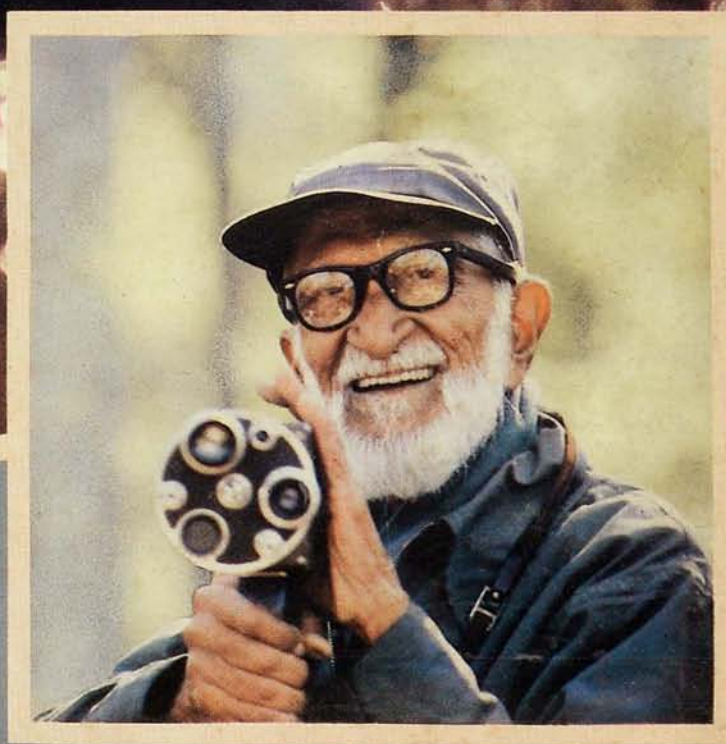


# Hornbill

1988(3.4)

...wings  
of time...



Memories of Sálim Ali



BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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# Hornbill

1988 (3, 4) July-December



BNHS

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## SALIM ALI

*If I hemmed and hawed in search of an excuse for having forgotten the task I had to do, Salim Ali would smartly slap the arm of his chair in exasperation, a displacement activity which struck one where it should. The small eruption of anger over, he would admonish "that is why I have been repeatedly asking you to note down things". One could not afford to make a habit of forgetfulness or finding excuses. You were then labelled "unreliable" and consigned to the dust heap. He was a perfectionist who could not bear the general national attitude of 'Jaane do' (=let it go). Seeing him in one of his moods of frustration at failing to get his staff to achieve, reminded one of the temper tantrums of Pandit Nehru at the shoddiness that surrounded him or Gandhiji's efforts to have his countrymen dig and use trench latrines. Their countrymen appreciated the anxiety for perfection and being unable to live up to the standards did the next best thing, elevated them into the Nation's Pantheon of saints. Perhaps that is what is happening to Salim Ali. He was by no means a saint, nor was Pandit Nehru nor Gandhiji.*

*Those of us who had worked with him over the years remember him not as the mellow and gentle old man of the TV and news media but as the tough and determined perfectionist who had deliberately set his foot on a path away from the mundane 'normal' path of conventionality. A man who would not listen to reason but set out jauntily to do what he wanted to do and not what other people wanted him to do or to be. He was a non-conformist.*

*His abiding grace was his delightful sense of humour and the humility which made his hackles rise at fulsome praise. Let us hope that we have not said anything, as we reminisce about him in the following pages, that would have made his hackles rise.*

J.C. Daniel



### Message from the Prime Minister on the death of Dr Salim Ali

"In Dr Salim Ali's death, the nation has suffered a great loss.

"He was one of our foremost Scientists, who was widely admired and loved. His outstanding curiosity and zest, his extra-ordinary power of observation and description and his sustained hard work of the highest quality over decades have been an inspiration to generations of scholars.

"He has died full of years and with the satisfaction of knowing that a large number of professional and amateur naturalists share his passion for preserving the wonderful variety of nature's manifestations.

"My condolences to the members of his family and the large circle of his friends and followers".

RAJIV GANDHI  
New Delhi, 20th June, 1987.



# the early days

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*Salim and Family;  
Deonar 1912.*

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*Tehmina and "Jane" with a "dead deer";  
Solapur 1928*

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*VIP coach, Cochin Forest Tramway;  
1933*

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*Salim Ali and Tehmina Salim Ali at Dehra Dun; 1934*



*The Mehmandar buying cotton for stuffing birds in the weekly bazar at Dana village, Afghanistan; May 1937*



*On the head of the big Buddha Baman looking south towards Koh-e-Baba, Afghanistan; April 1937*



*Salim Ali's collecting gang — Ghorband Camp I; 15 April 1937*

## Little known traits of Salim Ali

*Syed Asad Akhtar*

The 2000 seat auditorium of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) was filled to capacity on September 1st 1978, with quite a few people sitting on the floor listening in rapt attention to Dr Sálím Ali. Prior to the talk, Sálím Ali led an enthusiastic band of birdwatchers on a birdwatching-cum-nature ramble through the forests of the BARC located in the Trombay Hills. The trail led to a dilapidated Portuguese church which was especially sought to be visited by Sálím Ali. He wished to see the Barn Owls, which were roosting in the church. These owls had been recorded in the same place, during his ornithological

survey of the Bombay and Salsette islands about four decades back! Unfortunately not a single specimen was observed on this occasion.

This birdwatching cum lecture trip had a rather interesting sequel. On one of my visits to Dr Sálím Ali's place at Pali Hill, I suggested during the course of a conversation with him as to why the Government could not take up afforestation in the Trombay Hills. He appreciated my suggestion but replied that these hills were too eroded for such a scheme to be feasible. I had the temerity to argue that it was feasible, as I had seen patches of fresh plantations being maintained by the

BARC in these hills, so finally, the conversation ended there, leaving me with an unsatisfied query, which was perhaps guessed by him. A few months later he invited me to a birdwatching programme in the BARC forests. It was then that I realized that he had not taken lightly my suggestion regarding afforestation in the Trombay Hills, when he could have easily brushed it aside. His sporting approach to questions and suggestions even from a college fresher stunned me. Indeed, he never shut his mind to opinions at variance with his own and never had a casual approach. When others in his position do not bother to listen even to their compeers, he took time off from his busy schedule to recall and think over a conversation which others would have considered frivolous. **१**

## Some old letters

*Aamir Ali*

I had occasional correspondence with my uncle Salim Ali over the past forty years. To my regret, I didn't make any particular effort to keep his letters but looking through what he would have called the "chaotic litter" of old papers in my study, I find that eight of them have survived, written between November 1975 and May 1987. This is a haphazard bunch and much of the matter is of personal and family interest only. However, there are some sections which might be of more general interest.

One of the striking things about Salim's letters was that though he had an enormous world-wide correspondence, both personal and 'official', he seemed to devote all his time and energy to the letter he was writing at the time, however unimportant in the general scheme of things.

In the summer of 1975, I was in New York and saw the autobiography of Col. Meinertzhagen in a bookshop in Times Square. Knowing of Salim's close association with the colonel, I thought I would send it to him. Foolishly, I sent it by sea mail so it took months to get to him. He wrote on 24 November 1975 (he was seventy-nine years old at the time):

"How thoughtful of you to send me the Meinertzhagen book. 'Meinertzhagen had become a close friend to me in his later years, before he died, and always insisted on my staying with him when in London. Our association began when I accompanied him on an ornithological expedition in Afghanistan in 1937 through the intervention of Hugh Whistler. Before I got to know him well it was by no means an altogether cordial relationship and we had some violent disagreements. Essentially he was a bully with milder men, and early on he tried the same game with me. But he respected those that stood up to

him—a typical British characteristic—and in time we became very good friends. I developed the greatest admiration for his uprightness and total disregard of danger, physical or any sort. He was an excellent ornithologist and I had great regard for his views, opinions and originality of thought and interpretation: very good and stimulating company on expeditions."

During the early 'forties', I often accompanied Salim on his various expeditions, whether a day's outing, a weekend or longer. Alas, I was not really a birdwatcher, and my interest was in walking and camping rather than birds. Nevertheless, it was not possible to spend so much time with him and not have some knowledge and enthusiasm rub off on one.

In the autumn of 1975, I made a rather long trip through Africa, both east and west. I wrote a lengthy account to my parents and included a lot of bird notes in the hope that

Salim would see them. Indeed, he did and wrote to me in that letter of 24 November 1975:

"I have been delighted with your letter from the African tour and to note that you have at last been well and truly bitten by the bird-watching bug, and discovered the method in the madness! It will certainly add to the joy of your living for evermore (how very true!) as it has done in my own case. Several of the species that left you guessing could, I think, be found in that excellent FIELD GUIDE FOR EAST AFRICA by Williams. The manual for West Africa is a 'thick square' book by David Bannerman but it is not a thing that can be carried about in a normal pocket! You must have a look at it in some library."

And in a letter of 18 January 1977, he wrote:

"I am so happy that you are so well and truly bitten and wish it had been earlier, both for yourself and for the 'cause'.....keep the bird-flag flying."

And again, on 2 September 1984, when I was on the eve of retirement:

"I hope you are all well and flourishing and suitably braced up for the impending retirement. What do you propose to do thereafter? I hope you will get more time to 'stand and stare', preferably at birds."

In a letter of 29 June 1986, he reiterated his enthusiasm for the delights of bird-watching:

"It was fortunate for you that even though somewhat late in life, you were bitten so well and truly by the bird-watching bug. Thanks to it I cannot imagine anyone else enjoying a more satisfying and fulfilling life than I have had in spite of the turbulent periods of violent ups and downs we had after my retreat from Burma."

Once when racking my brain to try and write a piece for the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*, I wrote to Salim to ask what he remembered of the bird life of Pali

Hill in times gone by. At the most, I was hoping for two or three lines with which I could impress the readers of the *Newsletter*. What I got was a full page of very worthwhile and interesting notes. I have already quoted them in full in the *Newsletter*, but no one will be so unkind as to remember that. He wrote to me on 18 January 1977:

"I discovered your note accidentally just this morning while rummaging among the chaotic litter on my desk". (Reminds one of Bernard Shaw, reputed to have a large cloth bag in which he used to put all the letters he was supposed to answer, and fish one out at random when he had a few minutes.) "In 1924-25, soon after returning from Burma, I used to collect birds within about a mile radius of our house on Pali Hill. The area was covered with an extensive mango grove, and babul jungle, palmyra palms and paddy fields—more or less as in Kihim around Kamat village at the present time. And of course there was that beautiful green Golf Links, now a housing slum. There were practically no constructions beyond a few thatched shelters. It is difficult to give the number of species then found in our garden or on Pali Hill in winter, but it could well be 40 or 50 at the peak. The most noteworthy birds that have almost completely disappeared from the neighbourhood since, and from our garden (or what is left of it after so many of the old trees have died), are bulbuls (Redvented, Redwhiskered and Whitebrowed) jungle babblers, fantail flycatchers, ioras and frequent drongos. Grey Wagtails that used to visit the badminton lawn regularly every winter ceased coming altogether about 4 years ago and one by one the other migratory species are also forsaking the area. Some, such as the Golden Oriole, Paradise Flycatcher and Blyth's Reed Warbler occasionally show up when first arriving on migration, but hurriedly move on to more con-

genial habitats. The Pied Crested Cuckoo that used to appear every year just before the monsoon has apparently found better places to go to. It is sad to look over my old notes of those days and compare those days with the present situation! I think it is quite possible that you heard a Flowerpecker and a Coppersmith in our garden, but with the dying and the removal of the old trees they will not be here much longer. The crows alone will reign supreme: they are already in firm control!"

Salim was working on his autobiography for many years. On my visit to India, I would ask him about it and his answer was that, due to the insistence of friends like Ralph Hawkins of the Oxford University Press and others, he was working on it, off and on. But there were so many other things to do, it was slow work. On our visit in 1983, he asked us if we could think of a suitable title for it. In his letter of 2 September 1984, he wrote:

"Thanks to the goading and prodding of my secretary Archana, the MS. of the autobiography has finally been completed, and accepted by OUP. It remains to be seen how many years publication will take at the traditional OUP speed. Can you rack your 'powerful' brain for a suitable snappy title? So far only two have come: 'Some Dreams Come True' (Hawkins), and 'In Full Flight' (Ravi Dayal). I prefer the former."

My wife and I made some puerile suggestions but couldn't really think of anything good. When I heard that Salim had chosen the title of 'The Fall of a Sparrow' it was immediately clear that was of course, just the right one. How was it that I hadn't thought of it myself? Especially as I regard myself as a bit of a specialist on *Hamlet*.

Yes, I had the good luck of living in Salim's shadow for many years. When his wife died in 1939, he came to live with us and did so from 1940





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*Repose. Kihim, Maharashtra*

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During the last one year since Dr Sálím Ali died, much has been written and said about his achievements in scientific research, and his unparalleled contribution to ornithology, and the many learned books he has written on the subject; also the numerous awards that he got.

Very few got an insight into his private life. We who lived with him for almost half a century in the same house at 46 Pali Hill, not only appreciated his great achievements but were observers at close quarters, of his personal life, the good and the bad. Perhaps readers would like a glimpse of this side of this unique personality.

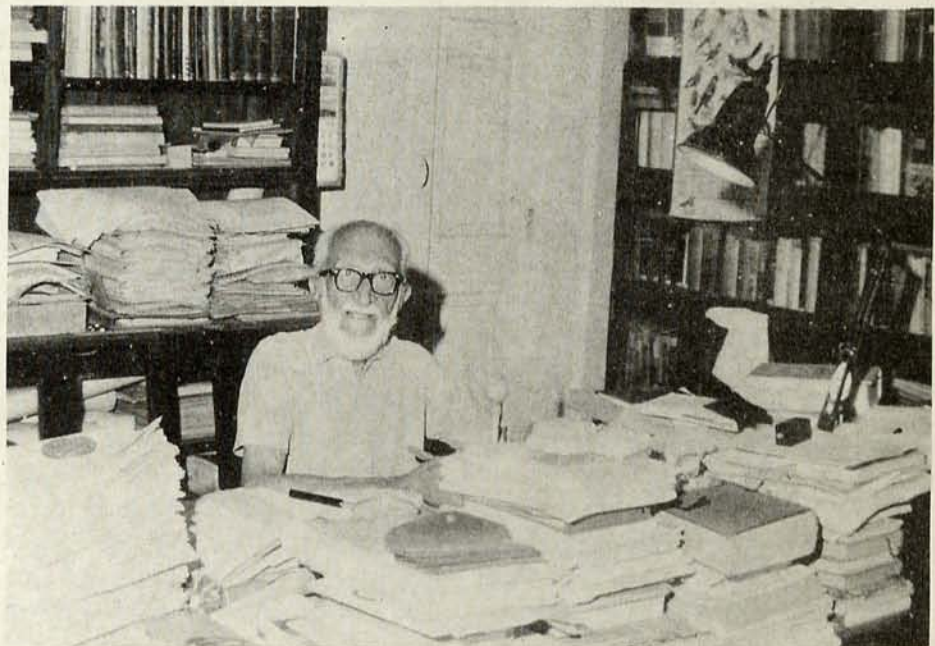
He was living in Dehra Doon in 1939 when his wife Tehmina died. My mother (Sálím's elder sister) invited him to come and stay at our house in Pali Hill (which she owned). With his characteristic preciseness, he laid down how much space he would want for his living quarters, study, library etc. Fortunately we had a fairly large house and there was no real problem in meeting these requirements.



*Hasan Ali's No. 46 Pali Hill — The shared home for 40 years*

When he arrived in Bombay he soon established a rigid schedule of work and self discipline. He was an early riser and needed a cup of tea on getting up. This was fine in an era when we had plenty of servants, but in the last few years it became difficult to satisfy this requirement. My wife hit upon the expedient of keeping all the tea things ready, showing him how to light the gas and boil water. His glee at being able to make his own tea was a

source of amusement for all! In fact he had a highly developed sense of humour and would enjoy jokes immensely—his own as well as others! When my first grand child was due he was keen on a girl, and when a boy was born, he said “damn swindle”. At another time he came back from his walk with his walking stick. At the entrance he saw a cockroach which he managed to swipe with his stick so that it was thrown several feet away, and he



*In his study at Bandra, Bombay*

gleefully shouted "goal, goal".

He had very punctual and rigid habits. Immediately on getting up very early, he would start work and we would hear his typewriter clattering at around 5 a.m. Breakfast would be around 8 a.m. after which he would look through the newspapers for some time and get back to work. Once a week he would visit the BNHS. In the early years he drove a motor cycle (he was quite an expert on this) but later on, switched to a station wagon presented by his close friend Loke Wan Tho and later the Jeep station wagon, also presented by Loke but in later years he found it difficult to drive and a car and driver from the BNHS would pick him up. If the driver kept him waiting beyond the scheduled time, he would get a firing which kept him on his toes for the rest of his life! (In fact many of us faced his monumental temper occasionally.)

Normally after lunch he would take a short nap and then resume his work. All meals were on the first floor with my parents and my own family, until I set up my separate establishment on the ground floor in the wing adjoining to Sálim Ali's. Invariably, in the late evenings he would go for a fairly long walk and was a well known figure on Pali Hill, Carter Road and Band Stand.

He was totally dedicated to his work and disliked being disturbed. Never were we or my children able to indulge in noisy games, hifi and such like thing. He was most intolerant of sloppy work and expected near perfection from those around him. He would resent visitors while he was deeply immersed in work, but such was his innate courtesy that he never actually refused to see anyone who turned up without an appointment. This does not mean he was a recluse and enjoyed going out in the evenings to meet his favourite nephews and nieces.

He took a great interest in

children and youths who had the slightest interest in Biology, Zoology and allied subjects and many became interested in Ornithology because of him. He used to have long discussions with my son Rauf even before he was a teenager. Rauf later went on to get a Ph.D in Biology. (He is now associated with the Sálim Ali Institute of Ecology, Pondicherry University.)

He had many visitors, often world renowned personalities like Horace Alexander, Dillon Ripley,

blindly support all that we said. First he had to be convinced that the matter was of sufficient importance for him to take up. Then he had to have a draft of our representation and he would carefully correct it. The final letter would be entirely his own, and over his signature.

