

Edward Blyth, Charles Darwin, and the Animal Trade in Nineteenth-Century India and Britain

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Introduction

Early professionals in the natural sciences found great difficulty in establishing their social level and a steady income.¹ The pursuit of science – unlike other professions, such as law or medicine – did not overcome low status, nor did it confer high status. Naturalists also differed from other professionals in that their profession did not usually generate income through fees: they required salaried employment, which in itself diminished their social standing. There was still the assumption that scientists were gentlemen of independent income. This resulted in the pitiful salaries that forced practitioners to take on more than one position, or to accept socially degrading side employment. Many naturalists, such as William Swainson, Alfred Russel Wallace, Henry Bates, John Gould, and Edward Blyth, found it necessary to supplement a scanty income with mercantile activities. Victorian society generally frowned on such activities and they could be easily held against a social marginal scientist on his uppers. This state of affairs led Edward Forbes to complain bitterly: “People without independence have no business to meddle with science. It should never be linked with lucre.”²

This paper will illustrate the problems faced by early professional naturalists, and the way in which they were forced to make a living, by examining the animal trading of the zoologist Edward Blyth, curator of the museum of

¹ David Elliston Allen, “The Early Professionals in British Natural History,” in *From Linnaeus to Darwin: Commentaries on the History of Biology and Geology*, ed. Alwynne Wheeler and James Henry Price (London: Society for the History of Natural History, 1985), pp. 1–11; Paul Lawrence Farber, “Aspiring Naturalists and Their Frustrations: The Case of William Swainson (1789–1855),” in *ibid.*, pp. 51–59.

² David Elliston Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), p. 85.

the Asiatic Society in Calcutta for more than twenty years. This is a neglected and almost unknown aspect of his career, and one in which he attempted to involve both Charles Darwin and John Gould. Blyth's far from unique financial and social difficulties were exacerbated by his residence in a country with a particularly conservative and rigid class structure, and, on his return to England, by his mental illness and alcoholism, which carried their own ineradicable stigma. Darwin was happily exempt from the necessity to ply a trade by virtue of a substantial private income; he and Blyth together represent almost the two extremes of social status a zoologist might experience in the nineteenth century. It was fortunate for Darwin, and thus for science, that such social differences did not constitute a barrier to the transmission of knowledge between naturalists – on the contrary, as Anne Secord has pointed out, they tended to facilitate this transmission.³

Blyth's time in India and his life afterwards demonstrate how greatly the social and scientific experiences of a low-ranking scientist without secure income, reliant upon an employer, differed from those of successful, high-status, and financially independent men like Darwin. These include the financial straits Blyth faced as a result of his difficult relationship with his employers, the Asiatic Society; and his increased domestic liabilities, which led to involvement in the profitable, if unorthodox and socially dubious animal trade. I will discuss the extent of his involvement in this trade; the Indian context; the invitations he made to Charles Darwin and John Gould to join his enterprises; and their responses. Finally, I will discuss Blyth's return to England and his relationship with Darwin and fellow zoologists until his death in 1873, and will attempt to determine the effect of his animal dealing (which two of his obituarists tried to downplay or conceal) on his career in India and afterward.

Darwin and Blyth

In a letter to Charles Darwin dated February 23, 1856, Edward Blyth, then in Calcutta, offered to “share with [Darwin] *the costs and the profits* of a few speculations . . . the latter being somewhat inordinate; but this need not be published to the world!”⁴ This offer arose from Blyth's long-standing involvement in wild animal dealing. Offering a “good supply” for £10 of the live domestic pigeons Darwin had requested, Blyth told him:

³ Anne Secord, “Corresponding Interests: Artisans and Gentlemen, in Nineteenth-Century Natural History,” *Brit. J. Hist. Sci.* 17 (1994), 383–408.

⁴ Edward Blyth to Charles Robert Darwin, February 23, 1856, in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–91), IV, 39 (hereafter cited as *CCD*).

I would *very much rather* have the value in hardy living creatures; as especially Maccaws, – and Marmozets if you could but procure some. . . . It is a fact, that I can always get £50 a pair for Maccaws, the cost in London being £3 or 4. . . . For one or more pairs of Marmozets, I think that I could now get £100 per pair, without difficulty; & they go into *Zenanas* where nobody sees them or is even likely to hear about them. Natives of enormous wealth are the purchasers, who care not what they give for what they particularly fancy.⁵

Darwin's reaction to this interesting proposition is unknown. As it appears that he did *not* become involved in any such scheme, it is possible that his reply resembled the polite rebuff Blyth received from the ornithologist John Gould, to whom he made a similar (if more lucrative) offer in 1859.

Darwin preserved about forty letters from Blyth, commencing in April 21, 1855,⁶ when, in response to Darwin's enquiry of February 27 the same year,⁷ Blyth began a series of lengthy "Notes for Mr Darwin," pouring out his extensive knowledge of Asiatic fauna and of domesticated wild animals. Their first recorded involvement had occurred twenty years earlier when, in February 1838, Darwin's opinion was sought by the British Museum in the matter of Blyth's petulant and ultimately unsuccessful complaint against George Robert Gray at the museum.⁸ Their recorded first meeting occurred a few months later that year, at the Zoological Society.⁹ After that, there is no record of any contact between them until 1855. This lack of contact was hardly surprising: the two men, almost exact contemporaries, could scarcely have been more dissimilar, except in their all-consuming passion for science. These dissimilarities were widening even before 1841 when Blyth left England. Darwin, from a family of clergy and physicians, was a university-educated gentleman of pacific temperament and methodical working habits, an independent income, and a strong reputation built on his geological work and the voyage of the *Beagle*. Janet Browne has described how the outfitting for Darwin's "voyaging" (financed entirely by his very wealthy father) cost £600, more than twice what it had cost to keep him at university for two

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶ Blyth to Darwin, April 21, 1855, *CCD*, V, 309–318.

⁷ "I have the pleasure to acknowledge receipt of yours of the 27th February, and am much gratified to learn that a subject in which I have always felt the deepest interest has been undertaken by one so competent to treat of it in all its bearings" (*ibid.*, p. 309).

⁸ Christine Brandon-Jones, "Charles Darwin and the Repugnant Curators," *Ann. Sci.*, 53 (1996), 501–510; John George Children to Darwin, February 21, 1838, *CCD*, VII, 467–468.

⁹ Charles Robert Darwin, Notebook D, pp. 30, 33, in *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836–1844*, ed. Paul Howard Barrett, Peter Jack Gautrey, Sandra Herbert, David Kohn, and Sydney Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 341–342.

years.¹⁰ The additional £1,200 or so it cost his father to support Darwin during the five-year *Beagle* trip¹¹ was only a small part of the financial cost to Darwin's family for a life spent in the pursuit of science.

In the late 1830's, Darwin's fame was in the ascendant in the aftermath of his return from South America and the books resulting from his explorations, as he quietly began his investigations into the origin of species. Blyth, in contrast, had already failed at one career at the time of their first known contact in 1838: the son of a clothier, he had abandoned a business as a druggist in 1837. Thereafter, he sought to earn a living as an author and editor, but until he was offered a position in India in 1841 as curator of the museum of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, he struggled to earn enough for survival. However, incidents such as his complaint against George Gray recurred in his career, indicating a combative and tactless approach to his peers, which contributed to his lack of advancement. His career, like that of his fellow zoologist William Swainson (who was forced to emigrate to New Zealand out of economic necessity in 1837),¹² eventually encompassed virtually every possible method of making a living (bar teaching) open to a professional zoologist in the early part of the nineteenth century – and with very little better effect than that of Swainson. The position with the Asiatic Society was hardly one that Blyth's peers envied – it was so poorly paid that the Society members had expressed strong doubts as to whether a properly qualified European could be found to curate the museum for so low a salary.¹³ However, sharp necessity meant that Blyth had little choice but to accept. He was so poor in 1841 that he had to be advanced £100 from the Asiatic Society for his fare to Calcutta and for “outfitting.”¹⁴ Once there, however, his employment in India, while meagerly paid and very detrimental to his health and social prospects, gave him unparalleled opportunities to study the Indian fauna and domesticated animals, on which he became a respected

¹⁰ Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin Voyaging* (London: Pimlico, 1996), p. 157.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹² Farber, “Aspiring Naturalists” (above, n. 1), p. 9.

¹³ William B. O'Shaughnessy, Secretary of the Asiatic Society, referred to it as a “good salary,” and thought that they could “very easily procure such an individual from England” (William B. O'Shaughnessy to Asiatic Society of Bengal [ASB], January 26, 1840, in *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* [Proc. ASB] for November 1839, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 9 [1840] 961). However, Dr. John Grant, the Society's apothecary, preferred to offer the post to the person originally intended for the curatorship, Dr. John McClelland, or to “any other qualified gentleman in India,” rather than to hire “one who after his arrival in India would very likely become discontented at finding himself tied down for five years upon a salary which may sound imposing in Europe, but would be only a pittance for a man of education in India, and scarcely upon a par with the pay of some mechanics” (John Grant to ASB, February 15, 1840, in Proc. ASB for December, 1839, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 8 [1840] 1064).

¹⁴ Proc. ASB for June 2, 1841, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 10 (1841), 502.

expert.¹⁵ It was in this capacity that Darwin sought his assistance, which Blyth gave unstintingly for the next fifteen years.

Darwin initiated this correspondence with a man he knew as a published authority on many questions he was investigating. He probably did not know Blyth well personally¹⁶ before Blyth's departure to India (although he had formed a favorable opinion, telling Hooker "I liked all I saw of him"),¹⁷ and very likely had little thought of establishing a close friendship with his distant correspondent. However, Blyth saw the communications in a different light. To Blyth, sitting in virtual exile in Calcutta, poorly paid and in some disgrace after a bitter dispute with his employers some years before (see below), the solicitation of his help by the respected and respectable Darwin was a lifeline. Darwin's help was sought by Blyth over the curatorship of a contemplated new Indian museum (see below), and was given in Blyth's attempts to join the expedition to China.¹⁸ His assistance was also solicited in helping Blyth to secure a pension. Darwin seems to have been remarkably tolerant of Blyth's demands on what was, after all, a very slight acquaintance. Although he may have been surprised at Blyth's offer to involve him in animal dealing, it is unlikely that he was offended by it, any more than he was by symptoms of Blyth's mental illness back in England.

While in India, Blyth's situation was harsh. As a quasi-government employee, he enjoyed neither the status of a civil servant,¹⁹ nor a salary liberal enough to allow him to devote himself entirely to his work while sav-

¹⁵ George Orwell, in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962; reprint, 1979), p. 108, described "the attraction of India . . . for the lower-upper-middle class. The people who went there as soldiers and officials did not go there to make money, for a soldier or an official does not want money; they went there because in India, with cheap horses, free shooting, and hordes of black servants, it was so easy to play at being a gentleman." Nonetheless, India did have a reputation as a place to make a fast fortune and in Blyth's case, the alternatives were nonexistent.

