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MASTER DRAWINGS is published quarterly by Master Drawings Association, Inc., 225 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016-3405. Annual subscription rates: DOMESTIC, one hundred and twenty-five dollars ($125); FOREIGN, one hundred and sixty dollars ($160). Periodical postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Return postage guaranteed to 225 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016-3405. Subscribers outside the United States may write to our editorial office for a list of bookdealers who handle foreign subscriptions.

For information concerning subscriptions and advertising, contact: Master Drawings Association, Inc., 225 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016-3405, tel: 212-590-0369; fax: 212-685-4740; administrator@masterdrawings.org or www.masterdrawings.org.

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Volume L, no. 4
Published December 2012
Design by Jak Katalan
Layout by the Editor
Printed by Dolce Printing, Maywood, New Jersey

The mission of Master Drawings is to present the best and most important new research and reviews in the field of drawings, from the fourteenth century to our own time in Europe and the Americas. The journal is primarily concerned with the publication of newly discovered material, significant new reattributions, and fresh interpretations.
The “Early Birds” of John James Audubon

ROBERTA J. M. OLSON

The sky was serene, the air perfumed, and thousands of melodious notes, from birds unknown to me, urged me to arise and go in pursuit of those beautiful and happy creatures.

Then I would find myself furnished with large and powerful wings, and, cleaving the air like an eagle, I would fly off and by a few joyous bounds overtake the objects of my desire.

John James Audubon, Ornithological Biography (1831–39)

Arguably the greatest American artist-naturalist, John James Audubon (1785–1851)—as seen in a portrait (Fig. 1) by John Syme (1795–1861)—was indeed a *rara avis*. Since he is considered America’s first great watercolorist, it is strange that there have been few serious studies examining the development of his signature experimental techniques. With one foot in art and the other in the natural sciences, this legendary figure defies categorization. In both his written and painted works, including his greatest triumph, *The Birds of America* (1827–38), he combined a naturalist’s curiosity with an artist’s eye and a poet’s expressiveness to ensure his unique place in the pantheon of natural history. Also a gifted storyteller and a prodigious writer, Audubon (or “JJA,” as he signed many of his works) wrote vivid, picaresque, often diverting accounts in letters, journals, articles, and books. Today, his writings still actively engage his audience with the birds whose lives he observed, researched, and brilliantly described in their natural habitats as they supplement his incomparably beautiful, cinematic images. After a brief background discussion of the artist’s youth and an introduction to *The Birds of America*, this article will examine his earliest known extant representations of birds to reveal exciting discoveries about his early efforts drawing birds.

*The Birds of America* (1827–38)

Despite the mining of an extensive body of documentary evidence and an already rich, and ever-
Figure 2

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Great Egret, 1821

New York, New York Historical Society
expanding, bibliography about the man and his greatest work, the classic *The Birds of America*, Audubon remains an enigmatic and controversial figure. This “mystery” results from a lack of understanding not only about his youth and the lacunae of early works, but also about the historical context of the double-elephant-folio edition of *The Birds of America*, the driving passion of his life. Engraved in a complex process of etching and aquatint by the master printmaker Robert Havell, Jr. (1793–1878) and hand-colored in the Havell shop, this series of folio plates, which is frequently bound into four volumes, is considered one of the most spectacular natural history documents and visually arresting body of art works ever produced. Together with its watercolor models, it cuts across disciplines and remains among the most important contributions to the fields of ornithology, art, and natural history.

While the Havell prints after Audubon are widely known, the artist’s exquisite watercolor models in the New-York Historical Society (hereafter N-YHS) are less familiar and even more intriguing. Deemed a national treasure, 435 of these extraordinary avian masterpieces are preparatory for 433 of the 435 plates engraved by Havell (no studies are known for pls. 84 and 155). Another thirty-six avian watercolors in the N-YHS collection are Audubon’s earlier, alternative studies for various plates. Among them is an early study for his plate of the Great Egret (Fig. 2), a work that is undeniably one of his most beautiful watercolors, for which he employed impasto gouache with other media to create the bird’s ethereal aigrettes, its spectacular breeding plumage. JJA probably rejected it as a candidate for engraving because he was forever trying to prove his credentials as a naturalist. While the watercolor is aesthetically stunning and true to nature, revealing the bird’s breeding aigrettes and unique vertebrae, he believed that it did not showcase his observational skills in the field and, therefore, chose a later watercolor representing the bird in a feeding posture for the engraving. The thirty-six alternate studies and 434 watercolors preparatory for *The Birds of America* (a total of 470 sheets) trace their provenances directly back to the artist. In 1861 his destitute widow, Lucy Bakewell Audubon (1787–1874), began searching for an institutional home for them. When it appeared that the British Museum was interested in purchasing the group, the Historical Society decided that it was important to keep them intact for the nation and in 1863, during the height of the Civil War, obtained the priceless treasures by subscription for the then-not-inconsequential sum of $4,000. Nearly a century later, in 1962, the illustrator Clara Peck (1883–1968) gave a trio of smaller avian watercolors, each dated 1827, to the N-YHS; they constitute JJA’s quick riffs (in a more summary watercolor technique and varied palette) of single birds that he had already depicted in three watercolor models for *The Birds of America*, only two of which were engraved. One, the watercolor depicting the Blackburnian Warbler, is, in fact, the artist’s critique of his earlier watercolor of that bird and features a better articulation of feathers, as well as media corrections. Audubon most likely executed these three sheets with great *sprezzatura* for friends or patrons, perhaps while staying in Liverpool. Finally, JJA’s watercolor model for the California Condor, which at some unknown point had become separated from the rest of the flock, was donated in 1966. This gift brought the total number of Audubon avian watercolors in the N-YHS collections to 474.

Through *The Birds of America* and his watercolor models for its plates, Audubon sought to transform traditional natural history illustration into an art, and in the process he became a first-rate Romantic artist. In the past, Audubon’s associations with artists in America and abroad and his general familiarity with Old Master painting have been underestimated. He believed that naturalists should know art and also study living creatures, assigning the failure of past ornithological illustration to a lack of this kind of knowledge:

*Take such advantages away from the naturalist, who ought to be an artist also, and he fails as completely as Raphael himself must have done, had he not fed his pencil with all belonging to a mind perfectly imbued with*
Audubon’s father sensed an imminent slave revolution on the island and sent the boy to his home in Nantes, on the coast of Brittany, and shortly thereafter, when the French Revolution started, sold his plantation and followed his son to France. JJA was welcomed and raised by his stepmother, the wealthy and childless Anne Moynet (1736–1821), who doted on the boy and his half-sister, Rose Bouffard (1787–1842), from another of his father’s extra-marital affairs with a mixed-race mistress. Legally adopting both children in 1794, his father and stepmother renamed him Fougère (meaning fern) Audubon, a name associated with his mother’s family. They did this not only to establish his legitimacy, but also to placate the French Revolutionary authorities in Nantes, where the Reign of Terror was especially extreme and the Catholic Church and Christian saints’ names were outlawed. In 1800, well after the Terror, they baptized him Jean-Jacques Fougère Audubon, probably to distinguish him from his father and out of admiration for the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778).14

