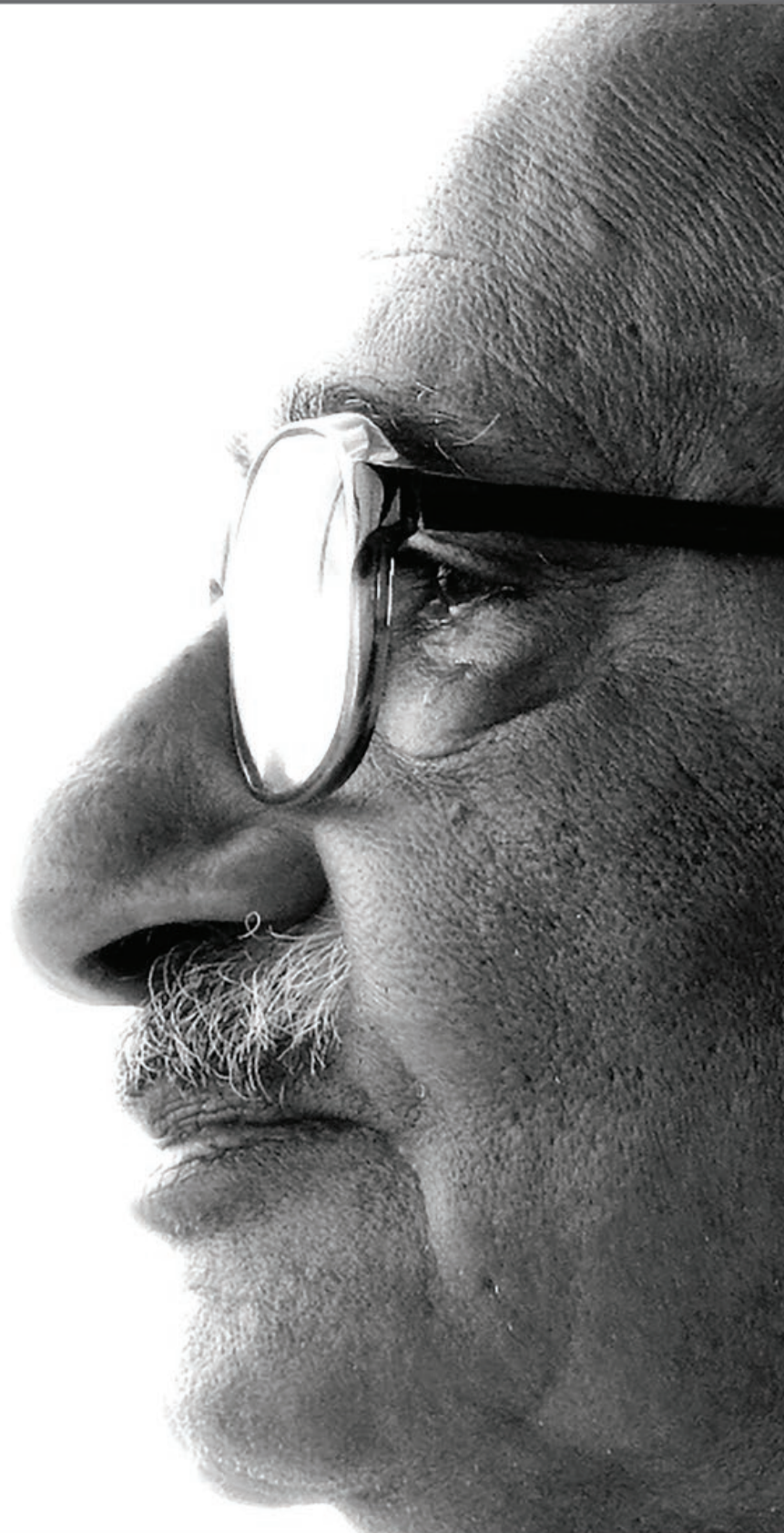
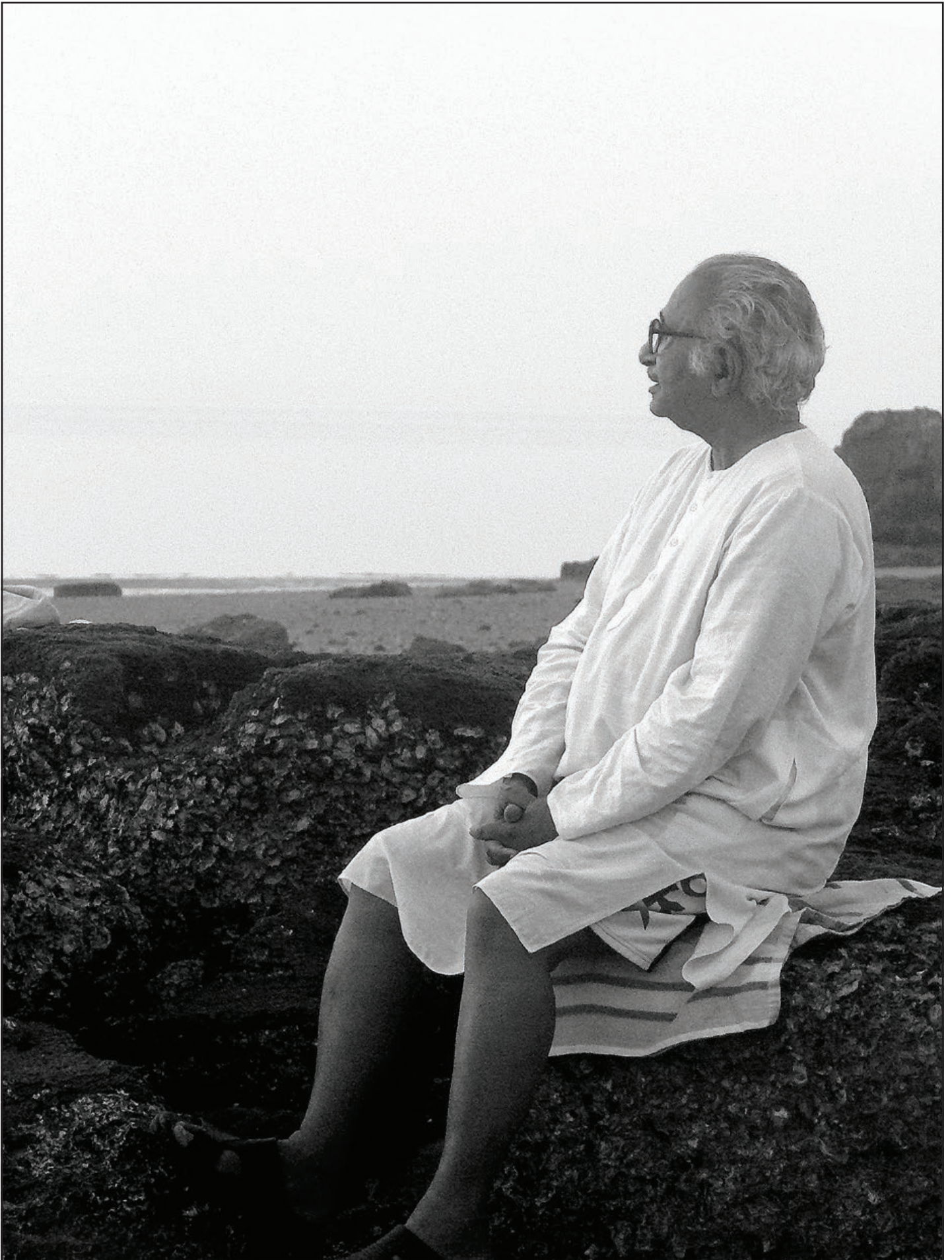


Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat

"How immensely reassuring
as I walk under the trees
listening to the birds
and letting my eyes rise
to the now glowing
snowpeaks
high
in a
cerulean
blue sky
that all
this
loveliness
and
my ability
to comprehend
it is because of
the presence of God!"





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Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) was founded in 2000 with the objective of conservation of birds of the State through field research, documentation, training, awareness activities, networking with like-minded NGOs; and lobbying for protection of birds and their habitats. It is the only statewide network of bird-watchers, ornithologists and conservationists of Gujarat striving to achieve the above goal.

BCSG brings out a quarterly newsletter – 'Flamingo'. Articles, notes on bird-life of Gujarat, interesting bird sightings, knowledge about important bird areas, information / appeal regarding conservation issues, reports on society's events and activities are published in 'Flamingo'. For publication of articles/notes in the Flamingo, both the common English and scientific names must be given when a bird species is mentioned for the first time and later references, common English name only. Common English and scientific names should follow Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp (2011), Birds of Indian Subcontinent, Second edition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi. If the nomenclature is adopted from other source, full reference should be given.

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Editorial....

Dear Readers,

It is a privilege to place before you our newsletter 'Flamingo' in its new avatar. It is probably apt that it arrives in your hands at a juncture when the 'nature lover' within all of us has been deprived of the fatherly presence and warmth of Shri Lavkumar Khachar - a man of great vision, ideas, words and action concerning nature conservation.

