



Young birder finds 57 birds color marked by BNHS in one day

Birds are color tagged to study migratory patterns

Mumbai: 27th May: Bird watching is not only an engaging and knowledge-oriented hobby but it is also equally fascinating and full of wonders. We have been receiving sightings of ringed birds from several of BNHS members as well as photographers. Recently however, a young bird watcher Mr. Vedant Kasambe felt this exhilarating sense of achievement when he recorded 57 birds with colored bands and rings during his birding excursion in the wetlands of Navi Mumbai in a single day. There were alpha-numeric codes on these bands. These tagged bird sightings were meticulously tabulated by Vedant, a student member and volunteer with BNHS, and sent to BNHS.

The method of marking individual birds with bands or color tags to study migration patterns dates back to a century. The most convenient method is bird ringing in which a bird is captured and a metal ring engraved with a unique serial number is fixed on the leg of the bird, which allows for easy identification later.

When a bird with a tag is later recovered, it helps to establish a connection between two distant sites the bird visited. It also helps provide information on the life span and movement tendency of the bird. Following this method, BNHS has been able to establish connectivity for birds ringed in India through 3000 recoveries with sites in 29 countries spanning five continents. In addition to ringing, BNHS has adopted the more recent methods of banding birds with color bands, color flags and neck-collars following international protocols.

The sighting records of color tagged birds reported by ornithologists and photographers have yielded interesting results on movement of waterbirds and established links between migratory birds wintering in India. In the past year, 37 color tag sighting records sent by birdwatchers from wetlands near Jamnagar have shed light on the seasonality of movement of migratory birds. Additionally, two Greater Flamingos color banded in Khijadiya, Gujarat, were recorded dispersing to other sites in the following season, presumably owing to the drought conditions at the tagging site. One of these individuals was recorded in Bikaner (Rajasthan) and another in a wetland in Mumbai.

Along with substantial ringing recovery records for Chilika Lake, Odisha and Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu, shorebirds color flagged at these sites were recorded in coastal wetlands in China and South Korea during their return migration journey. Similar studies in Pong Dam, Himachal Pradesh and Chilika Lake geese fitted with neck collars gave interesting records of changing wintering grounds and connectivity with their breeding grounds in China and Mongolia.

During the migratory season of 2018-19 extensive efforts were made by the BNHS Team in color tagging shorebirds in the wetlands around Mumbai. So far, the team has successfully tagged 3906 waders and 39 flamingos between August 2018 to May 2019. Owing to these efforts, what is normally a rare event, sighting of a tagged bird is now becoming more common and easy.

Deepak Apte, Director – BNHS noted, “the compilations of multiple bird sightings provide great insights into the population dynamics and seasonality of movement of migratory birds. This information provides valuable piece of scientific evidence in developing conservation strategy for these sites. Getting wetland areas in Navi Mumbai and Uran region such as Panje, NRI, TSC, Belpada, Bhendkhal and Bhandup Pumping Station recognized as globally significant sites under Central Asian Flyway was possible only because of such extensive studies.”

Such data is being collected and compiled at BNHS since many years under its efforts for studying birds and their migration. BNHS hereby appeals all bird watchers to send us the data of their encounters with tagged birds by capturing an image or recording the tag number. This information can be sent to us through email on bands@bnhs.org, as well as any queries regarding tagging can be addressed on this email address. To ease the data gathering and in view of making it more accessible to bird watchers, BNHS plans to develop a user-friendly android application for collecting this data.

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