BNHS, this insightful session attracted around 90 participants. If you missed the live session, you can watch it on the BNHS-EIACP website: <http://bnhsenviis.nic.in/ViewMajorActivity.aspx?Id=18762&Year=2020>

The BNHS-EIACP organised an online photography competition with categories such as (a) Bird Portraits, (b) Birds of Prey, (c) Birds in Forest Habitat, and (d) Bird-Plant Relationships, with winners receiving prizes. The competition received entries from 100 participants. Additionally, a quiz titled "Know Your Birds" engaged 679 participants, raising awareness about bird conservation. ■

For updates on future events, please visit: <http://bnhsenviis.nic.in/Home.aspx>



Collaborating with the Wildlife Division, Jaisalmer, in Pokhran Tehsil

Since 2019, the BNHS has been actively engaged in the Thar Landscape to conserve and restore the habitat of the great Indian bustard outside the protected areas of Desert National Park. Partnering closely with local communities in Pokhran Tehsil and collaborating with various government departments, BNHS has built meaningful relationships with schools across the region. To further these efforts, BNHS celebrated Wildlife Week from October 1–8, 2024, under the guidance of the Wildlife Division at Desert National Park in Jaisalmer. The week-long celebration featured educational and creative competitions, such as essay writing and painting, at Government Senior Secondary School in Khetolai and MJM School in Chacha, Pokhran. These events, co-organised with Eco-Clubs, emphasised environmental education



and awareness. This outreach was especially significant for young students, inspiring them to become future protectors of their local environment and ecology. ■

@ Sharanbasaveshwar College, Kalaburagi

BNHS organised a lecture on October 6 at Sharanbasaveshwar College of Science in Kalaburagi, Karnataka presented by Dr Sujit Narwade, Deputy Director. Fifty students attended the event, where Dr Narwade introduced BNHS's conservation efforts and discussed the ecological importance of grasslands. He

highlighted the unique ecosystems within grasslands and addressed threats such as urbanization and agricultural expansion. The event concluded with an interactive Q&A session, providing valuable insights into grassland conservation and biodiversity. ■



Karnataka Degree College, Bidar

On October 7, BNHS hosted an event at Karnataka Degree College in Bidar to celebrate Wildlife Week. The event featured a poster and quiz competition, with 60 students participating. The poster theme, "Threats to the Grassland Ecosystem", encouraged students to address issues such as habitat loss, climate change, and invasive species. Winners of the competitions were awarded by Dr Narwade and the college principal, and the Department of Zoology received a framed photo of the Lesser Florican as a memento. This event raised awareness about wildlife conservation and ecosystem protection while fostering a spirit of healthy competition. ■



@ Shokaliya, Ajmer

On October 5, BNHS collaborated with Shokaliya School in Ajmer, Rajasthan to celebrate Wildlife Week, focusing on grassland conservation. Students learned about the importance of preserving local flora and fauna, particularly endangered species like the lesser florican. The event included poster-making and essay-writing competitions; the prize distribution ceremony was held on October 8. BNHS representatives emphasised the community's role in wildlife protection and installed an 8x4 foot awareness board in Shokaliya village. The board, featuring a message encouraging



unity in saving the lesser florican, serves as an ongoing educational tool for residents. ■

Wildlife Conservation through Coexistence

The Bhagalpur Forest Division, in collaboration with BNHS, celebrated Wildlife Week 2024 in Bhagalpur, Bihar. On October 2, a Ganga cleaning drive was organized at Barari Ghat, with approximately 25 participants, including forest officials, community groups like Dolphin Mitras and Ganga Prahari, and BNHS team members. The event aimed to highlight the urgent need to address pollution in the Ganga to protect its ecosystem.

On October 3, a felicitation ceremony honoured the "Garud Guardians" (experienced individuals), "Saviours" (young males), and "Sevikas" (young females) for their dedicated efforts in conserving the Greater Adjutant. Mr Arvind Mishra, founder of Mandar Nature

Club and member of the BNHS Governing Council, who has been pivotal in the greater adjutant conservation movement in Bihar, delivered a talk. BNHS researcher Mr Abhay Rai gave a presentation on "Snake Identification and Conservation". A total of 55 people attended the event.

