out, she saw a Great Blue Heron holding the struggling adult squirrel by the head. At her approach, the heron flew, carrying the squirrel to the lagoon where it perched on rocks in the water. The heron alternately submerged the squirrel, then took it out of the water and vigorously shook it. After about 5 min of alternately shaking and wetting, the heron swallowed the squirrel head first. Apparently the squirrel was still barely alive at this point, though greatly weakened. After swallowing the animal and drinking a quantity of water, the heron flew away. Whether the bird was deliberately trying to drown the squirrel by wetting it or merely lubricating it to ease swallowing is not known.

Great Blue Herons have been known to choke on prey too large to swallow (Palmer 1962). Weights of adult gray squirrels range from 338 to 750 g (J. A. Chapman and G. A. Feldhamer 1982, Wild mammals of North America, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Univ.), but the smaller individuals are found in the southern parts of the species' range.

Since girth is probably more critical than weight as a limitation on prey size for any predator that swallows prey whole, we measured the girth of a sample of intact road-killed gray squirrels (n=3) in Duval Co., Florida in June 1987. Maximum girth was surprisingly uniform at about 15.25 cm, measured at 3 places along the body (forequarters, middle, hindquarters).

Since Great Blue Herons have been observed swallowing prey as large as an Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*) (C. L. Abercrombie, pers. comm.), gray squirrels are probably well below the maximum size prey for this predator. However, the handling behavior of the heron was not appropriate to drown the squirrel, which would tend to indicate that the taking of air breathing animals by the Florida population of this heron is purely opportunistic and without evolved behavior to maximize success.

We thank James A. Rodgers, Jr. and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on the manuscript.—**Jeanette Brooks**, 8 Pablo Road, P. O. Box 561, Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida 32082 and **Robert W. Loftin**, Dept. of History and Philosophy, University of North Florida, 4567 St. Johns Bluff Road, S., Jacksonville, Florida 32216.

Florida Field Naturalist 15: 107-108, 1987.

REVIEWS

The fall of a sparrow.—Sálim Ali. 1985. Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press. 265 pp. + 71 black and white photographs. Rs.110 ($16.95).—In writing this review, I am at once hesitant because I know how little Sálim Ali enjoys public attention. In his own words "it took considerable persuasion from friends and 'fans' to evoke in me the courage to write an autobiography . . ." which would let "*curious* (my italics) people know how and whence I contracted the germs of ornithology . . . ." So, at the risk of incurring his displeasure, I am going to recommend this autobiography to anyone with a love of nature, a sense of humor and a curiosity about the progress of ornithology in India. This book has humor in good measure while it tells the extraordinary story of a man who followed his ornithological dream with scant regard for material gain at a time when ornithology was little known and scarcely regarded as a "respectable" profession among his peers. Consequently, Sálim Ali is one of those rare individuals who has lived life to the fullest and still continues to do so.

Scientific ornithology in India was initiated and pursued by the British, mostly by officers in Her Majesty's service. Originating as a "hobby" for many officers stationed in remote areas, it developed into a serious occupation in such pioneers as E. C. Stuart Baker who authored the second edition of the volumes on birds in the "Fauna of British India" series, and Hugh Whistler. Then, into this British dominated sphere came Sálim Ali. He had his appetite for ornithology whetted by a compulsory and nearly continuous stay in the

Tavoy district of Burma from 1914 to 1923 where he was attending to a family business. He went to Berlin to train under Erwin Stresemann whom he regards as his "guru" and came back equipped to make his own important scientific contributions to Indian ornithology.

Sálim Ali tells the story of his association with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), the foremost organization of its kind in India today. He traces this relationship from the time he was directed to its collections in the offices of Phipson and Co., Wine Merchants (!) after the "fall of the sparrow" to the present when he is president of the BNHS. He was twelve years old when the sparrow fell. He tells of his breaking into a virtually all-British stronghold, rarely resisting a chuckle at the sahibs.

He has interesting accounts of the ornithological surveys he conducted in association with the BNHS, in various Princely States of India, under the patronage of the Maharajahs. His sense of fun, adventure, capacity for hard work and striving for perfection come through at all times. Those surveys were the basis for several books on regional ornithology published by Oxford University Press, like "Birds of Kerala" and the "Field Guide to the Birds of the Eastern Himalayas." These culminated in his magnum opus, "The Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan" (in ten volumes), written in collaboration with S. Dillon Ripley. The Handbook was written to fully update Stuart Baker's work in the "Fauna of British India" series and to include original information on the ecology of the species. He also wrote a popular field guide, "The Book of Indian Birds," which is widely used today. He writes only briefly about his fascinating seminal study on the breeding biology of baya weaver birds. It is obvious, however, that Sálim Ali enjoys behavior and ecology much more than systematics.

He writes of his friendship (to cite only a few) with Hugh Whistler who gave him much useful practical advice in his salad ornithological days; with Richard Meinertzhagen, D.S.O., the intrepid Colonel of "A Kenya Diary" fame with whom he expeditioned to Afghanistan and shared other good times; with Loke Wan Tho, the "quiet and scholastic" businessman with an "eye for beauty" who became a world renowned bird photographer during his exile in India from Singapore; with J. B. S. Haldane and with Dillon Ripley with whom he still shares an uncommon rapport.

He writes with deep affection about his interesting and large family, some of whom were deeply committed to social or political causes. Though Sálim Ali is himself not political, he obviously has strong feelings about the role of the British in India and the role of Indians themselves. These feelings flash through occasionally.

Sálim Ali, unlike virtually all of us, was present at a time when Indian wildlife was "plentiful" and Indian forests were relatively well preserved. From his book one gets the flavor of what it must have been like then. The last tiger on the outskirts of Bombay was shot in 1929! Days and times, a whole period gone by. One detects regret and nostalgia in the book but only fleetingly for the "young" man of ninety years is optimistically passionate about conserving what is left. As a nominated member of the Indian Rajya Sabha (the country's highest governing council), Sálim Ali is actively fighting today for his own special part of the planet.

The book has many events and personalities condensed into its pages, snatches from a much larger wealth of experiences. However, it captures the essence of a great man whose example is worth savoring. The seventy-one excellent photographs are of memorable times and places (Editor's note: Sálim Ali passed away on June 20, 1987 after a long illness which he fought with tenacity. He will be missed by fellow ornithologists, conservationists, and friends throughout the world.).—**Renée M. Borges,** Department of Biology, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida 33124 and 104/C Aradhana, G. D. Ambekar Road, Naigaum, Bombay 400 014, India.