The last few years at Pali Hill were rather difficult. My father had suffered a stroke and soon thereafter my mother died. Since Salim and my father were the only ones at mealtimes, one with a speech



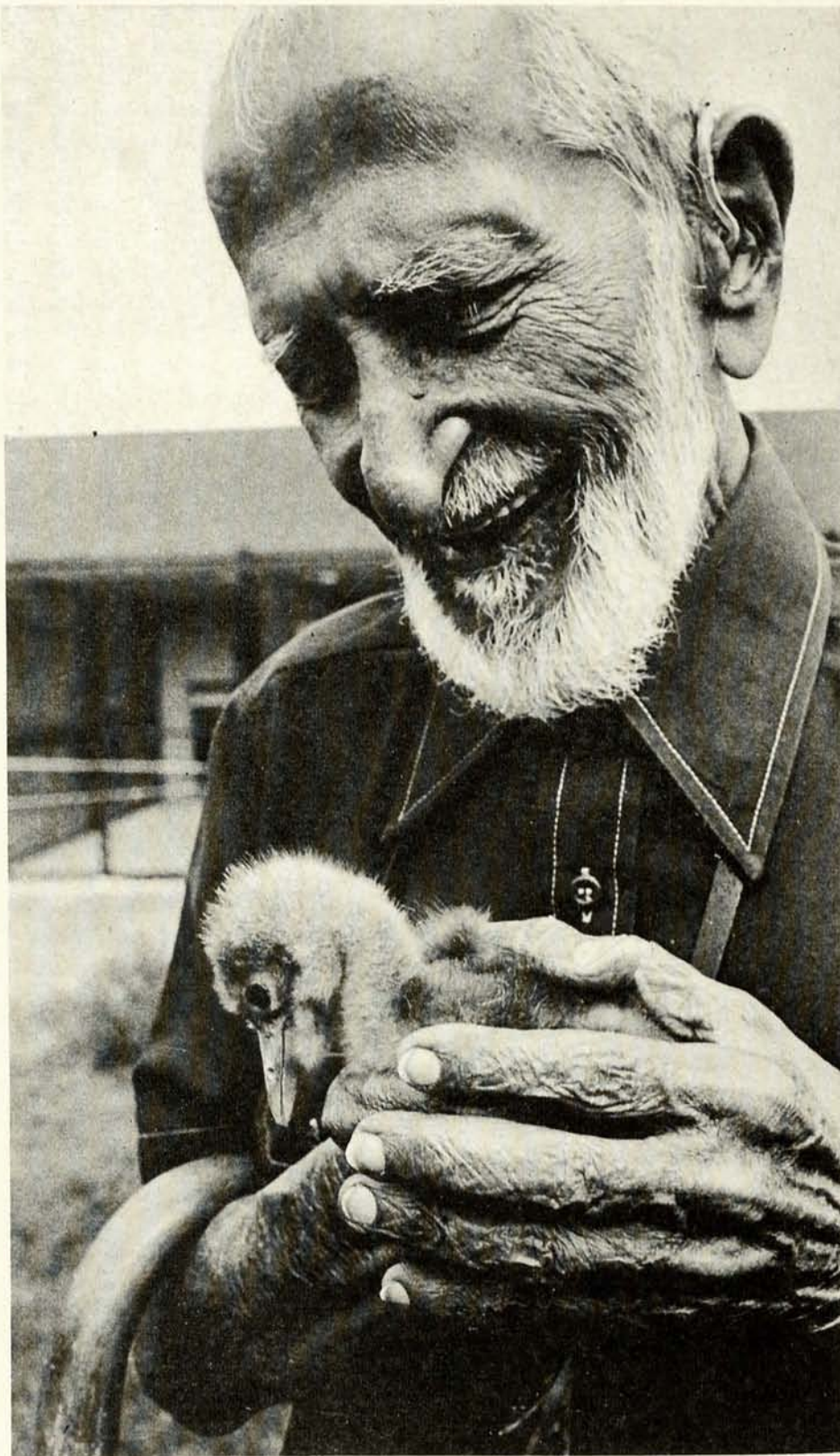
*At 31 Peppys Road, Singapore with Sir Percy and Lady McNeice; 1982*

Loke Wan Tho; Prof. J.B.S. Haldane etc.; who often stayed overnight or more. With the Lokes, we had a special relationship as his wife, sister Peng, brother-in-law Percy, all became close family friends. Loke's tragic death in a plane accident left Salim totally devastated.

When I became interested in Environmental problems some years ago (mainly with his encouragement) there was constant need to consult him on many matters, especially as he was President of the Bombay Environmental Action Group. At this stage he was quite close to the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and it became easier to put across matters to the Government. But it was not as if he would

defect due to the stroke, and the other with a hearing defect, communication became extremely difficult resulting in unnecessary and avoidable misunderstandings, and loss of temper.

When it became inevitable that we would have to sell the house, Sálim first moved to the Yacht Club for a few months and then decided to settle in Kihim, a village near Alibag. My father had built a house which now belongs to my sister and brother. He had it completely refurnished and repaired, with a new study, a room for his secretary, but illness overtook him and he could not make much use of the facility. Dr Ashok Nanavati made heroic efforts in the last few hours to save his life but it was in vain. **JH**



*International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, USA — with a Siberian Crane chick*

Dr Salim Ali visited the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in July 1984, and while he was here a Siberian Crane egg hatched. We named the chick Dr Sahib. The black-and-white photograph features Dr Sahib and his namesake, a bird that has subsequently developed into a magnificent female and which is paired to a handsome male named Anne Wright!

Ron Sauey and Dr Sahib were both attempting a meeting concerning various problems at a particular wildlife sanctuary in India. There was an administrator at that sanctuary that had made things difficult for outside researchers, particularly foreign researchers. This man was due to retire, and Ron commented that many problems would be resolved when he moved on. Ron concluded his remark by stating "But we'll have to wait for two years." Dr Sahib aptly concluded in his charming high-pitched voice, "Unless there is an accident." Everyone dissolved. Ron remarked that foreigners were particularly victimised. Dr Sahib responded, "Yes, foreigners are fair game."

In 1982 Dr Sahib stayed at the home of Ron Sauey while visiting ICF. Ron was a great cook and Dr Sahib found delicious slices of breakfast ham too much of a temptation for his Muslim values. When asked if he was enjoying the meal, he replied, "This is the most delicious red chicken!"

॥

*J.D.N. Banks*

We learnt of Dr Salim Ali's death through an obituary which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, and were extremely saddened by the news. We did not know him well, having met him on only two all too short occasions when he visited Sri Lanka all too briefly around 1980. However, my wife and I felt extremely privileged that Dr Salim Ali found the time to visit us while he was only in Colombo for a very few days, when he was good enough to look at my original illustrations for a pro-

posed book on the birds of Sri Lanka (A SELECTION OF THE BIRDS OF SRI LANKA) and pronounce them to be of an acceptable standard. This greatly encouraged us to proceed with publication though when he saw the book in published form he had this to say:

"The production of the colour plates is certainly quite good on the whole, but I only wish the figure in your original paintings had been larger. That would have done better justice to quality of your painting. As it is, too much space has been wasted in each plate which could have been more meaningfully utilised by making the figures larger without overcrowding. Making his figures too small was also my grouse with G.M. Henry in the plates he painted for Vol. 2 of the HAND-

BOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN. I am sure the booklet will prove very useful to bird watchers in Sri Lanka, and I hope also a good business proposition to you."

(The letter was dated 15th August 1981).

We took Dr Salim Ali's advice to heart when we subsequently published 'A Selection' of the butterflies, and of the Animals, of Sri Lanka in 1986, and in anticipation of the bird booklet becoming due for reprinting some 12-18 months hence, the paintings for the 2nd Edition have been made a great deal large! It is a matter for regret that Dr Salim Ali will not see the revised booklet when it eventually appears because it will hopefully be much improved thanks to his wise advice.

१

*Erach Bharucha*

To most people Dr Salim Ali was the foremost Ornithologist of the nation, and an international celebrity. But not many know that he was not just a renowned scientist, but a great human being. For those who have known him closely, he has been a *guru*, a confidant and a great friend. Salim Ali, the man, was indeed a compassionate individual with a profound understanding of all Nature. He had the same deep interest in plants, animals and human beings as he did in his beloved birds. His ability to read the signs of Nature in the field was matched by his quick understanding of the crux of a scientific problem when one spoke to him. The solution often seemed obvious after he had spelled it out in crisp simple terms.

What is it that had made the name 'Salim Ali' a household word for so many people? If one tries to analyse his charisma, it is the fact that his devotion to the study of Natural History, and to wildlife preservation was so great, that he had become an one man Conservation Movement. For him the crusade to save India's wilderness went on throughout his life—untiringly and unrelentingly till the day he passed away.

His dedication to field research in Ornithology and other branches of Natural History has been a great boon to the Bombay Natural History Society. It was at his instance and guidance that many projects were developed and carried out. These projects have dealt with major conservation issues that our country is faced with, and many ecological problems have been solved. As a scientist, he always had a fresh outlook, and was in fact far ahead of the times. He had indeed visualized the present sorry state of India's environment many years ago, and tried to move ad-

ministrators to arrest the terrifying deterioration.

I have often admired his approach to both birdwatching and birdwatchers. This is what made him a very special ornithologist. He once told me it was time birdwatchers stopped looking for the pinkheaded duck, and began spending their time observing the little understood habits of common species. Only recently he told me the story of a foreign guest who wished to see a particular bird. 'I took him to Borivli, and showed him what he wanted to see. But once he had seen it, and noted the place, time and date in his book, all he wanted to do was get back. What do such people ever achieve?', he said.

His thirst for information of the wilderness he loved never flagged. Even during the last few months of his life, he would want to know what I had seen during my visit to a forest or waterbody. 'How are your Flamingos doing at Bhigwan?', and 'What news of the Blackbuck at Rehakuri?' was what I was always

greeted with. And for me it was always wonderful, that he would ask for his hearing aid to listen carefully to what I had been doing.

A great Natural Scientist he had the ability to observe phenomena and draw the correct conclusions with great ease. Even at his 90th Birthday seminar he would ask the most pertinent questions at the end of a scientific presentation. His question showed what a complete grasp he had of various branches of Natural History.

Another lovable aspect of his personality was his special brand of spontaneous humour. His great wit would surface every now and again.

Sitting beside him on a stage for a seminar for forest officials he was being bombarded with questions. One of the questions had really no answer, and thinking he had not heard correctly—he turned to me to confirm what the question was. ‘But what can I say to that?’ he said to me. And then, turning to the questioner, he smiled and said: ‘Well, to answer this question, I must go and ask the birds’. The hall was in splits of laughter.

In the evening of his life, he seemed to have had only two great wishes. The wish that what was left of the Indian wilderness he loved be conserved. And the wish that the Society he had worked for, should grow to greater heights. He asked nothing for himself. His grave concern for the disappearing wilds of this country caused him great anguish. He repeatedly said that it would be possible to save what was left only through the efforts of the young people of our country. Today if we could pledge ourselves to conserve the varied and precious forms of life, the trees, the insects, the birds, and the animals that God has given our country, the last wish of this great dreamer-scientist will perhaps come true. Only then can the seeds of Salim Ali’s message to us bear fruit. It is up to us to see that his wishes are fulfilled. ॥

Waves were lashing at our boat, when it reached Pirotan Island on 24 December 1984. We all jumped on to the shallow sandbank. Our boat-staff lifted our guest and carried him on to the bank.

This was the second time in a short span of about a month, that Dr Salim Ali was visiting Pirotan, an island of corals, forming a jewel in the Marine Park. The sole purpose of the visit was *Operation Crab Plover*. Having learnt from Shri Lavkumar Khachar, that Crab Plovers can be seen on Pirotan in unusually large congregations, he had already made one trip. But to his misfortune (and our good fortune) birds flew away just as Dr Salim Ali reached the spot.

Dedicated and determined, as he always was, he gave me a pleasant surprise by visiting suddenly. This time Dr Salim Ali camped on the Island, staying in a tent for two days.

All the time he was on the move, spotting, identifying the marine and land birds. He seemed to be in a happy mood among the plovers, egrets, larks, sanderlings, turnstones, curlew, whimbrel and other waders. But what gave him real

## Operation Crab Plovers

*Sanat Chavan*

pleasure was observing Crab Plovers, over 500 strong on a small islet in the midst of the swirling waves.

At low tide Dr Salim Ali expressed his sadness at never having seen live corals in his life. That gave me an idea. We took a chair and tied two strong bamboo poles on both its handles, horizontally. Then six persons lifted Dr Salim Ali seated in the chair, and carried him on the following day right up to the edge of the coral reefs. I have never felt such happiness in showing corals to anybody earlier. It was a treat to see him holding a slimy, slippery octopus, slipping out of his hands and making him in turn laugh happily. He enjoyed holding puffer fish, and other creatures as well.

Well, that was one trip I cannot forget. It was an education in itself, but dedication, determination, wonderful stamina at his age, and steadiness; consulting and discussing bird ringing or identification of a bird with Mr Hussain and others.

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*Landing at Pirotan, Gulf of Kutch;  
Nov./Dec. 1984*

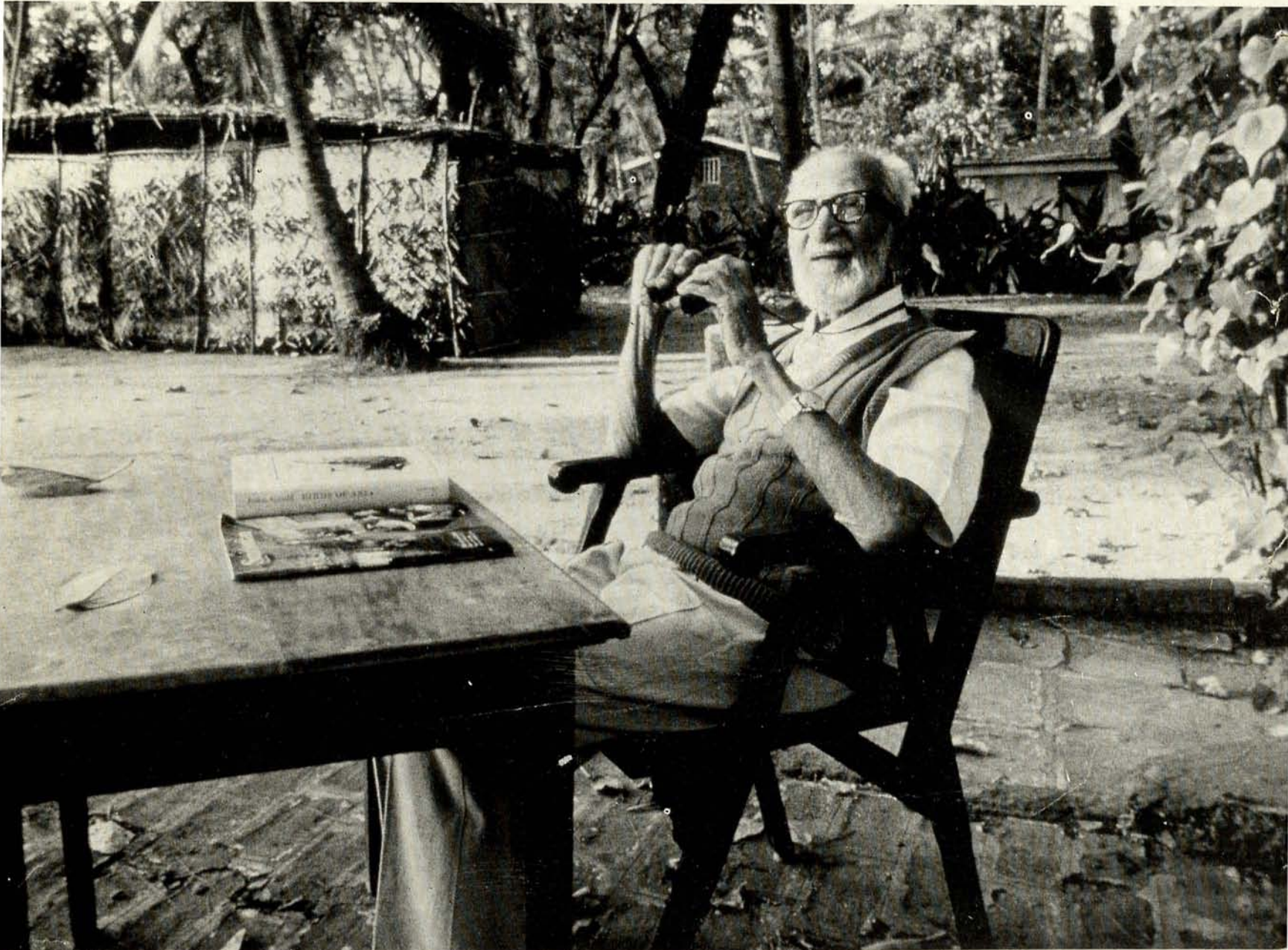
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*Richard W. Clark*

This is a photograph I took of Dr Salim Ali while visiting India in 1986. Meeting him and feeling his warmth and kindness are memories I will treasure always. He exuded an aura of greatness that must have been a lot like Gandhiji—though they both considered themselves ordinary men. I feel very privileged to have spent time in his presence. Tomorrow is our Thanksgiving holiday, and that makes me think of a remark that Salim Sahib made while

we were eating at Murad Manzil. He simply said, “pumpkin pie”, and was fondly remembering eating some while visiting the International Crane Foundation in Wisconsin. He also knew well that it is the traditional dessert or sweet of the Thanksgiving holiday. Earlier in the day we had been talking of Thanksgiving and Christmas because I was away from my family and in India. I like to think that he liked America. ॐ



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*Sitting on the foundation of the Kihim Bungalow where he wrote the Indian Hill Birds;  
January 1986*

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# in the field

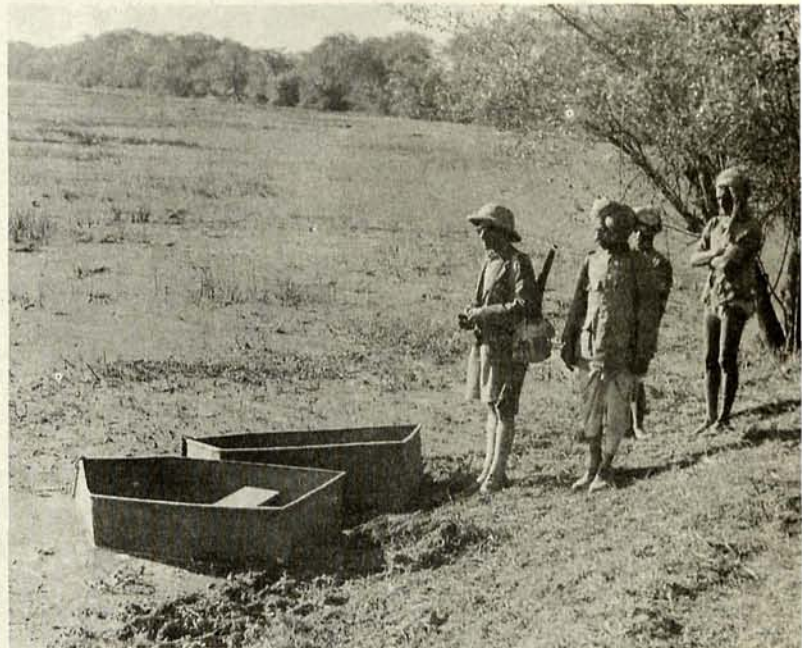
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*At the Keoladeo Ghana, Bharatpur;  
March 1937*

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*Swamped en route to Bastar; 1948-1950*

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*With Loke Wan Tho at Pahalgam, Kashmir.  
Note Salim Ali's plastic raincoat nibbled at by  
a cow when hung up to dry.*

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*Loading up at Pathankot, Birding trip to  
Kashmir with the Lokes and Hawkins (left)*

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*Near Lachen, Sikkim; 1958*



*Photographing Orchids, Sikkim 1955*



*Nest and eggs of the Jungle Nightjar.  
Bhimashankar, Maharashtra; May 1953*

*Guru and Shishya. With his first student,  
V.C. Ambedkar*





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*In the early days of bird ringing: Banding nestlings with hand-punched bird rings; Bharatpur 1958*

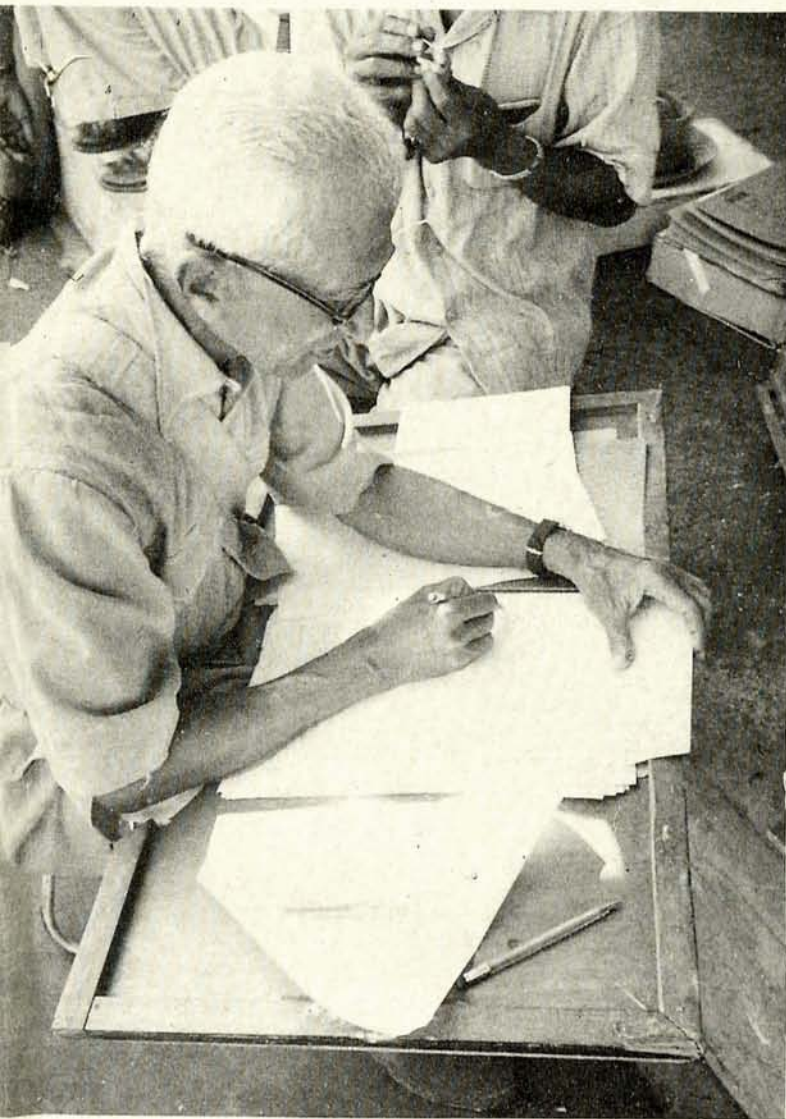
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*Dining with Loke Wan Tho in the field. Sikkim, 1958*