A born naturalist, he evolved to be even stronger as one does with time, due to his intimate interaction with nature's elements which surrounded him and his invaluable touch through nature education to everyone who happened to traverse through his aura.

On behalf of all the members of the BCSG, I pay tribute to the stalwart whose loss can only be compensated by our unceasing care and concern for nature and myriads of her manifestations. I also dedicate this revival-issue of our newsletter to this legendary figure and wish that we continue his legacy while we work together to strengthen bird conservation in Gujarat.

I am happy that Pranav Trivedi, who is very fortunate to have spent many years under his influence, as he himself grew into a fine nature educator has through his article for this issue aptly portrayed 'Lavkumar Sir' and his invaluable contribution.

I also acknowledge Shri Kishor Kadiwar, who happened to be his student at Rajkumar College, Rajkot for allowing me to use pictures of some of the exhibits and archival artifacts, he had fondly photographed earlier.

And last but not the least my heartiest gratitude for Shri Samir Shukla and Shri Manoj Dholakia of Pugmark Qmulus Consortium, who have assured to help me, fulfill my dream of a well-conceived newsletter of our Society, for as long as possible.

Following the sequence of volumes previous issues of flamingo were labeled as (1st Vol. in 2003), this issue will be considered as Vol. XIII and a combined 1-2 for the first two quarters of the year. The unpublished missing issues will be incorporated into a single integrated issue which will be published later in the year.

Bakul Trivedi, M.S.

Contemplating Life

"I for one visualize tremendous advantages accruing to mankind once we enter a partnership with Nature." - Lavkumar Khachar

MANBY.
29th May 2002.
Vaishikta.
HP 195103.

CONTEMPLATING LIFE. The Awakening To A New Day.
At 4.30 am there is plenty of light. Only the ^{gentlest} lightest of breezes blow down the slopes — a perfect day for a start of a new day! It needed some will power to throw aside the bed clothes and go for the morning shower. Every one else was indoors and possibly still asleep, but all around there was birdsong: the dawn chorus. I stepped out of the house and strolled into the orchard breathing in drafts of clear cool air. The whole body was charged with freshness. To some extent I felt the vibrancy that makes the birds sing so loud and clearly proclaiming their presence to the world at large or so it seemed to my human way of thinking. To a poetic mind, here were great singers in "jugalbandhi" in chorus proclaiming the advent of dawn whose rosy glow had started touching the highest mountain tops. The bioscientist would tell you that the birds are singing to proclaim territorial ownership and under great stress to procure a mate to cohabit with. A pious soul would tell me that the birds are thanking the Creator for the passage of darkness and the promise of a new day. To me, who have been contemplating death over the month, the avian exuberance is celebrating life. There certainly was no nagging fear of death and how could there be, since the dangers of darkness are all crawling into crevasses and deep holes while those of day are still not quite awake. This is the brief period the most brightly hued bird is not clearly visible and so can perch on vantage points in total safety. Before human beings ^{joyous} destroyed the forests and badly fragmented habitats, this great upwelling chorus must have preceded the Sun from East to West — in the Himalaya the first thrush to sing would be in some forested gorge of Annapurna, its call awakening the next thrush to the west and so on till those of Kashmir finally heard the call to rise and sing! Temple bells and the Mullah's call to prayer

-2 are human responses. Responses set into motion by the rotation of the Earth, the time varying with the seasons as the planet revolves the Sun ~~these~~ ^{that} pours limitless radiance to power life on Earth. Light and life are the same thing for there is darkness in the absence of light as there is death in the absence of life and life is, as we now understand, is the biological manifestation of light. What great insight in the powerfully assertive words of Krishna when he tells Arjuna that perfection, beauty, ^{or} and energy where ever present ^{are} possible ~~bec~~ due to a miniscule presence of Divine radiance! How immensely reassuring as I walk under the trees listening to the birds and letting my eyes rise to the now glowing snowpeaks high in a cerulean blue sky that all this loveliness and my ability to comprehend it is because of the presence of God! Might not prayer ~~then~~ be to live life vigorously? Vibrantly? // Since vibrancy results from metabolic dynamics, how else can this be generated without exposing the body willingly to the very forces that, in the first instance, generated the perfections? Can it be argued that metabolic functions can be maintained at their highest efficiencies without the environments in which they evolved? Concerns then, for pollution and degraded ^{habitats} ~~env~~ are not figments of idealistic minds, they should underscore every programme aiming for social upliftment. Perhaps, the time has come when our species should consciously embrace the very forces against which we "struggled" to survive. That would be our final attainment as a living organisms and prove to be what evolution ^{has been} ~~was~~ all about. The thought is exciting to the extreme. For one visualise tremendous advantages accruing to mankind once we enter a partnership with Nature. The first step in this direction is to internalise the disciplines which we have so far been resisting.

Lakshman

Memoirs of a Mentor: Lavkumar Khachar

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It was the winter of 1985 when as a 15-yr boy, I was standing in front of that legendary figure, who very casually told the three of us (two of my friends & me) to spend the night out in the forest alone and then see him in the morning! Before we could recover from the shock of this preposition, he spotted a flock of white birds flying at a distance and asked us a simple question: "what are those birds – flying there?" To this we replied "Cattle Egrets" in unison. As the birds approached closer, they turned out to be Little Egrets to our horror! He said with a chuckle, even the great Dr. Salim Ali used to say, "Perhaps, it could be Little Egret!" That was my first lesson in field ornithology in Dangs forests, which has remained with me till today and reduced the embarrassment that can arise on account of an impatient misidentification of bird species. Needless to say the legend was Lavkumar Khachar and I was in awe of him from day one.

On 12th February, 2015 when I met him for the last time at his residence in Rajkot, it struck me that our acquaintance was of 30 years. As I waited patiently, my eyes caught a glimpse of his article on why the Gir Lions should not be sent to Madhya Pradesh. When he finally arrived in a wheelchair, he talked conservation in a feeble yet affectionate voice. And I am sure if we met again I would have something new to learn from him. His slogan "Back to Nature" is a simple yet vital reminder for humanity to return to its roots.

Lavkumar 'Sir' – as all of us fondly called him may be considered the father of nature education movement in India. He believed that one's physical and mental fitness defines his/her relationship with Nature. Apart from reducing our burden on resources he believed a healthy and fit person can experience Nature in all its elements. He wanted each individual to go through the experience of challenging situations in Nature to help him/her transcend the subconscious fear of wilderness. Those who followed this ideology of his are till date indebted to him for this invaluable contribution to their lives. His own programme of nature education (Back to Nature), which started from exposure trips conducted for the students of Rajkumar College, Rajkot (RKC) in 1960s and later supported by WWF-India was one of its kind. It had five modules starting from Hingolghadh and moving to Little Rann of Kachchh, Pirotan island (for some time

Ajad island), Gir forest and ultimately Manali. These modules introduced the youngsters in the age group of 10 to 20 years to the wonders and vagaries of nature in all the major ecosystems of the State (i.e. desert, thorn-scrub, sea & forest) as well as to the grandest of all – the mighty Himalaya! Little wonder, they returned stronger, calmer and excited about being in Nature. Many turned into volunteers too and handled camp activities. He believed that volunteers should lead by example, being physically fit, value-driven and of sound character. All the volunteers who worked with me during 1993 to 2005 gained tremendously when he was present at the camp-site – not just by knowledge, but in terms of becoming stronger physically and mentally. This is put by him very elegantly and clearly in the 'Foreword' that he wrote for my book "Walking on the Green Path" which was a companion for volunteers who got trained with me for nature camps through a series of workshops and camps – "While it has been my experience that once a seemingly frightening exposure has been lived through, a remarkable change occurs in the child's personality... Any individual wanting to introduce others and particularly children to the joys of Nature should do so only after undergoing a very serious effort of going through a personal cleansing of the generations of fears as otherwise these will continue to be propagated. The cause of wildlife and wilderness conservation cannot be carried forward by individuals imbued by subconscious fears. The team of young people for whom this



"Mankind is no longer preoccupied with biological limits, we now are generating pressures totally outside biological needs."

book is prepared have been exposed to the “terrors of Nature” in the earlier WWF-India nature camps and as such writing this brief letter is a fulfillment of what I had been privileged to initiate in 1976 with WWF-India’s youth movement....”

I was amazed at the accuracy of his predictions about rainfall and one day asked him how he managed this. His answer with a mischievous smile was “You just need to observe clouds regularly for about 30 years!” Some of the best geography lessons I ever learnt were through his talks and discussions. His lecture on “how difficult it is for youngsters to die!” was my favourite and I made sure he gave it once to each batch in my nature education camps. Many conditioned ideas, fears and wrong notions of students were broken and dissolved in this talk.

