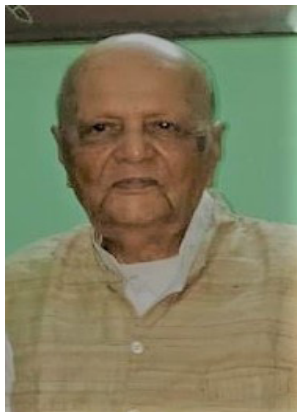


Obituary



Dr Ajit Kumar Mukherjee
An Ornithologist & Naturalist Par Excellence
(February 1925 – July 2021)

The man, who dedicated a major part of his life as a field biologist and a bird researcher from the Zoological Survey of India, is Dr Ajit Kumar Mukherjee (1925 -2021). Born in Banaras (Varanasi), the nonagenarian survived a smallpox epidemic in his childhood, a boat disaster in a whirlpool at the estuary river of Sunderban in his youth, and the excision of a life-threatening sarcoma at about 90 years of age. Despite all these ordeals, he had remained active as a sincere ornithologist and down to earth field biologist.

Dr Mukherjee had schooling and intermediate education at St. Andrews College, Gorakhpur. His graduation in Science was from Allahabad University, Allahabad as a fresh university pass out (M.Sc.) opportunity came to him when he got selected for a non-gazetted position at the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in 1946 under the Directorship of Dr S.L. Hora. In professional life, Dr Mukherjee had always been on his toes, surveying and collecting zoological specimens, especially birds from different regions of India. The birds preserved in the repository of Zoological Survey of India, along with many faunal reports, photographs, and his published works on birds, bear the testimony of his significant contribution (Bibliography of ornithological works by Sri Ajit Kumar Mukherjee: www.southasiaornith.in). His impressive work on the 'Food-Habits of the water-birds of the Sundarban, 24-Parganas District, West Bengal' was published in *Journal Bombay nat. Hist. Soc* (vol. 66(2), 68 (1&3), 71(2), 72(2) during 1969 to 1972 has remained as a memoir on birds of the estuarine habitats of Sunderban. His intensive study on the water-birds of deltaic regions of southern Bengal resulted in an award of his Ph.D. degree by the University of Calcutta. Surveys and reports on the status of some of the rare and vanishing wild animals and birds of India have been well documented in his books published by ZSI on 'Endangered Animals of India' (1982) and 'Birds of Arid and semi-arid Tracts'(1995). On request of the Publication Div., Govt. of India, Dr Mukherjee wrote a monograph on our National Bird, Peacock (1999).

Dr Mukherjee's internationally acclaimed and much-cited article on 'Some examples of recent faunal impoverishment and regression' was published in the book on 'Ecology and Biogeography in India', edited by Prof. M.S. Mani, by W. Junk, The Hague in 1974. He was nominated as a representative of ZSI at the CITES meeting held in 1981 at New Delhi. Dr Mukherjee was given the responsibility of the curator of the Indian Museum, Kolkata, and consequently, he became a visiting professor of Museology at the University of Calcutta. His innovation in setting up habitat cases for birds and animals at the galleries of the Indian Museum was highly appreciated by the visitors. Dr Mukherjee's academic distinction was recognized by the University of Calcutta, where he guided at least half a dozen Ph.D. Scholars in Zoology and Museology.

Dr A.K. Mukherjee won everyone's heart with his simplicity and compassion. He served in ZSI for about 37 years and retired as the Dy. Director at the regional Station, Jodhpur. Subsequently, as an Emeritus Scientist with fellowship support from DoEn& F (GOI) he was involved in pursuing research studies on birds of the arid zone and a book writing project. The footprints and images that Dr Ajit Kumar Mukherjee leaves behind can never go unsung and unnoticed. Dr Mukherjee is survived by three sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

September 2021

Ananda Mukhopadhyay, Rana Mukherjee
& Deb Mukhopadhyay