

WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY

Nature Needs Us

Nature Beats

ISSUE 5

VOLUME II

FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

— EDITORIAL TEAM
WNE INDIA

It is a privilege to share my thoughts with you for the first time through our monthly journal. As I look back at the work undertaken this month, one message stands out: conservation is not merely about protecting wildlife it is about people, communities and the environment we share.

At WNE India, we believe that concern must translate into meaningful action. Our response to the devastating Assam floods through the Emergency Disaster Management (EDM) initiative was one such effort. We established a flood relief camp and supported 50 affected families, reaffirming our belief that compassion and conservation must go hand in hand.

Our wildlife awareness initiatives also continued. To commemorate World Elephant Day, we organised a poster competition that encouraged young people to express their understanding and appreciation of elephants. Through our Sarpa Sathi initiative, we conducted snake-bite awareness programmes in schools and villages across West Bengal and Odisha, working to replace fear and misinformation with knowledge and preparedness.

Science and innovation remain central to our conservation approach. This month, we supported a startup grant for predictive forest-fire assessment and decision-support systems in Uttarakhand, recognising the growing need for technology-driven approaches to emerging environmental challenges. We also received the final project report on Cantor's giant softshell turtle, adding valuable knowledge to our ongoing species-conservation efforts.We were equally pleased to strengthen our Otter Project through an MoU with a Panchayat in Kerala, along with local institutional support. This collaboration reflects an important principle: conservation becomes stronger when local communities and institutions become active partners.Our awareness efforts extended to marine conservation through a webinar on horseshoe crabs and ghost nets, highlighting threats to a species that often receives little public attention.

For us, however, conservation cannot be separated from community development. As part of this commitment, we renovated the girls' toilet at Bally School, helping create a safer and more dignified learning environment for students. Sometimes, meaningful change begins with something as simple as providing a child with a clean and secure space.

Looking across this month's initiatives—from flood relief and community development to wildlife awareness, research, technology and partnerships—the common thread is our commitment to creating a more sustainable and compassionate future.

There is still much to do, and the challenges before us are complex. But with collaboration, science, empathy and community participation, every small step can contribute to a larger change.

We invite you to continue this journey with WNE India—not simply as readers, but as partners in building a future where wildlife thrives, communities prosper, and conservation becomes everyone's responsibility.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SAVING A RIVER GIANT 04

UNDERSTANDING VYPIN'S OTTERS 05

STANDING WITH COMMUNITIES 06

A POSTER THAT SPEAKS FOR COEXISTENCE 07

A MARINE CONSERVATION DIALOGUE 08

BILL DEFORMITY IN A LARGE-BILLED CROW 09

CREATING DIGNITY THROUGH BETTER SCHOOL SANITATION 10

TAKING SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE TO COMMUNITIES 11

SAVING A RIVER GIANT: HOW LOCAL COMMUNITIES ARE SECURING THE FUTURE OF CANTOR'S GIANT SOFTSHELL TURTLE



Under the WNE Startup Grant, WNE India supported a conservation project focused on safeguarding the breeding grounds of the Critically Endangered Cantor's Giant Softshell Turtle (Pelochelys cantorii) in the Chandragiri River, Kerala. The project has now been successfully completed.

The project addressed an important conservation challenge: the species' nesting habitat is under increasing pressure from river infrastructure, sand mining, flooding of sandbanks and vegetation succession. The study found that regulator dams and changes in river flow can submerge nesting areas during the breeding season, while degradation of open sandbanks further reduces suitable nesting habitat.

As part of the project, nine important nesting sites and sandbanks were identified and mapped along the Chandragiri River. Regular morning and evening patrols were carried out to locate turtle tracks and nests and to monitor potential nesting areas.



A major achievement was the documentation and protection of four active nests containing 160 eggs. Protective fencing was installed around the nests, while one nest was translocated to higher ground to reduce the risk of flooding. However, only 16 hatchlings were successfully released, resulting in an overall hatchling success rate of just 10%—highlighting the serious challenges facing the species.