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*Recording banding data; Kutch 1959*

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*On the Anamalai slope, Kerala, with N.G. Pillai; 1947*

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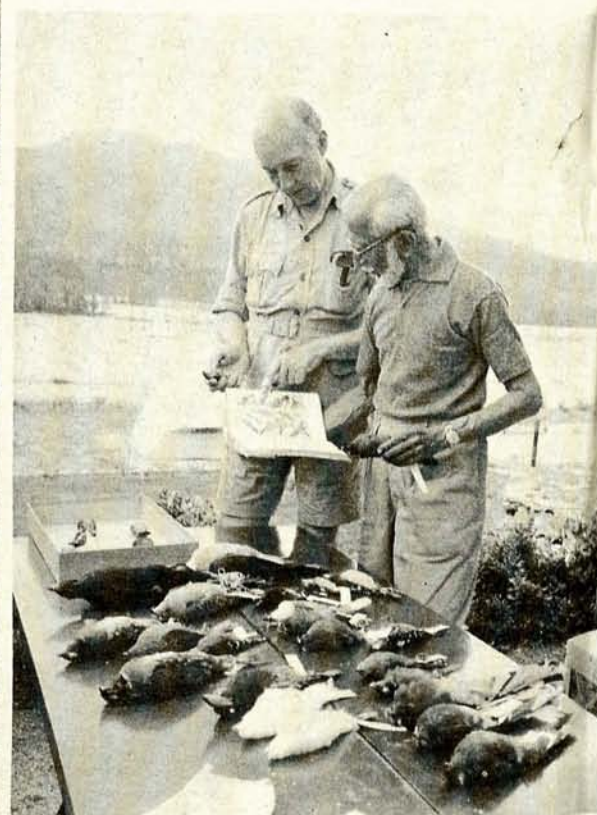


*Skinning the day's collection with the Ripleys*



*An abiding friendship*

*Lodrai, Bhutan; 23 April 1967*



Dr Salim Moizuddin Abdul Ali became a legend before his passing away, for his singular dedication and his complete identification with the subject of his interest. In the long span of his checkered life he had travelled widely, studied intensively, and contributed extensively on Indian birds—his prolific contribution far exceeding the total contributions of many others put together.

Being a student of art history I had little scope to dabble in ornithology, but strange it might sound now, a chance meeting with this remarkable man brought me on the periphery of this subject. Just after I joined the Indian Museum, Calcutta, as a deputy keeper Dr B. Biswas the Superintending Zoologist, Zoological Survey of India, whose office was on another floor of the same building where I worked, brought a frail old man with a pair of glittering eyes to my office to make a phone call as his phone was out of order. In the brief time before the call matured I was introduced to Dr Salim Ali, the doyen of Indian ornithology, and immediately we started discussing the two remarkable paintings of Bengal florican and Tibetan crane by Ustad Mansur displayed in the Art Gallery of the Museum. I had by that time already read his three part survey 'The Mughal Emperors of India as Naturalists and Sportsmen' published in the *Journal of the Natural History Society* in 1927-28. It was a pioneer work which showed the easy foray of an ornithologist in the domain of history and art. Little did I realise then that was Dr Ali's forte. He would go to any extent to give complete and authentic information of the subject. While completing my work on Mughal painting I came across many wonderful drawings

and paintings of Mughal masters like Ustad Mansur, Abu'l Hasan, Padarat, Govardhan and occasionally got stuck in the matter of identification. Who else to come to my rescue but Dr Salim Ali? He always found time for me and sent his comments from the monochrome photographs of indifferent quality or the indistinct slides I sent to him.

Once when I sent a colour reproduction of a painting from the City Palace Museum's collection and described it rather naively as "the picture of the kingfisher is not an authentic likeness of particular bird", prompt came Dr Ali's reply: "Actually I consider it a good and perfectly recognizable representation of the Blackcapped kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*). If you compare it with the illustration in plate 37 of my THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS (10th edition) or in plate 48 of Vol. 4 of my HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, neither of which is particularly good, you will agree that the Mughal painting is not such a bad likeness".

Several years later we published a portfolio of six colour reproductions of Mughal miniatures of birds and animals selected from the excellent holding of such examples in our Museum. We dedicated it to Dr Salim Ali. On receiving the first copy Dr Ali wrote to me: "The paintings are mostly superb and excellently reproduced by Vakils, and very adequate and interesting introductory notes by yourself. I am flattered to find that the portfolio is *undeservedly* (italics mine) dedicated to me: 'He was nevertheless aware of my inadequate background to dabble in matters of ornithology and did not hesitate to write: "Since you may be unaware of the international convention for the orthography of *zoological* Latin names, I am mentioning it here as it may help to guide you in future. It is a comparatively minor matter, but it counts a great deal with discerning

critics. The first name of the combination (genus); second name (species) should *always* begin with lower case, even if it refers to a proper noun (e.g. man's name). Thus the orthography of the name in the last line under plate III -Markhor—would be *Capra falconeri*. Falconer was the name of the person after whom the animal was described. The *i* after *falconer* has been wrongly left out in your text.

Absurdly enough the convention with *botanical* nomenclature is different. Here you are left with the option of commencing the second name either with cap. or l.c.!"

Now it was my chance to be flattered, he had become my true *guru*.

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## Salim Ali and Cherimoyer

Margaret Davidar

Dr Salim Ali the eminent ornithologist used to visit us in the Nilgiris now and then when he was my daughter Priya's doctoral guide. In spite of his greatness and the honours showered on him, he was a simple person who believed in enjoying himself. He bubbled with wit and humour which were spontaneous, but subtle. He would keep us roaring with laughter at the dinner table — we seldom had lunch together as he was out in the field most of the day. Then in his eighties he preferred vegetarian food and was passionately fond of fruits. I tried to procure as many varieties of fruits as possible to cater his taste.

Cherimoyer, a sophisticated custard apple, originally from Peru grows so well around Coonoor that it has become a Nilgiri speciality. Unlike the custard apple it has less seed and more pulp and a subtle flavour besides. When we introduc-

ed Cherimoyer to Dr Salim Ali, he took an immediate liking to it. I was saved the trouble of looking around for variety in fruits, and as we had this species growing in our garden, my task as hostess was made simple.

Cherimoyer is a finicky fruit. It has a short season and has to be picked at the right time. A little too early, the fruit becomes stone hard and even if it should ripen, it becomes chalky and flavourless. A little too late, I find that birds and squirrels have beaten me to it. Try to parcel it to the plains it is a disaster, as I found it later.

As Dr Salim Ali was so fond of this fruit, I tried sending him some to Bombay through friends during the Cherimoyer season. Dr Salim Ali was a meticulous correspondent of the old school. I would receive a prompt letter of appreciation. When he next came I served him his favourite fruit. And just to make conversation, I asked him how well the fruit travelled. "They travel best in the belly, Mrs Davidar", he said with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. I took the hint and gently pushed the fruit basket towards him and stopped sending parcels. ॥

my coming to Vansda so many times in the past that I decided I would not postpone my trip this time"; he said, adding "You know, I am past 90 and cannot say how long my lease will last." How prophetic his words unfortunately turned out to be. I fully realized that he had come only because of his feelings for me, and I was deeply touched.

That very evening we went for a short drive along the road to Dharampur. The next morning (28th February) I took Dr Salim Ali to Vansda National Park and he was extremely happy to see the rich forest area (which had once been my private property some years ago). He also very much liked my mango orchard there and said he would love to spend some days there if his health would permit.

That evening we had a small informal gathering of members of the Environment Awareness Club of South Gujarat (E.A.C.) and a few other interested friends all of whom Dr Salim Ali entertained with his enlivening talk for over an hour. It was a rare and happy occasion for all of us.

On the last day of stay we went in the morning along the forest road leading to Kevdi village and it was extremely disappointing to see the amount of illegal felling of trees all over the area. The evening was spent in watching the herd of cheetal and the few fourhorned antelopes and a female wild pig in the wildlife breeding farm I have in my compound at Vansda. Dr Salim Ali would have stayed on longer but had to leave the next morning (on the 2nd of March) for Bombay as he was to be felicitated by the World Wildlife Fund on the 4th March. He expressed his desire that he would be happy if I too could be present on the occasion and I therefore went to Bombay to attend the happy function. Little did I realise then that it was to be our last meeting, and his trip to Vansda, his last field trip. ॥

## His last field trip

*H.K.M. Shri Digveerdrasinghji*

There are not many persons in this world to come in touch with making it a rare pleasure and privilege granted only to the lucky. The late Dr Salim Ali was one such rare person whose association I shall always cherish with the fondest of memories dating back to the forties when as a school boy I used to meet him with Br Navarro S.J. of St. Xavier's High School.

It was therefore with great happiness that I received him at Vansda on the 27th of February 1987. He had come by car from Bombay despite his frail health and, as I thanked him sincerely for the trouble he had taken of travelling well nigh 175 miles, he said he nearly had to cancel the trip as he was not too well the day before. "But I was so ashamed to having had to postpone



*Bayonets at Bansda. With the Maharaja of Bansda's son and J.C. Daniel; 1986*

The US Fish and Wildlife Service, having been a strong supporter of the Society for many years and as collaborator on a number of joint research projects in India, offered to host a contingent from the Society to visit the United States in June 1984 as part of an effort to publicize the centennial celebration of the Society. Naturally, we hoped Salim would be part of the representation, but his age and health status were of major concern and many advisors in India and the United States recommended against his participation. Salim, for his part, took the position that he would be willing to come if his presence would benefit the Society. He and others were extremely sensitive, however, to his hearing problem and were worried that his poor hearing might create embarrassing situations that could detract from his overall presence.

The vicissitudes of time had taken their toll on the 87 year old Salim's hearing faculties and he struggled along with outdated, ill-fitting devices that sometimes created more problems than they were designed to relieve. Their age and inefficiency resulted in rapid demise of the batteries and keeping a supply of them was a recurring problem. Salim was constantly trying to adjust the volume on the aids to pick up what people were saying. The aids did amplify the sound to his ear drums but their loose fit also allowed sounds to enter the ears around the aids, thus creating echoes and feedback which often resulted in a painful, high-pitched beep. In frustration, Salim would turn the aids completely off. As a result he did not know what was being said and could not respond except with an embarrassed smile.

Nevertheless, undaunted by concerns for his health and especially of his hearing, Salim came to the United States as a guest of the Fish and Wildlife Service for a 15 day, four city Centennial promotion tour. He was accompanied by Mr.

J.C. Daniel, Curator of the Society, and Mrs Dilnavaz Variava, Executive Member. Before arriving, J.C. had requested that we arrange to have the "Old Man" examined by a hearing specialist as one of the first activities in Washington, D. C. By a stroke of good fortune, Ed McCrea of the Service's Office of International Affairs and who was assisting with the tour, had a friend, Mary Ernst, who worked in a hearing specialist's office. Salim was escorted to the specialist's office, under protest, for an examination. The results revealed that Salim's hearing loss was not as severe as imagined but that a large wax plug in one ear and the poor equipment combined to impact markedly on his ability to hear. Removal of the wax plug, discardence of the old hearing aids and replacement with new, custom fitted devices were recommended. It was felt that these actions would result in greatly enhanced hearing. The trouble was that the cost of the new aids was over US\$1200.00 and the "Old Man" wanted us to "quit fussing over him."

Ed and I had a quick discussion about our next course of action. We decided to gamble on Salim's friends and colleagues to raise the necessary funds. I started calling and writing to people while Ed and Mary dragged the "Old Man" back to the hearing specialist. The wax plug was removed and moulds were taken of the ear canals to prepare for a custom fit of the new aids. Salim continued to protest about this "unnecessary" bother.

Racing against a tight schedule, the aids were assembled and fitted just before the tour moved on to Chicago. Ed took Salim to an ice cream parlour immediately after the final fitting session in an attempt to mollify him as his fondness for American ice cream was well known. Musing over his dessert the "Old Man" allowed as how he did not notice any difference in the new

## Hearing aids for Salim

*David A. Ferguson*

aids. Ed laughed and responded that may be not, but this was the first time he did not have to shout at him to be heard.

Throughout the rest of the tour, Salim became more and more amazed at what he could hear. He heard sounds he had not heard in years and lots of sounds he did not want to hear such as the roar of traffic. Once he became used to the devices and the proper amplification settings, he took renewed interest in discussions and meetings he had previously shied away from. Upon his return to India, Salim wrote back to Ed, "Personally, I can't thank you and Mary enough for the dead set you made, against my protests, in getting me fitted up with those excellent hearing aids. But for your vigorous concern in the matter I should never have got them. The new gadgets have made all the difference, and I can now discover the presence of birds which for me were not there before! But for you and Mary these birds would still be absent for me. Many many thanks to you."

The gratuitous receipt of Salim's hearing aids resulted from the generosity of 23 donors in the US and England and their love and respect for the "Old Man". Salim was told that the aids were a present from "friends". More than once, thereafter, he would turn to someone in his company and in his quavering, querulous voice ask, "But how did this hearing aid thing come out?"

Salim's personal satisfaction with his new "ears" and their restoration of bird calls which he so enjoyed and which he thought he had lost forever, was reflected, I think, in his

vigorous quest of life in his last years. Those of us who had contributed to his enjoyment shared in his delight.

This story is not complete without a postscript. In early February 1986 I got a short, apologetic letter from Salim for not having written sooner.

### Zafar Futehally

Towards the end of his life, Salim Ali's room in his brother-in-law's house in Bombay, had the look of an over-stocked second-hand bookshop. Every flat surface was piled with papers; books and papers seemed to spill from the walls, and bookshelves reached up to the ceiling. Valuable works on natural history and ornithology rubbed shoulders with old, out of date calendars, and reprints and pamphlets lay cheek by jowl with massive volumes.

However, there must have been considerable method in all this apparent chaos. For, looking closer you discovered that each book,

*"Salim Ali's India" being filmed, Bharatpur;  
February 1983*



He had just completed a move in his living quarters with attendant inconveniences, when the unexpected occurred. "One of the major tragedies of the shift to Kihim was that on the very first night a rat made off irretrievably with one of my hearing aids from the dressing

table! This leaves me with only a single one and I badly need a replacement. If at all possible will you please bring one out with you?" Luckily, we were able to replace the loss within a few months and once again the "Old Man" was able to hear his birds. 9

however old, had been carefully handled and was in excellent condition. (He sometimes used to settle down himself to dust and clean his books.) And, if you asked Salim for the negative of a certain family photograph taken in 1926, he could produce it in five minutes; he would lay hands, almost immediately, on his original notes for any field trip—and he must have made an average of 4 trips in about eighty years; he could produce the typescript of any lecture or article; he could produce any letter written or received during the last three-quarters of a century; he could even, I'm sure, show you the accounts of any of his ornithological camps.

We all know what a very meticulous naturalist he was. What

may be surprising is that the disciplined habits of the ornithologist extended to all the other activities which did not directly bear in his work. Even personal letters, for instance, were carefully docketed and filed, the answer being typed out fastidiously by himself. He was not a fast typist, but there were hardly ever any typing mistakes. For someone who only acquired a personal secretary when he was about eighty, this was not a small achievement. Salim's handwriting too was slow, but exquisitely individual, and it never deteriorated. Indeed, if the world had contained no birds, he might have made a living as a Calligraphist; his Urdu script was particularly beautiful, and he took great pride in it.

The disciplined habits included the habit of being careful with money, and accounting for every rupee spent, particularly if that rupee happened to belong to someone else. His arrangements on all the field camps, whether surveys or bird ringing camps, were careful and economical to a degree. *Dhal*, rice, and *dahi* were the menu for two meals a day, week in and week out—sometimes months. Having extremely spartan tastes himself, he could not understand that some of his staff might welcome a few extra "luxuries", particularly as they all worked without stop for nearly 12 hours a day. Sometimes, Salim preferred to return part of the grant rather than "waste" any of it in what others might consider reasonable comforts. I used to



wonder if the lack of these small comforts sometimes made the staff reluctant to join expeditions which were, in other ways, so exciting and enjoyable.

Nevertheless, the important point was that he managed to organize major projects, and to carry out such internationally important research work, on shoestring budgets. He squeezed the most out of every rupee partly by his attention to details, and partly by sheer good husbandry. No wonder all his equipment, whether cameras, guns, cars or even shoes, seemed, like his books, to remain in mint condition forever.

Salim's pride in his own books was not limited to the text or its scientific value. He was proud of the illustrations, the paper, printing, binding and jacket design; for he always made sure that he had a say in all these things. He loved to touch and handle a well-produced book. As far as illustrations for his own books went, indeed, he used to take as much trouble as if he were painting the pictures himself—standing over the artist, and making sure that every single feather was finally placed just right. He must have helped several local artists to become good natural history illustrators. Nobody around him was allowed to get away with work which could only be described as "it will do". In fact, his special phrase for damning anything shoddy was to say that it was "will do, will do."

Salim has left a name in the world of ornithology which will ensure that his scientific methods will always be respected and emulated by the many young naturalists who are now starting their careers. What we ought to remember is that his high standards, his quality consciousness, always reached far beyond the limits of his work; all his activities were informed by the same exact and painstaking habits which were so outstanding a feature of his ornithological work.

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*Audubon Workshop, Bharatpur, Tree planting at New Forest Lodge; February 11, 1976.*

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*The ornithologist meets a sadhu at Bhimashankar, Maharashtra; 1953*

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## A stay in England

*C.F. Hewetson*

Salim Ali had stayed with us several times when he had been in England but on the last occasion we had a good example of his energy. He had a number of visits to make during the day and did not reach us until 10 p.m. for an evening meal. It was midnight before we parted and I arranged to take him bed tea at 7 a.m.! but when I brought it in the bed was empty and I found him already in the garden trying out new pair of binoculars which had been presented to him recently. We regretted at the time that he had such a busy programme that he could not spare us a little more time; but even more so now that he had died and there will be no more visits.

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Mr. Naidu, Curator of the Delhi Zoological Park, as the logical choice as the interviewer. I use Mr. Naidu's compound as the parking place for my car for the many visits I have been making to photograph the nesting colonies in the zoo. He referred Sabina to me and that is how it came about. We did the interview on 28th November of 1986 when he was in Delhi to attend the Rajya Sabha.