It was around the family’s summer estate, La Gerbetière (meaning “the place of wheat sheaves”), near the village of Couëron, ten miles west of Nantes, that JJA’s wanderings away from school into the countryside initiated an incurable passion for nature. There he began drawing his “feathered tribes.” Recounting those early days, he noted: “None but the aërial companions suited my fancy.... My father...pointed out [their] elegant movements...the beauty and softness of their plumage...the departure and return of birds with the seasons...and, more wonderful than all, their change of livery....”15

What motivated Audubon to undertake a project of this magnitude, crystallizing the growing environmental interests of an increasing number of naturalists? He believed that a bird’s habits, calls, and diet, as well as its peculiar “cast of countenance” (G.I.S.S. [or jizz]: General Impression of Size and Shape) were all required to distinguish it. Frequently troubled about killing, he sacrificed birds in order to resurrect them on his drawing board and give them immortality in his watercolors and Havell’s engravings. In dramatizing his energetic protagonists and their struggles for survival, Audubon’s watercolors for The Birds of America and its plates have become icons for American birders and environmentalists.

AUDUBON’S EARLY LIFE AND TRAINING

Complex and often contradictory, Audubon was a first-rate intellectual, but also a man of child-like simplicity, curiosity, and magnetic intensity.13 Born on 26 April 1785 in Les Cayes in the French colony of Saint Domingue (today’s Haiti), JJA was the illegitimate son of Jean Audubon (1744–1818), a French naval officer, merchant marine captain, and sugar plantation owner who became a fervent supporter of Napoleon Bonaparte (1768–1821). Initially he was named Jean Rabin, after his mother, Jeanne Rabine (1758–1785), a French chambermaid who died soon after his birth. In 1788, Audubon’s father sensed an imminent slave revolution on the island and sent the boy to his home in Nantes, on the coast of Brittany, and shortly thereafter, when the French Revolution started, sold his plantation and followed his son to France. JJA was welcomed and raised by his stepmother, the wealthy and childless Anne Moynet (1736–1821), who doted on the boy and his half-sister, Rose Bouffard (1787–1842), from another of his father’s extra-marital affairs with a mixed-race mistress. Legally adopting both children in 1794, his father and stepmother renamed him Fougère (meaning fern) Audubon, a name associated with his mother’s family. They did this not only to establish his legitimacy, but also to placate the French Revolutionary authorities in Nantes, where the Reign of Terror was especially extreme and the Catholic Church and Christian saints’ names were outlawed. In 1800, well after the Terror, they baptized him Jean-Jacques Fougère Audubon, probably to distinguish him from his father and out of admiration for the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778).14

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sion—he had intractable seasickness (mal de mer) and tried to run away—he failed the candidacy test and returned to Nantes in 1800.

Military draftmanship and watercolor techniques may have been part of Rochefort's naval curriculum, and he certainly observed their use, but throughout his life Audubon claimed to have learned drawing from none other than Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), who had visited Nantes briefly in 1790. Over the years, JJA no doubt came to believe this fiction, borne of a need to compensate for his illegitimacy and lack of formal artistic training and to inflate his prestige. Most likely there was a kernel of truth to his declaration. As a talented autodidact, Audubon probably did study the work of David, the most celebrated painter of his day and Napoleon's favorite artist, so for all intents and purposes David was his "master." He confessed quite honestly: "David had guided my hand in tracing objects of large size" (implying the academic practice of copying from casts of ancient sculpture). And he usually phrased it ambiguously: "I had studied under the instruction of the celebrated David." Audubon was frequently prone to exaggeration, and the David connection was only one of the tall tales he invented to burnish his early reputation.

In 1803, his father sent the eighteen-year-old to America to oversee the family's property at Mill Grove near the Schuylkill River outside of Philadelphia, thus preventing his conscription into Napoleon's burgeoning army. JJA immediately fell in love with America's wildlife, becoming a champion of his adopted country and later, in 1812, a citizen. A few months after his arrival at Mill Grove, he met and fell in love with English-born Lucy Bakewell from the neighboring estate Fatland Ford. In 1805, at Lucy’s behest, he changed “Fougère” to “Laforest” (Franglais for “forest”), a nickname with which she fondly addressed him for a long time. For a year, in 1805–6, JJA returned to France—where, as we shall see, his study of birds turned more scientific, although his ostensible goals were to sort out his business affairs at Mill Grove and to ask his father’s permission to wed.

Audubon’s Earliest Bird

By Audubon’s own account, his father first encouraged him to observe birds in the marshes of the Loire River estuary, today known as the Marais d’Audubon, near La Gerbetière. By JJA’s own account, Captain Audubon owned a book with avian illustrations that lit the fire of what would become his life-long obsession:

I wished to possess all the productions of nature, but I wished life with them. This was impossible.... I turned to my father, and made known to him my disappointment and anxiety. He produced a book of Illustrations. A new life ran in my veins. I turned over the leaves with avidity; and although what I saw was not what I longed for, it gave me a desire to copy Nature. To Nature I went, and tried to imitate her. No doubt, this pivotal tome was some iteration of the Histoire naturelle des oiseaux (1770–86) by Georges-Louis LeClerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788), with its spectacular illustrations engraved by and after François-Nicolas Martinet (c. 1725–c. 1804) under the supervision of Buffon’s cousin Edme-Louis Daubenton (1732–1786). It featured nearly a thousand illustrations, an unprecedented number, albeit with birds perched in formulaic poses. There were many editions of this popular work published sporadically during the turbulent times of the French Revolution, and its plates, issued separately, were known as the Planches enluminées [or coloriées] sans texte. Audubon remarked, “I wish I had known the Count de Buffon—what an original he was—and is yet. What a model to copy from! What lights! Yes, what lights!—and what shades he has cast over Nature’s grand tableau.” As testimony to Buffon’s seminal influence and his father’s possession of Buffon’s “Illustrations,” JJA referred to the engraved plates of The Birds of America in the same manner, as “my ‘Illustrations.’”

Certainly the youth’s first attempts at drawing birds must have been fledgling at best. But, always aspiring, Audubon continued to set his sights high: “How sorely disappointed did I feel for many years, when I saw that my productions were
worse than those which I ventured (perhaps in silence) to regard as bad, in the book given me by my father! My pencil gave birth to a family of cripples.”27 By his own admission (perhaps an overstatement), he burned “hundreds of these rude sketches annually” on his birthday.