He worked ceaselessly to safeguard and restore the natural habitats for wildlife and for future generations of India’s children. The challenging journeys afoot to Mt. Kailash and Lake Mansarovar with Gurdial Singh in 1954 and ascent to the Nandadevi basin in 1977, at a time when no Indian naturalist had attempted such adventures before spoke of his role as ambassador for wilderness protection. He wrote accounts of both these journeys in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (JBNHS) and the Himalayan Journal respectively. The latter led to the creation of the first Himalayan National Park – the Nandadevi National Park. He also had other firsts to his credit with respect to creation of Protected Areas. His forays into the Gulf of Kachchh conducted with the support of the present Jamsaheb of Nawanager led to creation of the country’s first Marine National Park and Sanctuary. Hingolghadh and Khijadiya Sanctuaries are other examples of his tireless efforts to save Gujarat and India’s natural heritage for future generations.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, he got involved with two very important projects in Gujarat. These entailed restoration and regeneration of two village ‘wastelands’ from their degraded states for use as outdoor learning facilities. The two sites were Bakore in Panchmahals and Beyt Dwarka, an island off the coast at Okha. I was fortunate to witness the transformation of the two sites in a span of just two decades. In 2014-15; I visited both. To my utter surprise, I saw a pair of Indian Grey Hornbills, Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, Red-throated Flycatcher, Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher, Oriental Magpie Robin, dozens of Rufous Treepies and a Crested Serpent Eagle at



Bakore – all indicating a maturing forest from a wasteland in 1989! Raised water level in the well, plenty of good quality grass, and return of the native trees are indeed some of the miracles created. Even the surrounding areas that once were barren hillocks support a lush forest today. And at Beyt Dwarka, Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) and Babul (*Acacia nilotica*) trees – 15 to 20 ft tall stand today where there was no tree to talk of! In place of a few scattered and tattered mangrove bushes which had survived the onslaught of human denizens, a grove of lovely mangroves with Grey and Reef Herons, Ibises and other birds roosting atop and breeding. Marine life too has recolonized the inter-tidal zone around. Both are being used as fabulous camp-sites too. The two models described above are a testimony to Nature’s own power to take care of herself with some protection and nurturing. This amazing transformation is thanks to the vision and belief of Lavkumar Sir.

Just like a rainbow, Lavkumar Sir’s contribution to conservation came in many colours and shades. He played a pivotal role in halting the denotification of a major area of the Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary in Kachchh. The effort succeeded partially in that it secured 444 sq km area instead of the earlier 94 sq km (as per the first order) out of the original 765 sq km. Great people foretell things that we generally don’t imagine or consider worth paying attention to. Two of his critical predictions about the future of Sarus Crane needing attention and the spread of Gando Baval (*Prosopis juliflora*) creating havoc for conservation in the state have come true not too long after his warnings in the 1980s and 1990s respectively.



“Before human beings destroyed the forests and badly fragmented habitats the joyous upwelling chorus of birds must have preceded the Sun from East to West - in the Himalayas the first thrush to sing would be in some forested gorge of Arunachal, its call awakening the next thrush to the west and so on till these of Kashmir finally heard the call to rise and sing.”

Memoirs of a Mentor...

Now, let me come to Lavkumar Sir's forte – birds and his contribution to ornithology in India. His journey into the world of Nature took off on the wings of birds from a very early age. This was in part thanks to his grooming in the erstwhile Princely State of Jasdan that was illustrious in terms of love and respect for Nature and to the atmosphere of birdwatching in the then Kathiawar region created by the erstwhile rulers of the Princely States surrounding Jasdan. In this list, he included the bird-trio of Bhavnagar – Krishnakumarsinhji, Nirmalkumarsinhji and RS Dharmakumarsinhji (he called them his Bhavnagar “Gurus”); Jamsaheb of Navanagar and his cousin DS Shivraj Kumar of Jasdan. He was also fortunate to receive tutelage and grooming from a very prestigious company of great birdwatchers and outstanding naturalists such as General Harold Williams, Horace Alexander, Dr. Salim Ali and Zafar Futehally with enviable contemporaries such as Humayun Abdul Ali.

If one glances through the early volumes of Newsletter for Birdwatchers (1960s & 1970s), virtually every issue had one or two pieces by him reporting some observation as well as highlighting important issues/thoughts. Journal of the BNHS, Himalayan (Club) Journal, 'Vihang' (a Gujarati newsletter for birds), and much later the newsletter/journal 'Indian Birds' also benefited immensely from his contributions. This is no mean feat when you consider the breadth of observations and issues that he covered through these write-ups. When the Indian Ornithological Society – a first of its kind in India was formed in 1961, KS Lavkumar (as he was known then) was the youngest member of the editorial team at the age of 30 along with DS Shivraj Kumar of Jasdan and Dr. R. M. Naik – an ornithologist who groomed many young ornithologists in Gujarat later. At a young age of 40, he co-authored with RS Dharmakumarsinhji a book entitled 'Sixty Indian Birds', which was brought out by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. Among the many accolades that he received included the Salim Ali - Lok Wan Tho Lifetime Award for Excellence in Ornithology for his pioneering work in ornithology, Certificate of Merit awarded by His Royal Highness Prince Philip for his contribution in initiating the Youth Education Movement and developing the Nature Camps for WWF-India, Venu Menon Lifetime award in 2004 and Delhi Bird Lifetime Achievement Award.

As rightly put by Bikram Grewal in an obituary in Live Mint - “It was with his passing away on the 2 March, 2015 in Rajkot that I realized that it marked the end of an era; that a glorious

chapter of Indian ornithology had come to an end. The greats had all gone.” Here, I am tempted to quote two excerpts representative of the flavour and content of his earliest writings showing how his in-depth knowledge of geography and birds along with his vision of conservation (see the Bustard piece) and a flair for the language combined to make these some of the best nature writings that exist in India.

Some birds around Badrinath (1 & 2)

“During my visit in early June, the birds were busy rearing their broods, and one pair had taken residence right inside the temple courtyard under the beams of a corridor which was used for sermons in the day and Kirtans at night, and was brightly lit by gas lamps. The birds went about their household chores of rearing a hungry family over the heads of hundreds of devotees, perching at times not more than a foot above single heads before flying up into its nest. It was a wonderful example of how a bird of the wildest rivers trustingly accepts man where the latter's destructive propensities are subdued temporarily by needs of the spirit.....The birds along the water at Badrinath are restricted in species on account of their inflexible ecology, and the rather specialised method of feeding required, but the birds are an unfailingly attractive group to watch. They are also of interest, as they are typically Himalayan, and above all there is something irresistible in the way they lead their lives along the dangerous rivers and among the perpetual roar and thunder of the waters cascading down those breathtaking gorges....From Badrinath, the valley becomes a broad U-shaped valley that suggests a time in the remote geological past, when it contained a gigantic glacier which has receded to leave the remnants that today form the Sathopant glacier at the head of the valley from which a glacial river flows out as the Alaknanda. These old glacial valleys have very broad, flat floors gently grading into greater heights, but the sides steeply rise upwards often in sheer cliff faces polished to a smoothness which only the giant and icy chisels of a glacier can do...If the birdwatcher is lucky, he might well see the flitting form of a Wall Creeper which is about the size of a large sparrow, with round full wings of a Hoopoe and the same uncertain flight of a butterfly. The general coloration is dark grey with crimson linings in the wings; the beak is long and curved, but it is the habit of alighting and running up sheer walls that is diagnostic of the Wall Creeper and it lives its perpendicular life on cliff faces above 14,000 ft. in the Himalayas, descending to the foothills in the winter, where birds have been recorded on the sandstone faces of Imperial



“Life can survive in the slime, it cannot scintillate just as water exists in a pool but only sparkles when hurled against boulders to throw up drops of spray or churned into waves and eddies.”

buildings.... For a Chough is a bird of the unfettered Himalayan elements, for ever circling and tossing, rising and falling, and as free as the winds that breather across these magnificent mountains. Like Wordsworth I often lie on my couch in a pensive mood and there is sudden joy as the Choughs come circling across that 'inner eye which is the bliss of solitude.'" – K. S. Lavkumar (Newsletter for Birdwatchers Vol. 1: No. 9)

THE Great Indian Bustard

"...The best method to safeguard the Great Indian Bustard is to Include it on the list of the "farmers' friends". Specially in Rajasthan, where locust-fighting is a major project, the introduction of the bird to farmers and herdsmen should be made so as to make them aware of the value of the bird as a destroyer of locusts and other such pests. An effort in this way to elicit positively their help in protecting the bustard would go further than all the legislation banning its shooting. Once the villagers realize the bird is of value to their economy, they will no doubt extend it protection from poachers in the same way as sentiment has safe-guarded so large and possibly such a good eating, bird like the Sarus Crane and the peafowl. I am certain that it is mainly indiscriminate killing which has sadly reduced the numbers of the Great Indian Bustard, the spread of agriculture is not the main cause, as they could no doubt range across cultivated land for their omnivorous fare. During the rains when they breed, there is sufficient shelter for them in the crops. Bustards wherever they are not harried by man, are remarkably tolerant of his proximity. There is little purpose served by establishing sanctuaries without proper staff to protect the inmates..." - K. S. Lavkumar (Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Vol. 3)

In 1996 he wrote an excellent review on the "Birds of Gujarat" in the Salim Ali centenary year, which was almost fifty years after Dr. Salim Ali's classic account of Birds of Gujarat in the Journal of the BNHS. This is the last comprehensive review available to us on birds of the entire state.