October 4 featured a "Bird Race" and a "Photography Competition," where 10 birders and photographers showcased the biodiversity of Bhagalpur. The top teams and winning photographers received certificates.

On National Dolphin Day, October 5, a "Dolphin Run" was held, followed by a presentation on the "Bhagalpur Bird Atlas" by BNHS researcher Mr Abilash R. The event was graced by Dr Nawal Kishor Choudhary, IAS, District Magistrate, Bhagalpur, and Professor Dr Sunil Kumar Choudhary of Tilka Manjhi Bhagalpur University, with 40 participants in attendance.

A discussion on conservation efforts in Bhagalpur took place on October 6, featuring six participants from various organizations. Ms Vertika Patel, BNHS Researcher, highlighted the activities of the Bird Ringing and Monitoring Station (BRMS) in Bhagalpur. The celebration concluded with a drawing competition at Adarsh Ucch Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Kadwa, on October 8, where 59 students participated, and prizes were awarded to the winners.

This Wildlife Week, the Bhagalpur Forest Division and BNHS reaffirmed their commitment to wildlife conservation through education, community engagement, and collaboration. ■



Bengaluru Chapter of BNHS Successfully Conducts First Nature Trail at Lalbagh

The newly established Bengaluru chapter of the BNHS successfully conducted its inaugural nature trail at Lalbagh during Wildlife Week 2024. This well-attended event drew local nature enthusiasts and wildlife lovers, focusing on the critical role of citizen science in biodiversity monitoring through activities such as bird counts and habitat restoration.

Led by BNHS members Girish Gopalrao and Vinod Karuvat, the nature trail is the first of many events planned by the chapter. Future initiatives aim to include regular nature walks, workshops, and educational programmes to engage the community in scientific research and deepen the understanding of Bengaluru's natural heritage.

Participants observed a variety of bird species during the walk, including the black-crowned night heron, brahmyn kite, white-breasted waterhen, pond heron, spot-billed duck, rose-ringed parakeet, Indian crow, white-throated kingfisher, little cormorant, Eurasian moorhen, common myna, darter, cattle egret, painted stork, grey heron, and little egret.



The BNHS Director extended congratulations to Mr Sushil Saxena, Girish Gopalrao, Vinod Karuvat, Varun, Ranjitji, and Asif Khan for their dedication in organising this successful event, which marks the beginning of the Bengaluru chapter's efforts to bring citizens closer to nature and foster active participation in conserving the region's biodiversity. ■

25 White-rumped Vultures Tagged for Release at JCBC Pinjore



In a significant step towards vulture conservation, 25 White-rumped Vultures (WRVs) were tagged with GPS GSM transmitters on October 5, 2024, at the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre (JCBC) in Pinjore. Each bird was fitted with a 50-gram Ornitella tag, enabling continuous monitoring and data collection.

The tagging was conducted by the vulture keepers from JCBC Pinjore under the supervision of experts, including Sachin Ranade, Centre Manager of VCBC Assam; Hemant Bajpai, Centre Manager of JCBC Pinjore; Kazveen Umrigar, Conservation Breeding Specialist; and Jeff Francis, Conservation Biologist.

To ensure the vultures' safety and comfort, each bird was carefully restrained, and the tags were securely attached using specially designed harnesses made of teflon. Following tagging, an acclimatization period allowed the vultures to adapt to the harnesses, during which staff monitored them closely, addressing any signs of discomfort or attempts to remove the tags.

Comprehensive health assessments, including blood tests, confirmed that all health parameters were within normal ranges for the species. Additionally, cloacal swab samples were sent to the Pune-based PDRC for disease screening. This preparatory work ensures that the vultures are ready and equipped for a successful reintroduction into their natural habitat. ■

21st BirdLife Asia Regional Partnership Meeting 2024



The 21st BirdLife Asia Regional Partnership Meeting 2024 was held in Bogor, Indonesia, from October 7–9, hosted by Burung Indonesia with support from BirdLife International. Over the course of three days, 35 presentations were given, covering topics such as science, policy, species conservation, flyway protection, and promoting collaboration between partners.