¹⁶ Darwin could not, for example "speak of *personal* qualifications, of which I know nothing" when writing a testimonial for Blyth to join an expedition to China (Darwin to C. Lyell, [Mary 24–April 3, 1860], *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, vol. VIII, ed. Frederick Burkhardt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 1340.

¹⁷ Darwin to J. D. Hooker, May 10, 1848, *CCD*, IV, p. 139.

¹⁸ Darwin to William Henry, December 20 [1859], *CCD*, VII, 439.

¹⁹ This was clearly demonstrated by a plea made in 1862 by the Government-General in Calcutta for reconsideration of Blyth's pension application: "It appears from the papers on the case that Mr. Blyth's application was considered inadmissible by the late Hon'ble Court of Directors, on the ground that 'the grant of pensions from the public revenues is strictly limited to those who are in the direct service of Government.' . . . As a special case, however, it appears to His Excellency in Council to have claims to consideration. It is the case . . . of a man of science, who has devoted himself . . . to . . . the Asiatic Society, a body aided by and closely identified with the Government India" (Proc. ASB for July 1862, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 31 [1862], 430). Despite this plea, the application failed again in 1863: Proc. ASB for January 1863, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 32 (1863), 32.

ing for his old age, nor the opportunities to prosper that full-time involvement in trade might have brought. He could have quit the Asiatic Society's service, but that would have meant relinquishing access to the Society's collection that he had done so much to improve, and also relinquishing what little status he had acquired from his curatorial position. Moreover, he probably realized that financially there was little option but to remain: the Asiatic Society offered the only employment in India for a man of his special talents, and he could not afford to return to England. He struggled in India for more than twenty years on a salary of £300 per year (the same at his retirement as when he was first employed) and a small house allowance of £4 per month. It was not until after his return to England in 1863 (despite the determined effort of influential men in India and England to obtain it sooner) that he finally obtained a half-pay pension. By this time, worry over the lack of pension provision had contributed to a mental and physical decline that started several years before his retirement.

Blyth's offer to Darwin, inept and unrealistic as it may have seemed to Darwin (and perhaps to modern historians), should thus be seen in the context of his poor and deteriorating circumstances in India. Speculation in trade was routine in India, where profits from importing and exporting goods formed the basis of many a family's wealth.²⁰ (Nevertheless, merchants undeniably ranked lower in the social scale than did military officers or high-ranking civil servants.) Blyth's offer was an attempt to demonstrate that he had something material to offer Darwin, and that he was more than the poor petitioner he frequently appeared. However, by 1856 such was Blyth's financial and employment situation that "lapsing into the style of 'the man with a grievance'"²¹ had become a regular feature of his letters to fellow zoologists. It is therefore necessary now to digress slightly and explain how Blyth's circumstances had deteriorated, in order to put into perspective his offer to Darwin, and then to John Gould.

Difficulties with the Asiatic Society

The Asiatic Society of Bengal was established in 1784 by Sir William Jones. After many years of neglecting zoology (a principal reason apparently being its founder's intense dislike of the science)²² it gradually acquired a

²⁰ See, for instance, Zoe Yalland, *Traders and Nabobs: The British in Cawnpore, 1765–1857* (Salisbury: Michael Russel, 1987).

²¹ Blyth to Darwin, February 23, 1856 (above n. 4), p. 38.

²² Deepak Kumar, "The Evolution of Colonial Science in India: Natural History and the East India Company," in *Imperialism and the Natural World*, ed. John M. Mackenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 61.

respectable, if small, collection of natural history items, and important works were published on the subject by the very few members then interested in the subject.²³ The Society's employment (funded by a grant from the East India Company) in September 1841 of the ornithologist and reviser of Cuvier,²⁴ Edward Blyth, was welcomed in Britain, where it was felt to have given a "great impulse to Indian Zoology."²⁵ However, Blyth's difficult temperament, the financial restraints upon the Society, and the internal jealousies and conflicts arising from a fundamental dichotomy of views over the role the Society should play in Indian intellectual life and the fitness of its officers to direct it, led to problems with the curator of the museum. Blyth's troubles with his employers, to which he referred several times in his letters to Darwin,²⁶ began as early as 1844 (when there was friction with Brian Houghton Hodgson, a popular and senior member of the Society),²⁷ but they came to a head in the period 1846–1849.

In 1846, the Society found itself in dire financial straits over the abortive publication of the drawings from Sir Alexander Burnes's ill-fated expedition to the Indus River and Afghanistan. Blyth had opposed publication because of the very poor artistic and scientific standard of the illustrations to be produced.²⁸ The autocratic secretary of the Society, Henry Torrens, left in

²³ Christine Brandon-Jones, "The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Promotion of Indian Zoology, 1784–1865" (forthcoming).

²⁴ Edward Blyth, [The Mammalia, Birds, and Reptiles], in Georges Cuvier, *The Animal Kingdom, Arranged after Its Organization, Forming a Natural History of Animals and an Introduction to Comparative Anatomy* (London: Williams S. Orr, 1840), pp. 38–288 [a revised, one-volume English edition].

²⁵ Hugh Edwin Strickland, "Report on the Recent Progress and Present State of Ornithology" (1844), reprinted in William Jardine, *Memoirs of Hugh Edwin Strickland and Selection from Scientific Writings* (London: John van Voorst, 1858), p. 269.

²⁶ Blyth to Darwin, August 4, 1855, *CCD*, V, 401; February 23, 1856, *CCD*, VI, 38–43; February 26, 1856, *ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁷ Blyth and Hodgson had several times clashed in print over zoological matters, but in 1844 Blyth was (unfairly) blamed by Hodgson and Henry Piddington, the curator of the Museum of Economic Geology, for a delay in the publication of a new species described by Hodgson. Hodgson was preempted, on account of this delay, by J. E. Gray. See Brian Houghton Hodgson, "Summary Description of Two New Species of Flying Squirrel," *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 13 (1844), 67; [George Robert Gray and John Edward Gray], *Catalogue of the Specimens and Drawings of Mammalia and Birds of Nepal and Thibet Presented by B. H. Hodgson, Esq. to the British Museum* (London: [British Museum], 1846), Hodgson's annotations to his personal copy held in Natural History Museum Library, London, pp. viii–ix; and Henry Piddington to Hodgson, July 1, 1844, Zoological Society of London [ZSL] Library.

²⁸ Edward Blyth, "Reply to the Minute by Capt. Munro, Regarding the MS. of the 'Burnes Drawings,'" *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 16 (1847), 1168–1175. A set of lithographs of these pictures is stored in the Oriental and India Office Library, London (OIOL reference p. 185–1912: "62 plates of natural history drawings. Copies of those made during the Alexander Burnes mission to Kabul [1837–42]"). The present author's examination of the prints, corroborates Blyth's and others' low opinion of their quality.

1846, and his departure exposed the poor state of the accounts.²⁹ By then the project had cost nearly 6,000 rupees (about £600 – half the annual income of the Society, and twice Blyth’s annual salary) and was only one-third complete. The lithography of the drawings was halted and a committee was set up to examine the value of the work done (including notes that Blyth was writing to accompany the drawings).³⁰ The committee was also asked to report on Blyth’s entitlement to back pay of 3,200 rupees, representing an extra 100 rupees a month from May 1844 to December 1846, which was promised both in consideration of the extra work of preparing the notes and his “zealous exertions in increasing the Society’s collections.”³¹ The committee eventually unanimously endorsed the view of Blyth’s friend Robert W. G. Frith: “I certainly cannot recommend the publication of such *trash* as these Burnes’ drawings are. I believe there is little if anything new amongst them, and if there be, it is almost impossible to identify their affinities, so wretchedly bad and incorrect are the figures.”³² This conclusion was reached notwithstanding the fact that at a meeting in 1843, where the lithographs were displayed, they had been “greatly admired, as being far superior to anything of the kind hitherto produced in India.”³³ Unfortunately, Blyth’s text (which, to exacerbate matters further, was delayed when notes in his care made by a member of the expedition were unaccountably lost)³⁴ was also found to be “scanty and unsatisfactory.”³⁵ His claim for backdated pay was based as much on his previous curatorial efforts as on the manuscript, but, as Blyth complained of one committee member: “From the whole tone of his minute, it is perfectly clear that Capt. M[unro] laboured under the erroneous impression that a large sum had been promised to me for the performance of a certain task, and that I had not given the Society the worth of their money; and this it seems to be his object to show very unsparingly.”³⁶ It was reluctantly resolved that “Mr. Blyth’s claim [should] be paid in full in consideration of his general services to the Society during the period concerned, and without reference to

²⁹ Annual report for 1846, Proc. ASB for January 1847, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 16 (1847), 93–100.

³⁰ William B. O’Shaughnessy, Circular, Proc. ASB for July 1847, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 16 (1847), 853–854.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 853.

³² Robert Frith in Proc. ASB for July 1847, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 16 (1847), 858.

³³ Proc. ASB for July 1843, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 12 (1843), 616* [duplicate page numbers, indicated in volume by“*”].

³⁴ Blyth to Henry Torrens, September 21, 1844, in Proc. ASB for October 1844, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 13 (1844), ci–cii.

³⁵ O’Shaughnessy, Circular (above, n. 30), p. 854.

³⁶ Blyth, “Reply” (above, n. 28), pp. 1174–1175.

his MS. for the Burnes' drawings,"³⁷ but substantial ill-feeling against Blyth over this affair remained.

The longer Blyth remained in Calcutta, his position being made more unpleasant by the divisions in the Asiatic Society, the more the rewards of running the museum were outweighed by his concern about his declining standard of living. The withdrawal, because of the Society's financial state, of the extra allowance he had been given for three years, sharpened his resolve to improve his situation. He submitted a request for a pay raise and pension in December 1847³⁸ – an action that proved unwise, given the climate of opinion. Resentment remained against him over the "useless"³⁹ payment for his unsatisfactory work on the Burnes drawings; he had been reprimanded for ordering lithographs without express permission to incur such expense;⁴⁰ and he had been censured in the annual report for 1847 (published in 1848) for failing to produce a catalog for the museum.⁴¹ Furthermore, the Council felt that it was

an inauspicious period to address the Hon'ble Court [of the East India Company] in furtherance of any pecuniary claim. The diversion of the Oriental grant⁴² to so large an amount . . . cannot be regarded with indifference by the Hon'ble Court, nor can it have disposed them to entertain with much favour any fresh demand on their munificence . . . the Council [recommends that] Mr. Blyth's application . . . be referred to the section of Natural History for their report to the Council prior to the next meeting, and that the Section be invited to inquire into and report on the state of the Museum of Zoology, the extent to which the Society are indebted to Mr. Blyth for his service in that department, and to offer such suggestions as to its improvement and extension as they may deem desirable.⁴³

This resolution allowed the antagonistic elements in the Society to launch a full-scale attack on Blyth's curatorship. There seemed to be two factions

³⁷ Proc. ASB for July 1847, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 16 (1847), 861.

