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11-year-old birder from Mumbai has documented over 75 bird species

Joshua Bosco developed an interest in bird spotting at the age of four.

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Joshua is one of the youngest members of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS).(HT Photo)

Unlike most children who spend their idle hours glued to their phones, television, or computers, 11-year-old Chembur resident Joshua Bosco, a Class 5 student from Somaiya School in Vidyavihar spends his time bird watching. Armed with his weapon of choice, a digital camera, he has so far

documented over 75 bird species in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

One of the youngest members of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Joshua picked up the hobby at the age of four and joined the pan-India wildlife research organisation at five. The budding enthusiast aims to become an ornithologist.

Bosco maintains a bird book, where he logs details of the new birds he comes across. His documentation has helped his classmates identify and learn about various avian species.

“On most days, I can hear different sounds but I don’t see the birds. This forces me to keep searching for them. The songs of the Magpie Robin excite me every morning, and I rush to see where they are perched. What is even more exciting is to see the colour of their eyes and feathers, and how they make their nests,” said a starry-eyed Joshua.

“For every new bird I see, I learn new things about the species, such as where it originates, whether it is a migratory bird, what food it eats. It is almost like a new story every day.”

With studies across MMR highlighting a drop in bird sightings over the last five months, such efforts to spot and record bird species contribute immensely towards conservation practices, said BNHS officials.

In February this year, the Mumbai BirdRace, an annual bird-spotting event, witnessed a decline in the number of bird species in most habitats in and around Mumbai.

Joshua's mother recalls how at the age of four, he used to sit for hours at the kitchen window and watch a mother bird, perched on a nearby tree, feeding its fledging.

“He started observing birds at the age of four when a pair of Red-vented Bulbul and Coppersmith Barbet would visit the Gulmohar tree outside our window. He would get very excited hearing their sounds, and would immediately start looking for them,” said Shilpa Bosco, Joshua's mother.

She added that it was his uncle who taught him the basics of birding and gifted him his first camera.

“In May 2015, when he was seven, he flew alone to Jamnagar to go bird watching for 10 days with his uncle, which further shaped his interest,” she said.

During vacations, the young birder spends time in forest areas across India, honing his interest

“Even after our recent family trip to the USA, he returned to school with pictures of the birds he spotted at various locations during the trip,” she said.

In 2015, Joshua was selected by his school to present his photographs and share his knowledge with junior kindergarten students. “

Joshua is an enthusiastic and ardent bird watcher. As a school, we believe in the holistic development of children. There is a lot to learn from our environment, so we encourage nature lovers like him to appreciate the beauty of flora and fauna. He loves it when class sessions are held outdoors so he

can count the number of birds around him,” said Parveen Shaikh, principal,
The Somaiya School.