

The Fall of a Sparrow by Salim Ali. Oxford University Press, Oxford OX2 6DP, England (1985). 110 Rupiahs.

I have been asked to prepare a review of this autobiography and do so with pleasure, but my comments will be completely biased. I have known Salim for many years and have a very warm place in my heart for him. He is all of the things that this book reveals him as being. His dedication and sense of humour have always been qualities that appealed to me. Anyone who has read from his many works would expect this autobiography to be as well written and enlightening as it is.

Salim Ali spans three-quarters of the 20th Century during which ornithology went from looking at birds down the barrel of a gun to watching them with binoculars; from the period of collecting and utilization to that of enjoying and conserving. He was the winner of the second J. Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Prize in 1976 and is the dean of ornithology and conservation in India.

He has presented his story under 23 chapter headings which are events in his life, not necessarily chronological. He sprang from a rather multitudinous family and constantly refers to it; so much so that I would have appreciated a geneological chart to have kept all his relatives in order. The book deals almost more with people whom he has known than with his personal experiences. Although a consummate naturalist he is interested in people as well, but knowing him as an amusing raconteur I was a little disappointed in the lack of anecdotes and yarns. True, in the last half of the book he does tell a few that greatly enliven it.

All through the volume you find Indian words which are italicized and most of these are explained in a glossary at the end. However, a map of his travels and surveys in India would have been very helpful. To a reader without British or Indian background some of the narrative could be a bit mystifying, so a few maps would have helped. It is in the epilogues that he shows the true Salim Ali sense of humour and joy of living.

This is a book that any ornithologist worth his salt should have before him.

H. Elliott McClure
69 E. Loop Drive
Camarillo, CA 93010, U.S.A.