



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



APRIL, 2024

CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Dear Members,

We bring to you, our valuable members, the latest conservation newsletter of the BNHS, which is packed with updates from our field work, and the events we conduct for nature conservation.

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

BNHS GOVERNING COUNCIL 2024-2028



Dr Bharat Bhushan
Hon. Secretary, BNHS

BNHS has elected six new members onto its existing Governing Council – Dr Bharat Bhushan, Mr Dinesh Kothari, Mr Debi Goenka, Mr Kumaran Sathasivam, Dr Praveen Kumar Vashishta and Mr Peter Lobo – have been elected as members of the BNHS Governing Council for the 2024–28 term. They replace the six retiring members who completed their term. The Council has elected Dr Bharat Bhushan as Honorary Secretary and Mr Dinesh Kothari as Honorary Treasurer for this period. Also, the GC nominated Mr Arvind Mishra as a member of the Council and Ms Aditi Kothari Desai and Ms Sangita Jindal as Vice Presidents. We warmly welcome the newly elected members to the BNHS.



Mr Dinesh Kothari
Hon. Treasurer, BNHS

BNHS – Science Safari

The first edition of BNHS – Science Safari, in collaboration with Sparkle-Science, held on April 20–21, was a huge success, drawing both children and their parents. Themed around Earth Day, the overnight children’s camp featured a series of engaging activities centred on understanding the geological processes that have shaped Earth’s history and led to extinctions. The camp was packed with hands-on experiences, covering a range of subjects including chemistry, physics, biology, geology, astronomy, natural history, palaeontology, and creativity, all of which the children enthusiastically participated in.

The children built their own space vehicles and attempted to launch them using various methods, constructed their own telescopes, observed and analysed different types of plant and animal fossils, tried their hand at excavation during a mock ‘fossil dig,’ went on multiple nature trails to understand the

geological history of Mumbai, and spent a significant amount of time observing various celestial objects through high-powered telescopes.

The efforts of the BNHS team and Sparkle-Science were highly appreciated by the young participants and their parents, who also took part in the activities with their children. We look forward to returning with another exciting and activity-packed edition of BNHS - Science Safari soon. ■



BNHS submits report on Sarus Crane study to the High Court



BNHS has submitted its report on the preliminary observations of the Sarus Crane study to the Nagpur bench of the Hon'ble Bombay High Court (HC). The HC had previously ordered the Government of Maharashtra to engage BNHS in conducting the study in Gondia, Bhandara, and Chandrapur districts of the eastern Vidarbha landscape on Sarus Crane conservation.

The BNHS team, including Director Mr Kishor Rithe, Deputy Director Dr P. Sathiyaselvem, Conservation Breeding Specialist Dr Kazveen Umrigar, Assistant Education Officer Saurabh Dande, and Field Biologist Bharath, recently visited approximately 25 wetlands in Chandrapur, Bhandara, and Gondia districts to gather field observations. They also held several meetings with District Collectors and Forest Officers to discuss the conservation strategy based on their observations over the past six months.

During these meetings, the BNHS team discussed the process of issuing notifications for wetlands in these districts, as per the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules of 2017 issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), along with the Guidelines of 2020.

Meetings were held with Shri Vinay Gowda G C (IAS) District Collector Chandrapur, and Dr Jitendra Ramgaonkar CCF Chandrapur, Mr Prashant Khade DFO Chandrapur, Prashant Pisal Deputy CEO Zilla Parishad, and Mr Bandu Dhotre EcoPRO President in Chandrapur. The team also discussed the report from the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) from 2016, titled "Wetlands in the Forest areas of Maharashtra," which was submitted to the Forest Department, Government of Maharashtra. They also discussed the wetlands mentioned in the National Wetland Atlas, along with the reasons for the disappearance of Sarus Cranes from Chandrapur district. The last Sarus was recorded on Junona Lake in Chandrapur district in 2019. The solitary bird, after the death of a female, was also known to visit Manora Lake. Therefore, the BNHS team visited both lakes.

Additionally, the BNHS team conducted a meeting with Mr Rahul Gawai Deputy CF Bhandara, Mr Saket Shinde ACF,



Mr Shahid Khan of Save Ecosystem and Tiger (SEAT), and Mr Rajkamal Job, an eco-restoration expert, and Mr Mukund Dhurve Field Assistant BNHS, to discuss the research plan and conservation strategy in Bhandara District.

Mr Rajkamal Job had previously assisted the Forest Department in carrying out eco-restoration operations at Bhivkhidki Lake of Keslapuri village (Adyal range) and Bhondki Talab (Tumsar range) with support from the Maharashtra State Biodiversity Board (MSBB). It was decided to use the same methodology to restore wetlands in all three districts. Several issues related to water availability were discussed.

