

HORNBILL

DISCOVER THE LIVING WORLD

JANUARY-MARCH, 2020



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

From the Editor's Desk...

First and foremost, I wish to extend warm greetings for a safe, healthy, and happy New Year. I hope that the year will bring good news for our wilderness too.

I hope you have had a chance to go through our latest e-newsletter *ecoScapes*, along with the abstracts of various research and conservation projects undertaken by BNHS presented during our Annual Research Seminar. The response to the e-newsletter has been overwhelming, and we have received some donations to continue our work on endangered species.

The last quarter has been very hectic for Team BNHS. Our “International Conference on Wetlands and Migratory Waterbirds of the Asian Flyways” received an overwhelming response, with 280 delegates including scientists, academics, conservationists, state forest officials, and decision makers from 18 countries participating to review the current status of migratory waterbirds and conservation issues related to the wetlands of the Asian flyways, with focus on the Central Asian Flyway. A resolution from the conference will be tabled at the upcoming 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) being hosted by India.

On the last day of the conference, BNHS presented the Sálim Ali International, National, and Community Nature Conservation Awards, and the newly initiated J.C. Daniel Conservation Leader Awards for Young Men and Women. Some of the keynote talks of the conference and the entire awards ceremony were live-streamed.

The New Year will witness another major event, CMS COP 13, hosted by the Government of India (GoI) in Gandhinagar from February 15–22, 2020. BNHS is assisting GoI not only in the preparations but will also contribute to the scientific documents related to the event. BNHS Senior Scientists Dr P. Sathiyaselvam and Dr Ramesh Kumar Selvaraj are currently deputed to MoEF&CC to assist in CMS COP preparations. BNHS is also assisting Government of Gujarat in the preparatory work, and Dr Dishant Parasharya and Dr Bhavik Patel are deputed for the same. BNHS has received an invitation to the COP High-Level Segment, where ministers of CMS range countries will discuss core issues of policies and conservation measures for migratory species.



BNHS's wetland and bird migration research is expanding by leaps and bounds under the leadership of Dr P. Sathiyaselvam and his team comprising Dr S. Sivakumar, Dr Ramesh Kumar Selvaraj, Dr Madhumita Panigrahi, Ms Tuhina Katti, and Mr Omkar Joshi with scientific advice by the legendary bird migration specialist Dr. S. Balachandran, Deputy Director, BNHS. We received a boost for this programme with major financial support from MoEF&CC. Under this grant, BNHS will be working across 17 states, 48 waterbird sites, and 31 landbird sites. Our first key objective is to develop site-specific actions related to conservation of migratory bird species and their habitats in Protected Area Plans (both Management and Working

plans) and also to formulate action plans for non-protected areas. The second key objective is to train 350 forest department staff in bird ringing and CAF related work; the third is to develop comprehensive bird sensitivity maps and GIS tools to guide in the setting up of wind farms and transmission lines; and the fourth is to develop a National Action Plan for 20 key migratory species.

Similarly, we have been assigned a major project by the Government of Maharashtra to develop a conservation blueprint for six key wetlands of Maharashtra specific to CAF. The Government of Bihar recently approached BNHS to develop a proposal to set up a conservation blueprint for the major wetlands of Bihar with specific focus on CAF. BNHS member Mr Manoj Mishra helped us develop the proposal, which is at an advanced stage of discussion. Soon BNHS is expected to start a regional center in Bihar with support from the Bihar State Government. Recently, the Jammu and Kashmir, Lakshadweep, and Andhra Pradesh governments approached us to assist them in bird monitoring and management plan work in Wular Lake, Pitti Island, and Kolleru Bird Sanctuary, respectively.

The last quarter also witnessed a tragedy unfolding at Sambhar Lake, with mortality of about 20,000 waterbirds due to avian botulism. BNHS assisted the Rajasthan Forest Department during the period. We ringed about 300 rescued birds, and released them into the wild. We will continue to monitor these birds.

Conservation breeding programme for the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) received a major boost recently and the GIB breeding centre in Rajasthan now hosts nine healthy chicks that hatched from eggs collected from the Thar Desert. BNHS continues to work in the desert landscape, especially in its community engagement programme under the able leadership of Dr Sujit Narwade, to save the Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard.

At the end, I wish to express my appreciation to Mr Anupam Koley for sharing his stunning image of Irrawaddy Dolphin from Chilika Lake for the cover of *Hornbill*. It is probably one of the finest images of the species that I have seen so far.

Deepak Apte



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COVER : Irrawaddy Dolphin

Anupam Koley

Published and printed quarterly
by the Honorary Secretary for the
Bombay Natural History Society,
Printed at Akshata Arts Pvt. Ltd.,
Lower Parel, Mumbai.

Reg. No. RN 35749/79, ISSN 0441-2370.

