

R.C. Wroughton Multi-faceted Naturalist

Robert Charles Wroughton was born in 1849 in Nuseerabad, Rajasthan. He was an ardent sportsman and naturalist, who spent his early childhood in India. As he grew up, so did his interest in natural history. He joined the Indian Forest Service as Assistant Conservator of Forests, Bombay Presidency, and subsequently served as the Inspector General of Forests until his retirement in 1904. During his period of service, he collected a large number of natural history specimens, giving special attention to ants. He came in touch with the well-known Swiss formicologist (one who studies ants), Auguste H. Forel, to whom he sent the abundant material he obtained, and in the process, derived in-depth knowledge of this taxa.

Wroughton's interest in small mammals was aroused by Captain Glen Liston's work on plague and his special address given to the members of BNHS [JBNHS 1908, Vol. 18(4)]. Wroughton started by collecting bats on which his first mammal paper 'Some Konkan Bats' was published in 1899. During a visit home on leave, while working at the Museum in South Kensington, Wroughton discovered his forte as a mammalogist, and did admirable work in the field. The study of mammals then involved collecting and arranging skins and skulls in large series, to which Wroughton contributed greatly.

Wroughton realistically assessed the lacunae in Indian natural history studies and worked towards filling them. When W.S. Millard took over as Honorary Secretary of the Society, Wroughton found a useful ally in him. Both conceived and carried through the splendid idea of the Society's Mammal Survey of India (1911-1923), along with S.H. Prater and Charles McCann. During the course of this survey, many trained collectors were sent to different parts of India; collections of perfectly formed specimens and a series of systematic reports on the material were prepared in London and printed in the Society's *Journal*. This survey is

believed to be the first collaborative biodiversity study in the world. The project accumulated 50,000 specimens during the 12 years of its tenure and the information was published in 47 scientific papers. Wroughton also wrote about 200



intervening war years, Wroughton prepared a summary of the work done in Indian Mammalogy during the Mammal Survey. No work was too laborious, too great, or too difficult for him to attempt and to successfully conclude. This was the key character of Wroughton that was admired by all. Numerous species are named after him, including Wroughton's Free-tailed Bat *Otomops wroughtoni* and several ant species, including *Aenictus wroughtonii*, *Camponotus wroughtonii*, and *Carebara wroughtonii*, to name a few. ■

"There are numerous investigations, anatomical, physiological, ecological, geographical, and evolutionary, which can only be made by the study of animal life. While considerable data have been accumulated by the study of dead specimens in museums, or of the living creatures in the laboratory, the 'whence, how and where' of his existence which man is seeking to discover cannot be discovered by these means alone. The study of the living creature under the natural conditions of its environment is equally important."

... Salim Ali – THE BOOK OF INDIAN ANIMALS