Community participation remained at the heart of the project. A network of around 40 local informants was established to report turtle movements, nesting activity and accidental entanglements. A multi-stakeholder workshop at Pandikkandam brought together more than 100 participants, including representatives from the Forest Department, Minor Irrigation Department, local administration and communities.

The project demonstrated that community involvement can play a powerful role in protecting cryptic and data-deficient species. At the same time, the findings underline the need for long-term habitat restoration, protection of critical sandbanks and improved nest management.

From field surveys to community action, the WNE Startup Grant helped turn conservation concerns into on-ground protection for one of India's most threatened freshwater turtles.

UNDERSTANDING VYPIN'S OTTERS: FROM CONCERN TO FIELD RESEARCH







Following our previous field observations in Vypin, Kerala, WNE India has taken the next step towards understanding the growing concerns surrounding otters and aquaculture in the region. We have now collaborated with the Edavanakkad Grama Panchayat to undertake a field-based study focusing on otter habitat utilisation, movement patterns and their interactions with the local landscape.

The project has received financial support from the Edavanakkad Grama Panchayat, reflecting the Panchayat's commitment to understanding local wildlife concerns through scientific research. This collaboration brings together scientific expertise, local knowledge and community participation to develop a clearer understanding of the situation.

The upcoming field study will cover the diverse habitats of Vypin, including backwaters, canals, wetlands, mangrove areas and aquaculture ponds. Our team will document signs of otter presence, identify the habitats they use and study their movements across the landscape. Camera traps, field observations and other scientific methods will help us understand how frequently otters use different habitats and where they come into contact with aquaculture areas.

A particularly important part of the study is understanding the reported presence of the Eurasian otter (Lutra lutra) in Vypin. The species is not considered native to this region, and local accounts suggest that some individuals may have been introduced or released into the area following the 2018 Kerala floods. Understanding how these otters came to occur here, whether they have established a population, and how they are adapting to the local landscape requires further investigation.

Rather than relying solely on local reports or assumptions, our objective is to generate scientific evidence through systematic field surveys. We will also engage with local farmers, fishers and residents to document their experiences and observations, which can provide valuable insights into changes in otter sightings and interactions with aquaculture.

This project is ultimately about more than studying a species. It is about understanding the relationship between wildlife, aquatic habitats and the communities that depend on them.

Through our collaboration with the Edavanakkad Grama Panchayat, we hope this study will contribute to a better understanding of otter ecology and help identify practical approaches for reducing potential conflict while supporting both biodiversity and local livelihoods.

ASSAM FLOOD RELIEF: STANDING WITH COMMUNITIES IN THEIR TIME OF NEED







When floods strike, the challenges faced by affected communities do not end when the water begins to recede. Food supplies can be disrupted, stagnant water can increase mosquito exposure, and maintaining safe and hygienic surroundings can become difficult.

For WNE India, the situation in Bhurakala Gaon, Jorhat district, was especially close to home. Our local branch is based in the area, giving us a direct connection with the community and an opportunity to understand their needs on the ground.

As part of our Assam Flood Relief Initiative, we reached 50 affected households in Bhurakala Gaon, providing essential support during a difficult period. The relief effort was coordinated locally by Jitu Doley, helping ensure that assistance reached families who needed it.

The materials were selected with the immediate post-flood situation in mind.

Mosquito nets were distributed because stagnant and standing water following floods can create favourable conditions for mosquito breeding. Increased mosquito exposure can increase the risk of diseases such as malaria and dengue, making protection at night particularly important.

Rice and dal were provided to help families maintain access to basic food when flooding may have disrupted normal supplies and access to markets.

Bleaching powder was provided to support sanitation and hygiene in flood-affected surroundings, where maintaining clean conditions can be challenging.

But this initiative was never only about the materials. It was about standing beside our neighbouring community when they needed support.