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Views expressed by the contributors in
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Wildlife hunting in bustard areas

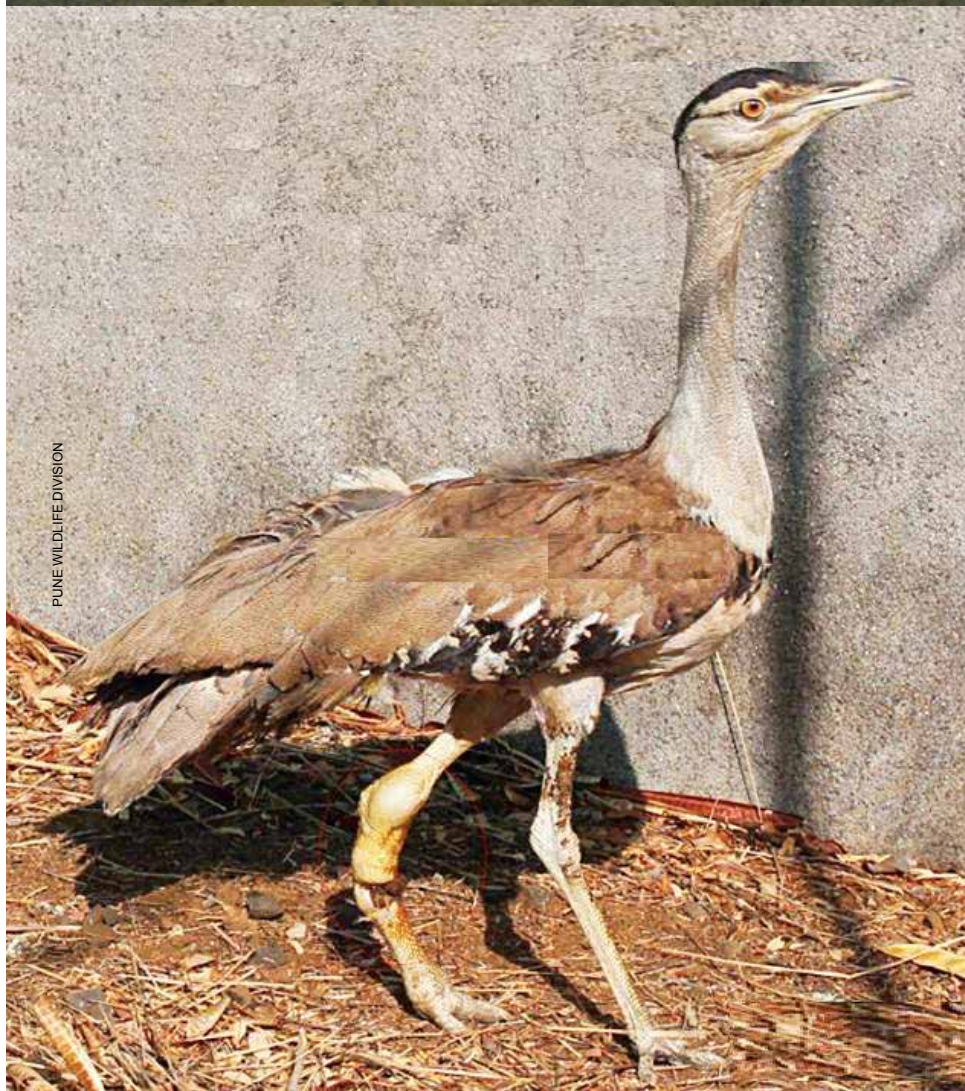
Text: **Sujit Narwade**

As a wildlife researcher, I have spent many hours in the field in various parts of India, especially in bustard areas collecting data on different species of birds and mammals — apart from my designated study species. In the course of my work, I have come across quite a few cases of poaching of wildlife, and here I narrate some of these.

Maharashtra



This photograph was taken 20 years ago, of forest department staff with a poacher nabbed with the carcass of a blackbuck. The current forest department staff of the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Solapur informed me that the poacher was charged under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. However, during the course of the case, the poacher's advocate argued that the accused was wrongfully charged for the crime as he belonged to the minority community of Phase Pardhis, who are traditional hunters. Because of the local politicians, nobody came forward as eyewitness and the poacher was pronounced not guilty and freed! Not long after this, Manohar Adgale, one of the forest personnel who had caught the poacher, was murdered, most probably as revenge. The acquittal of the poacher and the killing of the forest department personnel demoralized the forest staff.



An individual of the Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard was found dead in January 2006 near Mardi village in the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Solapur. The bird had a leg injury. The specimen is now in the BNHS Collection. Another similarly injured bird was found in the same area and brought to the office of the forest department in February 2012, treated and kept in care for one and a half months, but it died. Though the cause of the injury was unknown, both birds had similar leg injuries. The birds could have got caught in nooses laid for Blackbuck by Pardhis, or maybe injured as a result of collision with power lines, which in most cases is fatal for the birds.

On May 15, 2007, I came across a few persons putting out nets for Black-naped Hare on passage to a waterbody in Masla village, Tuljapur tehsil, Osmanabad district. They informed me that they occasionally hunted the hare for “fun” and were not traditional hunters. When I told them of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, under which hunters can face prosecution, they laughed and told me that hunting hare, blackbuck, partridge, and quail is a common practice. They removed the trap only after I explained to them the protected status of wildlife, and from fear of the legal action that might follow if I filed a complaint against them.