Until the recent discovery of an unpublished pastel of a European Goldfinch from 1803 in a private collection (Fig. 3),28 Audubon’s earliest attempts at drawing in France, which date from before his departure for America in the summer of that year, were considered entirely lost. This precocious drawing—here published in its entirety for the first time—is inscribed, signed, and dated at the lower right, *La Gerbe ettiers / Mars 1803 – J J A.* It reveals that Audubon was already experimenting with wetting pastel to achieve an opaque, gouache-like effect. His lack of formal artistic education, which was mitigated by an innate sensitivity to materials and willingness to develop his own methods, perhaps freed him from conventions and allowed him to innovate. He later confessed, “The first Collection of Drawings I made of this Sort were from European Specimen, procured by my Father or myself, and I Still have them in my possession.—they were all represented *strictly ornithologically,* which means... in Stiff unmeaning profiles, such as are found in all works published since the beginning of the present century.”29 Audubon inscribed his study of the European Goldfinch serially, first in French and then in English, in at least four campaigns over time, a practice he continued to repeat during his lifetime. They reveal that he was keen on identifying his subject taxonomically and relating it to ornithological authorities, including Buffon (*Le chardonneret — Buffon*)—and then the British ornithologist Francis Willughby (1635–1672) (*the Goldfinch, — thistle-finch. Willughby*).30 JJA’s Goldfinch perches on a conventional branch of the type found in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ornithological illustrations. It, together with the profile view, suggests that his model may have been a stuffed specimen rather than a skin or live bird. The branch resembles those in the watercolors and hand-colored etched illustrations found in some eighteenth-century ornithologies, such as those of François Levaillant (1753–1824) with plates by
Jacques Barraband (1767[?–]1809), who preferred to keep the branches simple to highlight the magnificent plumage of the birds.

It is significant that Audubon’s inscription on this pastel credits Buffon with the taxonomy of the species. Within the spectrum of natural history, Buffon had set the stage for both Audubon and The Birds of America by including field observations as a significant component of his text, something most ornithologies lacked. Audubon would adopt this feature, employing Buffon’s study as one of his early templates, which he would later expand. Buffon, as Keeper of the Cabinet du Roi (the royal natural history collection), was a vehement opponent of the detailed scheme of binomial classification pioneered by Carl von Linné (1707–1778), known as Linnaeus, considering it a sterile attempt to force disparate species into artificial assemblages, which in turn encouraged Audubon to organize his magnum opus not by taxonomic classifications, but according to his aesthetic and practical judgments, including which watercolors he considered ready for engraving. He preferred instead an organic order, which he believed was closer to that of nature. Arguably, his manner of presentation was far more interesting for his subscribers, albeit less scientific, because they each received their plates for The Birds of America in fascicles (usually one large, one medium, and three small prints). Most importantly, this organization allowed him to begin publishing before he had represented all the species. Moreover, because JJA was aware that new species of North American birds were being discovered as the exploration of the continent pushed westward, his organization accommodated that expansion.

When writing about the American Goldfinch in the 1830s in his Ornithological Biography (1831–39), the text that accompanied the plates in the double-elephant-folio edition of The Birds of America, Audubon compared the American bird to the European Goldfinch, from an entirely different family, which was an abundant inhabitant of the marshes around Couëron, where his model for Figure 3 was most likely obtained.

The flight of the American Goldfinch is exactly similar to that of the European Bird of the same name... uttering two or three notes whilst ascending, such as its European relative uses on similar occasions... showing the beauty of its plumage and the elegance of its manners.... So much does the song of our Goldfinch resemble that of the European species, that whilst in France and England, I have frequently thought, and with pleasure, that they were the notes of our own bird which I heard. In America, again, the song of the Goldfinch recalled to my remembrance its transatlantic kinsman, and brought with it, too, a grateful feeling for the many acts of hospitality and kindness which I have experienced in the “old country.”

Clearly, the European species he depicted in Figure 3 had made a great impression on him, and his work in France formed the foundation for his later research about the American Goldfinch.

Unlike most ornithological illustrators who used watercolor, Audubon executed his earliest extant studies of birds, as well as those of mammals, in the traditional eighteenth-century French medium of pastel, or “crayon,” which allowed him to produce exquisitely soft textures over an underdrawing in graphite. He also claimed that “whilt a pupil of David,” he had learned how to use different colored chalks and, by implication, pastels. Already in his pastel...
of the European Goldfinch (see Fig. 3) he had begun experimenting with the medium, stretching its boundaries by stumping his colors and wetting the white pastel of the bird's throat, thus prefiguring the innovations in his later, complex multimedia productions, in which he never abandoned pastel entirely, but used it more creatively.

Audubon was keenly aware of the ornithological traditions predating his great work, and he knew that his lack of credentials as a naturalist was his Achilles heel. Thus he was eager to credit his precursors and contemporaries for taxonomic information. Yet despite his respect for his fore-runners, he rarely based his birds overtly on earlier precedents. And when he consulted models, they were frequently unidentifiable because he had digested their lessons and transformed them, as in the dazzling watercolors for *The Birds of America*, which capture the essence of each species and, for the first time ever, are all lifesize—a feat made possible by the introduction of double-elephant-folio-sized paper. With the fervor of a neophyte, JJA was driven by an intense passion that eclipsed anything but his own pioneering vision and by a desire to convey the same sense of wonder he experienced in observing avian life. His approach melded the dispassionate spirit of scientific research (the product of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment) with a new Romantic sensibility, resulting in an intensely engaged spirit of inquiry, to which today's environmental scientists are heirs. The sensations he communicates of being embedded with the birds in their natural habitats lend an excitement to his cinematic depictions that is lacking in the work of his predecessors. But already in the early drawings he laid the foundation for his brilliant contributions to ornithological illustration and to the development of watercolor as a sophisticated artistic medium, often used in conjunction with intricate, layered media, including metallic pigments.

Today there are two major holdings of Audubon's juvenilia: the little-known, recently discovered trove in the Bibliothèque Scientifique, Société des Sciences Naturelles de la Charente-Maritime, Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de La Rochelle, France—and the cache at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, the majority held by the Houghton Library, with nine other drawings in the Museum of Comparative Zoology. The La Rochelle group comprises 130 sheets: 122 feature birds (one with a pair) and eight have mammals (seven drawn in America, three of which are dated 1804 and five of which are inscribed with locations in Pennsylvania). The collection at Harvard University consists of 116 sheets: 111 with European and American birds, three with exotic birds, and two with mammals. Whereas the French cache—including the earliest examples from America (Figs.
4–8, 10–11, 15) and sheets executed after his return to Nantes (Figs. 11–14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, and front cover)—dates between 1803 and 1806, the Harvard sheets (Figs. 16, 18, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39–40, 42, 44–45, 47) range in date from 1805 through 1821. After the artist’s few tentative experiments with what may be a watercolor stain under a layer of pastel or wet pastel on a few sheets in the La Rochelle group, the Harvard works reveal, as a group, JJA’s experiments with watercolor and his increasing inclusion of it as a major component in his mix of media, long before 1820, the date usually assigned to his embrace of the medium. Since the La Rochelle cluster has been reproduced only partially in a descriptive, regional publication, and those from Harvard have been published as a group only quite recently (as well as some individually over the years) and without knowledge of the La Rochelle birds, a comparison between these two collections yields fascinating information about the uncharted early years of Audubon’s career drawing birds.

