



J.D. Inverarity In the service of the Society

Born in Bombay in 1847 and educated in England, John Duncan Inverarity returned to his place of birth to serve as a barrister in the Bombay High Court in 1869. Such was the reputation he built for himself as a barrister that the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court was said to have remarked that “for thirty years [he] had no equal in India”! When not in his barrister coat, Inverarity pursued his passion as a big game hunter and naturalist. He became associated with the Society as member of the Managing Committee in 1891, and went on to become its Vice President in 1897.

Inverarity’s contributions to the Society’s *Journal* were tremendous. He excelled not only as a shikari, but also as a close and accurate observer of the habits and characteristics of the animals he hunted. With a flair for language and writing, he was able to describe his observations in his writings on sport and jungle life. In an interesting ‘Stray Notes on Old Indian Natural History and Sporting

Periodicals’ [1914, Vol. 22(4): 814–816], he writes about some of the periodicals such as the *Oriental Sporting Magazine*, published from Bombay from 1828 to 1833, the *Bengal Sporting Magazine* from Calcutta which later became *Bengal Sporting and General Magazine* and lasted till 1846, the *Calcutta Journal of Natural History* which lasted till 1848 and the *Indian Sporting Review* that lasted till 1851. The notes provide an insight into new revelations about Indian wildlife, even if mainly through sport. However, he does mention that the *Calcutta Journal of Natural History* was conducted very much on the lines of our own “*Journal*”, meaning *JBNHS*. “I find from it that the Thaming, Thamin or Eld’s deer, *Cervus eldii*, was first discovered in 1838 in Manipur by Lieut. Eld, Assistant Commissioner of Assam ...” he alludes to an article while also making suggestions for some of their articles to be reprinted in *JBNHS* as “the *Calcutta Journal of Natural History* is not easily got”.

Inverarity’s observations on the tiger helped to elucidate many points on the subject of the size of

the animal, its breeding pattern, mode of attack, and the treatment of its kill. One of his most endearing publications is ‘Unscientific Notes on the Tiger’, published in *JBNHS* [1888, Vol. 3(3):143–154] wherein he justifies his title saying he makes no “pretensions to the learned and scientific attainments ... hitherto read at our meetings” but nevertheless packs rich observations punctuated by amusing anecdotes. One such anecdote is about an existing superstition among the local hunters that “God allows the tiger one rupee a day for his food, so that if he kills a bullock worth Rs. 5, he won’t kill again for five days”.

He was a prolific writer and wrote on varied subjects based on his field experiences and reading; the range he covered included wild dogs, man-eating panthers, waters of western India, and even ‘... Mammalia of Somaliland’ [1891 Vol. 6(4): 457]. The latter was based on his expeditions to the Somaliland in 1889 and 1890. In his notes of the same, he even provides the Somali equivalent of the English names of the animals that he encountered there. He documented his study on the Indian Bison or Gaur through his paper ‘The Indian Bison, with some notes on stalking him [Vol. 4(4)]’, which was an important contribution to the understanding of this species. His articles were usually illustrated with photographs taken by him, some of which are displayed on the walls of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya in Mumbai.

Inverarity was blessed with the keenest power of observation and a great love for nature and outdoor life, all of which are reflected in the writings he left behind. ■