During the meeting, BirdLife partners committed to impactful and measurable conservation efforts. The partners also emphasised the importance of protecting biodiversity while uplifting and supporting the most vulnerable in society. Mr Kishor Rithe, Director, BNHS, addressed initiatives and policy changes for vulture conservation in India, highlighting the crucial role of collaboration with Asian partners to combat the illegal killing and trade of wild birds. Dr P. Sathiyaselvam, Deputy Director, BNHS, presented sustainable agricultural practices for crane conservation during a discussion session.

The BirdLife Conservation Strategy on the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) was also a major focus of the meeting. Key points discussed included:

- Unifying all 14 BirdLife Partners in the Central Asian Flyway
- Addressing illegal killing and unsustainable use of migratory birds
- Protecting, managing, restoring, and monitoring key sites along the Asian flyways
- Pursuing innovative financial mechanisms for flyway conservation

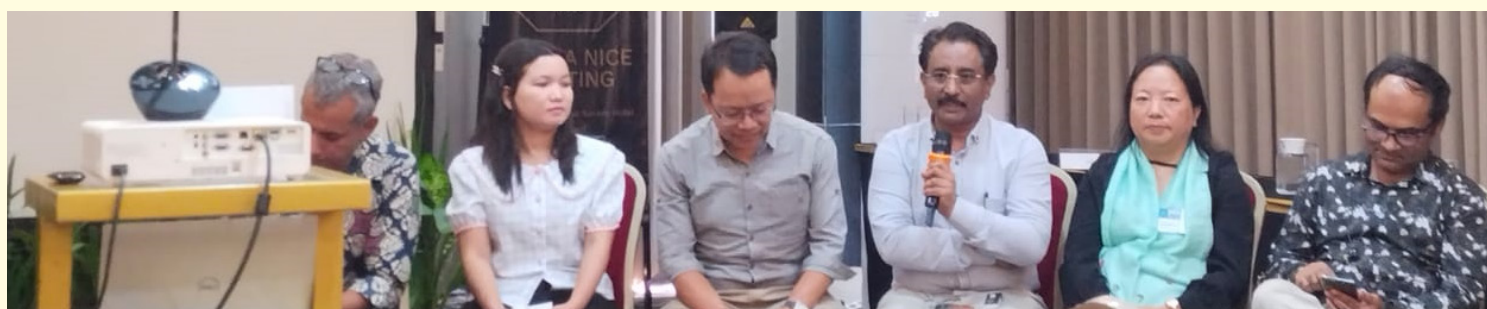


- Promoting bird-safe energy infrastructure, including the rollout of AVISTEP
- Supporting CMS initiatives for the CAF and national implementation of action plans
- Increasing public support for migratory bird conservation
- Strengthening the technical and institutional capacities of BirdLife Partners

The meeting concluded with BirdLife partners in Asia agreeing to collaborate in sharing the success of sustainable conservation. It also endorsed several important initiatives, including:

- BirdLife Asia Partnership Communications Strategy 2024–2029, developed by the BirdLife International Asia Communications Community of Practice Group
- Birdwatching Tourism Charter/Guidelines updated by the Ecotourism and Social Enterprises Practice Group
- Asia Regional Capacity Development Needs and Priorities
- Integration of Flyway Five-Year Plan & Regional Implementation Plans

The meeting underscored the need for strong regional collaboration to advance the goals of conservation across Asia. ■



Workshop on Hornbill Conservation in Imphal, Manipur

On October 7, 2024, the Wildlife Wing of the Manipur Forest Department hosted a one-day workshop on "Wildlife Conservation through Coexistence" as part of Wildlife Week. The event was chaired by Shri Anurag Bajpai, (IFS) Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and HoFF, Manipur Forest Department, along with Smt Soreiphy Vashum, (IFS) Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest. BNHS Ornithologist Dr Rajat Bhargava delivered a talk on hornbill conservation in Manipur. The presentation highlighted threats to native hornbill species and emphasised the challenge of cross-border trade in exotic hornbills from Myanmar to Manipur. Examples of recent rescues and seizures of hornbills were shared, along with discussion on the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and the role of CITES. The MoEF&CC has



recently approved a project for Tamenglong Forest Division, with BNHS providing guidance on methodology. BNHS is also planning a future project in collaboration with BirdLife Asia to monitor CITES-listed hornbill trade routes into India, working alongside various state governments. ■

Emerging Threats to the Black-Necked Crane in Ladakh

The black-necked crane (BNC) is the only alpine crane species. It was the last of the world's 15 crane species to be discovered by scientists. This medium-sized bird is primarily distributed across Asia, breeding mainly on the Tibetan Plateau, including some wetlands in Eastern Ladakh, and winters predominantly in the wetlands of the Himalaya/Trans-Himalaya region in India. Important wetlands at Hanle, Nyoma, Chushul, Puga, Yaya Tso, and Chumur serve as significant habitats for the BNC within the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary of Ladakh.