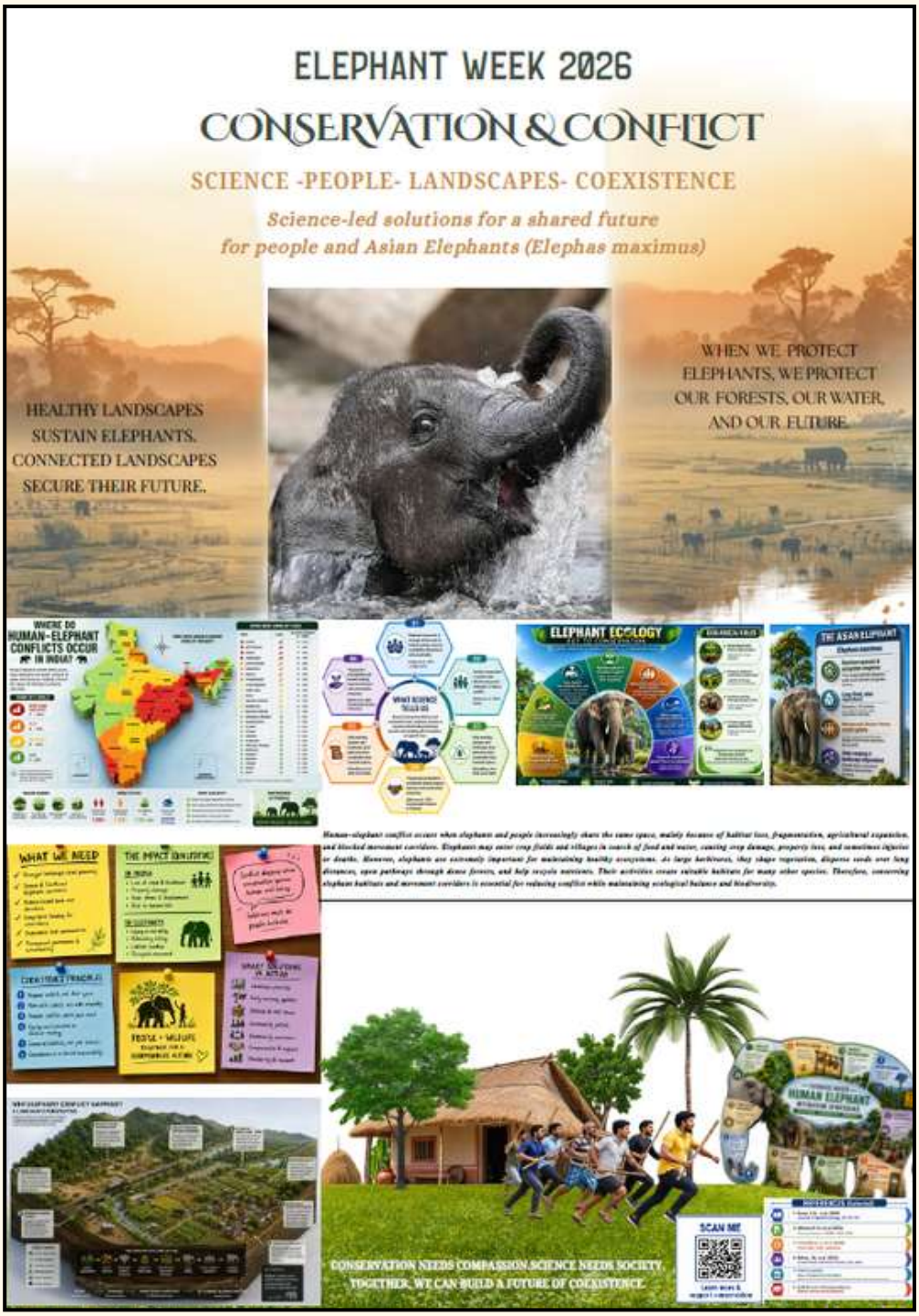
Being present in the area through our local branch allowed us to respond not as distant observers, but as part of the community around us.