His interest in plants was only next to that in birds and knowing the intimate relationship between the two taxa, he had his own ways to 'create' bird-conducive habitats everywhere – be it a degraded forest, institutional campus or an urban garden. He has been involved

in getting thousands of trees, ornamental plants and climbers suitable for birds planted and nurtured in many parts of the country. This would easily exceed the efforts of any individuals that we know of and it may include professionals such as landscape designers and architects too. He was sensitive to the appropriateness of planting indigenous ones in countryside/natural/degraded habitats, while going for a mix of key native species and aesthetic exotics in the gardens. He personally gave seeds of such trees to us, like a few wild *Erythrina suberosa* (Coral Tree) seeds which he once gave me. I planted a few and one of those grew into a tall tree of 35-40 ft within no time bearing flowers in spring that doubled our joy. He was responsible for convincing the concerned to plant a huge number of native fig trees (Banyan, Peepal, Gular/Umro, Pipar) at the Moti Khavdi refinery complex of the Reliance Industries. His student and very close aid Girish Adesara has developed this art and science further and continues to spread his philosophy and approach to the landscapes he creates. Many private farms of his students and campuses of various places including Sundarvan... stand a testimony to his interest, vision and efforts in creating rich habitats for birds and other beasts. Of course the birds have responded by nesting, roosting and feeding in such habitats.

Seldom one comes across someone who completes the whole



pilgrimage of both receiving and giving back to nature in one lifetime. I'll put Lavkumar Khachar's name among these, along with the likes of Dr. Salim Ali, Zafar Futehally, Humayun



"Mankind has down the ages sought to shield itself against perceived discomforts. The story of civilisation perhaps is the story of human beings attempting to avoid the onward driving forces and legitimising fears."

Memoirs of a Mentor...

Abdulali and Dr. AJT Johnsingh in India. I believe it was he alone who took himself to greater heights as he devoted his time and energies to cultivating within him a vision of introducing young people to nature just as he was fortunate to experience.

When I was asked to make a presentation on my personal journey in nature in the Annual Meeting of Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) in 2013, it dawned upon me how important Lavkumar Sir was as a mentor in my life and shared it with colleagues and invitees. To our collective surprise, each of my colleagues at NCF also had a similar mentor in their respective childhood and youth, who had motivated and nurtured them. A corner of my heart is permanently reserved for this revered teacher, where his sentence "Take care of yourself...you owe it to the world and yourself" is etched forever. The only true tribute that a student can offer his

teacher is to follow what he said and I'm glad I've been made an instrument in taking children "Back to Nature"...

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr. Bakul Trivedi for requesting and motivating me to write this piece for Flamingo. Sangeetha Trivedi provided excellent inputs both in terms of content and editing all drafts to enrich and improve the text. Aakash Trivedi helped in editing the first draft of the article. □



"Life can survive in the slime, it cannot scintillate just as water exists in a pool but only sparkles when hurled against boulders to throw up drops of spray or churned into waves and eddies."

K. S. Lavkumar Khachar of Jasdan

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Mr. Lavkumar Khachar of Jasdan was perhaps one of the most respected and eminent personalities in Gujarat and the whole of India in the field of nature education and conservation. In fact, his name is synonymous with Nature Education. He spent his life studying nature passionately and taught people to understand and love it.

He was born in the erstwhile royal family of Jasdan in Saurashtra, ruled by the great warrior clan of Kathis. He spent his childhood in the natural surroundings of Hingolghadh and he imbibed the interest in wildlife at that tender age and obviously the natural beauty of Hingolghadh and its surroundings inculcated many qualities in him as a true naturalist.

He was educated at the Rajkumar College, Rajkot where he started his career teaching Biology and Geography in 1956, after completing BSc (Botany) with Honors from St. Stephen's College, Delhi. As a student of Biology he was greatly influenced by Biologists such as Charles Darwin.

As a teacher he pioneered the concept of "Back to Nature" focusing on outdoor adventure activities for the young. He started by taking small groups of students during summer vacation for camping on the bank of mountainous Manaslu Nala in Manali region.

While at Rajkumar College, he took a group of students to trek from Kathmandu to Thyangboche Monastery at the base of Mount Everest, a journey of over 15 days one way. Rajkumar College was the first school in India to undertake such a venturesome trip. I was fortunate to be a part of that team.

His creative implementation of Nature Study Programmes so impressed the board of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) - India,



that he was given the responsibility of conceiving and initiating its Education and youth movement in 1976.

In 1984, he took charge as the Director of Sundarvan – a Nature Discovery Center in Ahmedabad under the aegis of the Centre for Environment Education (CEE). Today, State Governments and Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) are following the model created by him across India. He was instrumental in declaring the Gulf of Kutch islands as the first Marine National Park and Sanctuary in India.

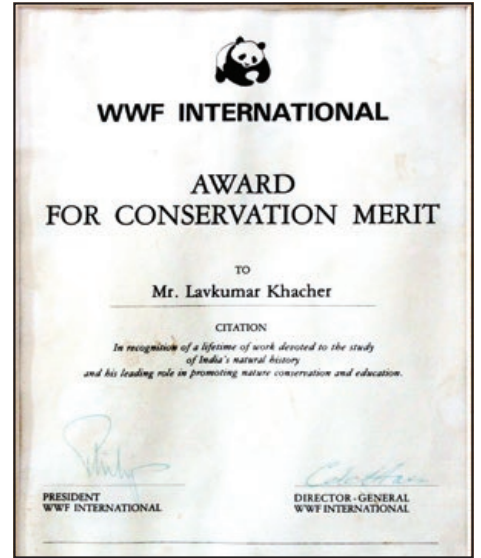
He had a close association with eminent people such as Dr Salim Ali, the most renowned ornithologist of the country who has written prolifically on birds of India. Gurdial Singh, a former Principal of the Doon School was instrumental in helping Mr Lavkumar to put forward the idea of declaring Nanda Devi basin into a protected area.

Another person of royal heritage was RS Dharmakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar, an authority on the Great Indian Bustards and a keen birdwatcher. Mr Dharmakumarsinhji jokingly used to say that naturalists are very few in India and just like the bustards, breed at a slow pace!

The beautiful property of Hinglaj farm overlooking the Beas river in the Himalayas was Mr. Lavkumar's summer home for the past 30 years. From his home he launched the nature education and camping movement that has been replicated and emulated nationwide by other nature lovers. The Hingolghadh Nature Conservation Education Programme (HNCEP), which was founded by him, is still instrumental in opening the eyes of nature lovers to the natural and cultural landscape, at the same time contributing to the local economy without threatening the local culture.



"There no longer is any need for struggle to survive. Survive we have and will, we now need to concern ourselves to live life fully with confidence and joy."



Our mountains are holy, our rivers divine, the ocean surrounding us is to be revered, and the flora and fauna (alas today so impoverished) to be cherished.

Mr. Lavkumar was recipient of the following awards for his dedication to Nature Education:

The Salim Ali - Loke Wan Tho Lifetime Award for Excellence in Ornithology for his pioneering work in Ornithology.

Certificate of Merit awarded by His Royal Highness Prince Philip for his contribution in initiating the Youth Education Movement and developing the Nature camps for WWF - India.

In 2004, he was awarded the Venu Menon Lifetime Achievement Award.

Lifetime Achievement Award as "Guru" from the Galaxy Education System in 2004.

Award from the Gujarat Government on the Republic Day 2006 for contribution to Wildlife Conservation.

His demise on the 2nd March, 2015 has been a great loss to nature lovers all over India and especially to Gujarat. To continue his legacy, we as individuals and organizations must endeavour to propagate and promulgate his teachings to the young and to our future generations in whom he had much hope. He wanted to instill the basic qualities of building a spirit of adventure in our young boys and girls and to give them a holistic approach to their lives and for them to be good citizens and leaders of our Nation. □

"In the democratic milieu of our times, we must have a very significant and defining role to play. Bird-watching and bird photography are self indulgences unless there is concern for the welfare of the objects of pursuit. Concern also is not enough, it has to be translated into personal understandings and life styles that will help iron out the conflicts and create a world where mankind and birds can live in harmony."



"Light and life are the same thing for there is darkness in the absence of light as there is death in the absence of life and life as we now understand it the biological manifestation of light."