³⁸ John W. Grant, Henry Walker, et al., *Application from Mr. Blyth for an Increase of Salary and a Retiring Pension – Report of the Section – Reply by Mr. Blyth – Further Report by the Section of Natural History* (Calcutta, 1848), p. 2 [circulated among Society members; copy stored in the Tracts on Zoology, Natural History Museum Library, London].

³⁹ Grant, in Proc. ASB for July 1847 (above, n. 37), p. 858.

⁴⁰ Proc. ASB for April 1847, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 16 (1847), 491.

⁴¹ Annual report for 1847, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 17 (1848), p. x.

⁴² This was the grant of 500 rupees per month that the government made to enable the publication of Oriental literature, which had been misdirected into the publication of the Burnes drawings and Dr. Theodore Cantor's *Chusan Zoology*: Annual Report for 1847 (above, n. 29), p. 95.

⁴³ Annual report for 1847 (above, n. 41), pp. x–xi.

in this attack. Arthur Grote identified the foe as the “Orientalists”⁴⁴ – the scholars, linguists, and philologists who saw their funds being threatened by the ever-growing museum.⁴⁵ The other faction comprised the medical fraternity. Blyth complained to Richard Owen in 1848:

The medical body . . . think that my office should be filled by one of them. . . . The leader of my opponents is one Henry Walker . . . who undoubtedly is a man of some attainments as a physiologist . . . they give me a deal of trouble, and have circulated most false and unworthy suspicious against me such as my soul revolts at.* [Footnote: Insinuating that I have dealt in specimens, perhaps, not my own. . . .] They intrigue in every way to get rid of me; accuse me of being an Ornithologist, and that the Society did not want an ornithologist. . . . I could astonish you by various statements of what I have to put up with but forbear.⁴⁶

The report by the Section of Natural History and a later response to Blyth’s defense were very critical, with a number of valid complaints about the state of the collection and the lack of catalogs. The criticism did, however, include some highly questionable points:

The Section take this opportunity of observing that the studying and describing new species of animals, forms no part of the duties of the Curator, however praiseworthy such labours may be in themselves when not interfering with more important duties. Nor can such labours be put forth as a claim for pecuniary recompense – on the contrary, scientific men are always willing to sacrifice both time and money for the advantages of studying and describing scientific novelties such as an Institution like this affords them.⁴⁷

If nothing else, this report showed how institutionally important, even in India, self-financing scientists were.

Far from praising Blyth’s studying and describing new species, which had led simultaneously to a vast increase in the number of specimens and to great personal acclaim for Blyth, the committee complained that,

⁴⁴ I.e., those in the Society who advocated studying Oriental literature and history, and who thought that the best way of imparting European learning was through the native languages. See Satpal Sangwan, “Science Education in India under Colonial Constraints, 1792–1857,” *Oxford Rev. Educ.*, 16 (1990), 84.

⁴⁵ Arthur Grote, [Memoir and portrait of the author], in Edward Blyth, “Catalogue of Mammals and Birds of Burma, by the Late E. Blyth,” *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, n.s. 2, extra no. 44 (1875), vii.

⁴⁶ Blyth to Richard Owen, September 6, 1848, Owen Correspondence, General Library, Natural History Museum, London.

⁴⁷ Grant et al., *Application from Mr. Blyth* (above, n. 38), p. 16.

in fact, in all those humbler but important duties of naming and arranging specimens, keeping accurate books, and attending to the rules of the Society, the present Zoological Curator appears to have been remarkably deficient.⁴⁸

They further alleged that he had disposed of specimens without authority (and negotiated their disposal without recourse to the Committee of Papers), and, most seriously (from the committee's point of view), he had allowed a "valuable" collection of shells to suffer severe damage, mostly from having been turned out of their drawers to make room for a collection of bats.⁴⁹ The committee concluded:

The Section considers the Society indebted to Mr. Blyth for his services in adding to the collection of Birds and Mammals; but the obligations of the Society in this respect are more than counterbalanced by the advantages enjoyed by the Curator of examining and describing the novelties in the Society's collections . . . it is clear that Mr. Blyth has completely mistaken his position in seeking to obtain an increase to his salary and a retiring pension. The duties required of the Curator do not warrant the Society in recommending an addition to the present allowance, whilst the very constitution of the Society, its uncertain tenure, being supported by voluntary contributions, are equally opposed to the prospective grant of a retiring pension to any of its officers. . . . The Section are of opinion that the Society committed a grave mistake in sending to Europe for a Curator.⁵⁰

This report (which was opposed by one member, Mr. Newmarch, editor of the *Calcutta Review*, as being "conceived in an illiberal spirit")⁵¹ was not published, nor was the reply that Blyth was grudgingly allowed to make.⁵² All that was finally announced was that the critical report was accepted, and Blyth's application for increased pay and pension was not to be supported.⁵³

It was the aftermath of this lengthy controversy, which effectively prevented Blyth from reapplying for a pay raise or a pension for the next eight years, to which he referred in his letters to Darwin of February 23 and 25, 1856.⁵⁴ There

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵¹ Proc. ASB for February meeting, 1848, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 17 (1848), 40: "Mr. Newmarch objected to the Report as conceived in an illiberal spirit, and treating of matters on which the Society were not invited to offer their opinion."

⁵² Proc. ASB for July 1848, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 17 (1848), 122–123.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Blyth to Darwin, February 23 and February 26, 1856, *CCD*, VI, 38–43.

was another factor that lent urgency to Blyth's quest for official patronage and support. In the letter of February 23, he indicated that popular opinion favored the establishment of museums, and just three days later he discovered that the Society was to begin negotiations with the government about transferring the Society's museum into government hands. Blyth, as he indicated to Darwin in the latter communication,⁵⁵ was worried that he would be overlooked in the selection of a curator (in fact, he had retired by the time the Indian Museum was established in 1865). The Society's refusal of a salary increase or a pension for him, together with his marriage in 1854,⁵⁶ made it imperative for him to seek extra income. He submitted another claim for increased salary in May 1856,⁵⁷ this time forwarded to the Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company with the fulsome recommendation of the Society⁵⁸ – and again displaying impeccably poor timing, as “John Company” was about to lose to the Crown its mandate to govern after the Sepoy mutiny. Grote attributed the failure of this application to the turmoil in India in 1857 caused by the rebellion. However, Blyth had by this time found other ways of supplementing his income. He began writing, under a pseudonym, for the *Indian Sporting Review*, recycling his scientific papers for a nonscientific audience.⁵⁹ He also continued the animal dealing he had begun several years before.

The Animal Trade

By the time of his 1856 letters to Darwin, Blyth had been involved in animal trading for at least twelve years.⁶⁰ When his prospects soured, it was a natural extension of his search for specimens for the museum to become more involved in the sale of live creatures. The museum of the Asiatic Society badly needed expanding when he became its curator, and he succeeded to the extent that, by 1856, the idea of transferring the museum to government hands to form a national institution was given serious consideration, almost entirely

⁵⁵ Blyth to Darwin, February 26, 1856, *ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵⁶ Blyth married Elizabeth Mary Turner Hodges, née Sutton, in Calcutta on February 20, 1854. He was forty-three at the time, and the lateness of his decision to marry is yet another indication of how impecunious he was.

⁵⁷ Proc. ASB for May 1856, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 25 (1856), 237–239.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁵⁹ Blyth wrote as “Zoophilus,” “Z,” or anonymously for the *Indian Sporting Review* and its successor, the *Indian Field*, between 1845 and 1859.

⁶⁰ Blyth to William Jardine, January 21, 1844, transcript in Gould Correspondence, Zoology manuscripts, Natural History Museum, London (hereafter, Gould Correspondence).

because of the extensive natural history collections.⁶¹ He built an impressive network of contacts who would provide specimens either by straight donation or in exchange for duplicates. Darwin supplied specimens,⁶² and so did Prince Albert, the Prince Consort of England,⁶³ but more typical were the contributors Blyth listed in 1846: Mr. W. Davison, proprietor of the Alnwick Museum; Mr. Kirtland, Under-Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford,⁶⁴ Hugh Strickland, the English ornithologist; Captain Arthur Purves Phayre, Principal Assistant Commissioner to the Commissioner of Tenasserim in Sandoway; Captain Abbott, stationed on the island of Ramree, Burma; Jean-Pierre Barbe, a Roman Catholic priest and missionary in Tipperah, the Tenasserim Provinces, the Nicobar Islands, and Penang; Captain Lewis, in the Nicobars and Tranquebar; E. O'Ryley of Amherst; Rev. F. J. Lindstedt of Malacca; F. Skipwith, in Sylhet, Tipperah, Chittagong; Major Jenkins, the Governor-General's representative in Assam; Dr. Stewart, in Allahabad; G. T. Lushington, at Almorah; Thomas Caverhill Jerdon, Assistant Surgeon in the Madras Service; Lord Arthur Hay (later the Marquis of Tweeddale), who had made a tour of the Himalayas in 1846; and Robert Frith, an indigo plant owner at Khulna.⁶⁵ Many of these men such as Stickland, Jerdon, and Frith were, or were later to become, close friends of Blyth's. It was through the personal contacts that Blyth himself had fostered that the museum received substantial donations of southeast Asian species from the Natural History Society of Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia), and of Australian specimens from the Sydney Museum. Through Captain C. S. Bonevie in Rungpore, he arranged a substantial exchange of specimens between Calcutta and the Royal University of Christiania (now Oslo).⁶⁶ Friends and acquaintances in Europe and India were used to being bombarded with an ever-growing list of desiderata, for which Blyth could offer for exchange specimens that he had collected, or that were ostensibly spare. With such wide-ranging contacts, he would have found it easy to arrange the purchase of live animals from all over the subcontinent – a fact taken for granted by the Earl of Derby

⁶¹ Richard Strachey, William Stephen Atkinson, et al., "Report of the Committee of Natural History," March 20, 1857, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 28 (1859), 402–403.

⁶² Proc. ASB for May 1857, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 26 (1857), 241.

⁶³ Edward Blyth, "Report of the Curator, Zoological Department, July," in Proc. ASB for May 1861, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 30 (1861), 185.

⁶⁴ Davison "some time ago made a collection of British skins to send a friend in N.[orth] America, but his friend dying, he has had the collection thrown on his hands, and w[oul]d be glad to get back some of the money which it has cost him" (Hugh Strickland to Blyth April [?], 1845, Strickland Correspondence, University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge.

⁶⁵ Proc. ASB for November 1846, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 16 (1846), c–ci.