Recently, the BNHS conducted an in-depth assessment of the impact of free-ranging dogs on BNCs and other endangered wildlife in the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary. As part of this investigation, the BNHS team carried out occupancy surveys of BNCs and identified several emerging threats across areas such as the Tsokar Basin, Yaya Tso, Puga, Tso Moriri, Hanle, Dungti, and Chushul. These threats include unregulated development near wetlands, increased tourism leading to camping, littering, excessive livestock grazing by nomads and local villagers, labourers camping near nesting sites, illegal quarrying, the development of a geothermal plant in BNC habitats, unplanned construction, and the predation of BNC eggs and chicks by free-ranging dogs. Many of these dogs, often found around army formations, cause extensive damage to BNC eggs and chicks, with a reported predation rate of approximately 71% in 2016. Most of these dogs rely on food provided by the military formations. ■

Asian Waterbird Census - 2024 Released in Bihar

The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2024 – Bihar State Bird Count Report and the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for AWC in Bihar were officially released by Dr Prem Kumar, Hon'ble Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department (DEC&CC), Government of Bihar, on October 5 and 8, 2024, respectively.

The AWC-2024 Report presents the results of the census conducted in Bihar. The state-wide AWC was initiated in 2022 by the DEF&CC, with technical support from BNHS, and involved voluntary citizen groups. It provides critical data on waterbird populations across 84 wetlands in 28 districts. This year, 285 volunteers from 19 teams participated in the AWC.

The SOP outlines the procedures followed during the AWC in Bihar. It details standardized protocols for bird monitoring, improving data accuracy and team coordination. Together, these initiatives underscore the importance of collaboration between government bodies, conservation organizations, and local communities in protecting Bihar's wetlands and the waterbird species that depend on them. ■



Screening of Saving the Indian Skimmer - A Conservation Story

On October 8, 2024, the eagerly awaited documentary 'Saving the Indian Skimmer' was screened virtually, drawing attention to one of India's endangered bird species. Filmed by Shekar Dattatri, the film highlights the Indian skimmer, a distinctive waterbird known for its unique feeding behaviour, whose population is rapidly declining due to habitat loss and degradation. Over 90 participants, including BNHS staff at the head office, attended the event online.

Set against the backdrop of the National Chambal Sanctuary, the documentary explores the multiple threats facing the Indian skimmer and emphasises the dedicated efforts of conservationists, forest officials, and local communities to protect these vulnerable birds. The film's stunning visuals of the Chambal River and Indian skimmers in action illustrate the significant impact that community-based conservation initiatives can achieve.

A key highlight of the film is the Guardians of Skimmer initiative, which engages local villagers in protecting nesting colonies. This programme not only aids in conservation, but also provides employment opportunities for marginalized communities, creating a model that balances both ecological and socio-economic benefits.

Following the screening, our scientist, Parveen Shaikh, led an insightful discussion, underscoring the need for sustained conservation efforts to ensure the survival of the Indian skimmer. The event reinforced the crucial role that ongoing, community-driven interventions play in safeguarding this remarkable species. ■



Monitoring the Great Indian Bustard and Habitat at Pokhran Field Firing Range

Following a particularly abundant monsoon, the great Indian bustard has successfully reared its young at the Pokhran Field Firing Range (PFFR), benefitting from the ample food resources produced by the favourable rains. The young birds are ready to take flight and over the next year and a half, mother bustards will focus on protecting her young from multiple threats and imparting vital survival skills. The bustards' instinctive migration in search of food will take them beyond the safety of the PFFR. Tracking this migration is challenging for the BNHS team, which monitors the birds across a patchwork of grasslands, farmlands, and fallow lands – once ideal habitats but now altered by the rise of the green energy sector, which



has encroached upon these critical areas. This development increases the risk posed by high-tension transmission lines and free-ranging dogs. On October 23, during a routine survey, BNHS team observed a group of bustards near their field station in Khetolai, highlighting the need for vigilant tracking to protect these endangered birds from growing threats. ■