Additional Sight Records of *Phylloscopus* warblers in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat

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According to Parasharya *et al* (2004), there are eight species of *Phylloscopus* warblers occurring in Gujarat. Due to the difficulties in identification of these generally hyper-active and skulking birds, there are very few published sight records and other literature about these birds here. It is a challenge to even get good photographs.

I present here some of my significant sight records of these warblers observed over the last four years.

Tytler's Leaf Warbler: *Phylloscopus tytleri*

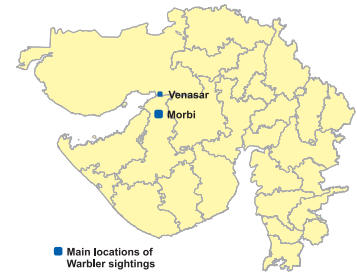


Photo: Prasad Ganpule

On the 13th September 2008, on the outskirts of Morbi, Rajkot District, Gujarat, (22°49'N 70°50'E) I heard a loud call from a tree. The call was a loud 'pee' called out four or five times followed by an equally loud 'pee-swee' repeated at least five or six times. I searched for the bird and found a small green colored warbler at a height of around 10 to 12 feet. At first I thought that it was a Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*) but the call was very different from a Greenish Warbler's regular call. (A Greenish Warbler winters in my garden and I am quite familiar with its call.)

The bird had olive greenish upper parts without any wing-bar. It had a long dark bill with a pale base to lower mandible, prominent supercilium and eye stripe. The underparts were whitish with yellow streaks. I took some images and referred to the reference books (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005, Grimmett *et al* 1998, Kazmierczak 2000) and identified the bird as a Tytler's Leaf Warbler (*P. tytleri*) based on its call and long beak. This individual was seen for two days.

On September 18th 2008 at around 08:00 hrs, when I was observing a Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) on a Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) tree near the same place mentioned above, when I heard the same loud call from the tree. I searched for the bird and found the warbler in the tree. This seemed to be a different individual than the one I had observed a few days before.



Description: This bird had olive green upper parts. It had no wing bar. The underparts were grayish with yellowish wash on belly. The throat was gray. It had a long supercilium with a prominent long eye-stripe. The bill was long with a pale base of lower mandible. I took some photographs of the bird and tried to record its call on my mobile phone but the high pitched 'swee' call could not be recorded. The bird was seen for three days. I referred to the reference books and again identified the bird as a Tytler's Leaf Warbler based on its call, long beak and plumage. This individual looked to be an immature Tytler's Leaf Warbler based on the gray washed neck and breast and yellowish underparts. This individual was seen for three days.

The Tytler's Leaf Warbler is a Near Threatened species (Birdlife International 2011) and is not shown to occur in Gujarat (Rasmussen 1998). There are no records for Gujarat in other published literature that I have access to. Ali (1955) collected specimens from the Surat Dangs and mentioned that "Not uncommon where the specimens were collected" and this could be the reason it is mentioned in Parasharya *et al* (2004) but this record is from the State of Maharashtra in Dhule District and not in Gujarat. Further details of this record are mentioned in Prasad (2003). It is possible that since this record was noted before the formation of Gujarat State in 1960, it is included in Parasharya *et al* (2004).

The sighting of two Tytler's Leaf Warblers here shows that this species does occur in Gujarat. It could be occurring in the South Gujarat area as well and needs further study.



"Perhaps the time has come when our species should consciously embrace the very forces against which we 'struggled' to survive. That would be our final attainment as living organisms and prove to be what evolution has been all about."

Large-billed Leaf Warbler: *Phylloscopus magnirostris*

Photo : Prasad Ganpule



On 1st November 2009 at around 17:00 hrs, I went to the Little Rann Of Kutch towards its western end near the village of Venasar (23° 20' N 71° 15' E). The area is a dried mud flat with a fresh water lake on one side.

I noticed a warbler in a clump of *Prosopis juliflora* trees. It was like a Greenish Warbler but it was noticeably larger in size and more sluggish in its movements. It was olive-greenish in colour. It had distinct lower wing-bar with a large dark bill. It had a prominent supercilium with a broad dark eye line almost as large as the eye. It did not call during the time I observed it. I was able to take two photographs and referred to Grimmett *et al* (1998) and identified it as a Large-billed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*) on the basis of large bill, sluggish movement and very broad, dark eye stripe along with the larger size, dark bill and general plumage.

The Large-billed Leaf Warbler is known to be breed in the Himalayas and it winters in the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka {Grimmett *et al* (1998)}. There are no published records of its occurrence in Gujarat. Further observations are needed to ascertain its present status in Gujarat - either a vagrant or as a passage migrant.

Mountain Chiffchaff: *Phylloscopus sindianus*

On 8th January 2008 at around 10:00 hrs while birdwatching in a farm near my home town of Morbi, I observed a Chiffchaff which seemed different from a Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*). This particular bird had prominent white supercilium in front of eye meeting over the bill, grayish upper parts without any olive tinge and whitish underparts with very faint creamish tinge to the flanks. The bent of wing was whitish. I managed to take one photograph and identified

it as a Mountain Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus sindianus*). I did not hear any call from this bird.

There are no records of the Mountain Chiffchaff for Gujarat in the literature that I have access to but it is shown to winter in Sind region of Pakistan which is near the Kutch region of Gujarat (Kazmierczak 2000, Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). It is likely that it may be occurring in Gujarat but is overlooked due to identification difficulties. Baker (1997) states that "in worn plumage, may be extremely difficult if not impossible to separate from *P. c. tristis*, unless call note is heard." It may be difficult to identify this in the field with certainty but I am fairly confident that this was a Mountain Chiffchaff.

Bright-green Warbler: *Phylloscopus nitidus*



Photo : Prasad Ganpule

This sub-species of the Greenish Warbler was recently separated and given full species status (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The occurrence of this sub-species in Gujarat is not well documented but it is said to be an autumn passage migrant through Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). While the Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*) is a fairly common winter visitor and passage migrant in Gujarat, the status of the Bright-green Warbler is unclear but it is given as migrant in Parasharya *et al* (2004). Ali (1955) collected specimens from Kutch in Bhuj & Khavda in October and early November and from Waghai in the Surat Dangs in April.

I observed a single Bright-green Warbler on 26th October 2010 near the town of Morbi at around 08:00 hrs. This could be identified by the stouter bill with a pale lower mandible, brighter green upper parts, yellowish supercilium and yellow streaked breast and underparts. The lower wing bar was



"Down the millennia it has been the dynamic forces of the Universe that have shaped our individualities be we can eagle, a tiger or a Bodhisatva."

Warblers in Saurashtra....

prominent and a faint upper wing bar could also be seen. It had a distinct three note call, which is different from the call of Greenish Warbler. I took some images and re-confirmed the identification. The bird was seen only for one day. However I have been observing the regular wintering of Bright-green Warbler in Morbi for the past three years. A single individual was seen in Morbi from December to March in winters of 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, thus confirming it as a winter migrant here.

Tickell's Leaf Warbler: *Phylloscopus affinis*

The Tickell's Leaf Warbler breeds in the Himalayas and winters in Central India and the Western Ghats. There are a very few records of this bird in Gujarat as per the literature available to me, with a single sighting reported by Akthar & Tiwari (1995).

On 17th October 2010, I was bird watching near Morbi when my attention was drawn towards a warbler uttering a hard 'chip' call. Being familiar with the call of Greenish Warbler, I immediately recognized that this call was different from the call of the Greenish Warbler. I observed the bird in detail. It had lemon yellow underparts with a bold, prominent lemon yellow supercilium. It had a dark eye-stripe with a pale lower mandible. I took two photos and confirmed the identity as a Tickell's Leaf warbler by referring to the reference books. The similar Olivaceous Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*) does not have lemon yellow colour to its underparts and has different



Photo: Prasad Ganpule

habits. I went back to the same place the next day but it was not seen again. It is possible that this warbler may have been overlooked and it could be an uncommon winter visitor or a passage migrant. The date of this sighting is indicative of this particular bird being a passage migrant.

Hume's Leaf Warbler: *Phylloscopus Humei*

I have been observing a Hume's Leaf Warbler in Morbi area near my home regularly for the last five winters, since November 2008. I have seen it here from about the last week of November up to the last week of February. It was seen this year also. I have also heard it in two other locations near Morbi. Other locations outside Morbi where I have observed the Hume's Leaf Warbler are:

Randarda Lake, Rajkot: while bird watching here with Ashokbhai Mashru and others on 26 Jan 2012, we observed and photographed two Hume's Leaf Warblers. Its distinctive call was also noted.

Near Thangadh, Dist. Surendranagar District: A single individual was seen in Mandav Vidi near Thangadh on two occasions. The first on December 2008 and the second on 3 Jan 2010.

Halvad, Dist. Surendranagar: A single individual was seen and heard in a temple grove near Halvad in Jan 2012.