⁶⁶ Proc. ASB for May 1842, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 11 (1842), 465.

when he requested that Blyth obtain and look after pheasants for him in Calcutta.⁶⁷

Blyth's London agent, at least until Blyth suspected him of defrauding him, was Abraham Dee Bartlett (1812–1897), who in 1859 became superintendent of the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park, London. Before this elevation, however, Bartlett had been a successful and well-known taxidermist, winner of a gold medal for this craft at the Great Exhibition of 1851,⁶⁸ and one who counted the British royal family among his customers. Blyth used Bartlett mainly to handle preserved specimens being shipped to and from Great Britain, something Blyth was entirely open about, both in his reports to the Society and in his letters to fellow zoologists. Just as animal trading seems to have followed from Blyth's specimen hunting, so it was for Bartlett, who was very likely to handle the sale on Blyth's behalf of a live animal to, say, the Zoological Society of London, or to Lord Derby, and to preserve it upon the unfortunate creature's death.

The Zoological Society and Lord Derby, with his menagerie at Knowsley Park (open 1834–1851), constituted two of the best British customers for wild animals in what was a fast-growing and lucrative trade in living colonial riches. The nineteenth century had seen a mushrooming of menageries in London and elsewhere in Britain.⁶⁹ Among such collections active around the time of Blyth's arrival in India, C. H. Keeling lists the royal collection at Windsor Park (1820–c. 1905), the Surrey Zoological Garden (1831–1856 – run by Edward Cross), the first Liverpool Zoological Gardens (1832–1863), Rosherville Zoological Garden (1837–1900), Cheltenham Zoological Garden (1838–1844), Manchester Zoological Garden (1838–1842), the first Edinburgh Zoological Garden (1839–1857), and Hull Zoological Garden (1840–1862).⁷⁰ The establishment of natural history museums and the popularity of zoological gardens gave a veneer of scientific legitimacy to a trade in live and preserved exotic animals that originated in the much older sport of wild-fowling and big-game hunting. The hunter's bag became a sought-after – and fought over – source of undiscovered species, particularly at this time when virtually any sportsman who travelled any distance beyond established

⁶⁷ This request was formally placed before the Asiatic Society to receive its permission: Blyth to Henry Torrens, Secretary, Asiatic Society of Bengal, in Proc. ASB for October 1844, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 14 (1845), xciii.

⁶⁸ Abraham Dee Bartlett, *Wild Animals in Captivity: Being an Account of the Habits, Food, Management and Treatment of the Beast and Birds at the "Zoo" with Reminiscences and Anecdotes*, comp. and ed. Edward Bartlett (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898), p. 3.

⁶⁹ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 206–210.

⁷⁰ Clinton H. Keeling, *Where the Lion Trod: A Study of Forgotten Zoological Gardens* (n.p.: Clam Publications, 1984).

European habitation, and who brought back trophies of the trip, could easily provide eager museum workers and menageries alike with novelties.

The Zoological Society of London was particularly adept at exploiting, through its scientific status, the convenient convention that disapproved of scientists' selling specimens to each other (see below). It was thus able to acquire a quite remarkable range of valuable animals from the corresponding members (who seemed to exist only so that they might be used in this way). These members received circular letters that suggested:

It is possible that, in the course of your residence at [blank] opportunities of promoting our views and objects may occur to you, and that you may be able to send to us occasionally, and at very inconsiderable expense, specimens of subjects in Zoology of much curiosity and interest.

Living specimens of all rare animals, and particularly of such as may possibly be domesticated and become useful here, will be much valued by us; and above all varieties of the deer kind, and of gallinaceous birds; but beyond this preserved insects, reptiles, birds, mammalia, fishes, eggs, and shells will be gratefully received.⁷¹

The corresponding members were happy to oblige, and it was the Society's extensive network of such men that allowed it to build its remarkable and comprehensive collection.

Despite this, needing as it did to keep a stream of novelties to maintain high gate receipts,⁷² the Society was still forced to buy stock, as were lesser menageries. One of several suppliers in the docks area of London – “the Commercial road” to which Blyth refers in his letter to Darwin⁷³ – was the famous “Jamrach's,” described by C. J. Cornish:

The main bulk of the traffic from the docks which line the river for miles below rolls past [Jamrach's] doors, which open to receive the ship-captains' ventures of birds and wild beasts. . . . In the little office at the back the steady traffic in wild beasts has gone on for a hundred years, between the Jamrachs and the ship-captains in the first instance, and later with buyers employed by Zoological Gardens and menageries. Frank Buckland, Van Ambrugh, and Mr. Bartlett, and most of the great circus and menagerie properties, have sat in the old Windsor chairs, and discussed the

⁷¹ Circular letter sent to corresponding members of the Zoological Society of London, 1827, quoted in Gwynne Vevers, *London's Zoo: An Anthology to Celebrate 150 Years of the Zoological Society of London, with Its Zoos at Regent's Park in London and Whipsnade in Bedfordshire* (London: Bodley Head, 1976), p. 42.

⁷² Ritvo, *Animal Estate* (above, n. 69), pp. 216–217.

⁷³ Blyth to Darwin, February 23, 1856, *CCD*, VI, 40.

merits of new purchases, or schemes for the capture of rare and valuable animals.⁷⁴

Jamrach's also dealt in other items of natural history interest: "armour and curios, idols and fetishes, mummy and Dyak skulls, weapons and snake-skins," and so on.⁷⁵ All manner of animals from all over the globe passed through the doors of Jamrach's and other lesser dealers in the dock's area. At Jamrach's, Cornish reported,

the panther's room was shared by an African black-buck from the Cape, a blacktailed jackal, various kangaroos and wallabies, and a pair of demoiselle cranes. On another storey were a happy family of monkeys, lemurs, and Chinese dogs, a pair of cassowaries, a viscacha, foxes large and small, "native companion" cranes, a brown Tasmanian opossum, coatimundis, a beautifully-marked civet cat, and two small Siamese porcupines.⁷⁶

Although the social gulf between them makes it seem surprising, it was perfectly feasible for Blyth to suggest that Darwin would be able to obtain exotic animals for him from London.

However, because Blyth was living so far from his target market, his trade was decidedly riskier than that of the London dealers. In January 1844 he told Sir William Jardine, the Scottish baronet and naturalist, that he had

just shipped a male Gayal [Asiatic wild cow] by which to judge from advices just received I fear I shall realize a loss. Kindly do what you can do for me by writing to the Manager of the Edinburgh Zool. Gardens or some of the continental people. The cost of food and transit is £40 if he reaches England alive and £25 if he dies on board in which case his skin and skeleton will be preserved. . . . I have had him here some months, awaiting an opportunity to ship him . . . now £100 would not even repay me for the losses incurred in procuring live animals from the interior for shipment though I fear I must be satisfied if the Gayal pays his own expenses. I also send you by the same opportunity a number of *Anser Indicus* [bar-headed geese].⁷⁷

The price asked was frequently not met, or even offered at all, as Blyth complained to David Mitchell, the secretary of the Zoological Society, in 1857:

⁷⁴ Charles John Cornish, *Life at the Zoo: Notes and Traditions of the Regent's Park Gardens* (London: Seeley, 1895), pp. 177–178.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 184.

⁷⁷ Blyth to Jardine, January 21, 1844, Gould Correspondence.

You may perhaps be aware that some years ago I sent a fine bull Gayal (*Bos frontalis*) which lived in the As[iatic] Society's garden for two or three years. The price asked for it was very moderate, and W. Ogilby, who was then Secretary of the [Zoological] Society, tried his utmost to inform the Council to purchase it; but unsuccessfully, and at length the beast died, and the skeleton was returned to me here, and is now set up in our Calcutta museum.

Again, I sent home a *Herpestes vitticollis* [stripped-necked mongoose], which the society declined to purchase off Barlett . . . whereafter it was bought by [Edward] Cross at the Surrey Gardens for £10, and resold by him to the Z.[oological] Society a few days afterwards for £20!⁷⁸

The remote trader was at the mercy of his customer, back in England. In 1857, Blyth (either as the result of misunderstanding Mitchell's wishes, or simply as a speculation) sent Mitchell a wild dog, a tortoise, geese, and a falcon, but Mitchell refused to take any responsibility for them. Although he had apparently himself invited Blyth to obtain animals for the zoo,⁷⁹ he was cool about Blyth's independent efforts, undertaking only to

act to the best advantage I can for you – entirely at your risk. I had great difficulty in finding a purchaser for the past pair of *Anser indicus* of which I wished to dispose – and I think £7 or £8 a pair is the utmost they will realize. The Dog & Tortoise will probably suit the Society, and I will value them fairly after their arrival: everything depends on their state at that time. If the Falcon is a healthy bird some of our few Falconers will perhaps be glad of him.⁸⁰

A price that was too low would not cover the cost of transport and board for a lengthy sea journey, nor provide a profit, as Blyth found when dealing with the canny Lord Derby. Blyth bought a female yak for £25 on Derby's behalf. Informing his lordship of the cost to himself, Blyth somewhat naively left Derby to name the amount he would pay; Derby thereupon sent Blyth £25 – which, as Blyth complained to Mitchell, did not compensate him at all for his trouble or risk.⁸¹ When the same animal was sold after Lord Derby's death,

⁷⁸ Blyth to David W. Mitchell, May 4, 1857, ZSL Library.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Blyth told Mitchell: "I . . . received your letter of March 25th, and am sorry to have to remark that I do not think it holds out much inducement to me to speculate in the purchase of animals. According to your proposition, I should have to bear the entire risk of the voyage, with a very uncertain prospect of remuneration should the animals arrive safe; and my past experience is [not?] sufficiently encouraging."

⁸⁰ Mitchell to Blyth, June 10, 1857, ZSL Library.

