

E.C.S. Baker Prodigious Naturalist

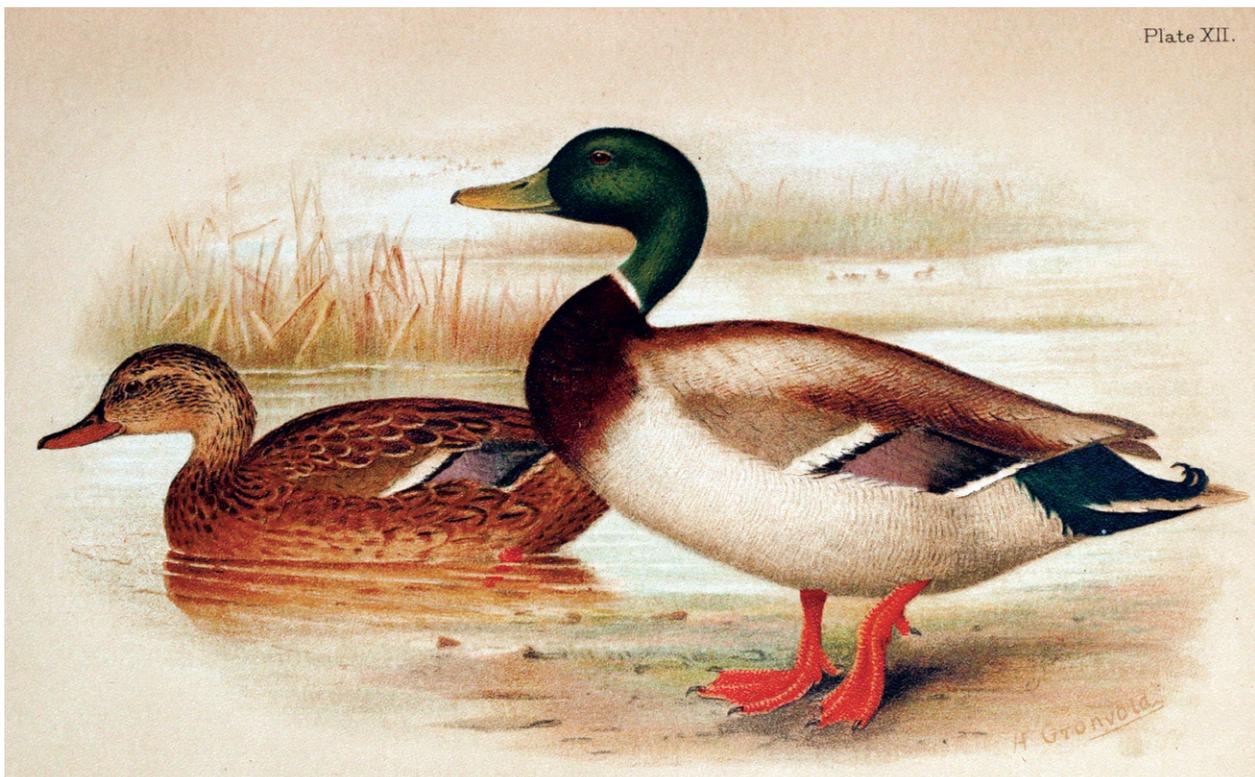
joined the Indian (Imperial) Police and spent most of his career in the Assam Police, rising to the rank of Inspector General. In 1898, he became a member of the Society. His first paper 'The genus *Chloropsis*' appeared in the sixth volume of the *JBNHS*. He contributed many other literary pieces, but his work on Indian ducks and game birds will always be remembered. The first of the series dealt with ducks, and it gained such popularity that the Honorary Secretary W.S. Millard decided to publish the papers in book form, which saw immediate success. Apart from financial success, the volume became a useful instrument in drawing attention to the activities of the Society, thereby increasing membership.

The year 1908 became a landmark in the history of the BNHS as the Society embarked on book publication. The very first book to be published was the British

ornithologist and police officer Edward Charles Stuart Baker's *INDIAN DUCKS AND THEIR ALLIES*.

