

40 a Ridge Road,
Bombay 6.
2.12.1967

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My dear Salim bhai,

I am sending you the proposed questions and the suggested times for each. Personally, I feel that 9 minutes, as suggested by the A.I.R. is much too short a time for the listeners to get any real idea. I have suggested to them that it should be a 15 minute talk, but as far as I can see, this is part of a programme already arranged which can either be accepted or rejected, since the local people are only acting on a request from Delhi and have no authority to make a change.

May I suggest that you get some ideas of the information you would want conveyed and time it to see if it can be fitted into 9 minutes. If not, you could support my argument for a 15 minute talk, which would mean dropping the talk and leaving it for some possible future occasion. If you feel it would be possible to convey some worth while information, we can go ahead.

It will have to be done in a hurry as they wish to record the talk by the 9th or 11th of this month, and there is not much time for consultation. Please make any modifications you want in the questions and in the time allotted to each. I have tried to work on the basis that we must first convey some essential information about you as a person, secondly information

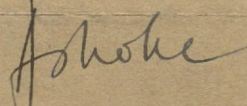
which would interest people who already know something and want to know more, and thirdly, something of general interest, experiences etc., which may arouse interest in those who have no special interest so far.

If you prefer shorter questions and answers, we could rephrase the questions, but I personally hate listening to interviews where the speaker is continuously interrupted by the interviewer,

I got your letter about the Salim Ali Loke Wan Tho Foundation and am sending my cheque to the Society.

With best wishes,

yours sincerely,



A.N.D. Nanavati.

P.S. Q. 5. — the reply would have to be general, not related to Bombay in particular, since this talk is for the External Service and not for a local audience. It can be rephrased to be ~~more relevant~~ later, if you ~~think~~ agree.

Interview for AIR External Service
recorded on 11 Decr. 1967

Questions for interview of Dr.
Salim Ali for All India Radio.

Note: The questions are as brief as possible. The words in parentheses are elaborated from these questions to suggest possible lines of approach or amplifications.

Time
suggested

4 ^{xii}/₆₇

- 1 min. Q.1. Dr. Salim Ali, different people come to love wild life in different ways. (Love of nature; love of hunting ; or even just force of circumstance). Can you tell us what aroused your own interest in ornithology?
- ½ min. Q.2. Is ornithology a hobby ~~maxis~~ for you or is it a full time occupation?
- 2 min. Q.3. Would you say it is easy to earn a living in ornithology. ~~WOMLXIXM~~
~~MAXIXM~~ What are the opportunities for a young man who wants to make it a career?
- 2 min. Q.4. These days we hear a lot about preservation of wild life. How does this apply to birds and what is its importance?
- 1½ min. Q.5. Are there any ~~sam~~ sanctuaries or places where interested persons can see and learn about birds ?
- 2 min. Q.6. Would you like to describe any specially thrilling or rewarding experience you have had in your career ?

A.1 This is not the first time I have faced this question. As far as I can recall, my real interest in birds was first aroused when as a boy of 9 or 10 I once shot a sparrow with my air gun. This was in the suburbs of Bombay, and somehow the bird seemed different from the House Sparrows I was accustomed to see around our residence in the city. It had a yellow patch on the throat like a curry stain, and this intrigued me greatly. None of my elders could solve this mystery., I was finally sent off with a letter to the Museum of the Bombay Natural History Society which in those days was housed in a room in the business premises of Messrs Phipson and Co., the wine merchants. My eyes nearly popped out when in the cabinets there I was shown the numerous kinds of sparrows to be found in India. It was then that I rather wishfully resolved to learn all I could about as many kinds of sparrows as possible. In this I received every help and encouragement from the kindly British officials who then ran the Society, in the way of training to skin and collect birds. Collecting in order to identify birds was necessary since popular illustrated books on Indian birds were unobtainable at that period. Incidentally that was my first contact with the Bombay Natural History Society, my connection with which has grown and strengthened over the 60 odd intervening years.

A.2 It of course started off as a hobby, but grew into a sort of obsession even in my school days, often - as I remember - to the dismay of my elders at home who felt that I should be better off doing my arithmetic lesson than chasing around after birds. Ornithology has now been my more or less full time occupation - whether you call it hobby or profession - for the last 40 years or so.

A.3 Not at all easy, and I would certainly not recommend it as a profession to anyone who is solely interested in bread^{winning}. But I will add this even for him, that since man cannot live by bread alone, ornithology can provide extremely satisfying butter to supplement it, and also to fill the belly of the soul! Professional openings for ornithologists, as such, are practically nil in India today, but there is no reason why ^{once} should continue to be so when due importance is given

study as in many of the more advanced countries. For it is recognized that as natural checks on insect and rodent plagues, and in numerous other ways, birds are perhaps no less important to our national economy than say pesticides, and of direct usefulness to Agriculture and Forestry.