⁸¹ Blyth to Mitchell, May 4, 1857, ZSL Library.

it fetched a much greater sum.⁸² Of course, the animals frequently did not survive the journey, and the seller was lucky if even the skin reached Europe in a fit state for use by a museum. Suppliers might be cheated by their London agents, with animals that had been reported as dead subsequently appearing in collections very much alive. Blyth suspected Bartlett of cheating him over a Tibetan Bear, as well as over other matters, and asked Mitchell's help in getting another reliable London agent.⁸³

Mitchell, while happy to exploit Blyth, appeared to think little of his abilities.⁸⁴ James Thompson, the head keeper of the Zoological Gardens, sent by the Zoological Society to Calcutta in 1856 to collect birds (especially pheasants),⁸⁵ contacted Blyth for assistance. His superior, Mitchell, replied to his report: "Mr Blyth has written to me a long letter; he says he will do everything he can to help you: but you have estimated him very rightly: and I have no doubt that whatever success you have, will be without any aid from him."⁸⁶ Thompson's comments to Mitchell in a letter of February 23, 1857, seem to confirm this prediction: "Mr. Blythe [*sic*] tells me he has done everything in his power to procure them [jungle fowl] but without success. I fear this will be a very great disappointment to you."⁸⁷

Despite this failure, Blyth demonstrated his good faith in a hasty letter to Darwin on February 22, 1858:

I have not time to write to you today, more than a word or two; but may mention that I packed off a box of specimens to your address by the Steamer "Himalaya," which left this on the 12th. ult. for England viâ the Cape. Also a lot of living bi[rds] to Mr. J. Thompson . . . who is to make over certain pigeons to you if they survive the voyage.⁸⁸

It should be noted that Thompson was sent out, not to collect animals from the wild, but rather to shepherd and care for such specimens as he could purchase or solicit. India, and particularly Calcutta, must therefore have been seen as an important center for the animal trade. Blyth was part of the chain of which Bartlett and Jamarach's formed the intermediary links: from him, and from other colonial officers, flowed a stream of novelties

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. This request was tactless of Blyth – Bartlett may have been a rogue, but he was also the man to whom Mitchell owed his job at the Zoological Society: Bartlett, *Wild Animals in Captivity* (above, n. 68), p. 2.

⁸⁴ This may have been owing to Blyth's earlier conflict with George Gray (for whom Mitchell had illustrated *The Genera of Birds*, 1844), or Blyth's remarks about Bartlett.

⁸⁵ *CCD*, VII, 29, n. 1.

⁸⁶ Mitchell to James Thompson, March 10, 1857, ZSL Library.

⁸⁷ Thompson to Mitchell, February 23, 1857, ZSL Library.

⁸⁸ Blyth to Darwin, February 22, 1858, *CCD*, VII, 28–29.

on which the Zoological Society and the Natural History Museum depended. This is amply demonstrated by an item in the Annual Report of the Zoological Society in 1864, which described a successful return visit to Calcutta by James Thompson that year: he brought back with him

the following fine series of animals, which had been brought together for the Society at Calcutta by the exertions of their Corresponding Members, the Babu Rajendra Mullick [of whom more below] of Calcutta, Mr A. Grote of Alipore [Blyth's friend and obituarist], Dr John Squire, and Mr Wm Dunn of Akyab: 2 Rhinoceroses, 2 Black Cuckoos, 2 Rose-coloured Pastors, 1 Rhinoceros Hornbill, 2 Concave Hornbills, 3 Green-necked Peafowl, 3 Lineated Pheasants, 2 Rufous-tailed Pheasants, 1 Peacock Pheasant, 2 Indian Tantali, 2 Indian Jabirus, 2 Sarus Cranes, 2 Land Tortoises.⁸⁹

Blyth's letter to Darwin of February 23, 1856, makes it clear that the flow of animals was not one-way. It is not often appreciated that the British wild-animal trade had a very active Indian counterpart, and it was in this that Blyth was inviting Darwin, and later John Gould, to participate. Institutions similar to those that created the demand for live and dead animals operated, albeit on a lesser scale, in India. The Zoological Gardens in London had lesser rivals in the Barrackpur menagerie⁹⁰ and the Calcutta zoo; and Blyth's own establishment, the museum of the Asiatic Society, was, until 1865, all India could offer that was anything like the British Museum. Wild animals from around the globe, and from all over India, came to Calcutta, which was a major port and disembarkation point. The lower-class Europeans in India were fond of such creatures as pets. The Scottish sailors who came to break the siege at Lucknow during the Sepoy Mutiny astonished one observer with the numbers of "monkeys, parrots, pigs, guinea-pigs, dogs, cats, mongooses or mongeese . . . and lots of other creatures" that they carried on board⁹¹ and upon their owners' return to Britain, such pets often found their way into zoos and menageries there.

Exotic animal-keeping was also the pleasure of many of the wealthy Indian upper class, and they were every bit as eager to obtain novelties from else-

⁸⁹ Annual Report of the Zoological Society of London for 1864, quoted in Ververs, *London's Zoo* (above, n. 71), p. 45.

⁹⁰ The Barrackpur menagerie was all that remained of a grand scheme of Viscount Wellesley for promoting the study of natural history. Wellesley lost favor, and "the menagerie lost its scientific purpose and degenerated into a place of amusement" (Deepak Kumar, *The Evolution of Colonial Science in India: Natural History and the East India Company* [London: University of London, 1989], p. 19).

⁹¹ Capt. Oliver Jones, quoted in Wayne Gottlieb Broehl, *Crisis of the Raj: The Revolt of 1857 through British Lieutenants' Eyes* (London: University of New England, 1986), pp. 154–155.

where as the British market was enthusiastic for Indian creatures. Lord Derby's almost exact Indian counterpart was Babu Rajendra Mallik (often called Mullick). Mallik came from a wealthy family of bullion merchants, and was an aficionado of both natural history and the arts.⁹² The extravagant lifestyle, called derisively the "Babu Culture," of the Great Houses of Calcutta who vied with each other in conspicuous consumption, was in decline (although the example of the ex-king of Oudh [see below] set a standard for ostentation that others tried to emulate).⁹³ Mallik, part of the new breed of wealthy philanthropists, and a cultivated man of sophisticated taste, retained sufficient of his caste's heritage to indulge in exotic species, founding Calcutta's first zoo.⁹⁴ In 1848, Blyth complained that the valuable carcasses of animals that, in the course of every year, were wasted by being thrown into the river,⁹⁵ from Calcutta and its environs, and that might have been given to the Asiatic Society's museum, included "a splendid male Ostrich, in perfect plumage. Two fine Cassowaries, ditto. A male Bara Singha Deer, also in fine order, shot by its proprietor for being vicious; as all Deer are during the period of the rutting excitement. A very fine male Nilghai. A large male Tiger. A Kustoora or Musk Deer (being the second that had been promised to me, whenever it died). A pair of English Swans. And Gazelles, monkeys, Parrots, &c., &c."⁹⁶ Some specimens were saved: a dead *Dasyurus ursinus* (an Australian spotted native cat or tiger quoll) was found in the street and placed in the Society's collection.⁹⁷

These were by no means the most unusual animals kept as pets. As indicated in Blyth's letter to Darwin of February 23, 1856, many of the animals were destined for the zenanas – the secluded and enclosed women's quarters of the wealthy. At the time of writing his letter, Blyth must have had in mind this lucrative pet trade in general, because a much more exciting opportunity for

⁹² Joyoti Chaliha and Bunny Gupta, "The Marble Palace," in *Calcutta: The Living City, Vol. I, The Past*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 176.

⁹³ Chitra Deb, "The 'Great Houses' of Old Calcutta," in *ibid.*, pp. 58–60.

⁹⁴ Bunny Gupta and Joyoti Chaliha, "Chitpur," in *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹⁵ Blyth ascribed this sort of behavior to "everlasting Hindu prejudices," and told Darwin that "they cannot be made to comprehend what interest I can feel in a dead bird, & the carcass is sure to be pitched away, as soon as ever any animal is dead" (Blyth to Darwin, [December 8, 1855], *CCD*, VI, 519–522.) To touch a dead animal was considered polluting by the high-caste Indians to whom these animals typically belonged.

⁹⁶ Edward Blyth, *Report on the Collection of Australian Vertebrata, Contained in the Museum of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1848), p. 3. I have not been able to establish whether this catalog was published officially or merely circulated privately. A hand-annotated copy is held in the Mammal Section Library, Department of Zoology, Natural History Museum, London.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

profiting from animal trade did not open up until June of that year,⁹⁸ when he made a short tour in the North-West Provinces – Lucknow, Cawnpore [= Kanpur], Allahabad, and Benares [= Varanasi]. As Grote described, Blyth used the opportunity to buy up the royal menagerie at Lucknow, after the annexation of Oudh [= Awadh]. The ruling Nawab of this kingdom, Wajid Ali Shah, was a poet and a man of sophisticated taste in a court notorious for excess. In October 1855, Blyth had reported with astonishment to Darwin that the Nawab was offering £4,000 to anyone who could train a pair of giraffes to draw his carriage.⁹⁹ The chief interest of the ruling family was in animals, and in the parks “elephants in score, tigers, rhinoceroses, antelopes, cheetahs or hunting-leopards, lynxes, Persian cats, Chinese dogs, might all be seen sunning themselves, either in their cages or stretched listlessly on the grass, as commonly as sheep and cows in an English meadow.”¹⁰⁰ However, upon the annexation, the king was forced to remove himself and his household to Calcutta, and his magnificent collection was sold. Blyth clearly had no compunction in profiting (twice, as it turned out) from the hapless king, who had been forced from power quite illegally on trumped-up charges of misgovernment.¹⁰¹ Grote provided details of the enterprise in his obituary:

The tigers were the finest caged specimens in the world, and to one who understood their value in the European market, the inducement to buy and ship the animals was irresistible. A German friend joined in the speculation, and found funds. Blyth was to do the rest, and as no competitors offered, he bought the bulk of the collection for a trifle. Eighteen magnificent tigers were sold at 20 rupees (£2) a head! Some casualties occurred on the passage down the river; but his collections, when exhibited in Calcutta, contained sixteen tigers, one leopard, one bear, two cheetahs, three caracals, two rhinoceroses, and a giraffe, which carried a saddle and was daily ridden. Difficulties unfortunately occurred in finding ships for the transport of the animals, and their detention in Calcutta caused further casualties and heavy charges, which his partner would not face. The speculations collapsed.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Grote, [Memoir] (above, n. 45), p. x, gives the month this tour took place as July, but the animals that Blyth purchased were already on display in Calcutta by the beginning of that month. See n. 103 below.

⁹⁹ Blyth to Darwin, October 1–8, 1855, *CCD*, VI, 463.

¹⁰⁰ Dennis Charles Alexander Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608–1937* (London: Routledge, 1973), pp. 217–218.

¹⁰¹ John Pemble, *The Raj, the Indian Mutiny and the Kingdom of Oudh, 1801–1859* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), p. 109.

¹⁰² Grote, [Memoir] (above, n. 45), p. x.

In an effort to defray the substantial maintenance cost of keeping such a large group of animals, Blyth exhibited the tigers in Calcutta:

THE GREAT FIGHTING TIGERS OF
LUCKNOW

On exhibition for a few days
from Sunrise to Sunset

At Tiretta Bazar near Bow Bazar Godowns,
Chitpore Road

The superb collection of sixteen full grown Tigers, some of enormous size, purchased at the late Government Sale at Lucknow, with the trained *Cheetahs* or Hunting Leopards, *Sia-gosh* or Hunting Lynxes and sundry other animals comprising a particularly fine specimen of the rare “Wild Dog,” (so miscalled) from the hill jungles of Assam.