Our contribution may have been small, but for the families we reached, it was a message of solidarity:

You are not alone. We are here, and we stand with you.

WORLD ELEPHANT DAY 2026

A POSTER THAT SPEAKS FOR COEXISTENCE



Winner

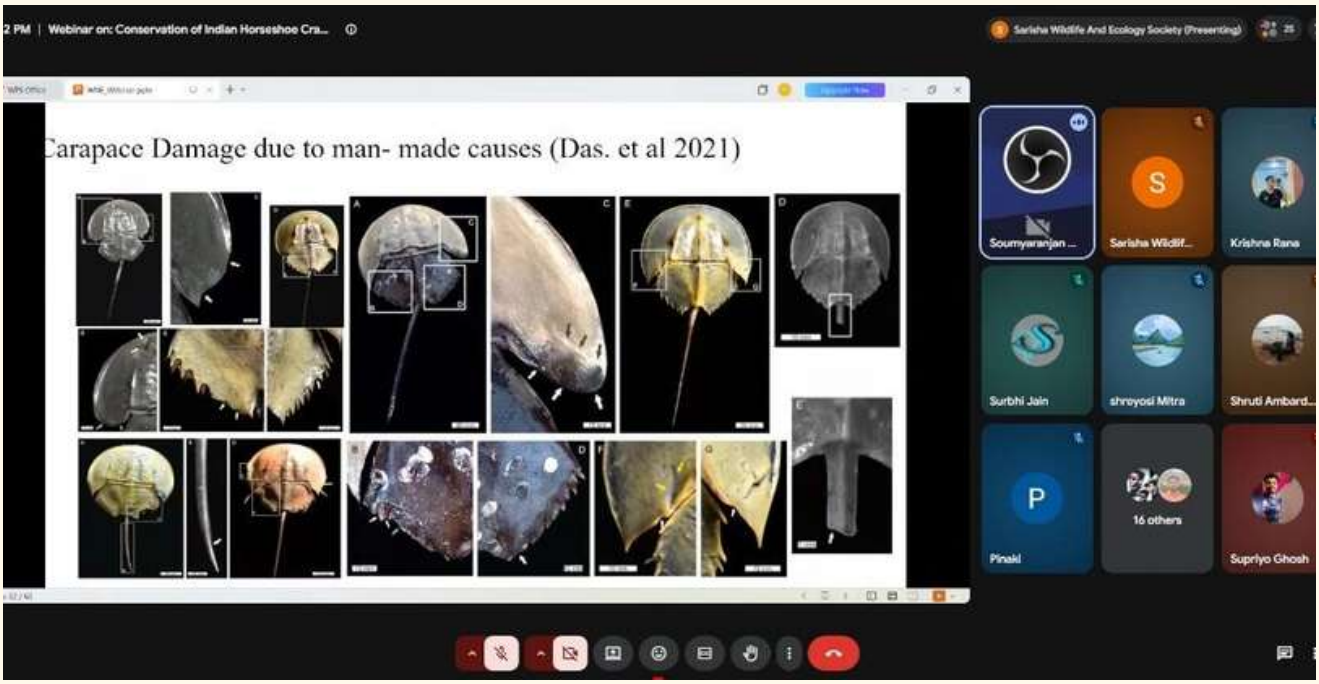
ANIK BISWAS

Topic:

Elephant Conservation & Conflict: Science, People, Landscapes & Coexistence

WHEN ART BECOMES A VOICE
FOR CONSERVATION

FROM HORSESHOE CRABS TO GHOST NETS: A MARINE CONSERVATION DIALOGUE



Marine ecosystems often remain out of sight, but the threats they face are increasingly difficult to ignore. From the loss of critical coastal habitats to abandoned fishing gear, human activities continue to create challenges for marine wildlife.

