

S.D. Ripley A Well-wisher of the BNHS

Sidney Dillon Ripley was born in New York on 20th September 1913. As a youngster, he took a liking to waterfowl, and began watching, collecting and breeding cranes, ducks, swans, and geese. He studied Zoology at Columbia University and later did his PhD from Harvard in 1943, while simultaneously working at the US Museum of Natural History (part of Smithsonian Institution). His career as an ornithologist began when he participated in the Denison-Crockett Expedition to New Guinea in 1937-38, and in the Vanderbilt Expedition to Sumatra in 1939 where he collected and described his first new species for science.

In 1943, Ripley travelled to India as a member of the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency during World War II. That very year he travelled to Bombay to meet Sálím Ali, but could not do so as he was away on a field expedition. However, by 1948, the duo had not only met but

also embarked on field trips together and their first joint write-up on 'The birds of the Mishmi Hills' appeared in *JBNHS* 1948: Vol. 48(1). Thus began their bond which was to last till the death of Sálím Ali in 1987.

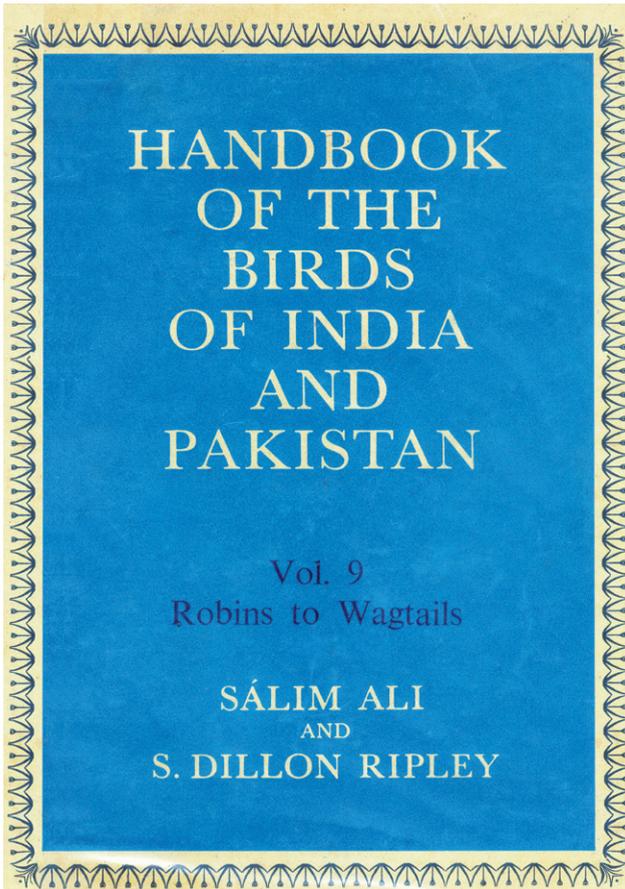
Sidney Dillon Ripley's association with the BNHS primarily relates to his interest in the avifauna of the Indian subcontinent and his friendship with Sálím Ali. He co-authored the *HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN* along

with Sálím Ali, which is the magnum opus of Indian ornithology. The idea was discussed as early as 1946, during their field trip to the Mishmi Hills in Eastern Himalaya, but work on this ten-volume series began only in 1964 and was completed in 1974. The *HANDBOOK* became a bible for bird studies in the Indian region, and consequent to a major revision remains a masterpiece. Several researchers even today use the *HANDBOOK* as their primary reference. Some of his other works include the *LAND AND WILDLIFE OF TROPICAL ASIA* (1964), *RAILS OF THE WORLD: A MONOGRAPH OF THE FAMILY RALLIDAE* (1977), and *BIRDS OF BHUTAN* (1996), the last co-authored with Sálím Ali and B. Biswas.

All along, Dillon Ripley's association with Sálím Ali bore rich fruit for BNHS, as he strove to garner support for the Society in its research and conservation activities. As Director of the Yale-Peabody Museum and later as Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, he helped to realize several BNHS expeditions to Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa, Bastar, and the Eastern and Western Ghats. When in 1967, BNHS stopped receiving



Sálím Ali with Mary and Dillon Ripley in a camp, skinning birds



The HANDBOOK remains the magnum opus for Indian ornithology till date



Salim Ali with house guest Dillon Ripley, at Pali Hill, Mumbai

financial assistance from WHO to carry out its bird migration studies, Ripley stepped in, and he was instrumental in helping BNHS receive assistance from the Smithsonian Institution and the Migratory Animal Pathological Survey of the U.S. Army to continue its work in the bird migration area.

As for some of Dillon Ripley's distinctions, he served as Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and President of the International Council for Bird Preservation (now Birdlife International), was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom (the highest civilian award of the United States) in 1985, held multiple

honorary degrees from academic institutions including Yale, Harvard, Cambridge, and Johns Hopkins, and was one of the key persons involved in drafting the Endangered Species Preservation Act and the Red Book listing of endangered species.

Ripley was known for his enthusiastic personality. His charismatic persona won many hearts, both in his social and professional dealings. As an ornithologist and wildlife conservationist, Dillon Ripley's life and career trajectory are inspirational, and his contribution to the Society's research activities monumental. ■

"Anyone with a hobby or an interest outside his business or office work is like a man who keeps himself warm because of an inner glow which proceeds from himself and is therefore more fortunate than the man who depends upon a fire to keep warm and from which he must one day move away."

... Salim Ali quoted by Loke Wan Tho