Terms of admission, 1 Rupee per person.¹⁰³

Blyth managed to beat up interest by constant paid advertising and “puffs” – articles he seems to have written himself¹⁰⁴ for the *Bengal Hurkaru*, the Calcutta daily newspaper. The animals were later moved to “a more commodious locality”¹⁰⁵ where they were joined by the saddle-broken giraffe, which proved to be a great draw.¹⁰⁶ It seems, from what Grote stated in his obituary, that despite Blyth’s efforts, the venture barely (if at all) covered its costs, and the sale of the animals was a prolonged business. In December 1858 the shipping of one of the animals was reported in the Calcutta press, in an article reprinted in the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* and clearly written by Blyth:

Rare animals from India. . . . By “Nile” which proceeded down the river yesterday, we hear that the celebrated huge Tiger, “Jungla,” the largest and most beautiful of the famous fighting tigers of Lucknow, is shipped for sale in England. This splendid animal is not only remarkable for his size, which far surpasses that of any tiger or lion yet seen in Europe, but for the extraordinary beauty of his colouring and markings – having all his body-stripes *double* . . . we doubt not that he will become an object of great admiration for his size and beauty.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, July 3, 1856.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, July 2, 1856.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, July 9, July 30, 1856.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1856.

¹⁰⁷ “Rare Animals from India” (reprint of item from *Overland Hurkaru* [sic], Calcutta, December 8, 1858), *Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist.*, 3rd ser., 3, (1859), 240.

By December 1859, Blyth had still to dispose of some of the animals from this venture. He told David Mitchell that he hoped to sell in America the tigers mentioned by Grote, because “from what I can learn, they are likely to command the highest prices in the United States.”¹⁰⁸ Three of the tigresses were later sold back to their former owner, the ex-king of Oudh, for £300, “from which 10 per cent is deducted by the King’s agent. . . . I may remark that the above is a very high sum here for tigers.”¹⁰⁹ Grote reported that “one of the tigers that reached England [presumably ‘Jungla’] realised £140.”¹¹⁰

The comparative failure of the Lucknow enterprise did not discourage Blyth – now widowed,¹¹¹ in failing health, and more determined than ever to make his fortune – from further speculation in the animal trade so that he could finally go back to England after nearly twenty years in Calcutta, unrelieved by furlough. He did not repeat his earlier offer to Darwin (which he may not have seriously expected to be accepted). Either a direct refusal or a lack of reply had perhaps alerted him to the risk of offending Darwin, and he needed Darwin’s influence with the British scientific community to intercede in his desire to accompany a planned expedition to China.¹¹² He did, however, write to John Gould on December 4, 1859, and again on December 21, to urge him to take advantage of a golden opportunity that seemed to have arisen:

After much consideration, I have decided that you are as capable a person as any I can think of to aid me in the most lucrative speculation.

I have received unlimited orders from the ex-king of Oudh and from the Nawab of Marshidabad, both of enormous wealth as you doubtless know, to procure for them any kind of animal I can for the menageries they are about to establish. Another collector of enormous wealth is the Maharaja of Burdwan; and between one and the other I can command pretty well what price I please. Let *us* therefore be at once and first in the field, and moreover keep our own secret. I propose that we share the cost and share the profits equally. . . . And now about the particular animals required. The more conspicuous animals of America are especially desirable, – as Llama, Alpaca, Wapiti, Jaguar, Ocelot, Puma, Capybara, Raccoon, Coutimundi, and American Monkeys, especially *Ateles* [spider monkeys] and Marmozets. . . . Also *white* peafowl, white and common (not ring-necked) Pheasants, Curassows, Guans, *Rhea*, Swans, . . . good Polish fowls . . . You might also send some of the common white Ducks with

¹⁰⁸ Blyth to Mitchell, May 4, 1857, ZSL Library.

¹⁰⁹ Blyth to John Gould, December 4, 1859, Gould Correspondence.

¹¹⁰ Grote, [Memoir] (above, n. 45), p. x.

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Blyth died of hepatitis in Calcutta on December 7, 1857.

¹¹² Proc. ASB for February 1860, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 29 (1860), 81–83. See also n. 16, above.

downy tuft on the head. Of European animals, Red and fallow Deer, Bears, Lynx, and of Birds, one or two Ravens, Jays, and Magpies. . . . I do not think one can do much with dead specimens. But one or two fine Narwhal tusks might sell well. . . . But this is a mere byeplay. The *money* is *to be made* in living mammals. . . . But I must not write more now. It is enough to remark that so good a chance of both of us clearing a good round sum is not likely to recur, and we surely ought to make the most of it.¹¹³

Blyth was not the only one enthralled by the extravagance of the ex-king of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah. The ex-king was living in high, some thought decadent, style in Chief Justice Sir Lawrence Peel's former residence at Metiabruz,¹¹⁴ a suburb of Calcutta that became a flourishing township, a second Lucknow.¹¹⁵ Calcutta was agog. Blyth wrote in a second letter to Gould that month that "all are absorbed in the one grand vortex, and the private life of an Eastern king," is being enacted with a vengeance."¹¹⁶ Wajid Ali Shah, now in enforced exile, apparently took delight in playing up his (invented) image. His huge household in Calcutta was a scandal, but upon being told by the government to reduce its number, "the king . . . not only tore up the letter but added ninety more women to his harem that same day."¹¹⁷ Blyth was doubtless not alone in believing that the king's money was "at least as well in our pocket as in those of the miserable parasites of the ex-monarch."¹¹⁸

Despite Blyth's urging, Gould was not tempted. Blyth may have been collecting "from all quarters, from China, Australia, Capetown, Singapore, &c. &c.," but he had to do without Gould's involvement; Gould had previously made use of Blyth's contacts in India to sell various of his books, so it was reasonable for Blyth to approach him.¹¹⁹ Gould had, as Blyth well knew, extensive experience in specimen dealing and was furthermore the kind of successful entrepreneur Blyth wanted to be. That was ultimately the problem – Gould was not so wealthy and successful that he had neither the time nor the

¹¹³ Blyth to Gould, December 21, 1859, Gould Correspondence.

¹¹⁴ Dhriti Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, "Trends in Calcutta Architecture, 1690–1903," in Choudhury, *Calcutta* (above, n. 92), p. 160.

¹¹⁵ Veena Taylor Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856 – 1877* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984), pp. 203–204.

¹¹⁶ Blyth to Gould, December 21, 1859, Gould Correspondence. *The Private Life of an Eastern King* was an account of the supposed excesses of the Lucknow court in the 1830s. Although obviously spurious, it outraged the British public and had given moral force to the political desire to annex Oudh: Pemble, *The Raj* (above, n. 101), pp. 105–106.)

¹¹⁷ Kincaid, *British Social Life* (above, n. 100), p. 218.

¹¹⁸ Blyth to Gould, December 21, 1859, Gould Correspondence.

¹¹⁹ Blyth to Gould, August 14, 1843; November 18, 1848, Gould Correspondence.

interest to involve himself in a speculation that, twenty years before (when both he and Blyth were at the start of their careers), he might have welcomed:

Since you left England my occupations and business have much changed and I nowadays devote myself to my works, which indeed demand all my attention during the time I am in London. I must tell you that some times during every year I am much away some summers in other destinations. . . . This absence and my numerous other associations precluded me . . . from entering into any arrangements with you for the supply of living animals which you wish forwarding to India. . . . I feel obliged however for the confidence you place in me and the advantageous offer to which your letter refers . . . you will be able to think of some other person and to delay will be of but little moment.¹²⁰

Gould's refusal to become involved was one more blow to Blyth, who had failed to secure the position of naturalist on the proposed expedition to China in 1860,¹²¹ and was again rebuffed when, as Grote mentioned, he applied to join a scientific expedition to Chinese Tartary in 1861.¹²² His health had already begun to give way. In that year he was obliged as a result of a "serious illness [requiring life-saving surgery¹²³] and consequent prostration of strength . . . on two occasions, to seek a change of climate. He obtained on this account five months leave of absence during the year."¹²⁴ It was becoming obvious that Blyth could not long continue in his position, and the question of a pension became urgent. The Society made an application on his behalf in 1861 that was refused, despite the support of the viceroy, Lord Elgin.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Gould to Blyth, February 29, 1860, Gould Correspondence.

¹²¹ A British expedition was to be sent to China in 1860 under James Bruce, and the Asiatic Society approached the viceroy, Lord Canning, to sound out the idea of sending a zoologist with this mainly military force. The initial response was negative, but this did not deter Blyth or the Society from attempting to solicit public and governmental support for the idea. The natural history records of the expedition were ultimately to be kept by Robert Swinhoe, a civil servant and amateur (but skilled) ornithologist whom Blyth had assisted and given advice for his work "The Ornithology of Amoy": Philip Hall, "Robert Swinhoe (1836–1877), FRS, FZS, FRGS: A Victorian Naturalist in Treaty Port China," *Geog. J.*, 153 (1987), 41–42.

¹²² Grote, [Memoir] (above, n. 45), pp. x–xi. The planned expedition was into Chinese Tartary beyond the Himalayan frontier: the country northeast of Ladak, and that between Ladak and Lhasa. See E. C. Bayley, officiating Secretary to Govt. of India, letter to ASB, May 29, 1861, in Proc. ASB for June 1861, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 30 (1861), 298.

¹²³ "You will probably be surprised at not having received a letter from me for so long a time, but I have been completely *hors de combat* for the last two months, in fact very seriously ill and have had to submit to a surgical operation in which I owe not merely my recovery but my life" (Blyth to John Henry Gurney, September 30, 1861, transcript in the Kinnear Papers, Zoology manuscripts, Natural History Museum, London).

¹²⁴ Annual Report for 1861 in Proc. ASB for January 1862, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 31 (1862), 57.

¹²⁵ See n. 19, above.

Blyth was not able to hold out in Calcutta for a successful outcome to his fight for a pension. Despite extended leave, his health did not recover, and he left India forever at the end of 1862. He wrote to Darwin just before his departure, telling him: “At all events, I reach England immediately, as I trust, by the screw steamer which leaves here on the 5th prox. ° [December] . . . via the Cape. I have many reasons to prefer that route among which are, that I can take a lot of living specimens with me for the Z[oological] G[ardens],¹²⁶ and because I wish to visit Capetown and examine its museum.”¹²⁷ He told Darwin also that the return to England was as much to attack the Secretary for State, Sir Charles Wood, on the spot as it was for him to recover the health and strength lost after twenty-one years in Calcutta. Blyth hoped to be supported by his friends, among whom, he hoped, he might reckon Darwin.¹²⁸ He left with a year’s full pay as sick leave.¹²⁹ During that time it was hoped that the application for a pension would be approved – but it was denied again in 1863.¹³⁰ Blyth was forced to borrow money from the Norfolk ornithologist John Henry Gurney until the matter was resolved.¹³¹ Finally, in January 1864, the Society was able to announce that “the home authorities have at least consented to grant a retiring pension of £150 per annum to their late Curator, Mr. Blyth.¹³² Grote stated that the granting of this pension was “owing, I believe, mainly to the untiring efforts made in London on Blyth’s behalf by the late Sir P[roby] Cautley [whom Blyth had many years before sponsored into the Asiatic Society] and Dr. [Hugh] Falconer.”¹³³

Blyth and Darwin after India (1863–1873)

Blyth’s first preserved letter upon his return to England was to Darwin.¹³⁴ He reached London on March 9, 1863, just in time to be caught up in the crowds celebrating the Prince of Wales’ wedding to Alexandra of Denmark. In that year, while still recovering from his Indian sojourn, he found time to attend to Darwin’s interests, asking Bartlett at the Zoological Society to perform

¹²⁶The animals were sold to the Zoological Society for £20.16.8: Zoological Society of London Council Minutes for January 7, 1863, ZSL Library.