Celebrating Forest Owlet Conservation Day

On October 24, 2024, the BNHS-EIACP team celebrated Forest Owlet Conservation Day with 130 students from Z.P. School in Mahuli village, Shahapur tehsil, Thane district, Maharashtra. The school, located near Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, is close to the site where the Forest Owlet was rediscovered in 2014. The celebration included a documentary screening on the Forest Owlet, followed by an engaging session on bird ecology and identification led by Programme Officer Mr Nandkishor Dudhe. The students eagerly participated in a Q&A session and received bird brochures and posters. The event was supported by Natasha Girkar, Information Officer, and Niraj Patel, IT Officer from BNHS-EIACP.

This initiative fostered a shared hope among participants that the Forest Owlet will continue to thrive in Tansa's forests. ■



Meeting with Karnataka State Wildlife Board Member



On October 5, Dr Sujit Narwade and the BNHS team in Bidar met with Mr Vinay Malige of the Karnataka State Wildlife Board to discuss grassland conservation in the region. Dr Narwade outlined the ecological importance and challenges facing these grasslands, including threats from free-ranging dogs, habitat degradation, and unsustainable farming practices. Mr Malige expressed his commitment to conservation and proposed strategic measures such as sustainable land use, enhanced community involvement, and the establishment of protected areas. ■

Participation in Bird Tourism Training Programme at Maguri Beel, Tinsukia, Assam



On October 18, BNHS participated in a bird guide training programme organized by the Nature Conservation Society (NCS) in Tinsukia, Assam, marking the programme's third year. Attended by participants from across Assam, the event included presentations by BNHS scientists Dr Sujit Narwade and Dr Biswajit Chakdar, who discussed birdwatching and the benefits of eco-friendly tourism. Mr Arindam Sinha, Senior Project Fellow, shared his experiences in the field with endangered species such as the great Indian bustard and lesser florican, emphasising the challenges of their conservation. BNHS and NCS also discussed plans to designate Maguri Beel as a wetland and biodiversity heritage site, aiming to support conservation and promote sustainable tourism that benefits local communities. ■

Investigation of Bird Mortality at Sambhar Lake

Following reports of waterbird fatalities at Sambhar Lake in Rajasthan, a BNHS team conducted an investigation. BNHS scientist Dr Sujit Narwade, stationed in Ajmer, joined Shri Sharda Pratap Singh, Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) in Ajmer, to assess the situation on-site. Dr Narwade shared insights from BNHS's response to a similar crisis, emphasising protocols developed during an avian botulism outbreak. He highlighted the importance



of understanding ecological factors and health risks related to such events to better guide conservation efforts, safeguard wildlife, and protect local ecosystems. ■

Bird Count at Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP)



On October 27, 2024, BNHS members and volunteers conducted a bird count at SGNP, recording an impressive 83 bird species. Notably, two species were documented for the first time at the park: the large-billed leaf warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris*, observed on the Phansacha Pani Transect by Ashwin Mohan, Hansel Pereira, and their team, and the tawny pipit *Anthus campestris*, documented on the Jambhulmaal Transect by Rahul Pereira and team. These findings underscore the ecological richness of SGNP and highlight the critical role of our members in biodiversity conservation. ■

Butterfly Walk at BNHS Reserve Promotes Conservation Awareness

On October 13, 2024, the BNHS held a Butterfly Walk at its Goregaon reserve, attracting members and butterfly enthusiasts alike. The event aimed to promote awareness of butterfly diversity and conservation, offering participants an immersive experience into the vibrant world of butterflies.

Guided by BNHS experts, attendees explored the reserve's varied habitats, including the Open-Air Butterfly Garden, where they learned to identify different butterfly species and observe their unique behaviours. Experts also highlighted the critical role butterflies play as pollinators in maintaining ecological balance.