A.4 Fortunately, except for a few species such as the Great Indian Bustard, ^{- as yet -} birds do not stand in the same precarious position as many other forms of our wild life - the larger mammals for instance, and particularly the deer. But there is little room for compacency because the tables can turn overnight. Apart from the destruction of natural habitats taking place everywhere in the process called 'Development', the food habits of the people are also changing fast from vegetarianism to meat-eating. Very soon this may bring about direct pressure on the bird life, particularly on game birds, throughout the country. At present this pressure is more or less restricted to the neighbourhood of towns and cities. We have very good laws on paper for wild life conservation which, if properly implemented, should completely stop the netting and trapping of birds for commercial purposes - meat and feathers. But ^{practically no public opinion to back them} there is not enough watch and ward, and ~~a great deal of~~ poaching and smuggling continues to thrive. Unscrupulous gourmets are ever ready to buy illicit partridges and quail delivered at their back door when the law prohibits their sale in the open market!

A.5 Yes, luckily we have a number of very good bird sanctuaries in India, in addition to the National Parks and wild life reserves, where visits can always be highly instructive and rewarding. The Keoladeo Ghana Breeding Waterbird sanctuary in Bharatpur, Rajasthan, for instance is certainly one of the finest of its kind not only in India but anywhere in the world. In the nesting season which is principally in the monsoon - August to October - the massed concentration of nesting waterbirds here - storks, egret, spoonbills, ibises, cormorants, etc. - must be seen to be believed. Later in the season, during the winter months, phenomenal quantities of migratory ducks and geese add to the enchantment of the scene. Land birds are not to be seen, Normally, in any such spectacular masses, and they have to be specially looked for in their different habitats. Their variety is of course far greater and the beautiful scenic surroundings in which many of them

live makes their watching doubly enjoyable. In my experience few areas on the subcontinent are more rewarding for the bird watcher than the southern section of the Western Ghats ^{with} ~~and~~ their associated hills in Mysore and Kerala, and the eastern Himalayas, say Sikkim.

A.6 Normally bird watching is a rather humdrum and peaceful occupation, ~~and~~ providing few nerve-tingling thrills such as in big game hunting. Nevertheless I have some extremely realistic recollections of unsought and thoroughly uncomfortable meetings round the corner with wild elephants in Kerala and Assam when intent on identifying some elusive bird in dense cover. Such thrills, in small doses, add to the exhilaration of bird hunting with binoculars. However, perhaps one of my greatest thrills of another kind came ^{to me} when by a combination of what is known as 'hunch', and of perseverance and luck I hit upon the true story of the domestic life of our common weaver bird, the Baya, and its 'phased' polygamy. The findings have since been amply confirmed by more intensive field work in India as well as by others in Africa, and is now generally accepted as what may be called the Authorised Version. As you know, the male weaver bird builds a separate nest for each of his two to four wives whom he entices one after the other, but only if he can provide them each with a dwelling of her choice. Any ^{settling} analogy in this to modern urban living is of course purely coincidental!

Although bird migration takes place in India on a gigantic scale, so far we have very little precise knowledge of any of its aspects since no special study of the subject has been conducted. ~~Bird ringing was first started here in a small way through the efforts of the Bombay Natural History Society in 1926 with the active cooperation of some of the Indian princes.~~ But serious work on a sufficiently large scale only became possible in 1960 ^{when the WHO got interested in the problem.} (The occasion for this was the appearance or rather discovery of a certain virus disease in a forest area of Mysore state which seemed closely related to the Russian Spring-Summer Encephalitis, ^{known to be} endemic in western Siberia. This is a tick-borne virus suspected, and circumstantially believed, to be disseminated ^{in part} through the agency of birds.) ~~Since it was known that migratory birds visit our area from the Palaearctic region beyond the Himalayas, the World Health Organization got interested in, and sponsored financially,~~ a project of the Bombay Natural History Society to study the problem of Indian bird migration more thoroughly. During the six years that the scheme has been in operation nearly a hundred thousand birds have been caught ^{by our field teams.} and ringed. Ticks and blood samples have been collected from them for virological investigation. Many of our ringed birds have been recovered in northern lands beyond the Himalayas - in central Asia and Siberia - and significant data are steadily accumulating concerning their countries of origin and the routes travelled by them. The birds we have been handling so far are mainly ducks, geese, ^{and} waders - and a land birds chiefly passerines like wagtails, sparrows and buntins. It is too early as yet to expect any ^{thing} conclusive ~~results~~, but the results are gratifying and promising.