¹²⁷Blyth to Darwin, November 23, 1862, DAR 160.2: 204, DAR 205.2 (Darwin MSS, Cambridge University Library).

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Grote, [Memoir] (above, n. 48), p. xii.

¹³⁰See n. 19, above.

¹³¹Blyth to Gurney, September 12, 1863, transcript in Kinnear Papers (above, n. 123).

¹³²Proc. ASB for January 1864, *J. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, 33 (1864), 73.

¹³³Grote, [Memoir] (above, n. 45), p. xii. Cautley, an engineer, and Falconer, a paleontologist and botanist, are probably best known for the discovery of the Siwalik fossil fauna.

¹³⁴Blyth to Darwin, March 27, 1863, DAR 160.2: 203.

experiments on Darwin's behalf.¹³⁵ In November 1863 he wrote to Thomas Campbell Eyton, the Shropshire ornithologist, from Liverpool, where Blyth was visiting the Liverpool Free Museum to examine the Derby collection.¹³⁶ In Liverpool, he told Eyton,

I have also now [sent] to Calcutta, about £100 worth of living animals, which I purchased and shipped at [?Liverpool]. . . . Inter alia, I bought a fine healthy male chimpanzee for £30, & it is hard to say what he will . . . fetch, should he arrive safely, as I have reason to think he will [do] for one of the mostly wealthy natives of Lower Bengal.¹³⁷

In April 1864 Blyth wrote to Eyton from Dublin, where he was in the middle of a lecture tour about India that also took him to Belfast and Edinburgh.¹³⁸ He had been in Dublin since at least January of that year, as he delivered papers there to two meetings of the Royal Irish Academy.¹³⁹ He boasted to Eyton and to J. H. Gurney¹⁴⁰ of his reception in Ireland – in one letter he “had been dining at Kingston in the very highest society, several titled people being at the party,”¹⁴¹ and in another he had been “leading rather a grand life since I saw you, the guest of one peer after another, not the humble guest but the honoured one, and have invitations without end at this moment, more than I can possibly comply with.”¹⁴² The “grand life” he described sat rather oddly with his continued animal dealing and his far from comfortable finances. His financial situation, of which we gain some idea from his letters to Eyton, still relied to a large degree on the animal trade. While in Dublin he suffered the serious blow of having his pocket picked in a railway station “while drinking a slop of stout,” losing £93 a sum that was nearly two-thirds of his annual pension.¹⁴³ He wrote desperately to Eyton for the loan of £10, which was immediately granted. Shortly afterward, when the shock of the loss had worn off, he told Eyton that he was “in easy circumstances, but my money is all sunk in sundry speculations, & I had just that sum [£93] in

¹³⁵ Blyth to Darwin, April 7, 1863, DAR 160.2: 205.

¹³⁶ Blyth to Thomas Campbell Eyton, November 15, 1863, Thomas Campbell Eyton papers, American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia.

¹³⁷ Blyth to Eyton, April 14, 1864, *ibid.*

¹³⁸ Blyth to Eyton, April 11, April 14, and May 14, 1864, *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Edward Blyth, “On the Animal Inhabitants of Ancient Ireland,” in Proceedings for Monday, January 25, 1864, *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 8 (1864), 472–476; Proceedings for Monday, January 11, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 458–471. On p. 458 Blyth is recorded as having delivered a paper “On the Existing Species of Stag (*Elaphus*).”

¹⁴⁰ Blyth to Gurney, February 7, 1864, transcript in Kinneir Papers (above, n. 123).

¹⁴¹ Blyth to Eyton, April 11, 1864, *ibid.*

¹⁴² Blyth to Eyton, April 14, 1864, *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Blyth to Eyton, April 11, 1864, *ibid.*

hand, & no more.”¹⁴⁴ He did not leave Dublin for another month, waiting for funds from the Asiatic Society that were daily expected, being nearly £100 for three months’ salary and £300–£400 for the live animals he had sent to the Society.¹⁴⁵

One can appreciate the great role that animal dealing played in Blyth’s finances: this one shipment represented 100–130 percent of his annual salary, twice the pension he eventually received. However, his Irish trip appears to have represented the end of his involvement in this trade. Upon his return to England, he threw himself into ornithological writing, and in particular, into preparing a commentary on his friend Thomas Caverhill Jerdon’s *Birds of India*.¹⁴⁶ The obsessive work he put into this commentary either precipitated or was a symptom of a serious mental breakdown, one of at least two that he suffered upon his return to England.¹⁴⁷ He was by no means a spent force – he produced some very useful research (even writing papers while confined in an asylum)¹⁴⁸ and was employed, first by *Land & Water* and then the *Field*, to write on natural history subjects as “Zoophilus”; and he also continued to supply Darwin with information and material, in particular for *Plants and Animals under Domestication* and *The Descent of Man*. However, he was always a marginal character. He remained only a corresponding member of the Zoological Society and seems to have avoided any other formal associations (although he was, to his delight, elected an extra-ordinary member of the British Ornithological Union, at the instigation of his friend Alfred Newton).¹⁴⁹ Aware of his low status, he took every opportunity he could to “name drop” to Darwin and to Newton, always assiduously recording any contact with nobility or notable persons. The nadir of his fortunes came in 1870 when it was reported in the *Times* that he had been convicted of assaulting a cab driver while drunk, and that this was his second drink-related conviction in six weeks.¹⁵⁰ In a decade when the temperance movement was

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Blyth to Eyton, April 14, 1864.

¹⁴⁶ Blyth to Alfred Newton, April 13, April 22 and September 16, 1865, Newton Correspondence, Manuscripts Library, Cambridge University Library.

¹⁴⁷ Clara Sarah Blyth to Alfred Newton, December 1, 1865; June 18, 1869, *ibid*.

¹⁴⁸ William Bernhard Tegetmeir to Darwin, [after January 16, 1866], DAR 176: “Mr Blyth is writing some articles on India Cattle, (Gaours and Gayals) in the *Field*. I can cut them out and send you if you like, I am sure you will be sorry to hear they are from a place of enforced temporary quietness a private asylum in fact.”

¹⁴⁹ Blyth to Alfred Newton, December 2, 1864, Newton Correspondence.

¹⁵⁰ *Times* (London), December 14, 1870. The convicted “Edward Blyth” claimed to be a surgeon, but as his age, area of residence, and manner of expressing himself all fit with his being the Edward Blyth under discussion here, I have no doubt that the two were the same person. Blyth was, in the opinion of the presiding magistrate, suffering from delirium tremens which, if true, indicated a long-standing alcohol problem. Janet Browne (pers. comm.,

making rapid gains,¹⁵¹ this incident must surely have ended any hope he had of receiving the social recognition he clearly craved. He died of heart disease in December 1873.

Social Attitudes to the Animal Trade

Blyth's position in society in India and back home was considerably lower than that of Darwin, and of many other naturalists with whom he corresponded. As David Allen put it, "the mere fact of being in paid employment could be said to be inherently demeaning, whatever the circumstances."¹⁵² Blyth was socially ambitious, but the fact of his salaried employment, together with the trading he was engaged in, meant that he had little opportunity to realize this ambition. His animal dealing was something that he and his obituarists did not emphasize, as it was an even greater handicap to be "in any kind of commercial occupation producing or selling goods, especially at retail, as distinct from finance, foreign commerce, the professions, or moneyed leisure. . . . Too close contact with money contaminated one."¹⁵³ His friends tried to rehabilitate him retrospectively. In his obituary of Blyth, Allan Octavian Hume claimed that "repeated efforts were made to induce him to devote his energies to business, and paths to what, at that time, was certain wealth were freely opened to him."¹⁵⁴ The nature of these opportunities was not specified. Hume added that "neither neglect nor harshness could drive nor wealth, nor worldly advantages tempt him from what he deemed the nobler path."¹⁵⁵ Blyth himself wrote disgustedly to John Gould in 1850: "What little I can do to forward your views, you may of course rest assured that I will do, but really there is almost nobody here who takes the

November 24, 1994) suggested that an alternative explanation for Blyth's erratic behavior may have been an addiction to heroin; Douglas Brandon-Jones (pers. comm.) has pointed out that this is given some credence by Blyth's reference to life-saving surgery (see above, n. 123), which could have necessitated addictive opiates for pain control. While some of Blyth's more bizarre behavior in the latter part of his life cannot be explained purely by alcoholism, the balance of evidence would indicate that this was indeed a major problem, probably overlying a more serious mental disorder, possibly exacerbated by some other substance abuse.

¹⁵¹ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815–1872* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp. 247–278.

¹⁵² Allen, "Early Professionals" (above, n. 1), p. 3.

¹⁵³ Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (London: Dent, 1977), pp. 31–32.

¹⁵⁴ Allan Octavian Hume, "In memoriam," *Stray Feathers*, 2 (1874), [i] [a typescript page inserted before page 1].

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

slightest interest in ornithology, or indeed aught else than money making, and topics bearing reference to it.”¹⁵⁶

The supposed espousal of these unworldly ideals does not accord very well with the very active animal trading that Blyth was involved in as early as 1844, and certainly by 1856. It is interesting that Grote, like Hume, went out of his way to paint Blyth as something of a *naïf* when it came to money: “Had Blyth been less devoted to the special service in which he had engaged, there were not wanting opportunities of finding far more remunerative employment in other quarters. The Dutch authorities in Java seem to have about this time [1846] made him a very tempting offer.”¹⁵⁷ He concluded his eulogy to his close friend by writing: “Had he been a less imaginative and a more practical man, he must have been a prosperous one.”¹⁵⁸ Of all Blyth’s many animal-dealing schemes, which carried on for nearly twenty years, on and off, Grote chose to mention only the Lucknow speculation – which, given the amount of publicity it received at the time, he could scarcely have concealed. It seems likely that Grote, who himself provided animals to London Zoo as one of the Society’s compliant corresponding members,¹⁵⁹ was embarrassed by his close friend’s activities – as he was by the alcoholism and mental illness that were also expurgated from his obituary. Blyth’s fear that Darwin might find “such traffic *infra dig*”¹⁶⁰ was thus reasonable. The Lucknow adventure, with the slight hint of swashbuckling and with the opportunity it gave a European to profit from a native prince’s misfortunes (especially one from an infamous theatre of the Sepoy Rebellion, Lucknow), might have been thought less offensive than Blyth’s rather more usual habit of supplying the despised natives with pets for their pleasure.