Finally, the team conducted a meeting with Mr Pramod Panchbhai DFO (T) Gondia, Mr Jayarame Gowda Field Director of Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR), and Mr Sawan Bahekar President of Sustaining Environment and Wildlife Assemblage (SEWA) at Gondia to share the preliminary findings of the study report. After the field visit, BNHS communicated some urgent actions required, along with recommendations, to all three district collectors and Forest Officers. ■

Fifteen rescued Himalayan Vultures released in Kamrup



A significant milestone in vulture conservation was reached with the successful release of 15 Himalayan Vultures, a result of joint efforts by the Assam Forest Department and the BNHS. Rescued between March and April 2024, these vultures received meticulous care and rehabilitation at the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Belguri, Assam. These vultures are expected to begin their journey home in a few days, as they are migratory birds.

Before their release on April 29, 2024, each vulture underwent thorough health assessments by VCBC’s veterinarians. The transfer to the release site was executed precisely, using transportation boxes,

and supervised by a team of veterinarians, biologists, and forest department representatives.

The release of the vultures was attended by officials, including Ms Dimpi Bora IFS, DFO Kamrup West, and Range Forest Officers (RFOs) – Mr Dipan Deka from Kulsi and Ms Shamim Aktar AFS from Loharghat – highlighting the collaborative effort behind vulture preservation.

This event demonstrated a concrete commitment to safeguarding these invaluable avian species. Discussions during the release focused on future initiatives and methods to further vulture conservation efforts in the region, setting the stage for ongoing progress in this critical endeavour. ■

Vulture identification workshops organised in Pench TR, Maharashtra

BNHS, in collaboration with the Pench Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra, conducted four workshops on vulture identification for the frontline staff of all the ranges of the tiger reserve: East Pench, Paoni, Deolapar, Chorbahuli, West Pench, Nagalwadi, and Saleghat. The activity was carried out prior to the vulture surveys initiated by the Reserve’s management in May 2024, with technical support from BNHS.

During the capacity-building activity, participating staff were sensitized about the importance of vultures and the need for their conservation. They were then taught in detail how to identify the different vulture species recorded in Maharashtra, along with tips on identifying nesting sites. Lastly, the staff were engaged in picture quizzes to sharpen their identification skills and enhance their knowledge. ■



The Pink Tide: BNHS bids farewell to the Flamingos



On May 06, 2024, BNHS conducted its final Flamingo Walk for this season at the wetlands near TS Chanakya Maritime Institute, Navi Mumbai. The flamingos will soon depart for their breeding grounds in Kutch, only to return in the next season.

The 18 participating members began their journey near the service road and circled the pond, observing various bird species. They were guided by Asif N. Khan, Associate Officer of the Programme Department, with assistance from passionate young birders Vaibhav Haldipur and Hrishikesh Ghogare. In addition to flamingos, participants had the opportunity to see several waders in their breeding plumage, such as the curlew sandpiper, broad-billed sandpiper, Temminck's and little stints, yellow-eyed babbler, red avadavat, and even a small flock of lesser whistling-duck.

The walk was not just about observation; it also aimed to impart valuable insights into bird conservation and the critical



role wetlands play in maintaining ecosystem balance. This experience served as an important reminder of our shared responsibility to protect and preserve the natural world for future generations.

For more information about upcoming nature walks by BNHS, please visit www.bnhs.org. ■

Celebrating International Mother Earth Day

On the occasion of International Mother Earth Day, New Acropolis Mumbai and BNHS jointly organised an event Many Seeds, One Garden: Learning from Sacred Groves of India. Renowned environmentalist, historian, and author Dr Nanditha Krishna, along with Philosopher and Director of New Acropolis India, Yaron Barzilay, spoke about age-old tradition



of environmental conservation rooted in indigenous knowledge, culture, and religious practices, highlighting the hidden wisdom nature offers to humanity.

Sacred groves, besides being repositories of rich biodiversity that harbour many rare species, serve as living examples of the strong symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature. Perhaps by reviving our connection with Mother Nature, we can learn to revive and deepen our connection with ourselves. ■



Tree Walk at Marine Drive

The BNHS, has been conducting tree walks at iconic locations around Mumbai to promote environmental awareness and appreciation for Mumbai’s rich floral diversity.

The Tree Walk at Marine Drive was led by Dr Rajdeo Singh, Assistant Professor at St. Xavier’s College, on April 7. The Art Deco style of architecture that lines Marine Drive, now a UNESCO world heritage property, provided a perfect backdrop to learn about the trees in the area. Participants were introduced to different tree species, their unique characteristics, ecological and historical significance, life cycles, adaptation to the local climate, and their role in the urban ecosystem. They were intrigued to learn about trees like the samudra-phal, tamanu (undi), breadfruit, and fig trees like banyan and peepal, and their significance in Indian culture. ■

Tree Walk at Joseph Baptista Garden, Mazgaon Hill

The tree walk on April 21 at the Joseph Baptista Garden on Mazgaon Hill in South Mumbai, led by Dr Rajdeo Singh, Assistant Professor at St. Xavier’s College and Mr Asif Khan from BNHS, was attended by 12 participants.

The garden, known for its tranquil ambience and historical significance, provided an ideal setting for the walk. During the tree walk, BNHS members were introduced to a fascinating array of tree species, both indigenous and exotic to the region. From towering rain trees to elegant palms and flowering beauties, each tree was a testament to the resilience of nature within Mumbai’s bustling landscape.