**THE AVIAN PASTELS IN LA ROCHELLE**

After immigrating to the United States in the summer of 1803, JJA drew his first American works at Mill Grove. Those pastels, which he executed before his return to France in March 1805, are all in La Rochelle. They can be readily identified by their inscriptions and their depictions of lifeless subjects hung from strings (Figs. 4–8, 10–11, 15). “My next set was began in America,” he recalled, “and there without my honoured Mentor [his father] I betook myself to the drawing of Specimen hung to a String by one foot with the desire to shew their every portion...in this Manner I made some pretty fair sign Boards for Poulterers!” It is significant that Audubon considered them a “set” and modified his discussion of one with “next” to imply that he had drawn an earlier set before coming to America, to which the European Goldfinch (see Fig. 3) would have belonged.

During his early days on America’s frontier, Audubon had access neither to illustrated ornithological treatises nor mounted specimens, forcing him to work from nature. By suspending bird corpses in mid-air by a string, sometimes with the aid of a pin, he hoped to avoid the static profile formulas devised by medieval illustrators, which still served the developing science of systematics and taxonomic classification. His approach had the additional effect of underlining the precariousness of all life and adding poignancy to these studies. While he depicted sixty-seven birds (one sheet has a pair) and one mammal alive in the La Rochelle trove, the sheets with corpses number forty-four small birds, twelve larger birds, and seven mammals. Among them are: a Red-bellied Woodpecker with a limp and extended tongue (Fig. 4); a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, inscribed *wood Soeker / Ko berd* (Fig. 5); a Brown Thrasher (Fig. 6); a Blue Jay (Fig. 7); and an Eastern Meadowlark, depicted from the back and front in good academic fashion, a practice originating in the Italian Renaissance (Fig. 8). From the minimal inscriptions on these trimmed sheets, Audubon was clearly not yet bilingual but was attempting to use English while in America.

His representations reflect an awareness of still-life paintings of dead game trophies and *natures mortes*—like those by Frans Snyders (1579–1657),...
most notably a pair of paintings in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Agen, including the Still-life of Dead Birds and Cherries from 1712 (Fig. 9).\textsuperscript{50} The birds in paintings by these and other “fine” artists are frequently more skillfully rendered than those in ornithologies, because many ornithological authors, who were amateur artists, illustrated their own texts and based their illustrations not on life but on descriptions from books, taxidermied specimens, or skins. By contrast, Audubon preferred drawing from live birds “on the wing,” and when his subjects were not alive, he longed to reanimate them, a feat that he finally accomplished in painting his watercolors for The Birds of

Melchoir d’Hondecoeter (c. 1636–1695), Willem van Aelst (1627–1683), Jan Weenix (1640/49–1719), and Alexandre-François Desportes (1661–1743), who, like Audubon, was a hunter. They bear, moreover, an uncanny resemblance to works by Louis xv’s Painter-in-Ordinary of the Royal Hunt, Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755),

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{brown_thrasher}
\caption{JOHN JAMES AUDUBON Brown Thrasher, 1803–5 \textit{La Rochelle, Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle}}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{blue_jay}
\caption{JOHN JAMES AUDUBON Blue Jay, 1803–5 \textit{La Rochelle, Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle}}
\end{figure}
America. His suspension of their dead bodies by strings and pins was the first step toward that goal. Some of his early avian pastels have a modern feel, among them the Purple Martin (Fig. 10), which ranks as a tour-de-force use of pure pastel in shades of black, gray, and white. In this simple composition, the bird, hung by a white string, appears to turn in the wind and begins to intimate the animation in his later works. Audubon also experimented with bird banding at Mill Grove by attaching a thin silver thread to the legs of nestling Eastern Phoebes, becoming the first American naturalist to investigate homing and to identify individual birds that he had banded.

This highly significant French group of birds was discovered in 1995, when the town of La Rochelle and its museum were preparing for a bicentennial celebration of the birth of the French naturalist Alcide-Charles-Victor-Marie Dessalines d’Orbigny (1802–1857), son of Dr. Charles-Marie Dessalines d’Orbigny (1770–1856), surgeon, amateur naturalist, and Audubon family friend. During the process of inventoried the documents and collections gathered by the
d’Orbignys, the trove was uncovered in the attic of the museum. It consisted of nine voluminous wooden cases with the title Iconographie C.M.D. d’Orbigny and contained numbered leaves on which original drawings, many of them trimmed irregularly, are mounted together with illustrations clipped from publications dating from different periods, including the contemporary journal Magasin de Zoologie of Félix-Édouard Guérin-Méneville (1799–1874). They are frequently attached by a single, sometimes rusty, common pin and grouped in series according to their zoological order. A case in point is one folio (Fig. 11) that features JJA’s depictions of a live Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (nos. 2 and 3), which he inscribed, listing Buffon as his taxonomic source; not surprisingly, they are paired with a pastel Audubon executed in America of a Red-headed Woodpecker corpse hung by his bill (no. 1), as well as a printed illustration of a woodpecker cut on four sides from the 1799–1808 edition of Buffon’s Histoire naturelle: générale et particulière (oiseaux). Charles-Marie d’Orbigny (Audubon’s second mentor) began this compilation, which attempted to establish systematic zoological groupings, with the aid of his son. Some of the clipped prints mounted on the folios are inscribed with the date 1839, referring to the new series of Guérin-Méneville’s Magasin de Zoologie. They thus provide a terminus post quem for the d’Orbignys’ pruning of Audubon’s studies and their assemblage with the avian prints for the purpose of taxonomic comparison.

Nine of Audubon’s fascinating pastels with representations of European avian species depicted as though alive (as well as a single mammal) in La Rochelle are initialed LJJA (Figs. 36, 38). The “L” stands for “Laforest” (Laforêt). (Only one, the Whitethroat [Fig. 12], is inscribed with a date, Le 21 Juillet 1805.) Audubon punctuated these initials inconsistently with periods but never after the “A” (except in unusual cases when it was part of a statement and the period after the “A” also ended the thought). This is similar to the way he signed his mature works, which are frequently initialed J.J.A. This practice suggests that back in
France and under d’Orbigny’s wing Audubon was keen to establish his own identity as an ornithologist on his studies from live birds or mounted specimens.

The La Rochelle trove shows Audubon’s rapid development. During the early days of his return to France, he drew two transitional European species hung by strings, the Blackcap and the Gray Partridge. Later that year he reprised the Blackcap alive on another sheet (Fig. 13), critiquing his early attempt and demonstrating a desire to animate his subject; it also shows his lifelong practice of outlining the entire composition, including its setting. From the limp corpses of American species that he drew at Mill Grove (Figs. 4–8, 10–11, 15), followed by these two European examples, he progressed to European birds represented alive, and drawn from either specimens perched on branches or captive individuals (Figs. 12–13). Soon thereafter, he executed his seminal representation of the Northern
Cardinal (Fig. 14), a North American species that he probably studied from specimens in France (note the French inscriptions) but enlivened with his American observations. This pastel represents a sea change for the artist: instead of a solitary bird, Audubon drew a mating pair inhabiting a botanical setting of laurel. As was his customary practice from this time onward, he first delineated in graphite the contours of the birds and the entire composition with their leafy surroundings, as seen in other early sheets from France (e.g., Fig. 13).