Recent field guides like Kazmierczak (2000), Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) and Grimmett *et al* (2011) show its occurrence in South Gujarat and up to Bhavnagar area but there are no records shown for Saurashtra region. Recently there have been reports from Kutch (Bhopale 2010) and from Gir (Bishop 2010).

It seems Hume's Leaf Warbler is more widely distributed in Saurashtra than previously thought. The above records from Rajkot, Junagadh and Surendranagar district show that it is a widely distributed winter migrant to the area and that it could be occurring in well wooded areas with trees in other parts of the region.

Conclusion:

The sighting of these six species of *Phylloscopus* Warblers is significant considering that two species viz. Large-billed Leaf Warbler and Mountain Chiffchaff reported here are new to Gujarat and the Tytler's Leaf Warbler can also be said to be a new species based on the data given above.

More species of *Phylloscopus* warblers could be occurring here. Observers should be on the lookout for Plain Leaf-warbler (*P.neglectus*), which could be occurring in Kutch. The call of these birds can be a good way of identifying them. With proper observations and photographs along with their call, there should not be much difficulty in the identification of these



"The time has come now to concentrate on disciplining our urges and converting passion in to compassion, love and understanding."

wonderful birds. I urge other bird watchers here to be on the lookout for the various warblers occurring here.

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"We all are concerned about the immediate security of our families. How can then, declining numbers of insects or of vultures take any precedence over human needs? What meaning does bird watching have in a highly competitive world? Are any of us able to provide clear answers? I regret the conservation groups have totally failed to provide reasonable answers. Nor, for that matter, have we been able to evolve demonstrable models proving that our concerns are not esoteric but highly pragmatic."



"The passion and concern for birds among other living forms, laid the bedrock for the world conservation movement."

Possible first record of Black-winged Cuckooshrike in Gujarat

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Mit Bhatt: Mavji Nivas, Nr. Jalaram Temple, Vesu, Surat-7.

On 14 March 2015, we visited Sagai forest in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, Narmada District. At around 4 pm, soon after reaching there, second and third author started photographing birds in the surrounding area. At that place, they encountered an unfamiliar bird, which they could not identify at first sight. After keen observation, we were surprised to see a Black-winged Cuckooshrike (*Coracina melaschistos*), which first author had seen multiple times during his visits to the Himalayas. It was probably a female or an immature bird, with faint barring on the underparts, a broken eye-ring, barring on the vent and thicker bill. Though similar to the Grey-bellied Cuckoo, this could be identified as a Black-winged Cuckooshrike since it was seen well and the characteristic features were noted.

It was not shy and allowed us to take photos from a distance of just around 30 feet. It was hopping from one branch to another branch of a Teak (*Tectona grandis*) tree. On the next day also, it was seen moving around at the same place. After referring to the distribution maps in various field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), we came to know that its occurrence was not shown for Gujarat.

Black-winged Cuckooshrike affects open forest, riverine bamboo jungle, pine, oak and chestnut woods, abandoned lands and groves. It breeds in Himalayas and NE Indian hills and winters in the peninsula, with scattered records from Kolkata, Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, western Maharashtra,

Karnataka and as far south as Tamil Nadu (at Point Calimere) (Ali & Ripley 2007). Sighting of the bird in this area could be a change spotting on its return migration from a regular wintering area towards Himalayas. However as per published literature, there is no report of this species from Gujarat. Hence this sighting can be treated as the first photographic record of this species from Gujarat.

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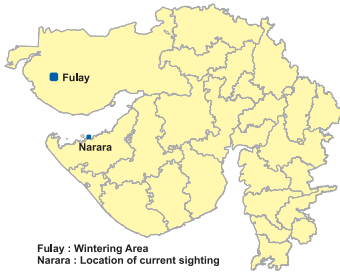
Photo : Devratsinh Mori



"The tragedy of our times is that mankind's success has extracted a heavy cost to all other living groups."

Significant sight record of Grey Hypocolius at Narara, Jamnagar District

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After getting a message about sighting the rare and elusive Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) by birders Mr. Noshewan Shethna, Mr. Kunal Munsiff and Mr. Pratik Joshi at Narara creek, near Vadinar port, Dist. Jamnagar. We

were thrilled and decided to take a chance to see the bird.

I started with Jay Bhayani, Suraj, Mehul and Umesh Khetani on 15 March 2015 (Sunday) at 7 am. As Narara is about 50 km from Jamnagar city towards Dwarka, we reached there in an hour. While travelling the last 3 km stretch, we could enjoy sightings of Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) to our right in the sea waters.

Towards the left side of Narara beach, the habitat is quite different. There are scattered 'Pilu' (*Salvadora persica*), other thorny trees/scrub and mangroves. After taking necessary permissions, we approached this area and there we found fellow birders Arpit Deomurari, Yashodhan Bhatia and Dr. Bhadania settled on a grassy area opposite a huge *Pilu* tree. We could listen to the calls of Grey Hypocolius (Gujarati Name: *Mascati Latoro*) frequently. It was a mewing piew...piew...chirrup with trilling. As the birds were behind the tree, we still could not see them.



Photo : Prasad Ganpule

Rosy Starlings (*S. roseus*) were also perched on the same tree. All of a sudden the flock of Rosy Starlings flew away and we saw that two Grey Hypocolius joined them. The flock settled some 50 m away from us. After 20 minutes the birds returned to another *Pilu* nearby. The birds were calling constantly and within 10 minutes a handsome male Hypocolius came



Photo : Prasad Ganpule

out and perched on the top of the tree. A lifer for all of us!!!! I could not resist taking photos of this beautiful bird, and they too appeared to be quite friendly if you don't make hasty movements. Then another male came out. We could see the plumage clearly as it was now adequately bright and sunny out there. The male has grey head with black mask, which looks striking. While I was watching it, the bird occasionally slightly raised its crest, and then quickly lowered it. A terminal tail band was visible, making it more attractive when seen in flight. After some time, the birds suddenly flew away but we could still see the other male to our right side, perched on a thorny bush near us which too eventually flew away. We were indeed excited to see this beautiful bird which we observed for almost one hour. We returned to Jamnagar cherishing memorable moments with 'Mascati Latoras' in Narara area !!!!

(Grey Hypocolius might be visiting this area in the past too, and must have been remained unnoticed!! There are only two reported sightings of Grey Hypocolius outside the Banni area. Ali (1931) noted it near Mumbai and Vora *et al.* (2007) reported a sighting from Little Rann of Kachchh area. Hence this is indeed a wonderful record of this rare bird, which was believed to visit only Kachchh district. - Edit)

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"We human beings have added to the difficulties of almost all birds in our ascendancy as the most populace and dominant species on the planet."

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[Note: Most of the information presented above is taken from the eBird website and this article is intended to get more birdwatchers to share/upload their sightings, to form a database of birds of Gujarat.]

Bird watching as a hobby is now gaining popularity. More and more people are attracted towards it. Due to the easy access to digital cameras and well illustrated field guides, and popularity of bird photography on the social media, identification of birds has also become easier. Almost all birdwatchers maintain a personal database of their sightings, including trip lists and life lists. This data is very important for understanding bird distribution, seasonal movements etc.

The advent of eBird in India is a very important step in maintaining and sharing data with others so that the individual observations, collected from many observers, are shared with other birdwatchers and researchers/ornithologists.

What is eBird?

eBird is a global, internet-based checklist programme for gathering observations of birds and for birders to maintain their personal records. It was launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society (USA) with a goal to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers.

How eBird works?

The observations of each participant join those of others in an international network of eBird users. eBird then shares these observations with a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists, and conservation biologists. In time, this data will become the foundation for a better understanding of bird distribution.

eBird encourages users to participate by providing Internet tools that maintain their personal bird records and enable them to visualize data with interactive maps, graphs, and bar charts. All these features are available in English, Spanish, and French.

A birder simply enters when, where, and how they went birding, then fills out a checklist of all the birds seen and heard during the outing. Automated data quality filters developed by

regional bird experts review all submissions before they enter the database. Local experts review unusual records that are flagged by the filters and ask observers to provide additional information, thus verifying their sightings.

eBird data are stored in a secure facility and archived daily, and are accessible to anyone via the eBird web site, www.ebird.org.

Benefits of eBird

- Easy to use
- It keeps the records safely.
- Acts as an easy search engine.
- Provides opportunity to explore dynamic maps, graphs and bar charts.
- Provides facility to share one's sightings with others.
- Provides opportunity to contribute to science and conservation
- Embedding photos, videos, sound files etc is also possible.
- Maintains life list, location-wise lists, species-wise lists and summarize observations by week, month or year.

Data Integration

eBird collects observations from birders through portals managed and maintained by local partner conservation organizations. In this way eBird targets specific audiences with the highest level of local expertise, promotion, and project ownership. Each eBird portal is fully integrated within the eBird database and application infrastructure so that data can be analyzed across political and geographic boundaries.

Why Should I contribute to eBird?