I was offered a contract for a 20 minutes interview. The first meeting with Sabina led to a second meeting with yet another Sabina who was also on the project team and we worked out the modalities. The girls gladly accepted my suggestion not to limit the time and for the interview to go on as long as Dr Salim Ali could tolerate it. In the event it rolled over more than a couple of hours and I think three cassettes. That is how one twenty minutes programme ended up by becoming two. It was put on the air in late May '87 while I was away in Europe and I have not yet been able to see it. In retrospect, how poignant Dr Ali's concluding words now seem. I do not know if these were included in the programme that was aired. Towards the end I mentioned that it was customary to end with a request for a message and asked if he had any for his admirers. Dr Ali realised I was being both half serious and half jocular and a small impish smile lit his face and he said that he hoped to live to be a hundred. I had absolutely no doubt at that moment, so fresh and full of life did he appear that he would indeed complete his century. Certainly it was far from my thoughts that within months of this event he would be no more. Only after his death did I learn that he had been ailing already.

I had admired him from a distance for many years. I learnt my birds from his books. To actually have the privilege of interviewing him and be with him for sometime

and then seeing him in flesh and blood was a privilege of the highest order. As my payment for the job I requested a copy of *THE FALL OF A SPARROW*. I had him autograph the book for me at the end of the interview and Sabina was able to climb over all the equipment and get behind his shoulders to film him signing his name. He was patient and cheerful throughout the interview. He had desired that I should see him before the shooting actually started and the moment he knew of my friendship with Hindal and Adil Tyabji and Javed Choudhry, to all of whom he was related, we immediately found common ground and there was a warmth and good feeling. He was pleased to learn that Javed and I were friends at college and that this had lasted into our service years in Gujarat. A man who valued good friendship, he was visibly delighted when I told him that Hindal and I were room mates at the National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie. I found him extremely sharp; his memory in extremely good shape and with the power to recall things far back in time. He showed beautiful manners and abundant grace of the old world type, mindful and attentive at all times, all the gestures and observances that make for civility and courtesy. Unfortunatley, the cameras were not on when he talked fondly and movingly of his wife Tehmina and her great contribution to his work with her encouragement and support. Later in the interview during the actual filming I could have brought him back to this topic but, caught in the web of my pre-prepared script, overlooked it.

In the end the abiding impression that remains is one of a man of great liveliness and awareness, of boundless commitment to things outside of himself, and of great grace and civility. To the many salutes that are bound to come, I would like to add my own small one.

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*Fateh Singh Jasol*

The privilege of interviewing Dr Salim Ali for the Universities programme on television came to me quite fortuitously. The programme was done by Jamia Milia Islamia University. Young Sabina, a student at that University and unit leader of the filming team first approached

You may please print the following lines from the world known English poet.

Though our hearts like muffled  
drums are beating  
As funeral marches to the grave

Lives of all great men remind us  
That we can make our life sublime  
And departing leave behind us  
Foot prints on the sands of time  
Foot prints that perhaps another  
Forlorn and ship wrecked brother  
Seeing shall take up heart again.

Dr Salim Ali was a real and sincere ornithologist and it was a great honour to all Indians and all ornithologists of the world, irrespective of their political creed and religious faith. It was a fitting recognition of his patriotism which prompted the Government of India to appoint him as a Member of the Indian Parliament.

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### Shivraj Kumar Khachar

I first came in contact with Dr Salim Ali in 1946, when I joined the Bombay Natural History Society. I remember visiting the Society in its old rooms at Phipson & Co., and Dr Salim Ali meeting me there. Over the years we met often in Bombay and corresponded on our subject of common interest, Birds. I came in close contact with him, and our friendship developed into something very special for me when in 1960 I joined a Bird Ringing camp at Kuar Bet in Kutch.

Dr Salim Ali came to Hingolghadh for the first time in 1960, and we had our first bird ringing camp then. Since then I have always travelled with Dr Salim Ali on his various tours of Kutch and Saurashtra. It was always a pleasure to travel with him. He had a wonderful sense of humour and his



Kuar Bet Camp, Kutch — The vehicle he used for over 20 years; March 1960

love of literature helped us sometimes to pass monotonous waits at various places. I remember once he woke up at Jhinjhuvada and got ready. I also followed suit as we were to leave early for Jalandhar Bet. It is only after we had packed and got ready that he solemnly remarked "Rather late to rectify our mistake". I asked him what had happened. He said look at your watch. I did so, and it was only 4 a.m. Too late to unpack, undress, and get into bed; too early to leave!!! We laughed, sat and talked of so many things till it got light and we could summon our jeep and depart.

A documentary was being filmed on the life of Dr Salim Ali and one of the episodes was to be shot in the Rann of Kutch at the 'Flamingo City'. He wrote to me to join him. I joined the party at Bhuj and we went on camel back from Khavda.

We reached Nir after dark for a night's halt in the open. It was a tiring ride but Dr Salim Ali was cheerful and up and about the next morning. We rode out into the Rann eager to see the Flamingo City. My camel went ahead and I had a powerful pair of binoculars. I looked at the distant colony and was excited to see the Lesser Flamingo also on nests along with the Greater Flamingo. I shouted to Dr Salim Ali about this and he hurriedly came up. We went nearer and then dismounted and approached on foot and excitedly surveyed the scene and tried to estimate the number of birds. This was a very important

En route to the Flamingo City; February 1974



discovery as the Lesser Flamingo had till then not been found to breed anywhere except Africa. Dr Salim Ali told me "You write an article on this for the Society's journal as you saw it first". I was struck by his generosity and large heartedness, but refused and asked him to write the article as a senior ornithologist. That night we camped on the island under the stars. At sunset Dr Salim Ali asked if he could have some hot soup. It was winter and quite cold. Our supplies had soup packets, but unfortunately no fuel. I gathered all the cardboard cartons of our biscuit

busy filming White-eared bulbuls, Common babblers, Redvented bulbuls, Purple sunbirds, Brahminy mynas and Rosy pastors feeding on the nectar of the lovely Rohida (*Techomella?*) flowers which were in full bloom in the whole hedge around the rest house. What energy and enthusiasm and what stamina at his advanced age. He asked me to try for the seeds of these trees, and I got some for him the next June. One tree was growing at his Bombay

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*Kuar Bet Camp, Kutch; 16 March 1960*

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and other packets, dug a hole in the sand, lit a fire and boiled the water enough. My cooking efforts were rewarded with watery eyes from the acrid smoke, but a warm thank you from the Doctor. "I never knew you were also a good cook". I had to tell him that this was my first attempt.

On our return we went straight from the Flamingo City to Khavda which we reached at sunset. The long camel ride was exhausting and left us all bruised and sore. We fell into our beds with aching limbs and even had temperature. I woke up at sunrise (it was winter, January 27th 1974), and looked at Dr Salim Ali's bed. It was empty. I washed and went out and sure enough he was

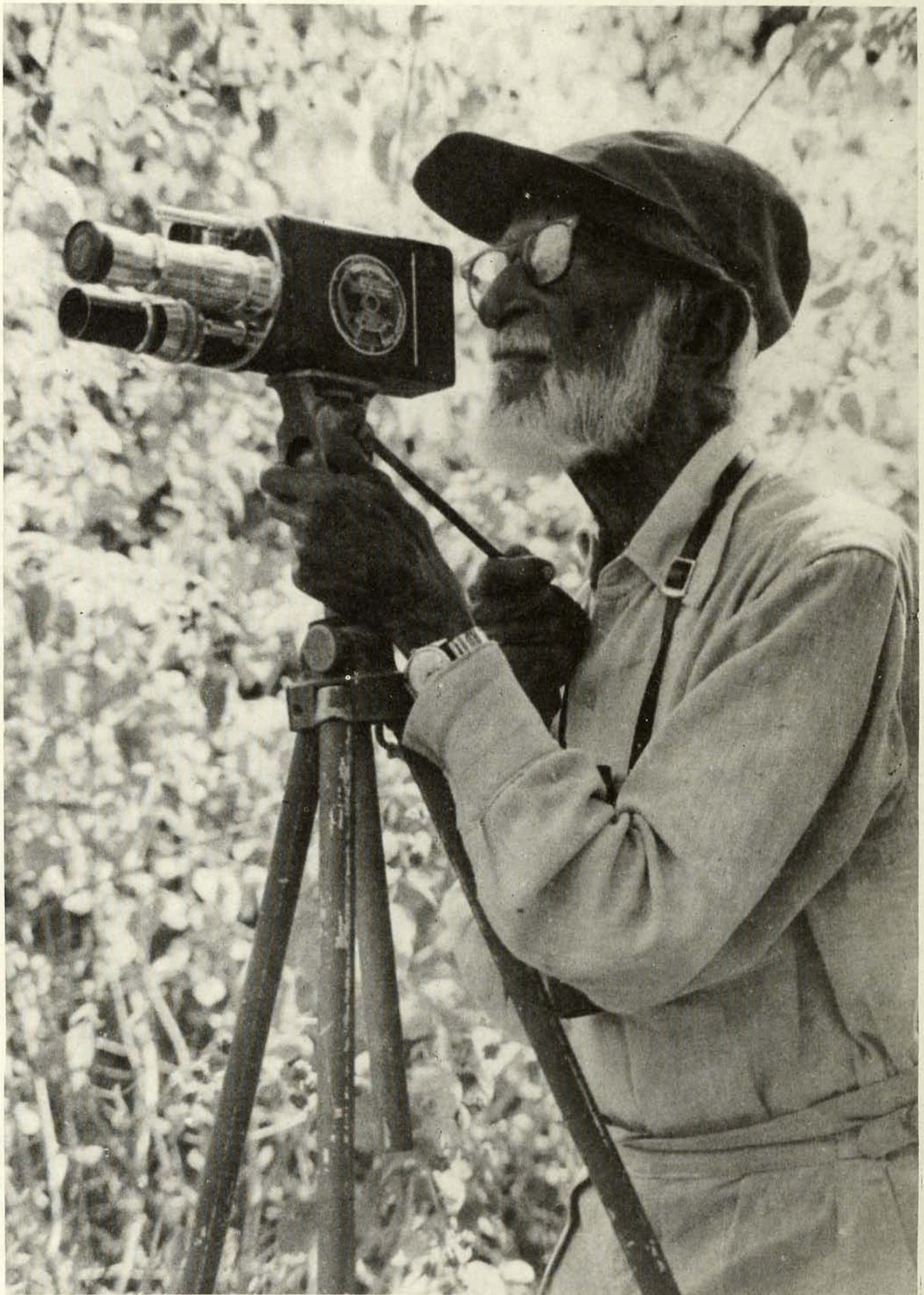
residence at Pali Hill, Bandra, and the others are now blooming trees at TELCO near Pune.

I was to go to China to attend the International Crane Workshop in May 1987. I went to Bombay to meet Dr Salim Ali and discuss the problems we had with China. He was at Kihim on the 13th March. I went across the ferry to his beachside cottage. He was overjoyed to see me suddenly and a little surprised that I had managed the taxi, ferry, State transport and rickshaw journey. I spent the whole day with him and his memory was marvellously sharp and he could remember what had happened a fifty years ago with clarity. In the

evening I had to go to the ferry and he insisted on coming to the landing stage in his car. On arrival the tide was out and we had to wait for 40 minutes. I asked him to drop me and go home, but he refused and we sat and talked in the car on many matters. At that time he told me quite matter of factly that the doctors had given him about a year more to live. He asked me to meet him before I left for China on 30th April 1987. Unfortunately, he was taken ill while in Delhi and I could not meet him. In June he sent me word with Prof. R.M. Naik to come and see him soon and tell him all about China trip. I met him on 13th June. He was at Bandra. He was overjoyed to see me and we talked for two hours on so many matters concerning Ornithology. I read out parts of the papers for the Crane Workshop and a short article on the Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*). We discussed how little we knew about its movements. Dr Salim Ali thanked me and said "What a lovely vase of flowers you sent me in Delhi". I was astonished. This was in April and he must have received so many flowers and callers; he had been seriously ill. How could he possibly remember such a matter? This shows his marvellous old world courtesy and affection for my family.

At 12 o'clock I took his leave and he was sad to see me go. He asked when I would come again, and I said after a month and a half. He then remarked "after such a long time?" This was our last meeting. A giant in the world of Ornithology and Conservation, recognised for his qualities worldwide, heaped with honours, having left an enormous amount of original work and literature has gone forever. His qualities of hard work, meticulous accuracy, kindness of heart and sense of humour will always remain in my, my family's, and in millions of admirers' memories for many years to come.

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*With his "old faithful," thousands of film footage later*

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I was flying to Delhi from Dehra Dun and Salim Ali Saheb was also booked on the same flight for Delhi. As luck would have I was carrying in my bag a few of my photographs of wildlife. As the flight staff as well as the security staff of Doiwala airport are known to me, when I told them that I had photographs of wild animals and birds in the bag, some of them wished to have a look at them. As I took the pictures out of the bag and put them on a table, I heard a soft voice behind me saying: 'Beautiful'. As I looked over my shoulder I recognised Dr Ali though I was unknown to him. I wished him with folded hands. He looked at all the pictures very carefully and patted my back and said "Young man I have one request." I replied: 'As an elder you should not request, but order.' Then looking at the pictures he said: "Please carry on young man; look, I am now too old and the field vast; one man's life is too short to complete the work. Therefore, I want that youngsters like you should give a helping hand, so that the work which I could not finish in my life time is carried on". These words of Salim Ali Saheb and the way he said them touched me deeply.

We were together for 50 minutes in the aircraft, and we talked on the various ways of preserving wildlife. Only after that day did I start working on birds a little. Previously I had never bothered about birds. **१**

On one morning in October in 1978, I was in Kameng, the erstwhile NEFA, when the autumn days make life most pleasant in that part of our country. I was driving on the Bomdila-Se La (the Se Pass)—Tawang Road. The road winds beautifully, maintaining a zero gradient right round the lakes to make driving a satisfying experience. During the months of September and October, hundreds of varieties of button sized multi-coloured flowers merge with the finest grassy meadows and the rhododendrons adorn the lower heights of the Se La massif. The steel grey chiselled rocky outcrops of the two shoulders of Se La rise majestically about 2000 ft over the pass. The whole landscape makes it a fascinating country and a small paradise for nature lovers, easily comparable to the approach hills of the Mansarovar and is perhaps as beautiful as the best spots in Zaskar, in Ladakh.

During the autumn, not only do the Monpas migrate to these meadows with their yaks, sheep and horses but as the Siberian region gets colder, the legendary Russian duck find their way to the warm waters of the Se La lakes and scores of other lakes in Arunachal, Sikkim, Bhutan and elsewhere.

Around 9 a.m. having crossed the Pass, I saw from a distance a small object, which appeared hazily to be a man standing on the bank of the twin lakes of Se La. As I drew closer, I saw the silhouette of the figure of a man through the mild fog that had locally formed over the lake. The fog formed, lifted, evaporated and formed again, a strange phenomenon of the Se La lakes. The figure appeared unusual and definitely not an Army person-

nel found here by professional expediency nor a local Monpa.

Driven further by an Army man's security consciousness and equally childlike curiosity, I stopped my vehicle, walked down the foot track to reach the lakes and finally the man. Unconcerned, he kept standing, looking smaller in his fur coat and large spectacles. Looking through his binoculars he kept making some notes. Well, I had run into an enemy agent. Not a bad catch; a Mandarin! I mused.

I closed within striking distance instinctively prepared for a quick close quarter battle. Fortunately the man looked anything but a Mandarin. "Ali... Salim Ali", announced a soft and gentle voice and a friendly hand was thrust at me. We shook hands. Salim, among other things asked me, in the first instance, to talk in whispers and to make no gestures, otherwise, he said, the Siberian ducks which were under binocs would be disturbed. I assured him that I would not do so. Minutes went past undisturbed, and I was spell-bound by his concentration. Frankly, I was feeling neglected, and I didn't like it. Then suddenly I heard Ali chuckle 'from Russia with love' as he took a zoom shot at the incredibly friendly Russian ducks, the pair having swum closer to us. "Obliging girls", I added, a rejoinder to Ali's, as he took shot after shot until it was all over and then we walked up to the roadside where we settled down to a cup of coffee which I had carried in my vehicle. "Wildlife", Salim said, "is a natural trust of you soldiers. You are their custodians. You should not destroy them". He repeated these lines again and again pleading emphatically, as if not convinced by any friendly nods, to his

## Remembrances

M. Krishnan

pleadings. Then as we drove down the Se La slopes towards Tawang, he surprised me when he asked, "Why dont you write?... you have so much to...". As I demurred, he shot back, "Write at least a love letter based on the animals, for Allah's sake".

I said that I would try more for sake of his feeling and warmth than Allah's. Without Allah's blessings, I said in the lighter vein, I couldn't have been in Kameng. He would not stop laughing thereafter.

With Ali's persuasion I began writing on Man, his creation, God and his creation. The birds unfortunately never stole my fancy, but the birdman, Salim, nonetheless did.

While driving back, I asked Salim whether the results of his sojourn in Arunachal had been satisfying. "Yes, indeed", he said in his easy style. He had seen a new species of magpies and sunbirds in Bomdi La one of which, he said sat on his palm. Often he would keep repeating this observation: "What a friendship, what love".

We drove to Tawang, where, he told me, he wanted to watch the famous monals, the pandas, and the 'snow-dnaphe' (Pro. Daanphe also). I showed him the Geshe La heights. Formidable they were, but I think he climbed up, where I suppose he did see some of the monals.

Courtesy was not to be forgotten in the world of birdwatching, writing and public workshops by Dr Ali. He wrote an affectionate letter to say how much he enjoyed the company of a soldier, who he thought was 'Khandani' than 'Khanduri'. Well, his letter—a personal and valued possession will continue to remind me of a man who the world knows as Dr Salim Ali, and, with whom I had the proud privilege of spending a few purposeful hours on the historic heights of Se La and that Shangri La, which we call, Tawang. 卐

Salim Ali was 91 when he died, and till shortly before his end, when sheer physical exhaustion claimed him, he was still fully preoccupied with his work as India's most knowledgeable and infectively enthusiastic ornithologist, guiding others in their avifaunal surveys and researches and, more rewardingly, personally engaging in field studies. Few men have had a more authentic vocation for their work or found it so self-sufficient and satisfying in itself, and though he had pride enough never to seek any form of personal advancement, plaudits and recognition came to him of their own accord as they have not to any other field naturalist in our country. I doubt if he really cared greatly for such things, but of course he was far too civilized and gentlemanly to refuse them—he accepted them gracefully, and then quietly utilized them to the extent to which they could be to further the causes and institution dear to his heart. Having achieved so much in the course of a long and eventful life, not only in his chosen field of scientific ornithological studies but also in his pioneering effort to infect thousands of Indians with an interest in our bird life, a fresh and sustaining value in their own lives that he, more than anyone else, helped to impart to them, I think he could have had few regrets in his last hours, and that perhaps he would have echoed Swinburne's lines:

'From too much love of living,  
From hope and fear set free,  
We thank with brief thanksgiving  
Whatever gods may be  
That no life lasts for ever;  
That dead men rise up never;  
That even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere safe to sea.'

I cannot personally claim any long association with him, though I knew him and admired him through

his writings long before he knew me. He has left behind much that is valuable and inspiring, much bird lore that is authoritative and carefully observed and checked, in his books and writings, and a whole body of younger men and women had their natural history guided, disciplined and stimulated by him: the Bombay Natural History Society which was even more a home to him than his own residence in Pali Hill will no doubt devise a commemoration worthy of so eminent and dedicated a patron and associate. I realize all this as I write, but still cannot help a sense of personal loss. Salim Ali was not merely a great naturalist: he was a man of refinement and culture, a man who cordially detested all pomposity and pretentiousness but who was incapable of anything petty or needlessly carping, who found enough zest and joy in life to compensate for all its pitfalls and injustices, a true gentleman in an India where, today, integrity and culture are so rare and little valued. 卐

A nesting colony of the Edible-nest Swiftlets  
in Loke Wan Tho's garage at Fraser's Hill,  
Malaya



I had the privilege of meeting the great man in January 1981 when I was spending some time at B.J. Medical College, Pune. In fact he signed my copy of *THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS*, one of my most treasured possessions.