During the walk, participants spotted numerous butterfly species, including the Common Jezebel, Blue Tiger, Plain Tiger, Blue Oak-Leaf, Malabar Spotted Flat, and Crimson Rose. In addition to identification, the BNHS team shared insights into butterfly lifecycles, habitat needs, and the importance of creating butterfly-friendly environments.

The event provided an engaging educational experience, helping participants develop a deeper appreciation for butterflies and their crucial role in supporting healthy ecosystems. ■



Butterfly Festival 2024

On October 19-20, 2024, CEC-Mumbai held a Butterfly Festival for members and others. The event featured activities for all ages, including butterfly trails, visits to the butterfly garden, and sessions on the butterfly life cycle. Participants, guided by BNHS staff, explored the butterfly garden and engaged in nature drawing and painting activities. A total of 88 participants enjoyed the festival, connecting with nature and learning about the life cycle of butterflies. ■



Field Visit of BNHS online courses

On October 5, 2024, CEC-Mumbai organized a field visit to the Bhandup Pumping Station for participants of the Leadership Course in Biodiversity Conservation and the Basic Course in Botany. Dr Rajdeo Singh, Assistant Professor of Botany at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, and Ms Kiran Thumma led the visit, where participants learned about mangrove habitats, plant morphology, and pollination mechanisms. Species observed included Nipa palm, *Excoecaria agallocha*, *Sonneratia caseolaris*, and *Avicennia*. The visit was attended by 11 participants. ■



Seminar Highlights Rodenticide Risks to Wildlife and Human Health

The recent seminar, Silent Killers! Are Rodenticides the Modern DDT? The Impact of Rodenticides on Native Wildlife and Human Health Across the Asia-Pacific, was held on October 30, 2024, at BNHS Hornbill House. With 33 attendees, including BNHS members and scientists, the event offered critical insights into the dangers posed by rodenticides.

Professor Raylene Cooke, Associate Professor Dr John White, and Dr Michael Weston (Wildlife and Conservation Biology)

from Deakin University's School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Australia, led the discussions. They explained how Australia's powerful owls naturally control rodent populations, underscoring the need to conserve natural predators. The team discussed expanding rodenticide research across the Asia-Pacific in partnership with the Bombay Natural History Society, emphasising the harmful effects of rodenticides on bird populations in India.

Dr P. Sathiyaselvam presented on the impact of pesticides on birds, offering insights into recent incidents, such as the mass mortality of demoiselle cranes in Khichan, Rajasthan. He highlighted the need for systematic research on pesticide impacts on wild birds and advocated for a centralised database to track and quantify these effects. The event underscored the urgent need for ongoing research and strategic partnerships to mitigate the risks posed by rodenticides in the region.

The Director, BNHS, expressed gratitude to the speakers and emphasised the importance of continued collaboration. ■



Remembering Uma Pratap Singh



With heavy hearts, we remember Mr Uma Pratap Singh, a dedicated former employee of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), who passed away peacefully on October 24th in his native village. Fondly known as Umaji, he served as a security officer at Hornbill House and remained a steadfast presence even after his retirement. For Umaji, BNHS was far more than a workplace; it was his home, a place where he found both purpose and deep connection.

Umaji's warmth and unwavering commitment made him an unforgettable figure within the BNHS family. He welcomed everyone who walked through the doors of Hornbill House with a smile and a genuine interest in their well-being. Colleagues, staff, regular visitors, scientists, and researchers alike felt his presence and support; over the years, he became much more than a security officer—he became a true friend to all.

His passing is a profound loss, not only to BNHS but also to everyone touched by his kindness and dedication. Umaji's exceptional service and loyalty will forever remain etched in our hearts, and he will always be remembered as a beloved member of the BNHS family.

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



BASIC COURSE IN FIELD ORNITHOLOGY AND BIRD MIGRATION STUDIES

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.

The Bombay Natural History Society (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 counts and marking for tracking bird movement. 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 | 91-89511 06860

Course Schedule:

2024

Batch V	: November 29 – December 1
Batch VI	: December 6 – 8
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

REGISTRATION DETAILS:

- Fee** : ₹ 6,000 (₹ 5,000 for existing BNHS members)
Includes tent accommodation (two people per tent) with cots, fans, charging points, pillows, and blankets
- Additional Expenses** : ₹ 4,000 (covers 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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