Previously Audubon had made other important strides toward his mature style at Mill Grove. Most astounding among them is his spectacular, nearly thirty-six-inch-tall depiction of a Barn Owl specimen with its wings spread (Fig. 15). The sheet is inscribed at the right vertically in brown ink, *fresaye*, an archaic name for the Barn Owl (*Effraie*). It most importantly proves that even in these early studies JJA was drawing species lifesize. His commitment to representing all of his birds in their natural scale would ultimately win him iconic status with *The Birds of America*. This was the first ornithological work in which all the birds illustrated were reproduced actual size, a goal toward which many ornithologists and ornithological illustrators had been working for some time. Our recognition of Audubon’s early full-scale representations of large birds allows us to predate by two decades this significant achievement. His Barn Owl is one of the three largest drawings in the La Rochelle trove, each of which is now a foldout sheet that either JJA or one of the d’Orbignys creased.

Audubon’s ability to represent all of his largest species lifesize was made possible not only by his ingenious compositions, but also by great changes in the papermaking industry. A number of complex factors—technical, cultural, and economic—gradually led to wove papers, invented by James Whatman I (1702–1759), which were expressly calibrated and sized for the medium of watercolor. Mills also produced papers in greater dimensions, a development fueled by the demand for ledger sheets—for engineering and architectural needs, as well as for surveys and town planning—
and the burgeoning market for great quantities of paper required by the expanding number of professional and amateur watercolorists. For *The Birds of America*, both Audubon and Havell employed one of the largest sizes of these new papers, double-elephant, which is generally believed to have developed around 1790–1800. We can now highlight earlier references, among them that of the younger Whatman, James II (1741–1798), who wrote to his brother-in-law Edward Stanley (29 November 1772) that “The Double Elephant which I at present make is 3 ft. 4 in. by 2 ft. 2 ½ in., and is as large as any paper I have ever seen manufactured in Europe.” Indeed, Whatman was about to make Antiquarian (53 x 31 inches; 1,346 x 787 mm)—the largest sheet of its time but too ungainly for folios intended for binding and with many problems in drying—which he invented the following year.

It was in Nantes under the tutelage of the elder d’Orbigny that JJA began taking a more sophisticated, scientific approach to birds and the observance of their habits. During his year in France, Audubon’s passion for birds crescendoed. Together with d’Orbigny, he explored the marshes surrounding Couëron (comprising roughly 2,000 hectares), studying and hunting wildlife. His mentor not only afforded him access to ornithological treatises and prepared specimens (some today in the La Rochelle museum), but also taught Audubon to weigh and measure captured birds. Arguably, his renderings of mounted birds date later than those suspended by their wings, feet, or beaks, sometimes pierced by a pin. In aggregate, these works reveal Audubon testing his wings conservatively by trying a small variety
of techniques, media, styles, and poses. The majority consist of profiles that resemble mug shots, and assuredly reflect an exposure to illustrated ornithologies, especially those by Buffon and Mathurin-Jacques Brisson (1723–1806), whose plates from his 1760 edition were in the possession of d’Orbigny.71

Audubon’s inscriptions on the pastels in La Rochelle include taxonomical identifications, which reveal his struggle to name the birds he drew correctly. Eight refer to Buffon (including one mammal), six to “Brisson” himself (plus six cropped references to his classifications) for a total of twelve, one to Eleazar Albin (c. 1680–1741/42) and his A Natural History of Birds (1731–38), and ten to plates in an unidentified work. Similarly, in JJA’s earliest extant pastel, the European Goldfinch (see Fig. 3), the young artist also credited both Buffon’s and Willughby’s taxonomies. Since avian taxonomy was in its infancy and in flux, especially for American species, Audubon was wise to cite sources for his identifications.

Audubon had already started formulating a unique vision in the sheets now at La Rochelle, whose signature characteristics he would expand in his watercolors for The Birds of America. Among these were his representation of both sexes and juveniles lifesize; anatomical details that appear like footnotes—an occasional feature in eighteenth-century ornithological illustrations, like the graphite study on JJA’s pastel of a Red-necked Phalarope (Phalarope à bec étroit) of a bird’s-eye view of its beak;72 and ever more ambitious naturalistic settings, as in JJA’s pastel of a Hoopoe (front cover) holding an insect in its beak with a butterfly perching on the same branch;73 as well as inscriptions concerning taxonomy that he periodically would annotate.

Presumably, Audubon gave the large group of La Rochelle pastels to Dr. d’Orbigny as a token of his gratitude and esteem before departing Nantes for America in 1806. When, in 1820, Charles-Marie moved to La Rochelle, where he became a founder and then curator in 1836 of its natural history museum, he took Audubon’s early drawings with him and both he and his son continued to use them in their studies.

Audubon’s pastel drawings of three exotic birds, two with spectacular plumages, provide interesting evidence about the artist’s early working methods and his interest in birds beyond those of the North American continent that would make him famous. In one, the artist delineated the lifesize head, neck, and shoulder of a Southern Cassowary (Fig. 16),76 a double-wattled, flightless bird that Harvard scholars have suggested he studied in a zoo. It is more likely that he rendered this image—his only partial depiction of a species in the Harvard series (although two other pastels include another study of an avian head)—from a prepared specimen. This conclusion is suggested...
Figure 16
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Southern Cassowary, c. 1812
Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Houghton Library
not only by its profile view, but also by the ferocious nature of the species, which would have prohibited drawing it at such a close range. Alternatively, JJA may have studied it from a partial, prepared skin, because it was a traditional ornithological practice to collect the heads and beaks of large exotics. The bird’s size, however, also determined his fractional depiction that would have been limited by the dimensions of the paper in his possession at the time. His inscription at the lower left in graphite reinforces this idea, Head of the Cassawary natural size, a common notation and tradition in ornithologies of the period that attempted to show at least a portion of the bird lifesize. The sheet bears the watermark of the artist’s preferred paper J WHATMAN / 1810 (running vertically and easily visible through the dark pastel of the bird’s shoulder), which establishes its terminus post quem. Audubon may have studied it from a mounted specimen in the Peale Museum in Philadelphia, because Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827) is documented as negotiating for a specimen of this exotic species in 1799. Due to the vicissitudes of the museum’s history, most of Peale’s more than 1,000 avian mountings do not survive and are undocumented, including that of a Cassowary. Those not destroyed in a fire were dispersed and lost. Nevertheless, the painter’s mountings would have especially appealed to Audubon because they were renowned for their animated natural attitudes.