Although I have often thought about this visit and talked about it to friends, I never met Salim Ali again. Last year, however, he re-entered my life in a rather unusual way. My eldest son and some of his friends read a book entitled *THE VILLAGE BY THE SEA* by Anita Desai. This concerns a young man from a village on the Maharashtra coast who leaves to seek fame and fortune in Bombay. Once there, he comes across a meeting being addressed by "a tiny bespectacled white haired man" on the subject of birds and wildlife conservation. Later on, he again meets "the bird-watcher" on the coast while the latter is gazing intently into trees with a pair of binoculars, to the amusement of the locals.

My son has noticed my obsession with birdwatching, remembers my trip to Maharashtra and recommended that I read the book. He was quite fascinated when I was able to tell him that we probably had the autographs of "the birdwatcher" in the room next door! Naturally, he proudly told his friends who were very intrigued to see the signature.

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*Ranjit Manakadan*

In October 1984, Sálím Ali was camping for a few days at Nanaj in Solapur district, Maharashtra. It was one of those trips when everything went wrong. The weather was dry and hot, the grasses had seeded and Sálím Ali was tormented by the prickly, difficult to remove seeds of *Heteropogon contortus* and *Aristida* spp. that had embedded in

his feet, legs and socks. Added to his woes, the Great Indian Bustard was playing truant. And finally the last straw—Indira Gandhi had been assassinated.

Sálím Ali was plain fed-up, and in spite of our pleadings to postpone his journey to Bombay, he was adamant to go the next day as planned. We checked at the Solapur Railway Station and found all was well with the railways. The next day, we were surprised to learn that all I class coaches had been cancelled and those affected could either get their money refunded or travel second class. After a lot of confusion, it ended up with Sálím Ali and myself trying to make ourselves comfortable in a dirty three-tier sleeper coach of the Siddeshwar Express.

As the journey progressed, Sálím Ali expressed his desire to retire for the night. As he busied himself in the toilet, I pulled down the middle berth and spread the bedding for both. Sálím Ali came back and started packing his suitcase in his meticulous manner, as he is with almost all other things. I watched him as I sat on the edge of the lower berth, bending forward due to the obstruction of the middle berth. Sálím Ali then absent mindedly came to sit with me for a chat.

'Thud', his head hit against the edge of the unpadded, wooden, middle berth. I winced, clasped Sálím Ali's head to my chest and rubbed the hit area of his head. It was only after some time that I realised what I was doing. I let him go and took a quick glance—Sálím Ali was blushing.

The next morning, we parted company at Bombay. Later, at Hornbill House, I was greeted by an angry and fuming Mr Daniel, "Why did Dr Rahmani send him by II class?—let him come to Bombay!". I tried to explain, but Mr Daniel was too upset to listen. After lunch, as I passed Mr Daniel's room, I was surprised to hear his loud, happy call for me, adding heartily; "Ranjit,

Sálím Ali spoke to me on the phone—the old man is quite happy with you, says you know quite a lot about plants." Well, after that, Sálím Ali never had trouble, as he previously used to have, in recollecting my name and I am sure it had nothing to do with my knowledge of Botany!

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*D.N. Mathew*

The earliest picture that I recollect of Dr Salim Ali is that of our smart clean-shaven and thoughtful Vice-president and Chief Investigator who greeted us (personnel of the first camp of the WHO-BNHS, Bird migration study) at Bhuj Railway Station in March 1960. All of us were tired after a long and uncomfortable train journey but we were quickly put at ease by Dr Salim Ali's warmth and deep concern for each one of us. Later in the day we reached the salty snake-infested semi-desert of Kuar Bet our camp site.

Almost immediately Dr Salim Ali demonstrated to us the proper way to set up mist-nets and handle birds. The Chief Investigator would also carry heavy poles and field equipment with the rest of us. Any one who carelessly (or nervously) got a button entangled in a bird net or tried to release a bird with a flourish would get a taste of Dr Salim Ali's temper. In the excitement of trapping migratory Rosy Pastors and Orphean Warblers, we forgot the saw-scaled vipers which were around. The capture of a rare vagrant the Grey Hypocolius made Dr Salim Ali very happy.

But the happiest event in the Kuar Bet camp was the arrival of our ever smiling guardian angel, Mr Loke Wan Tho. In between his many strenuous attempts to photograph the White Scavenger Vultures, Mr Loke would also join the netting and ringing operations and cheer



anybody who was feeling sick. At the end of a weary day's work it was a most heart-warming and sublime experience to listen to the after dinner conversations of Dr Salim Ali and Mr Loke. Together they would recall the hard days on the dusty forest roads of the earlier surveys. Conversation was not confined to birds. Dr Salim Ali gave us glimpses of the great personalities like Mrs Sarojini Naidu and Jawaharlal Nehru and would recount some of the humorous stories of the former. He told us of the great passion of Jawaharlal Nehru for wildlife. Both Mr Loke and Mr Dinshaw Panday were lovers of poetry and would recite some of their favourite verses.

Those dream-like days ended when Mr Loke had to leave Kuar Bet. An event on that day illustrated Dr Salim Ali's sense of humour. Not satisfied with the way in which his friend's luggage was arranged in the rear portion of the station wagon, Dr Salim Ali was peering into the van through its rear window. A helper who was unsighted knocked down the clamp letting the window fall heavily on the head of Dr Salim Ali. To our anxious enquiries he replied that nothing serious had happened. 'That's one of the advantages of having a wooden head' Dr Salim Ali remarked rubbing the back of his head calmly.

Personally I found Dr Salim Ali's persuasive power to be tremendous. In June 1964 I went to 33 (later, 46) Pali Hill, to meet Dr Salim Ali before leaving for higher studies. 'You must come back to us for there is so much work to do on birds and we need trained people', I was told. After completing my course I could have chosen an easier and more remunerative career in ornithology by either staying on at the M.S. University or moving to an American University with my visiting teacher Prof. Andrew J. Berger. Dr Salim Ali's powerful words and exemplary dedication

compelled me to return and take up even a most uneconomic project for research on the role of birds in agricultural economy. Economic Ornithology was a field very dear to Dr Salim Ali who had been advocating it since 1936, but one in which no work had been done in India after 1912.

Dr Salim Ali's thoughtfulness was most soothing. Greetings sent to him were promptly acknowledged in his beautiful handwriting on an exquisite picture card.

The last time that I met Dr Salim Ali was at the seminar to felicitate him on his 90th birthday. Even

when busily receiving numerous friends and colleagues who had come to greet him at the Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium in Worli, Dr Ali remembered to offer me his condolences at the loss of my mother a few weeks earlier. Little did I know then that the end of that great life was so close. The luminous footprints that he has left on the sands of time will inspire others to aim for sublimity in life for generations to come, but there can never be another like Dr Salim Ali, a scientist, who practised every bit of what he professed. 卐

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*Trying out the Andaman hangman's noose  
for size*

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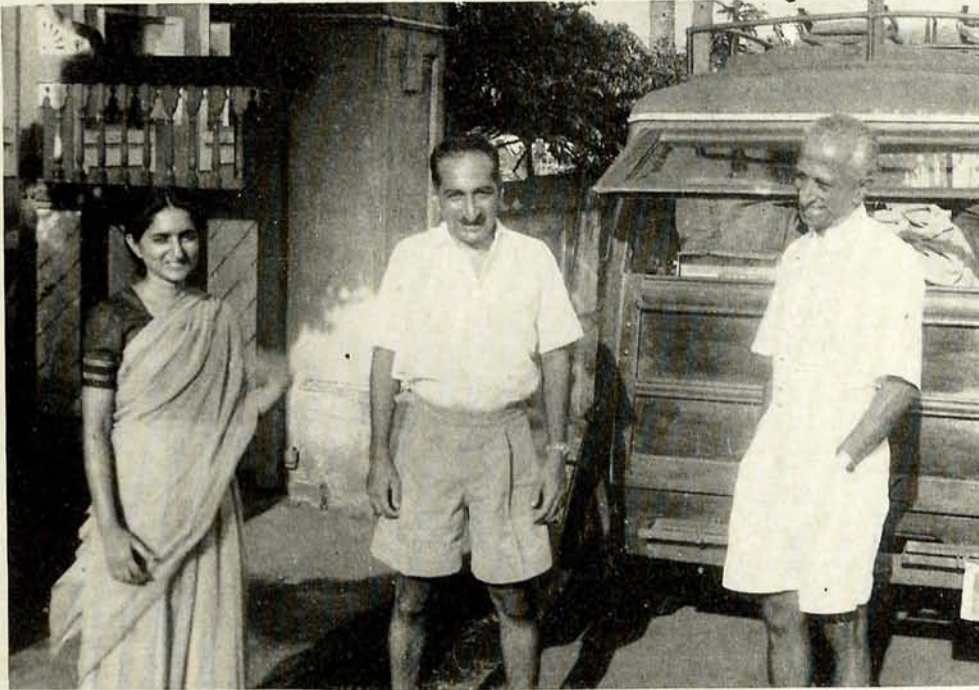
# with friends



*Col. R. Meinertzhagen, Miss Theresa Clay  
and E.P. Gee, Doyang Tea Estate;  
Assam 1952*



*Mangoes and the Renschers. A mango session at Pali Hill. R. Altevogt framed in the doorway.  
April 1953*



*With the Humayun Abdulalis, Perry Cross Road, Bandra; Bombay 28 May 1953*



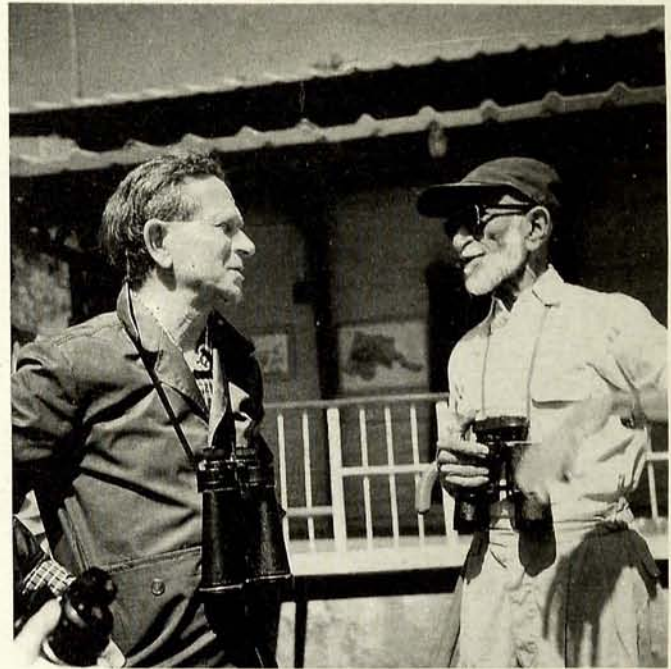
*At the XII Ornithological Congress June 1958*



*Loke Wan Tho and Salim Ali in Finland*



*With G. Nakanishi, President, Birdwatching Society of Japan*



*With Dr Alfred Schifferli*



*At Lake Naivasha, Kenya, with wildlife artists Robert Gillmor, Mary Cusa, Barbara Coombs and Dr. C.J.F. Coombs; March 1973.*



*Birding with Peter Jackson; 1983*



*At Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, U.K., with Sir Peter Scott; June 1985*



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*L. to R. : R.S.A. Quickrise (Audubon Society), Bharat Singh (Con. For.), Gupta (Chief Con. For.), Mary & Dillon Ripley; February 11, 1976*

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*With Prof. Geoffrey V.T. Matthews at Slimbridge; October 1976*

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*Identifying a bird in hand with Lavkumar*

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*Birding in the Keoladeo National Park with A.N.D. Nanavati and J.C. Daniel; 1980*

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*With Sunderlal Bahuguna at the Borivli National Park, Bombay*

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To reminisce about Salim Ali is to engender anecdotes in which he figured. His was a personality as to make every visit with him an amusing and inspiring occasion. Our paths crossed so many times that I cannot remember when I first met him. We were most often in contact during the life of the MAPS (Migratory Animal Pathology Survey) programme in the sixties and seventies.

MAPS was making a study of bird migration in eastern Asia and we had 13 banding teams in as many countries. Once each year we brought all of the responsible together for a discussion of activities, achievements and future work. If possible we tried to have these meetings in conjunction with those of the Asian Branch of ICBP, with IUCN conferences, or with the Pacific Science Congress. One of these was at Bharatpur in 1969 following an IUCN meeting in New

Delhi. Local game officials had set up large tents at the hunting lodge to house visiting males and females and one as a meeting place for ICBP and MAPS. All of my team leaders and several of my staff enjoyed this meeting from which many stories arose; too many to recount here!

Salim loved butter on his *chapatis* and at field stations where the rations were often stark (mashed up chicken stew, bones and all, boiled barley soup, *chapatis* and runt peanuts) it always sported butter for his *chapatis*, and often jam as well.

I got off the train at Bharatpur, 165 pounds of me and about an equal weight of luggage and hailed a bicycle motivated trishaw. My lack of Hindi and the operator's lack of English posed problems. I wanted to go to the Ghana Refuge which I knew was not far away, but refuge to him ended us in the beautiful citadel. Students gathered around but were not much more helpful. On our wanderings the trishaw operator became more and more fatigued. He stopped at a shop and reinforced himself with a betelnut chew. Final-

ly I recognized the road that I wanted, pointed to the entry sign of the refuge and we wavered on. Salim met us before the hunting lodge. The trip had taken an hour or more and the operator was exhausted as well as having tried hard to understand. So I tipped him several rupees! Salim was aghast and angered. He ranted at me for several minutes citing the fact that bloody foreigners like me were ruining India's economy by over-paying the help!!

A delegation of Russian scientists was to visit the Ghana refuge, including a virologist, ecologist and one or two others. Since at that time my studies of bird migration were considered subversive and biological warfare both in China and in Russia I was on their hit list and had not had an opportunity to meet some of the scientists whose work I was well aware of. So I made a hasty trip from Bangkok arriving at Ghana while these astute biologists were still present. They spoke Russian, one spoke French, there was a smattering of English.

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With MAP's Ornithologist, Elliott McClure, Dusky Horned Owl, and USSR virologists Prof. G. Netsky and Dr. Vera Obukhova; Bharatpur 1967

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Salim spoke Hindi, English, some French and I don't know what else. All I spoke was English and a smattering of Japanese and Malay. Conversation was matter of linguistic acrobatics, yet we all wanted information on various topics. It was fun, challenging and exhausting, but for hours as we toured the refuge and over the dinner table we accomplished much. A most remarkable discourse.

I was in Harold Coolidge's home outside of Boston snacking on sweet rolls when he was informed that he had received the Getty award. I was in Bangkok at Boonsong Lekagul's museum when he learned that he was the recipient. Salim was in California and was to have dinner with Herbert Friedmann in Los Angeles when I learned of it. I rudely invited myself to the dinner with apologies to Dr. Friedmann because this was the last opportunity that I had to talk with him. Knowing the economic condition of India and that Salim was a friend of Indira Gandhi I asked, "What happened to the Getty money when you received it? Did Indira let you keep it?" "Yes", he said, "I asked her about it and she said that I could have it tax free!" And I suspect that the Bombay Natural History Society benefitted from it.

It was in August 1974 at the 16th International Ornithological Conference at Canberra, Australia; I had hardly arrived at the registration desk before I was approached by members of the Indian delegation to inform me sorrowfully that Salim had just died. And would I write an obituary note for him!!! Since I had recently been in contact with the Bombay Natural History Society I doubted my ears. Also I had been misinformed by Indians before (especially in Calcutta where I was supposed to join a tour of Bhutan with Salim) so I held my peace and waited until I could learn from J.C. Daniel that Salim's death notice was a little previous!! As he

said in his autobiography it was interesting reading letters of condolence!! Luckily he out-lived that notice by thirteen years and completed his monumental ten volume of Indian birds and his autobiography as well.

I still have a vivid mental picture of him in his cluttered and poorly lighted study (one small light bulb glowing above his head at 33 or was it 46 Pali Hill, labouring meticulously as he put down on paper the myriad of facts concerning birds that he had accumulated during a long and fruitful life. Few of us can hope to have had such a wealth of experiences. Yes, knowing Salim was a roller-coaster of fun and experiences.

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## Unbelievable, but true

*R.S. Moral*

Yes, the most humane Dr Salim Ali, who was a true bird lover and did extensive and investigative work for the preservation of many bird species which would have otherwise gone extinct, suggested a very drastic remedy which may sound shocking on the face of it.

When I first started as an amateur birdwatcher, I had occasion to meet Dr Salim Ali on one of the outings, and I was introduced to him as a Marketing Official working for a government meats freeze preserving undertaking. He went into a deep trance for a minute and came up with the statement "Parakeets are very tasty" even Moghuls had them *tandooried*. Why not your company do something to promote their consumption?

I was shocked to hear this, specially from a bird lover and he continued, "I have advised Government for mass destruction and eradication of the pest, but the means are yet to be worked out. Can your company collect them for pro-



*Collecting Swallows; Assam*

cessing and marketing?"

I was stunned. He went on "Even live trapping could be tried if shooting damages the flesh." He explained, "The parakeet destroys much more fruits than what it needs for food. Take for example, its daily migration in thousands from Agra to Delhi for foraging the orchards and destroying most of the fruits in a day leaving the farmer to cry on the ruinage. They arrive with shrill cries announcing the great menace. Everyday new target areas get vandalised. The parakeet has become a major pest."

Practical difficulties due to uncertainty of the source of supply where the catch would be made and the problem of quick freezing at  $-20$  to  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  made the idea not feasible. Handling live birds involved other problems and what if trappers caught other species and sold them as pets or as food under the licence obtained for trapping parakeets.

The idea was given up though it had good intentions in preserving fruits for man, at the same time avoiding wastage of the parakeet meat, even though it could give as small as 100 g per bird or even lesser, and the quantity nowhere equal to other table birds.



*At the inauguration of session of Indian Board for Wildlife, Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, by  
Jawaharlal Nehru; 15 February 1958*

# conservation meetings

*International Ornithological Congress, Ithaca, USA; 1958.*

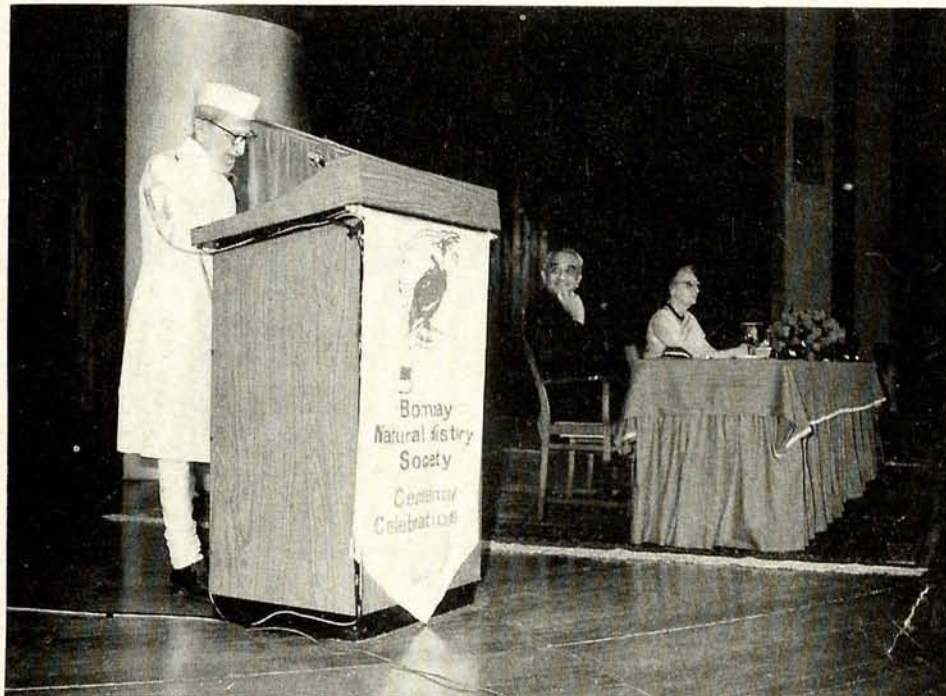




*Science City, Novosibirsk with Profs. Netsky and Maximov; 18 August 1969*



*Inauguration 'Project Tiger' IUCN,  
New Delhi; 1969*



*Welcome Address at the Bombay Natural History Society's Centenary function;  
September 15, 1983*

*With Prakash Gole and Commissioner Rajwade, at the 4th Maharashtra Pakshi Mitra  
Conference, Aurangabad; 26-27 January 1984*





Oscar T. Owre

I had the pleasure of guiding Dr Salim Ali into the Florida Everglades during what I recall was his first trip to Florida in the 1955-1959 period.