Both Grote and Hume would have been aware that there was a prejudice against gentlemen trading in animals or specimens, even if it was one honored more often in the breach than the observance. They had in their time supplied the British Museum and London Zoo, but neither appears to have done so for profit. (Hume’s astonishing donation of more than 82,000 bird specimens still ranks as one of the largest single gifts to the British Museum ever

¹⁵⁶ Blyth to Gould, February [8], 18[50], Handwriting Folder, Zoology Library, Natural History Museum Library.

¹⁵⁷ Grote, [Memoir] (above, n. 45), pp. vi–vii. In 1846 Blyth was known to have been in contact with Daniel Couperous Parvé, the under-secretary of state to the Batavian Government, when the offer may possibly have been made; see Blyth to Richard Owen, September 6, 1848, Owen Correspondence (above, n. 46). As Blyth was desperately trying to return to England at this point, either permanently or at least on furlough, this offer, if such there was, was probably not very attractive.

¹⁵⁸ Grote, [Memoir], p. xiv.

¹⁵⁹ Annual Report of Zoological Society of London for 1864, quoted in Vevers, *London’s Zoo* (above, n. 71), pp. 43–45.

¹⁶⁰ Blyth to Darwin, February 23, 1856, *CCD*, VI, 3.

made).¹⁶¹ It was a convention that Blyth seems to have obeyed until his financial difficulties in India.¹⁶² The Zoological Society did not presume to insult generous donors with money, but it did, for example, repay the largesse of one member, Babu Rajendra Mallik, by sending him “a selection of living animals likely to be acceptable to that gentleman.”¹⁶³ It was, however, normal for donors to have their expenses repaid, which may or may not have comprised a hidden (if slight) profit. It was common for items to be sold by naturalists, as J. M. Chalmers-Hunt’s work on natural history auctions has shown,¹⁶⁴ and the naturalists Alfred Russel Wallace and Henry Bates counted on making their living entirely from the sale of specimens they had collected in South America.¹⁶⁵ That such trading was not considered entirely correct is exemplified by the criticism directed at William Swainson by Nicholas Aylward Vigors.

Vigors, of the Zoological Society, had strongly criticized William Swainson in 1831 for, among other things, trading in birds and beetles.¹⁶⁶ Swainson was a “professional” zoologist in the sense most disliked by Vigors, in that he made his living solely from the pursuit of natural history – writing and dealing in specimens from his collecting in the Mediterranean and Brazil – and so was in similar circumstances to Blyth. Vigors, on the other hand, was an ex-guardsman, of independent income, and soon to be a member of Parliament. To Vigors, the true professional would have nothing to do with merchants, particularly those of Swainson’s low “caste,”¹⁶⁷ who prevented the elevation of zoologists to “a disinterested élite.”¹⁶⁸ It should not be imagined that he disliked Swainson simply because of his mercantilism (the point at issue concerned classification), any more than Blyth’s animal dealing was responsible in itself for his undoubted marginalization. John Gould, who (like Swainson, but more successfully) made his living through enterprises in publishing and collecting, sold specimens to museums without apparently

¹⁶¹ Richard Bowdler Sharpe, “Part 3: Birds,” in *The History of the Collections Contained in the Natural History Department of the British Museum, Vol. II* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1906), pp. 390, 393.

¹⁶² For example, Blyth exchanged specimens on a *gratis* basis with John Gould in 1834: Blyth to Gould, May 29, 1834, file “Blyth 1834–64,” Gould Correspondence (above, no. 60).

¹⁶³ Annual Report of Zoological Society of London for 1864, quoted in Vevers, *London’s Zoo* (above, n. 71), p. 45.

¹⁶⁴ J. M. Chalmers-Hunt, ed., *Natural History Auctions, 1700–1972* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1976).

¹⁶⁵ Wilma Beryl George, *Biologist Philosopher: A Study of the Life and Writings of Alfred Russel Wallace* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1964), p. 13.

¹⁶⁶ Adrian Desmond, “The Making of Institutional Zoology in London, 1822–1836,” *Hist. Sci.*, 23 (1985), 177.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

incurring any social censure; on the contrary, he had access to the highest echelons of society, despite lifelong and extensive specimen dealing and publishing activities – trade under no disguise whatever.¹⁶⁹ Vigors so little objected to Gould, his social status and his activities, that he was happy to employ him at the Zoological Society as a curator.¹⁷⁰ Gould was a striking example of how a combination of scientific respectability and financial success overcame a humble background and a living made from quite aggressive business activities. A similar attitude can be seen in the Zoological Society's decision to employ as superintendent of the Zoological Gardens the successful taxidermist Abraham Bartlett (who had played as a child around the feet of the animals in Edward Cross's Exeter 'Change menagerie) – but to decline to employ Mr. Cross himself because the Society was, according to Harriet Ritvo, “chary of Cross's vulgar impresarial inclinations.”¹⁷¹ There was little to choose between Bartlett and Cross in “impresarial inclinations” – the point was that the former was a success in business, and would have remained so, while the other was (temporarily) down on his luck after the forced closure of his menagerie in premises at Charing Cross.¹⁷²

The prejudice against trade, and against naturalists selling specimens, was still very strong in 1856 when H. T. Stainton, writing in the *Entomologists' Annual*, again warned against naturalists' bartering items instead of treating them as freely given gifts: this practice would reduce those involved to “hucksters and petty tradesmen,” and to be so labeled “damages a man's career for many years to get a bad character at first starting.”¹⁷³ In 1855 Blyth complained to Darwin: “There is scarcely a man here, with whom I choose to hold companionship, but receives from at least twice to 12 times per *mensus* what I receive; & after 14 years service, I have neither bettered my condition, nor have prospect of a pension to retire upon, after any amount of service.”¹⁷⁴ It is ironic that Blyth's resentment of this situation should have led him into speculations that would increase his social isolation, and to commit the *faux pas* of suggesting a trade deal to a gentleman of Darwin's class.

Blyth's post-India friendship with Darwin was a curious one. Blyth's personal situation grew steadily worse during the ten years of his retirement, but Darwin's need of his knowledge did not diminish; in fact, it increased after the publication of *The Origin of Species*, as *Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* and *The Descent of Man* were being written. Darwin

¹⁶⁹ Isabella Tree, *The Ruling Passion of John Gould* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), p. 219; Sharpe, “Birds” (above, n. 161), pp. 373–378.

¹⁷⁰ Tree, *Ruling Passion*, p. 14.

¹⁷¹ Ritvo, *Animal Estate* (above, n. 59), p. 213.

¹⁷² Keeling, *Where the Lion Trod* (above, n. 70), chap. 3.

¹⁷³ Henry Tibbats Stainton, “List of British Entomologists,” *Entomol. Ann.* (1856), 12–13.

¹⁷⁴ Blyth to Darwin, August 4, 1855, *CCD*, V, 401.

continued to receive information and observations from Blyth; in return, he was prepared not only to contemplate a trip to London to see Blyth (which, however, Darwin called off because of illness),¹⁷⁵ but also to have Blyth come to visit him at Down House.¹⁷⁶ He undoubtedly found Blyth of great assistance, and quoted copiously from the information he supplied. However, the personal element in their relationship was more valued and pursued by Blyth than by Darwin. That Darwin tolerated Blyth's continued claim to a close friendship with him may have been the result of gratitude for Blyth's flood of information and his unequivocal and public support for Darwin's theories, pity for the difficulties Blyth faced upon his return to British life, or perhaps a simple liking for the man himself. Darwin was, however, an exception in this tolerance. Alfred Newton, the Cambridge professor of zoology and ornithologist, was another such exception, but many others found the combination of mental illness, animal trading, and a deserved and regrettably public reputation for drunkenness¹⁷⁷ far too damaging a combination to be accepted.

It can be seen, then, that Blyth's weaknesses were exploited by Darwin and the rest of the scientific community. Financial exigency drove him to India, kept him there for twenty-one years, and led him into the animal trade. Darwin and other British scientists profited, not financially but intellectually, from Blyth's experience close to the ground, and they, like the Zoological Society of London, were happy to obtain animals from him as it suited them. The trade in live animals that fed the appetite for zoos and wild animal menageries also contributed to the science of zoology and systematics, through the constant supply of novelties from which new species could be determined and studied. Yet, Blyth and other naturalists found to their cost, exploitation by the scientific establishment did not lead to acceptance by it.

Acknowledgments

The unpublished materials referred to in this article have been quoted with the kind permission of the following people and organizations: The Natural History Museum, London (Gould, Owen, Jardine, and Gurney letters); the Syndics of Cambridge University Library (Darwin, Hooker, and Tegetmeier letters); the Zoological Society of London (Piddington, Mitchell, and Thompson letters); the American Philosophical Society (Eyton letters); the

¹⁷⁵ Darwin to Blyth, [February 19, 1867] and [February 20, 1867], Department of Rare Books, McGill University Library, Montreal, Canada.

¹⁷⁶ Darwin to Hooker [September 8, 1868], DAR 94: 91–1.

¹⁷⁷ See above, n. 150. And see Hooker to Darwin, March 29, 1864, DAR 101: 193–197: in response to Darwin's inquiry about Blyth's current whereabouts, Hooker replied: "I know nothing of Blyth nor where he intends to take up his quarters. – Unfortunately he drinks".

University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge (Strickland papers); and Balfour and Newton Library, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge (Newton papers). George Pember Darwin and Mrs Maureen Lambourne graciously gave me permission to quote letters from Charles Darwin and John Gould, respectively. Mrs Lambourne also transcribed the letter of John Gould quoted at n. 120. My thanks go especially to Janet Browne for the inspiration to explore this subject in more depth, and for her helpful comments and advice on the manuscript; to Jon Topham, Joy Harvey, Gordon McOuat, and Colin Groves for their assistance and advice on this and other subjects; to Ann Datta, Carol Gokce, and Jon Thackray of the Natural History Museum Library, London; to Adrian Friday and his staff of the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, for their advice and help in locating manuscript material; to Peter Kennedy and Barry Hoffbrand for assistance in diagnosing Blyth's illnesses; and to Daphne Hills for help with an elusive mustelid. I would also like to thank my husband, Douglas Brandon-Jones, for his assistance in the editing, criticism, and arrangement of this manuscript, for zoological advice, and for help in locating references.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of my brother, Brendan Patrick McErlean (1969–1996).