Today, the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University holds the largest number of surviving specimens. In his museum Peale installed many species in habitats, sometimes arranged in groups, with painted landscape backgrounds that are preserved in Peale’s famous painting The Artist in His Museum (Fig. 17). Arguably, these displays made a deep impression on Audubon and influenced his mature watercolor avian vignettes. In fact, he mentions Peale’s Museum repeatedly throughout the Ornithological Biography. Peale’s installations also had an impact on JJA’s activities in Cincinnati, where, in 1820, together with its curator Robert Best (c. 1790–1830), he “augmented, arranged, and finished” the diorama-like displays, painted landscapes, and prepared specimens for the Western Museum, founded by Dr. Daniel Drake (1785–1852) and modeled on Peale’s prototype. Without question Audubon drew the male Golden Pheasant (Fig. 18), a native of central China, from Peale’s special specimen (Fig. 19). Although the drawing is undated, he most likely executed it shortly after his 1806 return from France, as its style, the pose of the bird, and the conventional grass is very close to the drawings he made in France. Since Philadelphia was only 23 miles from Mill Grove, it was quite accessible. George Washington (1732–1799) had given Peale the male Golden Pheasant, together with a female, for mounting in 1787. The live pair had been sent to the US president from King Louis XVI’s aviary via the
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Golden Pheasant, Male, 1806–8 or 1812
Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Houghton Library

Figure 18 (above)

Figure 19 (right)
Mount specimens of a male and female Golden Pheasant from Peale’s Museum
Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Museum of Comparative Zoology

Figure 18 (above)

Figure 19 (right)
Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834) in November of 1786. Curiously, Audubon’s pastel of the female resembles Peale’s specimen neither in pose nor jizz, suggesting that he either consulted a skin when drawing the female or uncharacteristically drew it from memory. What Audubon accomplished with the medium of pastel in his representation of the male Golden Pheasant is truly extraordinary: take, for example, the pharaonic ruff and the gold-speckled tail. This bravura draftsmanship contains intimations of his dazzling, mature multimedia evocations of feather patterns and textures.

Audubon most likely executed these Golden Pheasants before he married Lucy Bakewell and moved to Louisville in April of 1808, although the specimens in Peale’s Museum would continue to be an occasional source for him. On his next visit to Philadelphia in July of 1812, he met for a second time his early rival in American ornithology, the Scottish expatriate Alexander Wilson (1766–1813), who he relates was drawing the Bald Eagle. It is generally accepted that Wilson’s model for his illustration of the species was the specimen in the Peale Museum that is visible at the upper left in Figure 17. Wilson himself had collected the bird and had given it to Peale. This mounted specimen was also Audubon’s model for his two studies of the mature Bald Eagle, the second of which Havell engraved as plate 31 in The Birds of America. JJA rejected the first (1820), whose primary medium was pastel, for a number of reasons, in favor of the second (1828), whose predominant medium was watercolor.

The provenance of the Harvard cache in the Houghton Library (107 sheets, including one mammal) can mostly be traced to Audubon’s lifelong friend and patron, the gentleman farmer and amateur naturalist Edward Harris, Jr. (1799–1863), whom the artist met in Philadelphia in 1824. JJA wrote in his journal, “Young Harris, God bless him, looked at the drawings I had for sale and said that he would take all, at my prices. I would have kissed him, but that is not the custom in this icy city.” On leaving the city, Harris pressed a $100 bill in his hand saying “Mr. Audubon, accept this from me: men like you ought not to want for money.” An inventory in the Houghton Library, which lists ninety Audubon drawings of birds “from Nature and of the size of life by J.J. Audubon, in the possession of Edward Harris,” reveals that Harris’s collection of Audubon drawings once included some not in the Harvard trove today. The Harris drawings—which may have entailed later gifts from Audubon to his friend—were purchased by Joseph Y. Jeanes (1859–1928), the Philadelphia collector, at various times beginning in 1892, from the estate of Harris’s heir, Edward Harris III (1851–1921). Jeanes may have acquired sheets from other sources, which eventually became part of his 1930 bequest.

Nine other early drawings by Audubon (eight birds and one mammal) are held by the Ernst Mayr Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, five of which are on deposit at the Houghton Library. Although their provenances are less secure, some hark from the extraordinary collection of Auduboniana donated by John Eliot Thayer (1862–1933), a member of the Harvard faculty, who from 1907 first put the university on the map as a major repository of Audubon material.

The Harvard pastels have inscriptions of at least forty-eight taxonomical references to Buffon and twenty-nine to Wilson. The latter’s American Ornithology (1808–14)—with engravings by another expatriate Scot, Alexander Lawson (1773–1846), after Wilson’s rough drawings of 268 species—remained a formidable influence on JJA. Not only is Audubon’s Ornithological Biography peppered with citations of Wilson’s volumes, but also twenty-one of the watercolors for The Birds of America have references to Wilson and his taxonomy inscribed on their rectos. At least eleven sheets at Harvard representing European and American species refer to both Wilson and Buffon, while two others note the first illustrated work about American birds—the initial tome of The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands (1731–43) by Mark Catesby (1683–1749). Although Audubon continued to mention Wilson, he never again cited Catesby and later rarely referred to Buffon—only three times in inscriptions on the watercolors for The
Birds of America—because other authorities had superseded their taxonomy. On the Harvard drawings JJA also twice named George Edwards (1694–1773)—described as “the father of British ornithology” and one of the first British naturalists to draw and engrave his own illustrations—and identifications in his A Natural History of Uncommon Birds (1743–51). In addition, JJA mentioned Albin three times and five times cited The British Zoology (1766; 1768–70) by Welsh naturalist Thomas Pennant (1726–1798), whose interest in natural history had been sparked by Willughby. These annotations suggest that while in France during 1805–6, JJA had access to Pennant and Willughby, as well as other treatises, in d’Orbigny’s library or elsewhere and that his inscriptions documented his taxonomical studies.

Actively seeking to establish a persona, JJA signed the Harvard drawings more ambitiously than the La Rochelle group and never employed the earlier initials “LJJA” that he had used in France. Instead he inscribed the sheets variously: JJAudubon (twenty-two times); JJA (seventeen); JA (eleven); JLJA (nine); JJLAudubon (seven); JAudubon (two); and A, JJA, JeanJLAudubon, JohnJLAudubon (once each), as well as naming one species auduboni. Again, his punctuation varied, although he never used a period after the “A,” save two exceptions where the period functioned for the entire line in a longer inscription. Like the other inscriptions on the Harvard works, his signatures display a progressive maturation.

IDENTICAL TWINS IN LA ROCHELLE AND HARVARD

Twenty-nine of Audubon’s drawings depicting European species at Harvard are versions of pastels in La Rochelle. JJA drew these pairs with some variations, and once there may have been others that are unknown or no longer extant. Audubon did not reprise his drawings of dead specimens in La Rochelle, including his three largest birds, in the examples at Harvard. At least four of the twenty-nine pairs also have another related pastel in the La Rochelle group representing a species variant, either a different sex or a juvenile. Unfortunately, most of the La Rochelle sheets have been trimmed, making it impossible to ascertain the extent of their original inscriptions and whether they were once dated. The Appendix (see pp. 483–87) reveals the correspondences between these pairs and other useful information.

The Harvard sheets belonging to the twenty-nine pairs resemble the artist’s works dated after his return from France. They have longer inscriptions—most in brown ink over partially erased graphite ones—than their French counterparts and sometimes multiple ones whose calligraphy can be dated. True to his usual practice, the artist continued annotating them over time, whereas those given to d’Orbigny have brief inscriptions, if any (albeit some may have been destroyed when the sheets were trimmed). Tellingly, only the group in La Rochelle has any Latin inscriptions to suggest that it was under d’Orbigny’s tutelage and/or to impress his mentor that Audubon used scientific nomenclature. Alternatively, one of the d’Orbignys could have added these Latin inscriptions to JJA’s studies, although the calligraphy seems to be that of the artist.