SUJIT NARMADE



NATURE CONSERVATION CIRCLE, SOLAPUR

On March 21, 2009, volunteers of Nature Conservation Circle, Solapur (NCCS), accompanied by the local police and forest department, found a few people feasting on cooked wild meat near Boramani village, 15 km along the Solapur-Hyderabad road. All the guns, ammunition, meat, and Blackbuck horns were seized. There were also ice packs full of meat, samples of which were sent to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad for DNA analysis. The meat was identified as that of blackbuck. The vehicle used was seized. A case was filed in the Sessions Court, and more than 10 years have lapsed. Similar case was also reported from Latur area in 2016, in which police played a crucial role, with prompt action.



DHANANJAY GUTTE

Karnataka- Maharashtra border



SUJIT NARWADE



ARAVIND KUMBAR

While travelling towards Karnataka in April 2010, Dr Arvind Kumbar from Akluj, Solapur, came across evidence of hunting of painted stork at a lake near Donaj village, Mangalvedha tehsil, Solapur district. He witnessed a couple of dogs eating the body parts of the species, and this issue was raised through local newspapers, especially in the Solapur edition of *Sanchar* and later in *Maharashtra Times*, which helped in creating awareness and control on hunting in the area.

On June 24, 2011, while conducting a survey around dusk, assisted by Bhagavat Mhaske, Forest Guard, Nannaj, we saw a Phase Pardhi tribal laying a noose trap for Blackbuck at Narotewadi on the boundary of Nannaj Bustard Area. Concealing our identity, we began talking to him and gathered that more people would be coming at the night to feast on the catch. According to him, these large nylon nooses are not available locally and are purchased from fishermen of Ujani backwaters, about 150 km from Nannaj. We seized the trap, and let him go, with a strong warning to him not to engage in such activities in future.



SUJIT NARWADE



On January 21, 2012, with the help of BNHS staff, I rescued a Black-headed Ibis (or Red-naped Ibis) caught in a noose trap laid in Hotgi lake, 4 km south of Solapur. Piles of heron and egret feathers seen at the same spot were evidence of continuous hunting pressure on the wetland birds in the lake. On contacting the forest department

and after frequent follow-ups, the culprits were punished. During our next visit to the lake in February 2012, a few persons approached my colleague, Mr Sameer Bajar, Mammalogist, BNHS, and threatened to kill him as revenge for reporting on them for hunting birds. Fortunately, the gang ran away on the arrival of our team members.



On June 15, 2012, during a survey of painted stork, I found a few people skinning a carcass on the edge of Donaj lake, Mangalvedha, Solapur. From a photograph taken from a distance of 200 m, I identified the animal as a Black-naped Hare, but before I could reach the spot from across the lake, the poachers escaped.



SLUIT NARWADE

On May 27, 2015, near Achegao, Solapur, a tribal woman was seen carrying shells of turtles, which had been eaten two days earlier.



SLUIT NARWADE

While conducting field surveys in Akola-Washim district on October 23, 2016, we landed in a tribal area near village Vadala, where a pangolin was being boiled up to loosen the scales, which local people believe has medicinal value!



On March 05, 2015, a man was seen carrying live birds in a bag at Hipparga lake, Solapur. After enquiring, the bag was opened and the bird turned out to be the Ruddy Shelduck which was released by us.

Andhra Pradesh

On November 22, 2018, while I was travelling to Rollapadu WLS, a person was seen selling a roasted mongoose in banana leaves, which indicated no knowledge or fear of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.



Thar Desert, Rajasthan



Hunting is prevalent in large expanses of the Thar desert, especially in winter, where the forest department seized some individuals of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and nabbed the poachers. Injured birds were sent to a rescue centre and the carcasses were burnt. In March 2019, a joint operation was led by Mr Kamlesh Bishnoi, Forest Guard, Desert National Park (DNP) with the help of Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) which nabbed the poachers, and made a strong case leading to punishment of the culprits. This also led to reduction in poaching of the Spiny-tailed Lizard in Great Indian Bustard areas of Pokhran, Jaisalmer.

Ajmer, Rajasthan



Releasing a Monitor Lizard captured by locals at the outskirts of Ramsar village, a Lesser Florican site, near Nasirabad, on December 07, 2019.

Though I have cited only a few examples of poaching of wildlife in the GIB and Lesser Florican, there are likely many cases that go unnoticed or unreported, as narrated in the article. Unless culprits are given strong punishment according to the law, this killing will not stop. The Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act is a strong and all-encompassing piece of legislation, but its implementation has been far from satisfactory. Education and awareness, sensitization of locals as well as officialdom towards the wildlife laws of the land, and coordination between agencies like NGOs, forest departments, police, forensic labs, etc. will help create evidence-based cases strong enough to clear the wildlife crime. ✖



Sujit Narwade, Project Scientist, BNHS, executes projects relating to conservation of bustards and floricans. He also helps Forest Departments to execute conservation plans.