We had a busy day of wading and tramping through the swamps. For some reason or the other we encountered a number of birds unusual for southern Florida. I guess I was getting carried away by

these rarities and probably spending quite a bit of time over them. At any rate, I recall the very serious admonition Salim gave me. The point of it all was that he was here for only a very limited time and what he wanted to become acquainted with were the *common* birds of south Florida, the *customary avifauna*—‘let us not spend so much time with the rare birds’. That, of course, was exactly what a serious student of Ornithology should have been expected to say. ॐ

Rishad Naoroji

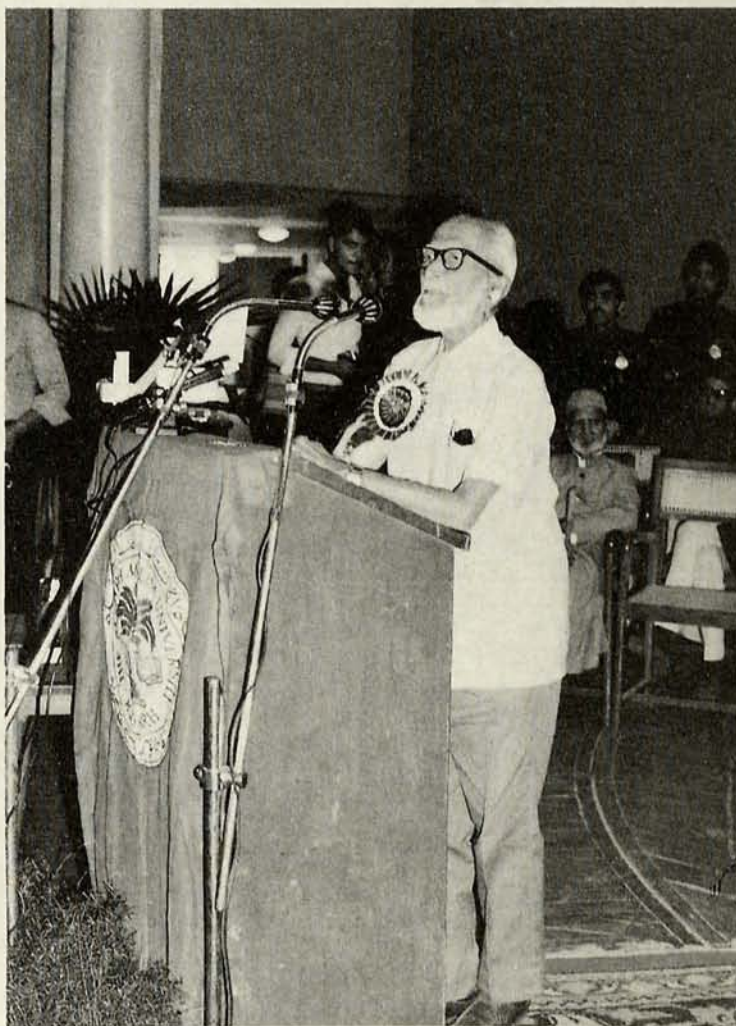
I was not close to Dr Salim Ali nor did I know him as well as many others, though I did have the opportunity to meet him on several occasions. What struck me most about this unusually dedicated and talented man was his forthrightness and his intense commitment to his life's work in spite of many obstacles. Unlike many fellow-conservationists, Dr Salim Ali was free from the trappings of ego projection, which has the cankerous effect of resulting in division amongst those of us who should be working together for a common cause.

Dr Salim Ali was easily approachable at any time, and I vividly remember the occasion when I visited him in 1985 at his Yacht Club residence to request to put in a word to Delhi about the deteriorating condition of the Rajpipla Forest. He shook his head sadly when I briefed him about the degraded state of these rich forests, which he had visited many years ago. His mind, even at that ripe age was remarkably crisp and clear, and he asked me probing details about areas he had visited so long ago. He then unhesitatingly penned an appeal to the Prime Minister's office strongly recommending that these forests be saved. Unfortunately, he died just before we got the relieving news that Rajpipla Forests have at long last been officially gazetted as a Sanctuary. The news would have indeed livened his failing health, as any successful fight for conservation would have! ॐ

I happened to meet Dr Salim Ali, ‘Father of Ornithology’, four times—during 1978 at Mundunthurai Sanctuary, 1979 in Hyderabad, 1982 at Kanha National Park and 1986 at Aligarh Muslim University. I have had the good for-

N.L.N.S. Prasad

tune of being with him watching birds and it is always pleasant to recall those occasions. He was a great source of inspiration to work



The inauguration function in the Kennedy Hall, Aligarh University on 28 March 1982

in the field either birdwatching or working on other wildlife. He was a simple, affable person and had good humour to his credit.

One of the incidents which is still afresh in my memory was the one at Aligarh University. Dr A.H. Musavi, Director of the Workshop, after his initial address to the gathering requested Dr Salim Ali to kindly inaugurate the Workshop but wondered how Dr Salim Ali could do it without speaking (apparently Dr Salim Ali consented to inaugurate the Workshop earlier, when Dr Musavi approached him, on the condition that he should not be asked to speak on the occasion!). The audience was eager to see what follows. Dr Salim Ali stood up, reached the microphone, threw a big smile—that was all—an 'inauguration with smile'. He stood there for a while without speaking and finally said, 'I inaugurate the Workshop'. There was a big applause from the gathering.

A sincere commitment to protect and preserve our rich natural heritage, the beautiful birds and wild animals, and work with determination towards achieving this goal will be the right way to pay tribute to the rare naturalist and birdman, Dr Salim Ali. ॥

## A deck of memories

*J.V. Ramana Rao*

1978, was the year Osmania University held a seminar on Exploitable Living Resources of Andhra Pradesh—Fish and Wildlife. Not only because of the eminence of the personality but because we knew nothing would please him more than to see his collection of Deccan birds, now in the custody of the Zoology Department, we were very keen to invite Dr Salim Ali Saheb to chair a session. We were honoured and elated by his ready acceptance.

At this conference and later at the

Eastern Ghat Seminar at Waltair and at the Wildlife Institute meet at Aligarh, I had the rare good fortune of spending long hours with him. At all meetings, he was all attentive and never missed a session.

His interest in wildlife was so great, he would not miss a chance to view birdlife, live or captive on film. Above all, of course, he wished to give a break to an ardent amateur enthusiast. He also gave a fillip to my student Nagulu by extending a grant from the Salim Ali-Loke Wan Tho Fund on learning that Nagulu was working without any financial aid. His concern for birdlife and birdwatchers was all too evident. This was also evident when we participated in the poster presentation session at Aligarh Muslim University during February 1986 in connection with the Workshop—Role of Universities in Wildlife Education and Research. Dr Salim Ali spent a considerable time viewing the exhibits depicting programmes of Osmania University on Wildlife Biology. After seeing the Pelican pictures he beamed with delight that Nagulu put to good use the financial support of the Bombay Natural History Society and made many useful suggestions to give better direction to the technical programme of work on pelican and Blackbuck.

When an eulogic tribute was paid to him personally for his role in the Centenary of the Bombay Natural History Society, his reply was characteristically simple and unassuming. It is indeed most fitting that between the Centenary and his 90th birthday, he was rewarded by Nature also with two highly cherished avian prospects, an alternate home for the Great Indian Bustard in Andhra Pradesh. In fact, it is in the erstwhile Nizam's State, now part of Andhra Pradesh, that he made the famous Deccan Bird Survey, the specimens from which rest in the Natural History Museum at this department. He was always

excited to recall this particular expedition and used to express great satisfaction over the safe preservation of this priceless collection of avifauna at the Osmania University. He gave much encouragement to the project formation of the department to study the biology and habitat in the same areas as the original Deccan Bird Survey as a commentary on ecological change. ॥

*M.A. Rashid*

It was way back in December 1979 during my tenure as Addl. Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, Gujarat State, that Dr Salim Ali fixed up his programme to visit the Flamingo City in the Rann of Kutch and requested me to make the necessary arrangements for the excursion. Incidentally, I had also arranged for his earlier visit to the same area in 1974, when we had together made an aerial survey of the Rann from an air force helicopter to locate any other colonies apart from the Flamingo City, where flamingos might be breeding. So on 7th December, after seeing off Air Marshall Latif who had come to Sasan to see the lions and other wildlife, I drove down post haste from Sasan to Bhuj. The next day, I received Dr Salim Ali and party (consisting of Dilnavaz Variava and Hussain) at Bhuj airport and drove down with them to Khavda, where we spent the night at the P.W.D. inspection bungalow. On 9th morning, we proceeded by jeep to Thuga, where the road ended, and got onto camels which were arranged for the six hours' ride to Nir located at the edge of the Rann, stopping to take packed lunch at Nathrai tank en route. We reached Nir at 5 p.m. and settled down in the makeshift but comfortable camp so thoughtfully arranged for the party by D.M. Naik, the then Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kutch. We

were rather taken aback to find the entire area beyond Nir completely submerged under 4 to 5 feet of water up to as far as the eye could see, which left us in no doubt whatsoever that it was going to be a herculean task trying to reach the Flamingo City in the midst of that watery wilderness the next day.

On 10th morning, despite all the hectic activity it was 8.30 by the time every one had had his breakfast and the camels for our transport were loaded and ready. It was after much cajoling and cursing that the unwilling beasts of burden were forced to enter the water one after the other. Those who have undergone the travail of camel ride know only too well how excruciatingly uncomfortable it can be to a novice even under the best of conditions; but what we were going through was a veritable nightmare, with our camels sinking into the slush up to their knees at every step and straining every muscle to pull their legs out to take the next laboured step forward. Perched precariously on the animal's rump, all we could do was to hang on desperately to the saddle to counteract the wildly swaying motion and prevent ourselves from being thrown off the animal's back. At times, the water level would suddenly rise up almost to the middle of the camel's body to submerge our legs dangling on either side. We were alternately making fun of each other and cursing the wretched beasts under our breath for the torture they were inflicting on us. The only person who appeared to be thoroughly enjoying the situation was Dr Salim Ali, possibly because his camel was carrying the lightest burden!

And so we plodded monotonously through the quagmire on and on, hour after hour, without any respite. Surrounded as we were by an endless stretch of water all round, there was no question of dismounting for a breather or to stretch our aching legs. I suppose

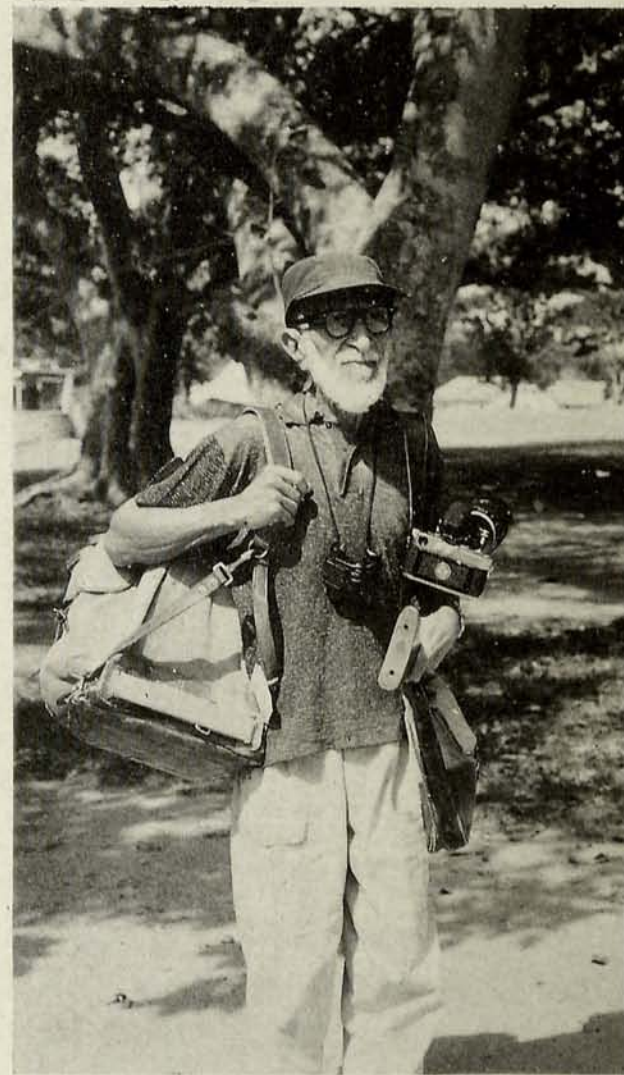
the constant rocking motion must have lulled me into a stupor and my mind must have wandered off. In the twinkling of an eye, my camel slipped and fell into the water on its right side. Before I could gather my wits about me, I was unceremoniously plunged into saline water of the Rann, with my camera and binoculars strapped round my neck. I felt the bump as I hit the bottom and the terror of a drowning man gripped my heart. Almost instinctively, I started thrashing my arms wildly in the water. As I gradually rose up to the surface, I gulped down some of saline water with the distasteful flavour of camel dung which nauseated me. As I surfaced, coughing and spluttering, with water cascading down the brim of my sun hat which somehow still remained in position, I must have presented a most incongruous sight indeed, for I could hear loud guffaws all round. But I suppose I was too grateful to be alive to feel any discomfiture at my predicament. I was indeed fortunate to have been thrown clear; otherwise, had the camel fallen on top of me, I would have certainly met with a watery grave in the midst of the Rann on that fateful day in December. Remounting the camel from my position in the water was quite an ordeal in itself and it took quite a lot of pushing, pulling and puffing before I could regain my perch on the camel's back, much to its obvious dislike.

Coming alongside, Dr Salim Ali first congratulated me on my narrow escape. And then, with that characteristic elfish smile on his face and a mischievous gleam in his eyes, he said: "This is the first time I have seen a camel put a forest officer in his place!" What was more, he had had the presence of mind to record the entire incident with his camera. I am sure the photographs must be somewhere in his private collection.

Incidentally, despite our

marathon effort, we did not succeed in reaching the Flamingo City that day due to extremely slow going and we had to turn back at 3 p.m. We ultimately returned to Nir at 7.30 p.m., with our bodies so stiff and cramped that we could hardly stand unaided on dismounting. Such a high degree of sheer physical endurance in a frail man in his eighties seems unbelievable; but then, as we all know, Dr Salim Ali was truly a giant among mortals and continued with his outdoor activities right up to the very end. I really do not know whether he would approve our wishing that his soul may rest in peace!

१



At Bandipur Sanctuary; June 1974.  
Ready to move

Early in 1960's when I joined the Bird Section of the Zoological Survey of India, I came to know of Salim Ali from his *THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS*. At that time, to me he was just a name and an author. Some years later, in early 1966, one day Dr Biswamoy Biswas, my mentor, called me to his room and introduced me to a fragile-looking old man with silver-grey hair and beard—Salim Ali, the legendary Birdman of India. He was passing through Calcutta on his way to Bhutan for field work. We chatted for a few minutes. He took keen interest in whatever ornithological work I was then doing, and I liked him. On several future occasions whenever he passed through Calcutta for Bhutan or other places in NE India and dropped in at Dr Biswas's office at the museum, I had the privilege of meeting him.

For studying the wintering Blacknecked Crane in Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, an expedition was arranged in January-February 1978 with Dr Salim Ali and his team from the Bombay Natural History Society, Mr Lavkumar Khachar from World Wildlife Fund—India, and Dr Biswamoy Biswas and myself from the Zoological Survey of India. However, due to unavoidable reasons, Dr. Biswas was unable to participate in the expedition, and Dr Salim Ali could not join it in Bhutan. Mr Khachar and I worked in Bhutan, and later, after visiting Subansiri, joined Dr Ali at Bhandarawa in Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh, early in February 1978. My cherished desire of working in the field with the Birdman of India was at last fulfilled! With him was another stalwart of Indian ornithology, Dr S. Dillon Ripley.

During the next few days I had the opportunity of watching him at

work. It was amazing how swift he was in his movements in such tough mountainous terrain and how determined was his every step in the field. His stamina and agility despite his frail physique and at his age were astonishing indeed. I was less than half his age, yet I was hard put to keep pace with him. His methods of observation, his way of collection of specimens, his keen interest in every

individual specimen were all ideal lessons for any one conducting a field ornithology survey. His way of explanation of the various problems, his manners, his wit, his encouragement to younger workers, his interest to see everything done neatly, and his praise for any good work done were greatly appreciated.

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## **Glimpses of Salim Ali: My guru for over 50 years**

*Dr. (Miss) Hamida Saiduzzafar*

### **BADMINTON**

When Salim and Tehmina came and settled down in Dehra Dun in 1934 I was a teenager, living at home with my parents and going to the local Convent School. Our home was named "Nasreen", and with the advent of Salim who was an excellent badminton player, it became a virtual club attracting many other young boys and girls. When not away on tour, Salim came regularly every evening, and was our enthusiastic, much-loved though rather strict, badminton champion. My father, S. Saiduzzafar Khan, although a generation older had much in common with Salim, and was at the forefront in encouraging these and other games. Both men put high value on "sportsmanship", and inculcated in us youngsters the spirit of acceptance of failure with equanimity and good grace.

### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

As well illustrated from his numerous publications, and from the enormous collection of photographs, slides and 16 mm film which he has left behind, Salim Ali was an excellent photographer, and delighted in taking photographs from odd and difficult angles in all sort of surroundings and illumination. Those were the days of slower films and black-and-white

photography. He taught me about the different types of cameras and lenses, their specific uses, setting up of a "hide" for bird and animal photographs, and many other things such as the correct way to "read" a negative; it was from him that I learned that the negative is far more important than the print, which is the variable entity. He taught me to take silhouettes, starting with his photographs of myself against the brightly-lit sunshine-bathed Mussoorie hills. He was a "stickler" for sharpness of focus, and disliked "gimmicks" or photographic tricks. Even until recently, he took a lot of interest in my photographs and slides, and always had some valuable critical remarks to offer.

### **WALKING AND RIDING**

In Dehra Dun, and much later at Bharatpur and Bombay, I was lucky to have accompanied him on long walks; in Dehra Dun, these "nature walks" were particularly exhilarating and instructive for me. Apart from the actual identification of birds, the most important thing he taught me in those early formative years was how to keep careful and accurate notes of the birds seen; not only that, but he showed me how to keep separate notes about the different species—their habits, their calls,

their nests and nesting habits, terrain, feeding, and so on. He showed me his "field notes" written haphazardly each day, and then how the information had to be classified and put into its correct place each night. That is how he was building up his *THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS* whose first edition was due to come out some years later. All this has helped me with my clinical work and notes in later life. I learned with surprise how well-informed he was about plant-life too. He often used to say that every ornithologist has to be a field botanist as well. He also taught me (and made me rehearse) the generic names of the birds and plants, which is so important for any serious-biologist, to avoid confusion of terms which occurs when using only the common-usage names. Salim Bhai loved the outdoor life, and we often went horseback riding together; we had a temperamental mare (who had been a race-horse), and Salim Bhai loved to ride her because she made riding much more thrilling when she "bucked" at every passing motor-car (in those days there were more tongas than cars on Dehra Dun roads).