Baker was educated at Trinity College, Warwickshire. In 1883, he

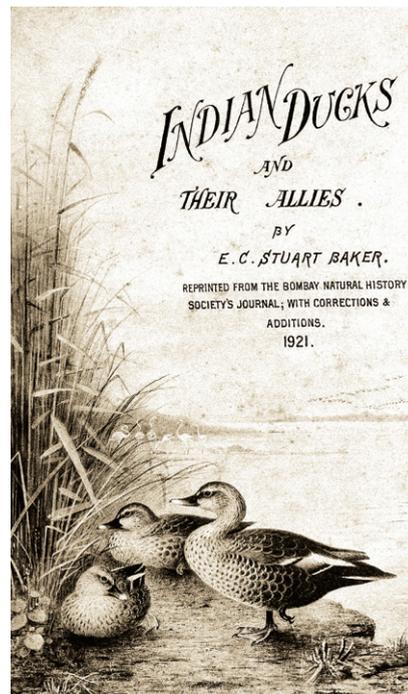
On request from W.S. Millard, Baker wrote another series of papers on game birds, starting with snipes, bustards, and sandgrouse. True game birds followed this volume, and rails



Mallard by Henrik Grönvold, from *INDIAN DUCKS AND THEIR ALLIES* by E.C. Stuart Baker

and waders were added, and these led to the publication of the book *GAME BIRDS OF INDIA AND CEYLON* (1921). A number of other books were published by him over the years: *THE FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, INCLUDING CEYLON AND BURMA – BIRDS* (1922), *MISHMI MANEATER* (1928), *THE NIDIFICATION OF THE BIRDS OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE* (1932), and *CUCKOO PROBLEMS* (1942). He was also prodigious in publishing his observations in the *JBNHS*, these a testimony to the quantum of field work that he packed into a lifetime, and his immense dedication and belief in the Society's *Journal* in which all these contributions appeared.

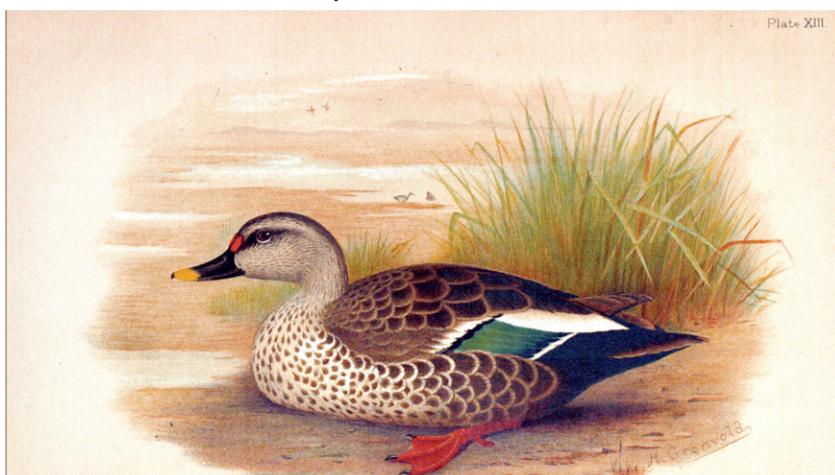
With great interest in birds' eggs in general, Baker amassed a huge collection of 50,000 eggs (and also nests), derived partly from his own collections, his contacts all over India, or purchased from collectors of Indian birds' eggs. He made a special study of the eggs and habits of the different Indian cuckoos and their foster parents, and wrote papers on this subject, which also resulted in two books mentioned earlier. Baker either sold or donated his collections to museums – BNHS has about a thousand eggs from his collections. However, since Baker depended a lot on local collectors, his collection has been considered of dubious



A revised 1921 edition of the first book published by the BNHS



Bar-headed Goose by Henrik Grönvold, from *INDIAN DUCKS AND THEIR ALLIES* by E.C. Stuart Baker



Spot-bill Duck by Henrik Grönvold, from *INDIAN DUCKS AND THEIR ALLIES* by E.C. Stuart Baker

provenance and unreliable. Baker had a good collection of skins, some of which he gave to the Society.

After moving to London, Baker was able to devote much of his time to ornithology and was elected Secretary and Treasurer of the British Ornithologists Union in 1913. He prepared and submitted A HAND-LIST OF GENERA AND SPECIES OF BIRDS OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE, which he later published in seven parts in the *JBNHS* (Vols 27–28).

Baker was an accomplished shikari and wrote interesting accounts of his experiences with big game. He had many fascinating escapades. He was twice tossed by a gaur, and trampled by a rhinoceros. As if that was not enough, in an encounter with a man-eating panther near Silchar, he lost an arm!

His contributions to Indian ornithology were commemorated in the naming of *Yuhina bakeri*, now commonly called White-naped Yuhina. ■