



Lt. Col. R.S.P. Bates Indian Bird Photography Pioneer



"The lack of any popular work revealing the methods employed by the bird-photographer has led me to bring out this book in the hope that to a certain extent this gap may be filled. When I took up the subject some twelve years ago, I at once found myself at a great disadvantage through not knowing how to make a start on the proper lines, and consequently, as I have had to learn gradually by practical experience, those twelve years have by no means been used to the fullest advantage. If therefore my experiences prove a help to the beginner in bird-photography, I shall feel that this book has achieved its main object in filling the gap which still seems to exist in spite of the great number of nature books which have lately appeared."

... R.S.P. Bates – BIRD LIFE IN INDIA

An ardent lover of birds, a knowledgeable and extremely hardworking field researcher, one of the first bird photographers in the world and one of India's most valuable ornithologists, that is Lt. Col. R.S.P Bates for you. Bates was born in 1897 in Surrey, England. He loved India and its countryside, and in particular had an unquenchable passion for Kashmir. Most of his holidays were spent exploring the smaller valleys and meadows of this state for the birds that inhabited them. The precision of his descriptions made them valuable guides for nature lovers, ornithologists, and other travellers to Kashmir.

Bates joined the BNHS in 1921 and became a Life Member in 1937. After his field trips, he made numerous notes and wrote scientific articles which became major contributions to the *JBNHS*. A few of his many published works are 'Impressions of Panchmarhi Birds' [1927: Index Herbariorum published from Kew – Royal Botanic Gardens Vol. 31(4)], 'Notes on the Habits of

Some Indian Birds' [1935: Vol. 37(4)], 'Bird Photography in India' [1939: Vol. 40(4)], and 'Fighting among Birds' [1956: Vol. 54(1)].

The credit for popularizing bird photography in India goes to Bates. Up to the time he published his popular series on 'Birds nesting with a Camera in India' [in six parts: *JBNHS* 1924: 24(2), 1925: 30(1-4), 1926: 31(2)], bird photography was a neglected art. The articles opened a wide field of interest and possibilities, which were explored by budding photographers. Some of his bird portraits are still considered among the finest ever made; with the limited technology available at that time, his works can be considered as masterpieces. This perfection was due to his ingenuity in improvisation and skill in preparing the gadgets that he required. Bates and E.H.N. Lowther, an officer in the East Indian Railway Company, also an accomplished field ornithologist and bird photographer, coauthored *BREEDING BIRDS OF KASHMIR* (1952).

Throughout his service in India, Bates maintained a close association with the Society. Even after retirement, he kept up his interest in birds and bird photography, and through his letters he rued his restrained life in England as compared to India, and the lack of time from mundane domestic life. He, however, managed to keep his fascination alive by taking part in several local natural history societies. He had actively taken to trapping and ringing of birds. Gardening was another of Bates's minor hobbies.

After his retirement, Bates dreamt of one more spell of birding in his beloved Kashmir, but that was not to be due to failing health. Bates was a gentle, simple, modest man, and one of the strongest links in the chain of distinguished British ornithologists working on Indian birds. ■