The tree walk also served as a platform for discussions on the importance of urban green spaces and the role trees play in mitigating environmental challenges such as air pollution and

climate change. BNHS members gained valuable insights into tree identification, ecological significance, and conservation strategies.

Mazgaon Hill, a landmark steeped in history, has been a witness to Mumbai’s transformation over centuries. Originally known as Mazagon, this hill was a strategic location for the British East India Company, offering commanding views of the harbour. The garden was later rechristened Joseph Baptista Garden, after the prominent Goan freedom fighter. The garden’s collection of trees reflects a blend of native species and exotic introductions, showcasing Mumbai’s botanical diversity. Trees like the Cannonball Tree, Jackfruit, and Branching Palm were just a few that were spotted during the walk.

We are delighted with the response to our Tree Walks and look forward to organizing more such events in the future. ■

For more information about upcoming events by BNHS, please visit www.bnhs.org.

Flamingo deaths due to transmission line in Karnataka



Mortalities of flamingos were reported at Ankasamudra Conservation Reserve near Vijaynagar in Karnataka due to collisions/electrocution with a transmission line. The BNHS reported the incident to the Forest Department, and the Chief Wildlife Warden took cognizance of this tragic event, ordering a post-mortem examination. ■

Golden jackal found dead in Kharghar



Courtesy: Lokmat

A golden jackal found dead in Kharghar intertidal wetland area: While the cause of death is still unknown, the unchecked destruction of mangroves and wetlands in Navi Mumbai raises questions about the potential impact of human activities on local wildlife. ■

Flamingo found dead in Navi Mumbai



Flamingo found dead after an accident: A group of flamingos walking along Palm Beach Road in Navi Mumbai during the early morning hours were hit by a cab. This unusual event has sparked concerns and calls for an investigation to determine why the flamingos strayed from their natural habitat in the wetlands. ■

Hornbill House gets a facelift



The museum at Hornbill House is receiving renovations, including fixing leaks and providing experiential learning to visitors. ■

Habitat of snow leopard and free-ranging dogs overlap in Ladakh



The BNHS team in Ladakh is monitoring endangered wild animals in Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary. They have found that snow leopard habitats overlap with those of free-ranging dogs, which is a serious threat to Ladakh's flagship species. The team is currently conducting further investigations into the activity patterns of these animals ■

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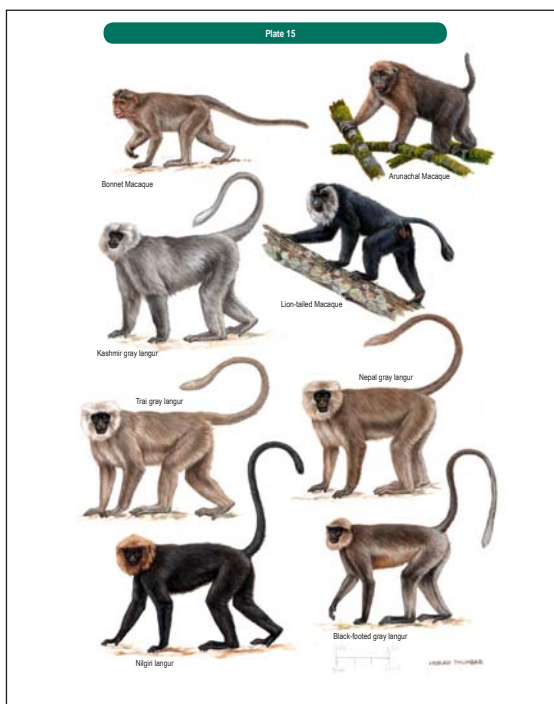
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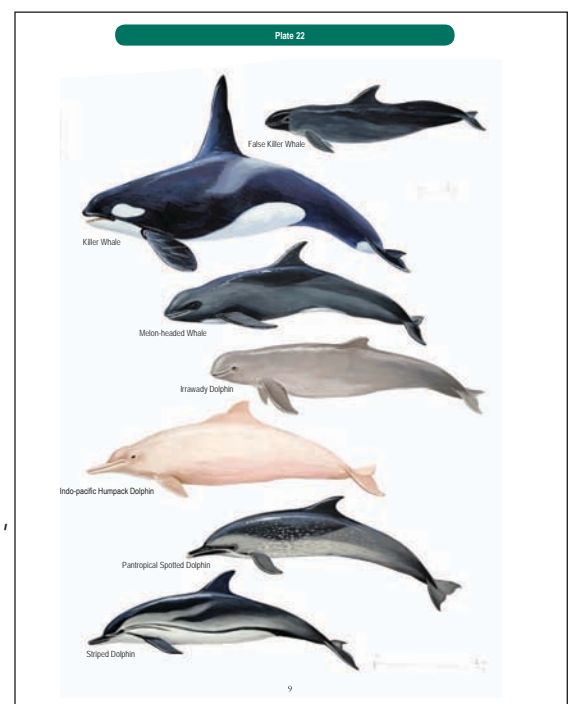
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