Every time that you see and identify a bird, you are holding a piece of a puzzle. Whether you are casually watching birds in your backyard, or chasing rare species across the country, you are helping to put this puzzle together. It might be a personal puzzle. For example, you might wonder when the Pied Cuckoo appears in your backyard each monsoon or what time of day the House Sparrow take a bath in your neighborhood fountain. Each time that you see and identify one of these birds - so long as you note the time and date - one piece of the puzzle falls into place.



"Down the millennia of struggling against great odds, even the most successful of species can succumb to unforeseen changes in life situations and mankind has been very vigorously creating newer and newer dangers for which animals are not prepared."

Or it might be a regional puzzle. For instance, scientists might be wondering how quickly House Sparrows are declining. Each time that you identify and count the numbers of one of these species, you are piecing together a part of that puzzle.

Or it might be an international puzzle. Each year during migration, hundreds of species fly from northern breeding grounds to southern wintering grounds. When do they arrive? where do they breed? and when do they return? Whether recording common birds in your backyard or searching for rarities, your sightings of these birds – with time, date, and location included – are pieces that can help ornithologists solve this huge puzzle, day by day, week by week, and year by year.

Unfortunately, just like puzzle pieces, these observations lose their value if they remain separate from one another. The sightings tucked away in your memory, or in your desk drawer, or in an old shoebox in your closet leave gaps in a partially painted picture. In truth, the only way that all these bird sightings make a contribution to our understanding of nature is when they are collected and organized into a central database where they can help complete this picture of birds worldwide.

eBird is this database. With thousands of birdwatchers across the continent helping to construct it by contributing their sightings, eBird will soon become a vast source of bird and environmental information useful not only to bird watchers but to scientists and conservationists the world over.

By keeping track of your bird observations and entering them into the eBird database, you'll benefit, too. You can access your own bird records anytime you want, allowing you an easy way to look at your observations in new ways and to answer your personal questions about what birds you saw and when and where you saw them.

What should I record?

The most effective and useful way to get your data into eBird is at the site level. Each time you go birding you should try to keep a complete checklist of birds with estimated counts of each species, and try to limit your checklists to fairly refined geographic areas (e.g., your yard, a local park, a favorite birding location). eBird has the ability to accept data at the county and state level, but these broad-scale observations are harder to work with for analysis, and eBird really thrives on site-specific bird information.

The more specific you are about your locations, the better the 'My eBird' tools are at building your lists, so it's a nice mutually beneficial relationship. There is no limit to the number of locations you can have, and a good general rule for eBird is that the more specific you are with your site information the better.

How are scientists using the data?

Researchers in the fields of ecology and conservation frequently conduct studies aimed at answering two questions: Where does a given species live? and how abundant is it? Knowing where species live, what habitats they use, and how abundant they are is the most basic information needed to protect a species. Knowing whether these patterns are changing with time is perhaps even more critical, since changes in bird occurrence can often be one of the first signal of more widespread environmental changes.

Plotting all of the observations of any species over days, weeks, months, or years allows eBird to determine the species' range, including movement patterns and changes in distribution.

Each species' seasonal movements become evident when comparing its distribution from various times throughout the year. By comparing a bird's range among different years, scientists can keep track of changes in distribution. Are breeding and wintering ranges of different species expanding, shrinking, or staying the same? Do migratory paths change between years? Answering these questions will help us understand birds more completely and aid in their conservation. From a scientist's perspective, knowing if a bird species is absent is equally important as knowing if it is present. For this reason, it is important that you report all of the birds you saw or heard whenever possible, so researchers analyzing your observations will know not only which species you saw, but also which species you didn't see. If birders only report the birds they went out looking for, the resulting distribution map ends up only showing where birders like to go birding and not where the birds are distributed. Accurate distribution maps need to reflect where birds are and where they are not.

When you submit actual counts for all species, your counts are especially useful. Comparing how birds' numbers change over time is especially important in conservation biology and your counts will be instrumental in helping scientists determine whether populations are increasing, decreasing, or remaining the same.



"It is a great tragedy of mankind that death is feared even as the present life is polluted, weakened, converted into suffering on account of a great desire for security and comfort in this life or earning points to encash in the next."

Research at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

A new study takes a novel approach to studying avian migration by using crowd sourced eBird data to quantify the day-to-day population-level movement of bird species during migration. The unique perspective provided by eBird has allowed researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to document for the first time population-level variation in migration speeds and routes:

Using eBird data, the authors confirm that established theories regarding the optimal speed of migration — theories that have only been tested with information from handfuls of individual birds and only from large species — are able to describe differences in migration speed among populations of broadly distributed species based on their body size. Additionally, the study's findings suggests that the total distance birds must traverse to and from breeding and non-breeding grounds influences the speed at which they travel. More generally, this work has demonstrated the viability of using eBird to provide knowledge about the ecology and evolution of avian

migration strategies, which will play an important role in the management and conservation of migratory species worldwide.

So go to www.ebird.org, login to your account or register with eBird and submit your observations. One can also upload data directly from the field with iPhone or android phone by using Bird Log Asia app.

Your observations regarding birds from Gujarat will help in understanding bird distributions, seasonal movements, bird diversity and help experts get an idea regarding important bird areas and their conservation. These observations are also helpful in building a database which can be used by researchers and ornithologists in the future. □



"Whether it is the communal and caste frictions or matters of the environment and wildlife conservation, the time has come for each and every one of us to start analyzing our very personal lives. This demand, for Government to do things or "they" or "we" must do this or that, is just shifting personal responsibilities. "What am I doing to reduce my footprint on the planet" should exercise the thinking of each one of us."

◀ Lighting the lamp as a mark of beginning of BCSG in the year 2000.



"Death is the cessation of life and instead of making it a preoccupation, it is living life vigorously and purposefully that alone can place it in its correct perspective."

BCSG Events

Plant identification and its conservation

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat on the occasion of World Forest Day (21 March) and World Water Day (22 March) organized a programme dedicated to plants and its conservation. The programme aimed at understanding the basics of plant-life, identification skills and its importance to environment.

The Serenity library and botanical garden a home to hundreds of indigenous species was selected as the programme venue. The library offers good collection of books on wildlife and conservation, and the botanical garden –an abode to hundreds of native trees planted over the years. The variety of tree species and equally maintained habitat was a perfect location for conducting this programme.



A presentation by a botanist Dr. Haresh Dhaduk from Anand Agriculture University on the topic – ‘Plant Identification and its Conservation’ included description of anatomical features of plants and basic skills required for their identification.

The Second presentation by a landscape designer Sh. Girish Adesara emphasized on the importance of indigenous plants, its valuable attributes and efficient uses in urban landscape designing. The interactive session highlighted the efficient use of native species as road dividers, for hedges and topiary, for designing groves and as road avenues.



Practical demonstration on field identification of trees was given by Dr. Santosh Yadav. Santosh helped participants identify few indigenous tree and plant species with reference to their physiological communication with other life forms and also cited examples highlighting intelligence system in trees, its evolution with the time and how trees efficiently use it during pollination and germination.

The programme concluded with a documentary watch - “Forest Man – Jadav Payeng” on life of a man who with his determination has recreated a forest and has now himself has become an epitome of conservation. It motivated the participants to protect the tree-life and contribute to conservation by planting trees.

Training Workshop on ebirding



eBird - A real-time, online checklist programme has revolutionized the way the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. A programme launched by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, is promoted by NCBS, Bangalore in India.

BCSG, a partner to NCBS, Bangalore conducted an event at Van Chetna Kendra, Ahmedabad, on 8 Feb 2015, educating birdwatchers on using eBird.

The aims of eBird programme were:

1. To introduce birders to eBird, showing various features (e.g, maps, seasonality, exploring birds at a location), how to upload



“A vigorous life needs to be exposed to the elemental vagaries of wind, rain and snow.”



lists and embed photos, and how to use it to maintain one's own birding records.

2. To discuss how birding groups could run a variety of projects through the eBird platform; like documentation and monitoring of birds from some specific location or region (could be the State as a whole).

The presentation by T R Shankar Raman, from NCBS was on 'Introduction to eBirding, why list birds and use eBird?' "The presentation highlighted the common problems faced by bird-watchers world around – maintaining diaries of checklists,

issues faced while searching records, unavailability of analytical tools and common identification issues. Shankar described the concept of eBird and its reason for origination, how the website can be effectively used for maintaining records and how efficiently data is used by Scientists and researchers world across. He mentioned that the Citizen Science Project invites bird-watchers to seriously consider uploading data online on eBird, which will further contribute in studying the avian diversity of different locations, the migration patterns in birds, breeding behavior, habitat study and further need for conservation.

The next session included a live demonstration by Sh. Rohit Chakravarty of NCBS on using eBird and its features, about how to submit the checklist, find species, uploading species count, mentioning breeding code (if any) and an option for entering remarks. He also showed audience the analytical tools available online which can be of great help to practicing scientists and students.

Both presentations concluded with the importance of uploading data on eBird platform which will benefit the birders' society world across.