To encourage greater awareness and discussion around these issues, WNE India organised a Tree Webinar on the Conservation of Indian Horseshoe Crabs and the Threats of Ghost Nets in Marine Ecosystems.

The session brought together 20+ participants for an engaging discussion on marine biodiversity, with a focus on two important but often overlooked subjects: the ecology and conservation of Indian Horseshoe Crabs and the growing impact of ghost nets on marine wildlife and ecosystems.

The webinar featured Soumyaranjan Dash, Research Scholar at the Western Regional Centre, Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Pune, as the speaker. His insights helped participants explore the ecological significance of horseshoe crabs, the challenges faced by these ancient marine animals, and the wider consequences of abandoned or lost fishing nets in the ocean.

Ghost nets can continue to trap and injure marine animals long after they have been lost or discarded. Understanding this hidden threat is an important part of building awareness about responsible fishing practices and healthier marine ecosystems.

The webinar was more than an awareness session—it created a space for learning, questions and dialogue. Bringing together participants interested in wildlife, ecology and marine biodiversity demonstrated the importance of sharing knowledge beyond the field and into wider communities.

For WNE India, conversations like these are an essential part of creating informed environmental action.

Because understanding our marine ecosystems is the first step towards protecting them.

BILL DEFORMITY IN A LARGE-BILLED CROW CORVUS MACRORHYNCHOS AT SHEKHA BIRD SANCTUARY, ALIGARH, UTTAR PRADESH

Ali Arzan & Aditya Rana

Department of Wildlife Sciences, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202002, Uttar Pradesh, India



Adult Large-billed Crow Corvus macrorhynchos with pronounced upper-mandible deformity, Shekha Bird Sanctuary, Aligarh, 12 January 2025. (Photo by: Aditya Rana)

Abnormal bill growth in wild birds has been documented across several continents (Humphrey & Parkes 1959; Pomeroy 1962). Within India, the main published record remains Kasambe, Joshi & Meppayur (2009), who compiled opportunistic sightings of bill deformity in House Crow Corvus splendens, Large-billed Crow C. macrorhynchos and Yellow-billed Blue Magpie Urocissa flavirostris. Their note included two Large-billed Crow records, one from Panhala Fort in Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, in April 1991, and a second photographed in November 2008 while the bird was foraging in forest habitat rather than around human settlement, unlike most of the House Crow cases they compiled from markets and refuse sites. A more recent note describes bill deformity in a Jungle Crow C. culminatus, a species formerly treated as conspecific with C. macrorhynchos, from Odisha (Samal & Pandey 2023). We report a further case of bill deformity in a Large-billed Crow, observed at Shekha Bird Sanctuary, a Ramsar site in Aligarh district, Uttar Pradesh, which appears to be the first such record from the Gangetic Plains.

On 12 January 2025, during routine fieldwork at Shekha Bird Sanctuary (27°53'N, 78°04'E), we observed a single adult Large-billed Crow with a pronounced bill deformity. Shekha is a freshwater perennial wetland, located roughly 17 km east of Aligarh city, formed after the construction of the Upper Ganges Canal in 1852, later notified as a bird sanctuary and India's 99th Ramsar site in 2026; the site supports more than 166 bird species (Rahmani & Sharma 1997). The affected bird was perched in a dry copper pod tree Peltophorum pterocarpum, collecting twigs for nest construction (Fig. 1).

The upper mandible was abnormally elongated and curved sharply downward, extending well past its normal length. The lower mandible appeared to be of normal size but showed slight misalignment relative to the overgrown upper bill. The bird's plumage was in good condition, and it continued nest-building activity throughout the period it was observed, suggesting some degree of behavioural adjustment to the deformity. Whether this individual can sustain adequate feeding rates and successfully raise young over a full breeding attempt could not be assessed from a single observation.

