

While browsing in the BNHS Library, you may chance upon Blatter and Millard's classic *SOME BEAUTIFUL INDIAN TREES*. If you are lucky, you may have picked up a copy bearing the owner's signature on the flyleaf, which reads "Charles McCann". The scrupulous notes and comments in the margins reveal the keen mind of one of BNHS's greatest stalwarts.

Born in Goa in 1899, Charles McCann completed his education in Bombay. He worked under the eminent botanist Fr. Ethelbert Blatter at St. Xavier's College as a laboratory assistant, as general factotum in the biology laboratory, and as curator of the college museum. He carried out research in systematic botany both individually and for his mentor from 1916 to 1920. After having left college, he worked with the City Police for about a year.

McCann joined the BNHS in 1921 as a field collector for the Mammal Survey in the Palni Hills and later in the Indus Delta, and soon became the Society's Assistant Curator. For any natural history trip, he was an extremely valuable companion, as he took a delight in repairing flat tyres, skinning birds, and doing

Charles McCann Curator of many hues



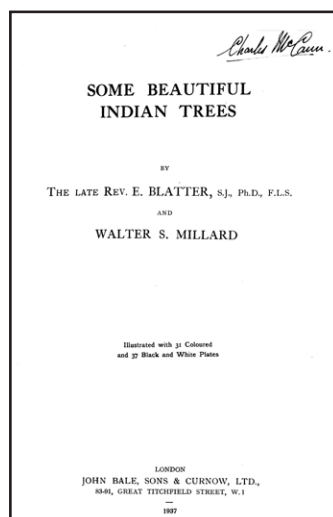
other grunt-and-groan work during surveys. Though busy with almost everything, he was always on the alert to spot features of natural history interest.

McCann was the editor of the Society's *Journal* from 1932 to 1947, and contributed 200 notes and papers covering an extraordinary range of subjects from taxonomic botany to bats. Some of his works include: 'On the breeding habits of some Myriapoda' 1918: Vol. 26(1), 'Notes on the flying-fox (*Pteropus*

giganteus, Brunn)' 1934: Vol. 37(1), and 'The flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber antiquorum* Temm.)' 1939: Vol. 41(1).

Charles McCann was also an outstanding botanist. He co-authored the 'Revision of the Flora of the Bombay Presidency' with Fr. Ethelbert Blatter, which was published in 16 parts in *JBNHS* (Vols 32–36). There was another collaborative monograph with

Blatter on the grasses of Bombay, published in 1935 under the aegis of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research. Another paper was 'The Study of Plant Life (3 parts, 1928–1929)' in *JBNHS* (Vols 32 and 33). McCann also undertook revisions on some Indian plants, which were published (along with scientific papers on Indian mammals, reptiles, and amphibians) by



Title page and photograph of flowers of Silk Cotton Tree by Charles McCann, from *SOME BEAUTIFUL INDIAN TREES* by E. Blatter and W.S. Millard

the BNHS. McCann also published popular books on trees: *SOME BEAUTIFUL INDIAN TREES* (1937) and *100 BEAUTIFUL TREES OF INDIA: A DESCRIPTIVE PICTORIAL HANDBOOK* (1959).

The Society was at that time busy working on the construction of the Natural History galleries of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India in Bombay. McCann contributed his efforts to the collection, skinning, modelling, and preparation of several dioramas. Despite the passage of years, these are considered among the finest exhibits of their kind in the world.

During India's Independence struggle, the future of foreigners and Anglo-Indians in India became insecure, which made McCann resign his post and shift to New Zealand. Though this was a decision he regretted all through his life, and wrote about in his letters, he soon found work as Vertebrate Zoologist with the Dominion Museum in Wellington. Putting aside his regrets, he focussed on the arrangement of birds and mammals, and later specialized on the whale and seal collections. After retirement, he joined the New Zealand Oceanographic Institute, and worked on deep sea fishes. He wrote 'Lizards of New Zealand' and some other papers for the Whales Research Institute, Japan.

McCann's invaluable scientific contributions on Indian natural history inspired BNHS to institute the Charles McCann Fieldwork Fund, which offers financial assistance to those interested in undertaking specific projects of field research. ■