#### SALIM ALI'S INTEREST IN SCIENCE

Apart from actual birdwatching and his descriptive writing, Salim Bhai was interested in all natural phenomena; he was delighted that he was lucky enough to see the Halley's Comet twice. He also often discussed with me shifting of the continental shelves, and he was very keen to understand better the phenomenon of bird migration, which people often asked him about at the end of his lectures. Once he asked me to demonstrate the anatomy of the eye to himself and his colleagues at the office of the Bombay Natural History Society; I was happy to bring and dissect a sheep's eye for their benefit, and it was a great success.

#### GLIMPSES INTO THE PERSONAL LIKES AND DISLIKES OF SALIM ALI

I have had the pleasure of staying as his personal guest at the family home in Pali Hill, and accompanying him on several of his less important field trips in 1976, 1982 and 1983. I was constantly amazed at his energy and zest, whereby he could, in 1976, clamber up and down the hillsides much better than myself. He would say, "You had better stay up here, Hamida, I'll go down to look for the nest of the Black-and-orange Flycatcher with these boys." He never committed himself on any fact he was not sure about; sometimes he would ask us to bring out his various books (e.g. *HILL BIRDS*, or *FIELD GUIDE*) and would look up the description to make sure the identification was correct. If we asked him a question, such as "which is the commonest species of bird in the world?" he would say, "I am not sure about the whole world; in Africa it is such-and-such; in India, perhaps, it is the house-sparrow." But he was not afraid to say, he didn't know. This was admirable in a man who had become an authority on birds. In fact, he resented the epithets "world-famous" or "world-renowned" which the press often showered on him.

He was extremely conscious of the fact that "Time was running out" on him, especially when he was trying to complete his 10 volumes of the *HANDBOOK* and later, his autobiography: *THE FALL OF A SPARROW* within his life-time. And because of his strict adherence to the time-table he had set for himself by the day, the week and the month, he could accomplish all these tasks.

#### DIET

He used to say, he was *frugivorous*, and if necessary he could live on fruit alone. He never "indulged" in heavy or greasy food, and perhaps one of the secrets of his comparatively good health and long

life was that he never put on extra weight which is so easy to happen in later life, when one's outdoor activities are reduced.

#### APPROACHABILITY

Although he was known to be short-tempered and sometimes had outbursts of temper with his peers, I found it amazing that he was always most kind and sympathetic to young people, and enjoyed answering their questions. If possible (within the constraints of time at his disposal), he never refused to sign the autograph-books of school children, as I have seen in Bharatpur and Aligarh—even when he seemed to be quite exhausted and tired.

#### SENSE OF HUMOUR

His wit and humour were legendary, and a lesson for all who came close to him. He could see the funny side of a situation and even laugh at himself. In November, 1986 when the Society celebrated his 90th Birthday, he wrote to me, "A pity you couldn't come and see the Birthday Boy!"

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*Removing birds from mist net; Bharatpur  
1965*

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*At Bandipur with M.K. Appaya, the Chief  
Wildlife Warden and K.R. Sethna at his right.*

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*The portrait of a personality*

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A practical work which we had to do was, the preparation of a project album on any science topic (as I am a science student), for the benefit of the students and the teachers. I took the opportunity and chose the topic "Life and work of Dr Salim Ali", which would have been incomplete but for the guidance and help of teachers and friends.

It was my ambition to meet Dr Salim Ali personally and show the project album to him and get it autographed. On 25th August, I had an appointment fixed with him at 10 a.m.

I did not know that he was not keeping well on that particular day. The appointment was to be postponed, and they tried to contact me by phone without success. Due to my over-punctuality and enthusiasm I reached his Bandra residence with my father at 9.45 a.m.

Archana, his secretary, went to his room to enquire whether he was in a position to talk to me, or whether the appointment be postponed as he was to leave his residence at 10 a.m. for a medical check up. When he came to know I had reached already in his goodness of heart he did not refuse to see me.

I was nervous and excited. To my surprise and happiness I saw him gracefully coming out of the room in the hall where I and my father were waiting. We greeted him and he made us feel so comfortable that I completely overcame my nervousness. He opened the album, which he had already gone through (I had sent the album to him through the BNHS two days earlier), and appreciated my work. He went through the minutest details and admired my collection of pictures, first-day covers, cuttings from newspapers and magazines, feathers of birds and drawings in the



Mala Sarin of Bhavan's College. Advice

project album. For the preparation of this album I had referred to his autobiography, THE FALL OF A SPARROW, a few magazines, etc. The only drawback he pointed out in my project was that I had referred to his autobiography and cited a few incidences from it. He said, "I am not discouraging you, but it would have been better, if it were in your own words".

Then he inquired as to why I had prepared the project and how it would help others. I convinced him about my interest in birds and thus in the life of an ornithologist and that I wanted my friend students who were unaware of ornithology to know about it.

After this I requested him to autograph my project album as a

remembrance which he did whole heartedly. At my request he posed for photographs, and while doing so even asked me to hold the album with him. His talk for those 20 minutes was so encouraging that I am waiting for an opportunity to work upon any topic on birds.

As a tribute to Salim Ali, I can only say that since my school days, I was interested in knowing about birds; in my college days I had seen a few films on Dr Salim Ali on the television, and now that I had personally met him my interest in this field has become fourfold. As a lecturer I will create interest in the minds of my students for Nature and will try my best to spread his message of Conservation of Nature.

१

With M.A. Badshah at Pt Calimere, Tamil Nadu; 1962



It was at the beginning of October 1981 that I first met Dr Salim Ali, the Grand Old Man of Ornithology, when he came to Pachmarhi in Madhya Pradesh to dedicate to the nation the Satpura National Park. This national park comprises of steep hill ranges running East-West from the highest point of Dhoopgarh to the plains of Churna, surrounded by the Tawa reservoir on its North and West, with interior deep forests of Bori Sanctuary on the South, and steep hill areas of Pachmarhi Sanctuary on the East. The area was so much liked and appreciated by Dr Salim Ali that he could not resist saying that "This is my national park and I shall not miss a chance to visit it again in the nearest possible future".

He kept his promise and revisited Bori Sanctuary adjacent to Satpura National Park and stayed there from the 8th to 13th November in 1982.

The entry to Bori Sanctuary being blocked by the Tawa reservoir on its west *via* Bardha, he had to travel by local ferry boats from one bank to the other reaching Churna

rest house by horse-cart involving a very uncomfortable travel on forest roads over a distance of about 25 to 30 km.

All the while during his stay in Bori Sanctuary at Churna and Dhain rest houses for about five days, he visited the field right from 6 a.m. till noon, and completed notes on field observations thereafter with the help of his young, energetic active personal secretary, Ku. Archana Mehrotra.

At his then grand old age of 85, he possessed a strong will and high tenacity. One morning at breakfast I was trying to discuss with my superiors as to how to make it possible to fulfill his desire to see the paintings in the rock caves, discovered by my team in a remote area of Bori Sanctuary and the Satpura National Park in 1979. Taking advantage of his being a little short of hearing I was quietly trying to plan his carriage up to the rock shelters. The grand old man overheard us, and feeling a little offended, perhaps, at our belief of his alleged weakness to walk and climb up to the rock shelter, he commented "Dont you know that my next visit is scheduled for Himachal Pradesh?" Finally he did fulfill his

desire of seeing the unexplored unique treasure of rock paintings, situated on the steep hill ranges near Churna, walking over a distance of about 5 km, and then climbing up a steep of about 800 to 1000 ft.

Practically every evening we went for a round to see the wild animals, and the round on the last day of his stay on 12th November 1982 was the richest and the most unique. While starting for this round Dr Salim Ali inquired his personal secretary about her preference whether to see a tiger or panther. She wished to see a tiger as against his own desire to see a panther. Perhaps in his honour we could first see a tiger, followed with the sighting of two panthers, and a number of other wild animals like sambar, cheetal, wild boar, etc.

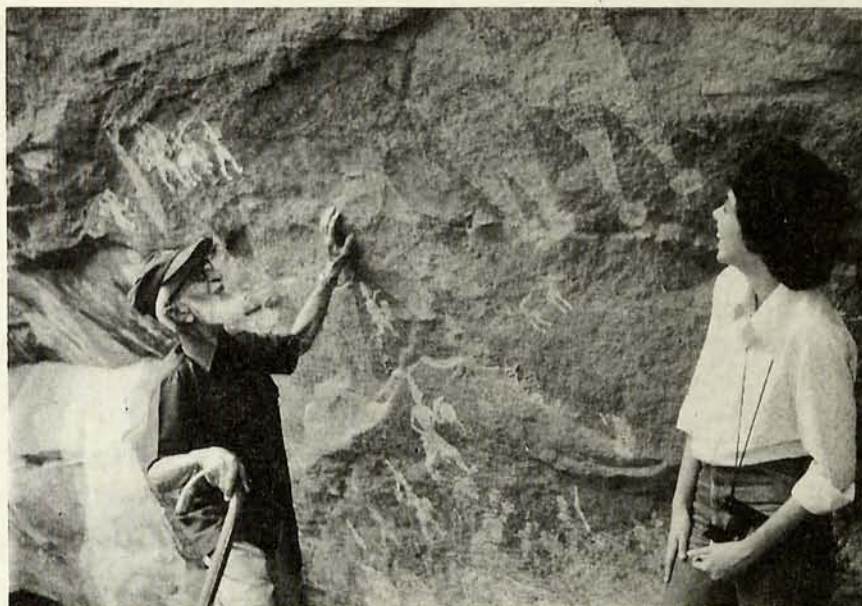
Dr Salim Ali has always advocated nature conservation for the long term service to humanity over and above all losses of revenue to the exchequer of the State. This is very well expressed in the remarks entered by him in the visitors' book of Bori Sanctuary of Hoshangabad district (M.P.), dated 13th November 1982, which are reproduced below:

"In 1941 I had an opportunity to visit Bori in company with C.R. Ranganathan, I.F.S. and a class of Ranger Trainees from the Dehra Dun forest Ranger's college, and am glad to be back here after over 40 years and particularly to observe that Bori is now a wildlife sanctuary and Satpura National Park. It seems to me highly desirable and advantageous from the management-point of view—if the two sanctuaries are amalgamated with the



*At the inauguration of the Satpura National Park near Pachmarhi, Madhya Pradesh —With J.J. Dutta, Chief Wildlife Warden and K.S. Saxena; 1981*





National Park into a single larger unit and all further exploitation operations in the park completely stopped considering the near-uniqueness of these magnificent central Indian Forests, the

sacrifices in revenue often involved in their preservation for the benefit of posterity would be infinitesimal.”

The areas of Bori/Pachmarhi Sanctuaries with Satpura National

Park of Hoshangabad district (M.P.) is a continuous source of revenue to the tune of about Rs 3 crores annually to the State exchequer from the world famous Bori Teak Forests. ॥

### Indra Kumar Sharma

I had corresponded with Dr Salim Ali as my *guru* and guide for bird studies since 1964. He was always encouraging and warm. In 1974 I visited the Bombay Natural History

Society for consultations with Dr Salim Ali and other noted naturalists and to refer to the library of the Society. I was welcomed warmly by Dr Salim Ali who invited me to visit his home at Bandra for detailed discussion and guidance. I

asked him for the location of his residence at Bandra. He gave the address and said that I should first ask for the bungalow of Dilip Kumar (film actor) as his house was next door. “I am known largely to bird-watchers only, and not to the common man”, he said.

When I reached Pali Hill, I enquired for Dr Salim Ali's house, but without results. I was reluctant to ask for the house of Dilip Kumar, for the fear of being considered a vagabond fan of filmstars. At last reluctantly I enquired for the house of Dilip Kumar, and it was instantly pointed out to me, and I found Dr Salim Ali's house which was next to it.

Dr Salim Ali warmly received me and gave valuable suggestions for birdwatching and ornithological studies. At the close of the briefing he drove me back to the Bandra railway station in his station wagon. ॥

Salim Ali and S.A. Hussain at Madhupar National Park, Bangladesh; December 1980



The first set of four stamps on birds was issued by the Government on 31st December 1986. These stamps were printed at India Security Press, Nashik, in 50 in a sheet by photogravure process on unwater-marked paper.

The designs of these four stamps were selected from Dr Salim Ali's famous books THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS and INDIAN HILL BIRDS. This was a great honour for him and also for the Bombay Natural History Society. He was also consulted before the issue of this first Indian series on birds.

20 paise scarlet and violet colour stamp depicts a Redbilled Blue Magpie sitting on a branch with its beautiful long tail. On 50 paise stamp, which is in scarlet and turquoise blue colour, is shown a Brownfronted Pied Woodpecker. A Slatyheaded Scimitar Babbler, shown perched typically on a branch, is pictured on blue and chestnut coloured one rupee stamp. Jade green and scarlet coloured two rupee stamp depicts a pair of male and female Yellowbacked Sunbird, sitting on a branch of a tree.

We sincerely request the Department of Posts to honour Dr Salim Ali on a series of stamps with pictures of birds on his birthday, which will be a fitting tribute to him.

May his soul rest in peace in the highest stage of heaven. ॐ

Dr Salim Ali has been credited with the discovery of several ecological races of birds in the Indian subcontinent. Even as such different races looked alike, really there is slight variations in their pattern of life, behaviour and physical modulations. Just for an instance take the case of Fairy Blue bird *Irena puella puella* which is found in the Western Ghats as a separate ecological race from its counterpart found in the Eastern Himalayas, where the dominant race is *sikkimensis*.

In his bird survey in Western Ghats Salim Ali discovered a number of ecologically varied races of many species of birds. These races were accurately identified, confirmed and named with the help of late Mr Hugh Whistler, a wizard in the taxonomy of birds.

In Kerala itself there are two races of birds named after Salim Ali. They are (i) Indian Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps indica salimalii*) and (ii) Travancore Streaked Fantail Warbler (*Cisticola juncidis salimalii*). But there is another one also Golden Backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) a common and resident species in many parts of India. In Kerala it represents a separate ecological race. Interestingly enough this race is scientifically named as '*Dinopium benghalense tehminae*', in memory of Tehmina, the birdman's beloved wife. ॐ

#### In the Andamans

In January 1985 Dr Salim Ali visited Kerala and inaugurated the seminar on Marine animals and Marine Parks at Cochin. I and a journalist friend of mine met him at the residence of Dr. E.G. Silas, who was the Director of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute at that time. During the conversation Ali talked about his experiences in Kerala Forests, especially the Parambikulam and Thatte Kadu. At last my friend asked Dr Ali "I realise that you are very much fascinated by birds. Would you like to have wings and fly like a bird?" Suddenly Dr Ali laughed and then said seriously "My attitude towards the winged animals is not romantic. I want to study and understand these beautiful creatures for the better understanding of the intricacies of the evolving nature. Birds are colourful. So romance is there. That is all."

This incident clearly indicates Dr Ali's attitude towards ornithological studies and on Nature. ॐ

#### Rakesh Trivedi

Salim Ali visited Indore for the second time in July 1981.

In spite of the cloudy and slightly drizzling weather on that day, the Avro from Bombay landed at Indore airport. The passengers had got down one by one and for a second it seemed as if the plane was empty but then I saw an elderly man trotting down the steps with the help of a stick. He was the Grand Old Man Salim Ali.

As he started meeting the officers, I too extended my hand, greeted him, and introduced myself as a nature lover. He had come in search of the Lesser Florican, locally known as *kharmor*. He had seen the florican near Indore in 1930, and wondered if it was still around.





Watching floricans in Sardarpur; September 1984

After a few days, on the 3rd of August 1981, the front page of a leading newspaper of Madhya Pradesh, the *Nai Dunia*, carried headlines stating that Salim Ali had succeeded in seeing the *kharmor* near Jaora. The people of Madhya Pradesh learnt that there is a man on this earth who is only concerned about birds. Through the newspapers they not only knew of the man, Salim Ali, but also of the Lesser florican which was being introduced to them for the first time. His visit inculcated an awareness amongst the people of Madhya Pradesh of the florican which was nearing extinction.

On 5th of September 1984 Salim Ali visited Indore for the third time to watch his favourite *kharmor*. I was with him once again. His first question was how are the *kharmors*. He was immensely pleased to hear that their number had increased.

On the 8th September, I reached Sailana. As soon as our jeep reached the guest house Salim Ali was ready, and we proceeded to the jungles of Sailana in search of the *kharmor*. The experience of watching the birds with Salim Ali was not only informative but gave immense pleasure.

The silence of the jungle was a

necessity while searching for *kharmor*, and Salim Ali was particular in maintaining discipline. A slight whisper irritated him and at times he even asked us to go back to the guest house if we were not interested. At about ten in the morning, the silence

## Salim in Chushul

A. Tyabji

The scene is an evening in Chushul in Ladakh, bordering Tibet, in the seventies: stark, bare, beautiful and ringed on one side by snow-clad mountains over which the Chinese, undetected, transported heavy artillery one night in 1962 when all the Indian eyes and guns were trained on the pass that runs down the centre.

We are three people on two motorcycles on which we have ridden up from Delhi on a motorcycling-cum-mountaineering spree. Our hosts are the ITBP, and since civilian guests are rare birds, the solitary IB and RAW officers have been invited to share the company. In a cosy and convivial atmosphere of thick woollens, the characteristic oil-heater emitting acrid smoke when sensing neglect and glasses of rum with crisp-fried mountain trout and quail to go with them we con-

of the jungle was interrupted by a peculiar sound very similar to the croaking of frog. Salim Ali immediately recognised the *kharmor*'s voice. He asked his research unit to follow and to try to trap the bird. Then for some time he sat on the grass to relax and said 'Now people have interest in the jungle and birds which wasn't there earlier. We neither had books with coloured plates nor did the youngsters, the spirit.'

Suddenly a researcher came running and said that the bird had been trapped. Salim Ali was delighted, and walked speedily towards the spot.

Two days later Salim Ali was successful in seeing a male. Watching through the binoculars, we moved forwards steadily towards the bird, but by the time we reached it, it had already been trapped. The bird was banded on its leg with a Bombay Natural History Society's ring and then set free.

१

verse. To a question on how the delicious snacks were obtained we are told evasively that the sound of the aircraft transporting supplies kills the birds and fish. Suddenly, struck by a thought, we are asked whether we know that 'famous man Saleem' (I suspect the reference is to Dr Salim Ali, grand-uncle, author and friend, but am cautiously non-committal!). 'That man', the speaker goes on, 'came here as our guest so we hospitably treated him to this'—waving his hand airily at our repast. 'He ate one kilo. He asked us how we got it so we told him (of dynamite and sten guns presumably). And then he went and complained to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She complained to our commanding officer. We got a bomb. Next time he comes (with venom) we'll feed him on bread and water'.