Scientific Approach to Bird Watching with special emphasis on Monitoring Bird Population



The lush green, beautiful campus of the Gujarat Forests Rangers College, Gujarat Forest Department at Rajpipla was the venue of this 4 Day event (25-28 Dec 2014). The programme was designed to educate wildlife enthusiasts on the various scientific techniques useful during monitoring avian diversity and population. The session included not just bird-watcher members of the Society but also invited trainees from the State Forest Department. The event generated a checklist of more than 200 bird species sighted at various locations during the programme.

On the first day in his presentation Sh. Uday Vora C.F. and Principal, Forest Rangers College, discussed out various scientific methods commonly used for recording bird data. He shared his experiences on the subject and briefed various problems that one may encounter in the field during the exercise.

The post lunch session was equally interesting with Mr. I. R. Gadhvi, explaining the basics of bird watching including do's and don'ts of birdwatching and also the field ethics.

This was followed by Dr. Maulik Varu's introduction to eBird: a website for maintaining online checklist. He explained how to



Parenthood is an onward process directed one way and any anticipation of return benefits negates basis biological dictates.

record data, maintain personal checklist, share it with others and download data for research purpose.

The second day began with a field trip to Sagai forest, in the Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary, Narmada Dist. The group was divided into small teams and each team was given a different route for a 'line transect'. A similar exercise was again carried out after lunch with 'spot counting' method. Thus the participants got an opportunity to actually practice both the methods that they studied on the first day. The programme also helped forest department trainees improve their skill on bird-watching and identifying birds with their common English names. On the other hand regular participants learnt more about plant identification from the rangers.

On the third day, beautiful and enchanting Ninai Falls was the location for bird watching. The place is very rich in flora and fauna and so a birders' paradise.

On the last day, the focus shifted to Wadhvana Lake, where the group was divided into teams and each of the teams was assigned a different block on the lake for bird count. This was the official bird census done for the Forest Department. Here participants got a firsthand experience of bird estimation on a wetland.

In the end, data and experiences were shared in the group and with the forest dept. staff.

BCSG Participation in Community Science Fair-2015, At NCSC-GNFC, Bharuch



Narmadanagar Community Science Center (NCSC-GNFC) is organizing annual science fair cum exhibition for students of Bharuch district. NCSC is inviting BCSG for participation since last 5 years and BCSG is arranging an exhibition stall every year. Our purpose of exhibition is to spread awareness regarding importance of nature education and conservation among students and also awareness about society's activities.

Last year we arranged a workshop on making a nest-box and a bird-feeder here.

BCSG Exhibition was visited by more than 3000 people. Visitors were students, teachers, parents and common citizens of Bharuch. We received good response from the visitors.

During five years of BCSG's participation in annual science fair by GNFC, we have got following benefits directly or indirectly.

- Now many people in Bharuch have started taking interest in birding.
- Many photographers from '18mm - Bharuch' have become good birders and have started photographing and identifying many local birds.
- Majority visitors at the exhibition have started keeping self made nest boxes, bird feeders and water baths in their gardens.
- We inspired some organizations like Rotary Corps of Bharuch, Dahej Industrial Association, NCSC etc for free distribution of Sparrow nests.
- A regular watch on population of peacock at Narmadanagar Township has been started by GNFC employees. At present more than 200 peacocks are residing in the complex. □



There will never be absolute perfection and it is continually aiming for the perfection alone that will get us to improve.

An Adieu to Lavkumar Khachar

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As I settle in my garden chair, I notice, on one of the uppermost branches of 'Karani' (*Pongamia pinnata*) sparsely dotted with half dried leaves, a parakeet couple assembling and making their intentions to pair for the coming season obvious. Soon they fly away, one chasing the other, and the next to come is a drongo who would glance upon the ground below and leave in a moment for a more lucrative perch, a lamp-post nearby, lighted just a while ago. Dwindling day light now only makes it possible to see darkened shapes of a couple of more visitors -a sunbird and a bulbul. The trees too, like me seem to sense the gentle unrest shown by the birds, as they prepare to settle to their respective roosting spots.

While scanning my garden at the twilight my eyes freeze at the sight of a garden 'jhula' (swing), where I imagine, a man sitting in a coloured kurta and a white pajama, taking stock of every corner of my gardenscape through his hypermetropic lenses! No, it's not that he preferred the 'jhula', in fact he never did. Last time when I made him sit on it, it was to take his photograph from a distant corner so that he would stand out conspicuously amidst the different shades and tones of the greens. My heart still senses his aura and eyes create a figure, so upright posing a pertinent question through his beaming look.

He would sometimes sit on the very same 'jhula' to watch a Hoopoe pair nesting in a nest-box (which it did for three consecutive years!) placed on a high beam running across the verandah to the right of the swing. He loved to see nest-boxes occupied by our avian friends. He loved to talk simple things, discuss out issues and draw out simple solutions. He never saw wildlife and its conservation in isolation. He would always place the common citizen in the center of any debate on Nature.

Most of all, he wanted the youth to go back to Nature. He believed, the passion of conservation lies in every young heart, only it needs to be aroused and nurtured. And he also believed, the only way to do it is to expose him to wilderness. It was his conjecture, that everything will fall in place only if an individual and subsequently the society identify and then connect themselves with nature. For him placing a nest-box on a column and a feeding tray in the balcony were as much important as, declaration of National Parks and Sanctuaries.

While sitting he would immediately size up the birdlife in my garden and probe into plant and tree diversity around. He would readily offer a prescription for newer species of shrubs, climbers and trees which needed to be introduced. He always insisted that I should have a small pond or a track of flowing water as 'water element' was glaringly missing from my garden.

He loved sugar-less black coffee and a jug full of cold water at his disposal, so that he can sip it at ease while reflecting on any topic.

His advocacy for indigenous plants and tree species was quite loud and clear. He himself would implement all his fancy ideas of planting native vegetation in his garden or at work places. His touch to a garden meant, it would surely have a well pruned hedge of 'Karamda' (*Carissa conjesta*), 'Awal' (*Cassia auriculata*) or 'Aamli' (*Tamarindus indica*), a green vertical wall covered by climbers, a *Ficus* tree in one corner kept in a proper shape, in addition to an undulating landscape with scores of native and exotic shrubs and bushes.

One outstanding quality of his was, to pen his thoughts on a paper while consuming coffee sip by sip and dispatch that bundle of beautiful cursive handwritings to the concerned recipient, neatly enveloped with his bold signature inscribed on one side of it. Not only did he write regularly for 'Vihang', he also periodically communicated with me, spelling out his explicit views, opinions and beliefs and occasionally showing his concerns with a bit of advice, some suggestions and a few words of blessings. A loving phrase "Take care of yourself", at the end of his 'inland letter' would literally take care of my anguish, my moods and my impatience at that point of time!

The Gujarati quarterly 'Vihang' which I had an opportunity to edit, carried his articles under a regular column which was named as 'Vihangavlokan' - meaning a bird's eye (over)view. In this column he would talk on a vast variety of subjects of his liking, ranging from 'how to create a micro-climate suitable to birds around your residence' to 'how a birdwatcher should observe discipline and restraint while reporting a new bird species'.

He was an ardent fan of 'Vihang', more so because it was in Gujarati. His discontentment almost amounting to frustration, about not being able to write and communicate in Gujarati haunted him till the end. He always praised my write-ups and editorials and encouraged me to write more and more. "Bakulbhai, write at least one page a day", he would tell me and what an honour and recognition for 'Vihang' it was, when he exclaimed, "Bakulbhai, you cannot stop 'Vihang' before having published my Obituary!!"

In fact, an obituary is rather out of context for a soul so great! His words and wisdom will always remain etched in our hearts and in spirit will keep on inspiring generations to come; that's why this is an adieu and not an obituary! □



"I liken Society to a garden, where the gardener has to take care not to permit weeds to take over or the more vigorous plants choking the others. The greater the variety of plants, the greater the need for vigilance by the gardener."



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“Having had the good fortune of having Lived my childhood surrounded by Nature, it has been difficult to understand the bleak and often claustrophobic upbringing of most children growing up cut off from Nature. It was in Rajkumar College, Rajkot where as a House Master privileged to train growing boys that I discovered the miraculous change in character of the boys when exposed to the great outdoors even for short periods. A week in the Himalaya would inculcate high discipline and spur metabolic processes to produce almost visible growth! A concern for Nature abiding. Thus, when I launched WWF-India’s Youth Education Movement in 1976, Nature Camps were conceived as important tool to arouse love for Nature. Hingolgadh, Pirotan, Gir and Himalaya became emotive experiences for thousands of school children and youth of Gujarat. The difference between these camps and others must be that each participant is central to the programme, and the experience generating a simple message that Nature is a joy to Live in and more important, showing that each individual is stronger than he or she thinks”.

“Every Human Activity must be backed by a commitment to the future and children are the future.”