



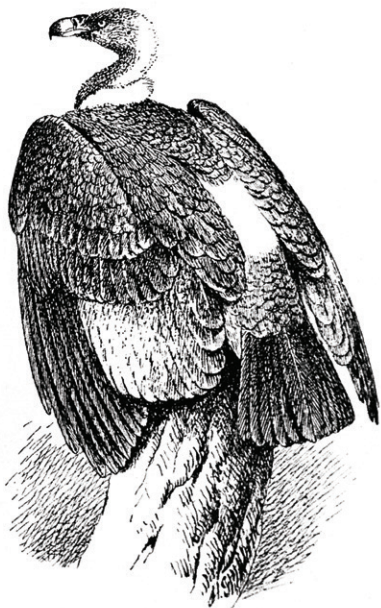
Hugh Whistler Last of the British Indian Ornithologists

Hugh Whistler was born in Lincolnshire, England, in 1889. He first came to India in 1909, where he was appointed to the Indian Police. Whistler was posted in several places from Phillour to Ambala and Simla. During these postings, he started corresponding with the British ornithologist Claud Buchanan

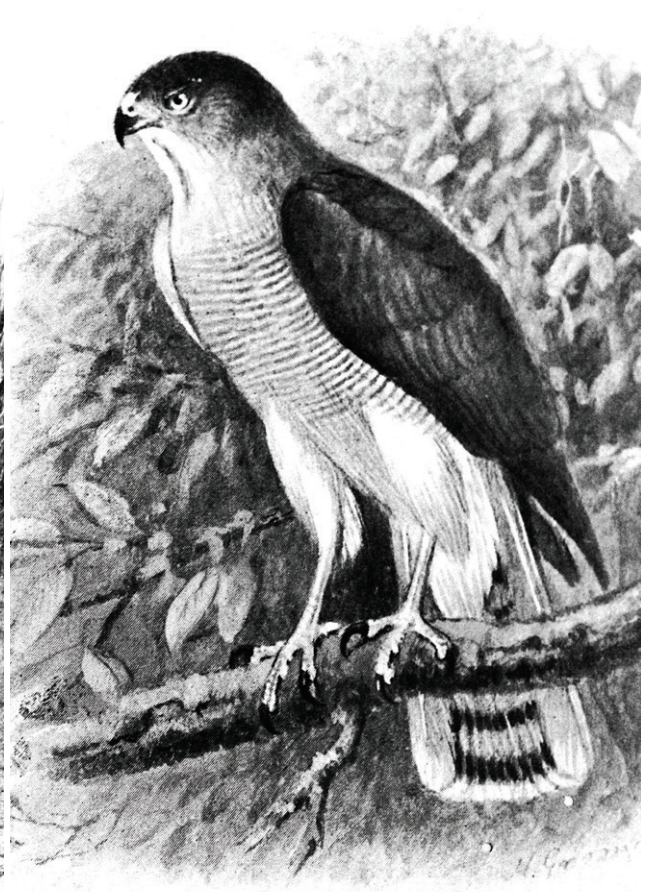
Ticehurst, whom he later met. The duo became close friends and, in the process, Whistler was introduced to scientific ornithology. Subsequently, he took an interest in the local birdlife wherever he was posted and kept careful notes and made collections. By the time Whistler retired, he had a very wide knowledge of the entire region of Punjab and its fauna.

After World War I, BNHS wanted to publish a popular illustrated work on Indian birds. Whistler was approached to take up the authorship as he had the requisite knowledge and an enjoyable literary style. The success of the **POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS** (1928) and Whistler's expertise is seen from the fact that it passed through four editions, and even today is cited in references.

Whistler left India around 1926 only to return after two years on a visit to Kashmir, and he travelled to several higher and lesser known parts of the region collecting natural history specimens. For the next few years, Whistler settled at Battle, Sussex, where he worked on birds, and almost every year, made short collection



White-backed Vulture, from
POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS
by Hugh Whistler



Sarus Crane (L) and Shikra (R), from POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS by Hugh Whistler

trips with Ticehurst to some region of the Indian subcontinent. The Society approached him to contribute a series of articles on the study of Indian Birds, which was serialized in the *JBNHS* in 10 parts from 1928 to 1932. The Society also invited him to join their Vernay Scientific Survey of the Eastern Ghats in 1929, and to work on the collections from the survey. His hard work, and timely assistance from N.B. Kinnear, resulted in a series of scientific papers in *JBNHS* on the survey which ran into 16 parts from 1931 to 1937 under the title 'The Vernay Scientific Survey of the Eastern Ghats (ornithological section)'.

At around the same time, Ticehurst and Whistler started to work on a *HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS*. Whistler had hoped to complete the book even after his partner's death, but due to his increased civil duties, he had little time on hand. The publication of the *HANDBOOK*, however, happened after Whistler's demise (Whistler died two years after Ticehurst's death, in 1943), as their manuscripts served as a base for Sálim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley's *HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT*.

Whistler was vigilant and meticulous in his work. He had

amassed a collection of 17,320 bird skins, which were donated to the Natural History Museum, London. Bird species like Whistler's Warbler *Seicercus whistleri* have been named in honour of this great ornithologist. Apart from species, several subspecies also bear his name, like the Andaman race of the Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus whistleri* and the northwestern race of the Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara whistleri*. The Whistler Prize of Sussex University, awarded to the best essay on natural history or archaeology, is named after him. ■