Audubon initially inscribed most of the Harvard sheets only in graphite and later either rewrote them in brown ink, with the graphite as a rule partially erased, or inscribed them elsewhere on the sheet in ink with elaborations. Some of the longer inscriptions on the Harvard works, especially on studies of American birds, are in English. They demonstrate JJA’s growing mastery of the language and support his working on them after his 1806 return from France. Throughout his life, the artist followed this basic pattern because he considered his drawings and their inscriptions to be works-in-progress. Yet his manner of annotating his works, like his style, has a distinct evolution that helps in dating them.

The twenty-nine pairs demonstrate that Audubon was attempting to improve his drawing skills and his ornithological knowledge, as well as
Figure 20

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Woodchat Shrike
(Pergrêche à tête rousse), Juvenile, 1805–6 (app. no. 14a)

La Rochelle, Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle
experimenting with formats for representing his birds. On some sheets he drew the species standing on mounds, a convention since the earliest ornithological treatises, while on others he positioned them on swaths of grass, and on still others he perched the birds on bare branches (some merely outlined in graphite) or on branches embellished with leaves, moss, or berries. Collectively they demonstrate that JJA was exploring models and beginning to invent his own manner of presentation as well as trying out different styles, as seen in the brace of juvenile Woodchat Shrikes (Figs. 20–21).97 A strange pair
that we will discuss at a later point.

In general, the duplicate drawings at Harvard—twenty-six in the Houghton Library and three in the Museum of Comparative Zoology—seem by comparison with their French complements more subdued and less animated, suggesting that Audubon replicated them as ricordi to take back to America. Usually the jizz of each bird is not as vivid and is more formulaic than its French counterpart (see Figs. 20–39 and the Appendix). Some pairs reveal that in his reprises Audubon tried to correct or clarify areas that did not please him in the initial compositions. Sometimes in the second version he focused more on the articulation of the feathers with a different manipulation of media.

In aggregate, the birds at Harvard also tend to have more elaborate settings than the La Rochelle versions. A fair number, for example, have dark brown tree trunks added in heavily applied brown pastel, which also characterize Audubon’s pastels in the years immediately following his visit to France. At times this friable brown pastel has smudged and migrated to the bird and its feathers (Figs. 22–23). Furthermore, in the Harvard versions of the various woodpeckers, their tails do not function as they do in nature, where they support the birds’ postures when clinging to tree trunks. This evidence argues that Audubon added the brown trunks at a later time when he was embellishing the settings and no longer studying the birds themselves. The inscriptions on eleven watercolors in La Rochelle that have taxonomical references from Brisson’s treatise in brown ink, parts of which are mistaken and/or cut—including an Avocet (wherein JJA added a brown pastel rectangular ground to the Harvard version to clarify the feet)—are not repeated on the trio of counterparts at Harvard. Similarly, on ten sheets in La Rochelle there are inscriptions referring to plates in an as yet unidentified ornithological treatise preceded by Pl 1–, five of which are duplicated at Harvard but without this reference (e.g., Figs. 26–27, 30–33), suggesting that they were for the artist’s reference or that they were added by one of the d’Orbignys after Audubon’s departure. In replicating his French pastels of the

Figure 22

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Great Spotted Woodpecker (Pic épeiche), 1805–6 (app. no. 19a)

La Rochelle, Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle
male and female Red-legged Partridge, Audubon made a telling mistake in his inscription.\textsuperscript{102} The single Harvard version of this pair, which he identified as a female (\textit{femelle}),\textsuperscript{103} was, in fact, modeled on the male rather than the female in La Rochelle. Since there is no formula for characterizing JJA’s twenty-nine pairs of counterparts and there are exceptions to most generalizations, the artist no doubt did not work on them in a linear fashion and may have executed some pairs or portions of
Figure 24
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Hawfinch (Grosbec casse-noyaux), 1805–6 (app. no. 12a)
La Rochelle, Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle

Figure 25
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Hawfinch (Grosbec casse-noyaux), 1805–6 (app. no. 12b)
Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Houghton Library
them simultaneously.

To elaborate further, we will discuss in greater depth a few case studies that suggest general tendencies. Among them is Audubon’s greater interest in settings as he matured, a trait manifested in the Harvard sheets, whereas in their French counterparts the birds tend to be more vivid as the result of direct study. In several instances where the artist merely delicately laid in a branch with graphite in the La Rochelle version, he completed it in its Harvard complement (Figs. 24–25). Sometimes in the reprise, JJA went too far, as with the two versions of the Scops Owl (Figs. 26–27), in the second of which he overembellished the setting with too many twisting, gnarled branches and also rendered the patterns of the bird’s plumage in an overly stylized manner. Even more interesting is the pair with the Common Redstart (Fig. 28–29). True to his lifelong prac-
Figure 28
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Common Redstart (Rougequeue à front blanc), 1805–6 (app. no. 5a)
La Rochelle, Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle

Figure 29
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Common Redstart (Rougequeue à front blanc), 1805–6 (app. no. 5b)
Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Houghton Library
tice, the artist laid in not only the bird but also the entire botanical setting, a branch with non-specific berries, in graphite lines on the La Rochelle sheet, which has unfortunately been cropped, whereas in the Harvard example he filled in the contours of the berry branch with pastels. Their colors identify it as a ripening black raspberry, which is native to North America. Coupled with this specific depiction of an American species, his refined application of pastel and careful articulation of its leaves suggests a later completion date, even after his return to America, as does the fact that by filling in the branch and its fruit, JJA partially covered his earlier, lengthy graphite inscription. Moreover, the Harvard Redstart is less animated than its French counterpart. Its plumage is duller, and its claws do not grasp the branch on which it roosts. Likewise, in the pair with a juvenile Woodchat Shrike (see Figs. 20–21)—which the artist executed in an alternative technique and style that represents a departure for him and, fortunately, one he did not pursue—his first rendition of the bird’s feathers is more accurate and less summary, though he clarified its feet in the second.

These same traits are also apparent in the two versions of the adult Woodchat Shrike (Figs. 30–31). Again, the bird is more animated in the La Rochelle version, in which Audubon brilliantly utilized the reserve of the paper to create the reflection of light in its eye (a characteristic of his later watercolors). There are, however, changes in the Harvard variant that suggest JJA was critiquing his earlier effort: he enlarged the width of the branch so that the bird’s feet clasp it more securely, corrected the throat (note the *pentimenti*), and developed the articulation of the feathers. Furthermore, in the second version the artist did not try to repeat the wonderfully textured branch or the dangling spider, nor its web, all of which foreshadow features in his mature watercolors. The hanging moss, which appears in the ornithological illustrations of John Latham (1740–1837) and others from the generation prior to that of Audubon, seems, like the branch, more stylized in the Harvard variant.