१

# awards

THE INTERNATIONAL JURY FOR  
*The J. Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Prize*  
of the World Wildlife Fund

HAS SELECTED FOR 1975

## SALIM A. ALI

*Creator of an environment for conservation in India, your work over fifty years in acquainting Indians with the natural riches of the subcontinent has been instrumental in the promotion of protection, the setting up of parks and reserves, and indeed the awakening of conscience in all circles from government to the simplest village Panchayat. Since the writing of your own book, the Book of Indian Birds which in its way was the seminal natural history volume for everyone in India, your name has been the single one known throughout the length and breadth of your own country, Pakistan and Bangladesh as the father of conservation and the fount of knowledge on birds. Your message has gone high and low across the land and we are sure that weaver birds weave your initials in their nests, and swifts perform parabolas in the sky in your honor. For your lifelong dedication to the preservation of bird life in the Indian subcontinent and your identification with the Bombay Natural History Society as a force for education, the World Wildlife Fund takes delight in presenting you with the second J. Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Prize. • February 19, 1976.*

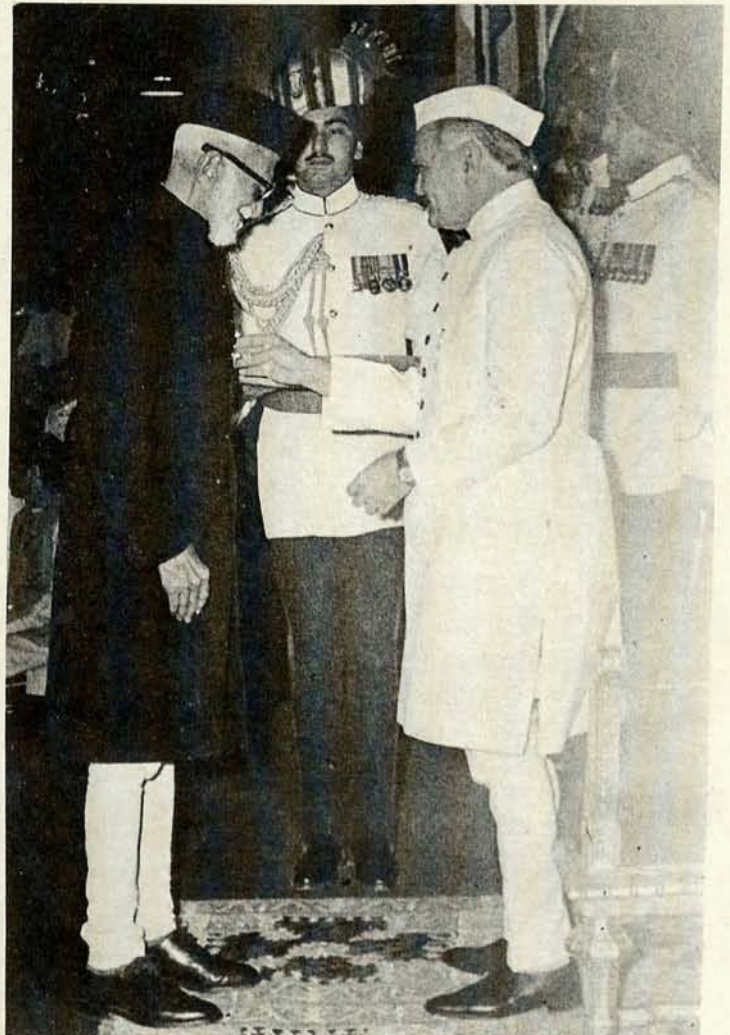
*J. Paul Getty*  
J. Paul Getty

*Jan 1976*  
His Royal Highness  
The Prince of The Netherlands

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Facsimile of the citation of Paul Getty Prize  
Award, 1975

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Salim Ali, Padmavibhushan; 1976.



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*With Mrs Indira Gandhi after investiture of  
Padma Vibhushan by President Fakhruddin  
Ali Ahmed; 3rd April 1976*

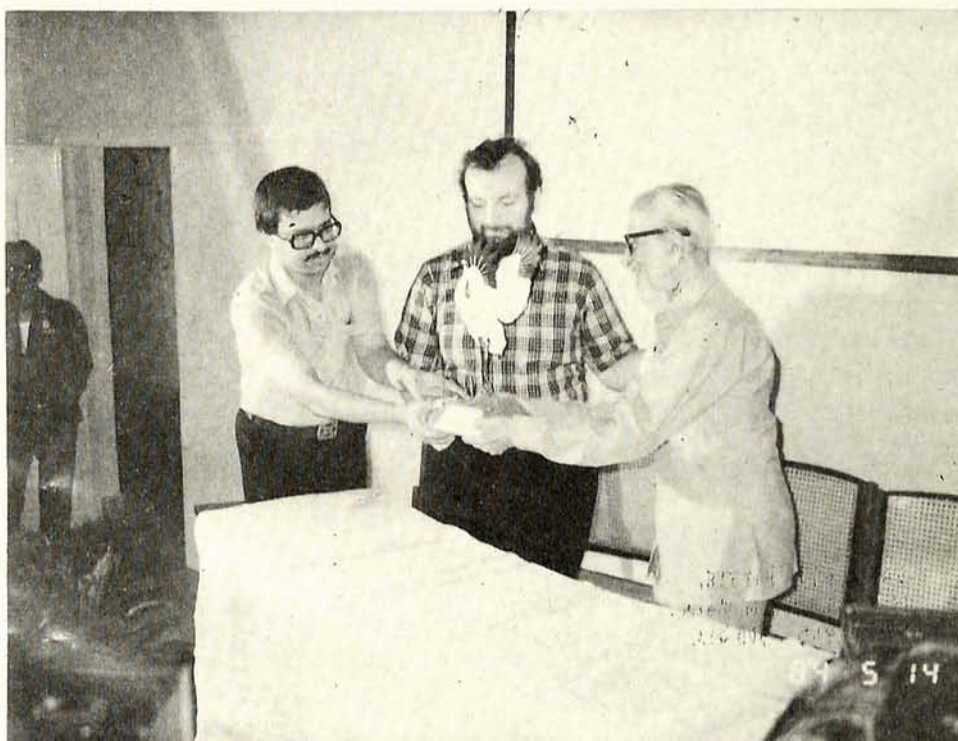
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*Receiving the IUCN Award from the  
Prime Minister*

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*Receiving the International Conservation  
Award of the National Federation, U.S.A.  
from Ed McCrae; 1983*

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## Salim Ali: Memories

Where celebrations are called for  
to mark merited milestones  
or epochal events,  
it is implicit that tributes are also due  
to the not so explicit—  
the journey itself,  
perilous but profitable when nature's treasures  
are unlocked, bristling with danger  
but bursting with adventure,  
the journey of discovery  
by pioneering pathfinders, the trail blazers  
whose footprints on the sands of time  
lead up to these milestones, and beyond—  
pioneers who, undaunted by adversity,  
undeterred by obstacle, set on  
wilderness trails—  
whose every trial and travail  
served to unveil,  
the grandeur, beauty and wonder  
of Natural History,  
of hill and dale, the deep and the swell  
and of beast and bird, flower and frond  
held in Nature's bosom, whose heart throb resonates,  
to fill the pages of history chronicling the glorious  
efforts of those who journeyed to arrive at milestones  
we remember and honour  
as on 15 September 1983,  
at the Centenary of Bombay Natural History Society;  
—Our naturalists, nature lovers, fieldmen, birdwatchers,  
wildlife biologists, natural historians—  
and of these, most particularly, the youngest of them  
all—

Dr Salim Ali.

Dr. J.V. RAMANA RAO  
*Professor in Zoology, O.U.*

### WHOM THE BIRDS LOVED

A washed saucer-like sun  
Is pushed down by the evening song  
of birds  
Under the crumpled sheet of  
darkness.  
Salim Ali returns to roost  
Forever, to a nest fashioned  
Out of straws of songs  
And pieces of evening's last sunrays  
The white Siberian cranes from the  
cold North

Join him in the drama of evolution  
Where new species explode and  
some die.  
For extinction is forever.  
Across the theatre of the Indian  
sub-continent  
Birds enact for him a hymn of praise  
In their language of whistle  
and song.  
As forked lightning swings  
Like branches of a tree against  
blue sky  
A peacock's shafted shriek  
Probes the abyss of darkness  
In quest of Salim Ali.

MAN MOHAN SINGH

### A tribute to Salim Ali

Cranes and ducks, starlings and  
geese  
travel without passports and visas  
to the welcome of balconied fables.  
Arched reeds and bulrushes bend  
In deep gratitude owed by time  
to the eternity of migrations.  
In Bharatpur the pythons bask  
in the sun  
as ducks circle over  
their coiled bodies.  
In Chilka the deer watch  
as grass greens itself  
to set up an orchestration of  
welcome.  
In Harike a Brahminy kite  
blazes in its golden passion.  
In Calimere a grey partridge  
sheds its protective cover  
to look at the sky above.  
India is united each winter  
in a North-South dialogue that  
language  
and bounds can never disrupt.  
Salim watches as birds watch him.  
His figure is etched against the  
twilight.  
The silhouettes of winged lines  
against the sky  
creep into bowled darkness and are  
lost.  
Salim's figure dissolves over the  
subcontinent.  
Drifting from clouds to light  
and wrapped in the lace of myths  
India lives in the unity of birds.

MAN MOHAN SINGH

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IN MEMORIAM

Oxford University Press pay tribute to **Dr Salim Ali (1896-1987)**, distinguished ornithologist and author, and a wonderful human being. He has kept his tryst with destiny but left behind for posterity a legacy of incalculable value:

Birds of Kerala

The Book of Indian Birds (BNHS)

The Fall of a Sparrow

Field Guide to the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas

Indian Hill Birds

Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan (Ten volumes)

Compact Edition of the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan

Concise Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan (forthcoming)

A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent (BNHS)



**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Bombay Delhi Calcutta Madras

## The dreamer whose dreams came true

Dilnavaz Variava

Prakash Vaidya

In October 1985 when Dr Salim Ali visited Hindustan Petroleum, Bombay Refinery premises at the invitation of the Company which has keen interest in Nature Conservation and pollution control, the then General Manager, Shri Minoo Balsara, asked me to be with Dr Salim Ali as I am known as a bird-watcher in the Refinery.

Over the years I had made a list of more than 50 types of birds seen in the refinery premises, and had kept a detailed record. This list was presented to Dr Salim Ali, and he was very pleased to see it.

During the conversation he asked me: "Which book do you use for reference?". "THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS by you Sir", I said. "Let me see the book", quipped Dr Salim Ali.

This really took me back. I did not know how to act, because the copy I have has travelled with me all over India and is in bad shape. In fact I never step out of the house without it, especially when I go out of town. One look at the book, and any body would know it is much used. I work in shifts and have no fixed days as 'off', and therefore I cannot go with the Bombay Natural History Society's group for birdwatching outings. But for the last 8 to 10 years, I go alone whenever possible for birding on my own, accompanied by the book, which is my Bible.

So I replied to him, "Sorry, Sir, my book is not in good shape". He was extremely pleased when he saw the book, and I was very pleased when he said, "That means you are using it".

Sálím Ali's extraordinary contributions as an ornithologist are extolled in the numerous citations and awards which marked the last few decades of his life. His qualities as a person are recorded in the hearts and minds of those who knew him and these were, in some ways, even more remarkable than his work.

We first met in 1973 when I was chief executive of World Wildlife Fund—India, which was then located in the Bombay Natural History Society's premises. Sálím bridged the 50 years age gap between us almost from the beginning—sending little humorous epistles signed 'Sálím', instead of the more formal 'Sálím Ali'. While our perspectives on issues sometimes varied, I cannot think of a single occasion where I could have attributed this to 'the generation gap'. In fact, Sálím was one of the youngest people I have ever known—in his love for learning, in the fullness of his delight with some bird which he must have seen a thousand times before, in his enthusiasm to go off on voyages of exploration at the slightest excuse! After I resigned from WWF—India, and joined the Executive Committee of the Bombay Natural History Society at Sálím Ali's urging, I had more leisure to accept his invitations to join him on these delightful trips—which now provide a whole library of happy memories.

The first was to Simlipal Tiger Reserve, a trip which the 85 year old maestro wanted to make because there was 'so much to learn' from its Director, Mr S.R. Chowdhury! There was, indeed, much to learn and in the pleasantest of environments—but also ample occasion for laughter. There are vivid images of Sálím hopping away from

Chowdhury's pet tigress Khairi for fear of being sprayed as part of her territory, of him complaining that the diesel jeep sounded just like a wailing widow, and of tea-time asides on the inanities taught at a Swiss finishing school which his wife had attended. He had a gift for putting his finger on the comic element in a situation and presenting it with a turn of phrase, and a twinkle in the eye which made it deliciously refreshing at the moment, but whose flavour is hard to capture on paper. He could laugh at himself with equal ease and it was fun to pull his leg and get a hearty chuckle or lightning quick repartee in return. In fact the only time I have known Sálím to be at loss for words was when an elderly Postmaster General emerged from the cabin adjacent to ours on the Frontier Mail to Bharatpur and accosted him as follows: 'You are the famous ornithologist (*sic*). You are so close to nature. Tell me, sir, are your teeth real or false?' Sálím had a complete set of troublesome dentures, but was, for once, too taken aback by this greeting to respond with a quip.

On these trips, and later when he spent several weeks staying with us in the last year of his illness, I found his courage, fortitude and good cheer in the face of pain were remarkable. He suffered from severe back-ache from a fall he had (in his eighties!) climbing a small wall to take some photographs. On a birding expedition to Arunachal Pradesh I recall his tying hot water bottles onto his back to relieve the pain of jolting jeep rides, but he never once thought of turning back, only of the goodly treasures hidden in the jungles ahead. In the Rann of Kutch in 1983, unusual rains had us wading on camel back through 5



feet of water for ten hours at a stretch, without any chance of getting off for food or other, more pressing, requirements. The 87 year old Sálim not only survived both the jolts and the tedium, but was alert enough, and mischievous enough to film the immersion of the Chief Wildlife Warden into the icy water when his camel slipped and fell.

Sálim was, in fact, not only a very strong person but a very strong willed person, and could be quite peppery when crossed—which I found out from time to time when I felt I had to do so. Fortunately the fire never burned for long! His quick temper, however, appears to have been a characteristic which predated his rise to fame and was not a result of it. In fact, he found pomposity so ridiculous, that he largely escaped it himself, despite the unfortunate subservience which he all too frequently received. Perhaps, also, his truly scientific spirit contained within it the seeds of a certain humility. Thus, for instance, on a trip to Bharatpur I recall that when Hukum Singh, the Forest Guard, corrected his identification of a raptor, the great doctor of ornithology promptly put his binoculars to his eyes and admitted his error.

Sálim was not only meticulous in matters of scientific accuracy, but in all things—from the care of equipment to the correct choice of a word. Any papers sent to him for comments would be read and corrected with great care—even for minor typographical errors. (I was, therefore, particularly pleased that during the entire Silent Valley campaign, he had occasion to amend only one word in the numerous letters and speeches I sent for his signature!) Despite this commitment to perfection and the unhurried pace of his work, he was able to produce a prodigious quantity of scientific work and yet was never too busy, or too famous, to answer a child's letter or query fully and without condescension. Characteristically,

therefore, when he presented his old airgun to our son Firdaus, it came accompanied with a list of carefully handwritten instructions to the 'Navjoti young man' on how to handle and look after it. His own personal belongings, from clothes to camera, seemed to last for ever thanks to the superb care he took of them. He was, however, no hoarder of material possessions. I recall his pleasure in giving away a significant part of the unexpectedly large royalty he received on a new book to various charitable causes and then discovering, to his chagrin, that he

spent in reading aloud our favourite poems to each other. His tastes generally ran to good fighting poems, and to light verse from Kipling. But there was one poem to which he often turned. It seemed to touch a deep chord in his heart. It was "The Fairies Siege" by Kipling, whose refrain could well reflect his own life for it ends with the words: 'Tis the Dreamer whose dreams come true!'

Without any leaning towards religion or philosophy in the conventional sense, Sálim yet had an incredible capacity to live his life fully

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*Fording the Namdapha river; Arunachal Pradesh, 1980.*

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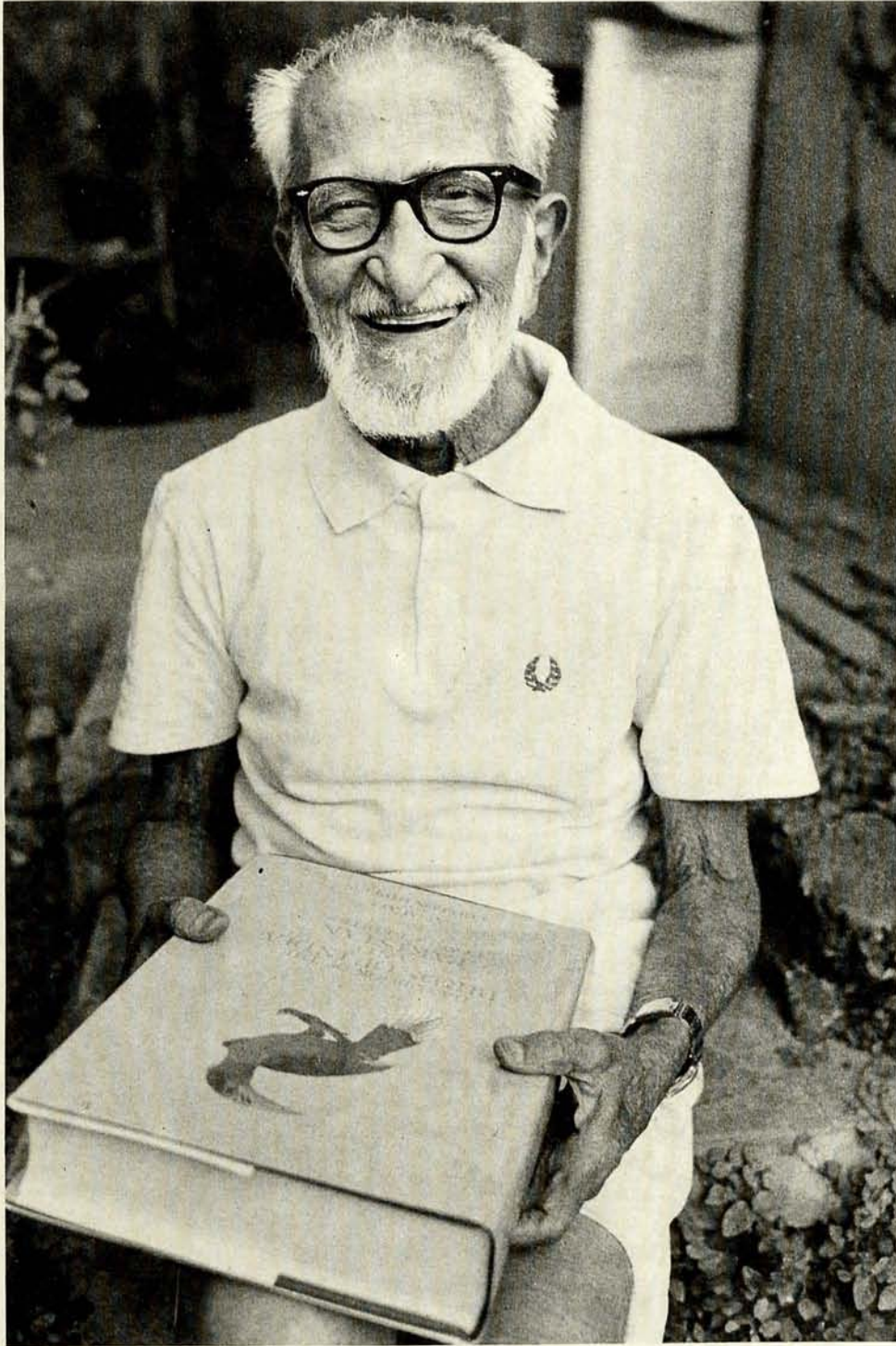


had to pay income tax on what he had already given away!

Sálim's mind was remarkable not merely for the depth of his observations on the natural world, and the keen curiosity for anything of scientific interest, but for the wide range of his interests, and his deep appreciation of beauty in any form. Some of our happiest hours were

in the present moment without any regrets for the past or anxiety about the future. It was a strong conviction, a kind of faith, that things would always work out well. It is a comfort to know that when his time came, he entered the realm of death with the same quiet confidence and strength with which he lived his life.

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*'The bird in hand' HANDBOOK'; September  
1983*

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## TWO WILD TITLES FROM HIMALAYAN BOOKS

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Compiled by Joseph Ewart

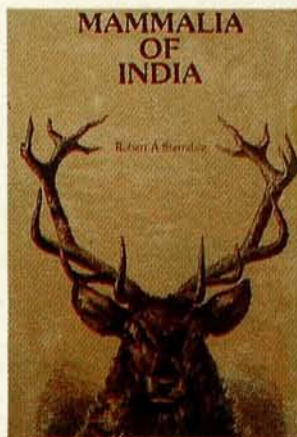
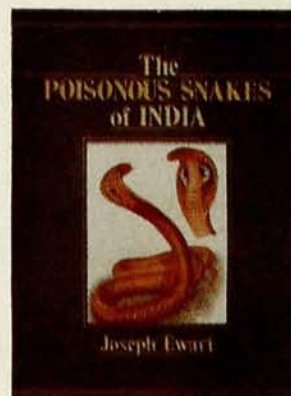
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