The proximate cause could not be established in the field. Physical injury, nutritional deficiency, infection and genetic factors have all been proposed for bill deformities in wild birds generally (Humphrey & Parkes 1959; Pomeroy 1962), and Kasambe et al. (2009) suggested that physical damage sustained while handling wire during nest construction may account for some Indian corvid cases; they tracked one House Crow whose deformed bill later broke off and largely regrew to a normal shape over subsequent months.

Culmen length in C. macrorhynchos varies from roughly 52 to 80 mm across its thirteen subspecies (Yamasaki et al. 2018), and beak shape in the species departs from strict allometric scaling more than expected, so distinguishing pathological deformity from normal individual or subspecific variation is not always straightforward. In this case the degree of overgrowth and curvature left little doubt that the bill was abnormal rather than an extreme but healthy variant. Every published Indian record of bill deformity in Large-billed Crow, including this one, comes from a single opportunistic sighting rather than a defined survey, so no estimate of prevalence exists for the species anywhere in its range. A systematic photographic survey at wetland roosts, of the kind for waterbirds in parts of the Gangetic Plains, could begin to close that gap.

Creating Dignity Through Better School Sanitation





A school is more than a place of learning. It is a space where children build confidence, develop friendships and dream about their future. A safe and hygienic environment is an important part of that journey.

At Nischinda Balika Vidyapith in Bally, Howrah, more than 1,200 students were using sanitation facilities that had become difficult to maintain over the years. The condition of these facilities affected students' everyday comfort and hygiene, particularly young girls who need safe and private spaces to manage their personal and menstrual hygiene.

Recognising this need, WNE India, with support from Muthoot Finance through its CSR initiative, undertook the transformation of all 18 toilet blocks in the school.

The renovation included new ceramic tiles, washbasins, durable doors, improved lighting, painting and thorough cleaning. What were once neglected spaces have been transformed into cleaner, brighter and more welcoming facilities for students.

For the students, however, the impact goes beyond infrastructure. For a young girl, having access to a clean and safe sanitation facility can mean greater comfort, privacy and dignity during the school day. It can also help her feel more confident and remain focused on her education.

This initiative reflects a simple but important belief: every child deserves access to basic facilities that support their health, dignity and ability to learn.

Sometimes, meaningful change does not begin with something extraordinary. It begins by recognising an everyday need and responding to it with care.

The transformation at Nischinda Balika Vidyapith is a small step towards creating a more supportive school environment—one where students can learn, grow and look towards their future with greater confidence.

Because dignity in education begins with ensuring that every child feels safe, comfortable and cared for.

SNAKEBITE AWARENESS: TAKING SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE TO COMMUNITIES













As part of our collaboration with Bharat Serums and Vaccines Limited (BSV), WNE India conducted a series of snakebite awareness programmes across schools and villages in Odisha.

The initiative focused on promoting scientific and timely treatment for snakebite, particularly in communities where traditional and unscientific practices can delay access to appropriate medical care. Through interactive sessions, our team discussed snake identification, common misconceptions, prevention measures, first aid for snakebite, and the importance of reaching a healthcare facility as quickly as possible.

During August 2026, awareness programmes were conducted across 18 schools, reaching approximately 2,400 students, along with community outreach programmes across 8 village locations, engaging around 205 villagers.

The programmes provided an opportunity to speak directly with students, teachers, farmers and local residents about what to do—and what not to do—after a snakebite. Participants were encouraged to avoid practices such as cutting or sucking the wound, applying tourniquets or using traditional remedies, and instead seek prompt medical treatment and antivenom when medically indicated.

Reaching schools and villages is an important part of building community preparedness. By creating awareness before an emergency occurs, we can help people respond more calmly and make informed decisions when a snakebite happens.

Through the support of Bharat Serums and Vaccines Limited, this initiative aims to strengthen grassroots awareness and contribute towards reducing preventable deaths and complications from snakebite.

18 schools | 2,400 students | 8 community locations | 205 villagers | 2,605 people reached

Know the facts. Stay calm. Seek medical care. Save lives.