

OBITUARY

EDWARD CHARLES STUART BAKER

The Society has sustained a great loss by the death of Edward Charles Stuart Baker at his home in Upper Norwood, London, on the 16th April 1944, in his 80th year. He was the son of E. B. Baker and was educated at Trinity College, Stratford-on-Avon. Following in his father's footsteps he joined the Indian Police in 1883, and his first three years were spent in Bengal, but in August 1886 he was transferred to Gauhati, and thereafter the remainder of his service was in Assam. In 1888 he met in Calcutta the late Dr. Hartert, then engaged on a collecting tour in the East Indies who described him in his *Aus den Wanderjahren eines Naturforschers* as 'the famous explorer and zoologist of the Cachar Hills.'

He joined the Society in 1898 and his first paper 'On the genus *Chloropsis*' appeared in the sixth volume of the Journal. Many other contributions appeared from his pen, but it will be for his papers on Indian Ducks and Game Birds that Stuart Baker will always be remembered. The first of the series dealt with the Ducks, and so popular were they that our Honorary Secretary, Mr. W. S. Millard, decided to publish them in book form. The book appeared under the title of 'Indian Ducks and their Allies' and was an immediate success and soon out of print. Apart from the financial success, the volume was the means of drawing attention to the activities of the Society, thereby increasing the membership. Realising this, our Honorary Secretary asked Mr. Stuart Baker to write a further series of papers on Game Birds and a start was made with the Snipe, Bustards and Sandgrouse, later followed by others on the true game-birds, and finally on Rails and Waders, of which so many kinds are found in India.

In those days the editors had great difficulty in making the *Journal* interesting to the wide circle of members. Long contributions on Micro-Lepidoptera, descriptions of butterfly larvae etc. were of scientific importance but of little interest to the ordinary reader, so that the value of Mr. Baker's papers in popularising the *Journal* must never be forgotten. Apart from that they also brought our knowledge of the different birds up to date.

In addition to his interest in Indian birds' eggs in general, Mr. Baker made a special study of the eggs and habits of the different Indian cuckoos and their fosterers. This huge collection consisting of some 6,000 eggs of cuckoos was obtained partly by his own collecting and that of his native collectors, as well as by his numerous correspondents all over the Indian Empire. He also acquired by purchase the collections of 25 of the principal collectors of Indian birds' eggs. These, however, were not mere collections of eggs for most of the clutches were accompanied by notes. He wrote many papers on the habits of cuckoos and their eggs, but it was not until he retired from the Dock Police that he was able to study his collection to the full. In 1942 he published 'Cuckoo Problems', the result of his years of careful observation and collecting.

Besides eggs, Mr. Baker made a considerable collection of skins. Some he gave to the Society, others he disposed of to Lord Rothschild, but the majority he sold to the Royal Museum in Sofia. His collection of cuckoos' eggs was acquired by the Trustees of the British Museum and came to the Museum after his death. Some years earlier he had presented his general collection which consisted of some 49,360 eggs belonging to 1960 forms.

Mr. Baker was fortunate in spending his service in the more remote and less known parts of Assam. He was from 1887 to 1899 in different parts of Cachar, and in 1900 was transferred to Dibrugarh where he remained for two years before going to Shillong as personal assistant to the Inspector-General of Police. In 1906 he became Deputy Inspector-General of Police in charge of C.I.D., which appointment he held until he was promoted in 1908 to Inspector-General of Police for Eastern Bengal, and in 1909 he was transferred from Shillong to Dacca. Later in the same year he was placed on special duty, and in 1911 he retired from Assam and returned to England



E. C. STUART BAKER.

1925.

where he assumed charge of the Port of London Police. This force he reorganized and brought up to a high standard of efficiency, and finally retired in 1925.

After he came to live in London Mr. Baker was able to devote much of his spare time to ornithology, and in 1913 he was elected Secretary and Treasurer of the British Ornithologists' Union, which office he held until 1923.

In 1913 the late Colonel Harington and Mr. Baker commenced revising the Indian avifauna. The former wrote a revision of the Indian *Timaliidae*, while the latter published reviews on the Silver Pheasants and Drongos. Early in 1920 the authorities at the British Museum were asked by the editor of the *Fauna of British India* to suggest someone to undertake a new edition of the volumes on Birds, and Mr. Baker was recommended. The first edition by Oates and Blanford was published in 4 volumes, but in the new edition it was found necessary to expand the work into six, with two additional volumes on synonymy.

For the next eight or nine years Mr. Baker was busily engaged in writing this important work, but he first prepared a Handlist of the Birds which was published in our *Journal*. At the commencement he was only able to devote his spare time to writing and research, but by starting early in the morning and working late he managed to get the first volume out in 1922. Thereafter a volume appeared yearly, surely a record for a publication of this magnitude.

When he retired from the Dock Police in 1925 Mr. Baker became a candidate for the Croydon Municipal Council and was returned by a large majority. For the years 1938-39 he was elected Mayor and continued to sit on the Council till 1942 when he retired. He was much interested in youth organizations and was a great supporter of Amateur Boxing both while in the Police and at Croydon, where he was President of the local Amateur Club.

Mr. Baker was a great shikari and wrote interesting accounts of his experiences with big game in our *Journal*, as well as the *Field* and *Asian*. He was a good rifle shot, and was twice tossed by a gaur and trampled on by a rhinoceros. Many years ago he lost his left arm in an encounter with a man-eating panther near Silchar. He was following the animal which had taken refuge in a native hut, when it charged and knocked the rifle out of his hand. The panther seized him and to save himself he thrust his left arm down the beast's throat. Luckily his shikaries came to his assistance and despatched the animal. Despite the loss of an arm he continued to shoot both with rifle and shot-gun.

Mr. Baker was an excellent tennis player, and in 1937 won the Men's Singles Handicap at Dulwich. He was also a keen rider and won numerous pony races in Assam. With his single hand he was extraordinarily clever and it was wonderful to see him place a small egg in a box of sand and inscribe it. He was awarded a C.I.E., for his services in India in 1932, and after the last War was made a Companion of the Order of the British Empire. In 1897 he married Ethel Mary Roffey, who survives him together with four daughters.

N.B.K.

At a meeting held on the 26th August 1944 the Committee of the Peermade Game Association recorded their sense of regret and loss at the death of Mr. E. C. Stuart Baker and Mr. H. Whistler. [Eds.]

PUBLICATIONS

Bombay Natural History Society.

The Genus *Chloropsis*. Vol. VI, p. 59.

The Bulbuls of North Cachar. Vol. VII.

List of Birds' Eggs from North Cachar presented by E. C. Stuart Baker. Vol. VII.

A new Wren from North Cachar. Vol. VII, p. 319.

The Birds of North Cachar. Vol. VIII, p. 162; Vol. IX, pp. 1, 111; Vol. X, pp. 1, 161, 339, 539; Vol. XI, pp. 222, 300; Vol. XII, p. 486; Vol. XIII, pp. 399, 563.