Three pair of woodpeckers demonstrate different ways in which the young Audubon over-
Figure 32
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (Pic épeichette), 1805–6
(app. no. 20a)
La Rochelle,
Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle

Figure 33 (below)
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (Pic épeichette), 1805–6
(app. no. 20b)
Cambridge,
Massachusetts,
Harvard University,
Houghton Library
worked his compositions. As previously noted, by adding the tree trunk in dark brown pastel to his second version of the Great Spotted Woodpecker (see Figs. 22–23), his ricordo became muddy, which rubbing has only increased, and the bird’s feet and their juncture with its belly lost. A similar situation occurs with the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (Figs. 32–33),108 in whose initial version JJA indicated the tree via its contours in graphite, with an unfinished area in blue pastel over the feet that he may have also intended to develop into a shadow below the bird. In the second version, the artist overworked the tree trunk and added stylized green moss almost gratuitously. Audubon also applied blue pastel over the black on the shoulders of both birds to give their feathers iridescence and depth, but only the initial version has graphite outlining of the feathers on the bird’s shoulders, a pronounced reflection in the eye, and pentimenti that indicate that the artist was plotting his composition. Moreover, JJA employed different pigments in the second version, including white or red lead in the bird’s crown that has turned gray. In a similar fashion he employed lead pigment in the crest of the Harvard counterpart of the brace of juvenile Green Woodpeckers (Figs. 34–35).109 It also has converted from bright red to gray, suggesting that the two Harvard variants were executed at the same time. The La Rochelle version with an overworked, dark brown tree trunk has been cropped, deleting the bird’s extended tongue capturing ants. In his second version, Audubon attempted to clarify the tree trunk that had become illegible. He also lightened the color of its bark in
order to reveal the bird’s foot and claws as well as the crawling ants and seemingly to reposition the ants on the bird’s tongue. Nonetheless, the graphite underdrawing on the La Rochelle sheet is highly detailed and its bird is anatomically better understood with a more convincing jizz than its “twin” at Harvard.

Audubon also changed the tonality, and perhaps the pigment, of the blue he employed in the Harvard rendition of the Eurasian Nuthatch (Figs. 36–37). As with the second version of the Green Woodpecker, he attempted to lighten the branch in order to set in relief the bird’s feet and the crawling ants (note that in the first version his initials are hidden under the pastel of the tree below the bird’s proper right foot, suggesting that he overworked this area after he thought the bird was completed). Despite JJA’s improvements, the bird itself is less convincing, and its throat and bill are not as successfully delineated and further removed from the model.

An analogous case occurs with Audubon’s two pastels depicting the Tree Creeper (Figs. 38–39), whose La Rochelle version is unfinished. Before completing the bird of the La Rochelle sheet, the artist tried to clarify the tree trunk on which it perches—in order to reveal its feet, buried in shadow, and the ants, which explain its posture and behavior—by applying white pastel over the brown of the bark. Because his attempt was unsuccessful, he abandoned it, without applying the upper layers of pastel to the bird’s feathers, in favor of its Harvard complement in which he clarified the bird’s shadow and the insects it pursues.

Prefigurations of Audubon’s Later Birds and The Birds of America

Although the La Rochelle and Harvard paired pastels contain intimations of JJA’s later works, such as characteristic poses that he would reuse or techniques that he developed further in his complex, multimedia models for The Birds of America, other drawings at Harvard that date after 1806 reveal Audubon’s ever-increasing introduction of watercolor into his mix of media. At first the artist used watercolor tentatively, more or less like a stain,
which he may have blotted in order to apply pastel over it. By combining pastel with wet watercolor, layering it in different manners, the miscibility of the powder in the watercolor both thickened the paint and diminished its identity as pastel. He also frequently wetted his pastel and dabbed it on or applied it with a brush so that the watercolor layer is disguised and difficult to detect without high magnification. As early as 1807–8, the tidal pools and translucency characteristic of watercolor begin to appear in his works, especially in the greens and blues of his compositions.

In 1811, by employing watercolor as the dominant medium in his composition, Audubon scored a triumph with his Carolina Parakeet (Fig. 40). Note the highly sophisticated, glazed green watercolor of the pecan leaves, as well as the
thousands of parallel lines defining the shafts and barbs of the feathers in mixed media. JJA’s mature composition featuring the species (Fig. 41),114 which would be engraved for The Birds of America, dates from c. 1825. In a tour de force of multimedia and synesthesia, which seems to suggest the never-recorded calls of this extinct species, the artist delineated the shafts and barbs of each feather.
Figure 41
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Carolina Parakeet: Study for Havell, pl. 26, c. 1825

New York, New-York Historical Society
er of all seven birds in sparkling graphite with parallel lines running mostly diagonally. The resulting shifting, kinetic sheen and iridescence captures the natural effects of light reflected off the feathers (their shafts, barbs, and vanes) as the birds moved through the cockleburs.

In 1812 he painted in watercolor the red crest and blue feet of the male in a pair of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers (Fig. 42). Their wings are enlivened by scratching out, shimmering graphite lines that create a lifelike surface, and strokes of blue pastel, demonstrating that Audubon knew that simple black does not exist in nature. This work ranks as a quantum leap forward from his earlier woodpeckers (Figs. 4, 11, 22–23, 32–35) and a prefiguration of his mature watercolor of the species, which he executed in 1825–26 and Havell engraved for *The Birds of America* (Fig. 43). His skills as a draftsman in full command of his media and tools is apparent in the white areas of the male’s wing feathers, where he used a tracer, a blunt-ended stylus, to create indentations for the interior modeling lines that lend them a subtle volume. “I have always imagined,” he wrote, “that in the plumage of the beautiful Ivory-billed Woodpecker, there is something very closely
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Ivory-billed Woodpecker: Study for Havell, pl. 66, c. 1825–26
New York, New York Historical Society
allied to the style of colouring of the great VANDYKE [the seventeenth-century painter Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641), known for his panache and full-bodied Baroque palette].

Audubon's use of unadulterated watercolor wash can be isolated in the luminous green, energetic worm that he outlined in graphite on the sheet of the White-breasted Nuthatch, which he drew in Henderson, KY, on 16 February 1813 (Figs. 44–45). It developed out of his pair of pastel studies of the Eurasian species (see Figs. 36–37) and prefigured his model of 1822 for Havell’s plate 152 of The Birds of America (Fig. 46), in which watercolor is the primary medium. For his 1813 work, he elected to use watercolor for the worm because of its transparency, an effect unachievable with pastel. His growing assurance with the medium and his realization of its potential is even more evident in his bravura treatment of the tree bark in the Pileated Woodpecker he painted on 15 October 1814 (Fig. 47), whose broad, free strokes the viewers’ eyes optically fuse.

After his trip to France, Audubon developed rapidly. For example, his brace of Nightingales in La Rochelle and at Harvard each includes a single egg with a shadow in pastel; they are a prelude to his Robin of 1807 in Houghton Library and its two more volumetric eggs, rendered in watercolor and pastel. He created the shadow of the upper egg with boldly applied watercolor that pools beneath the lightly stumped pastel. Likewise, as he continued to develop his mature style between 1806 and 1820, JJA frequently incorporated multiple birds as well as more ambitious narratives and settings into his increasingly intricate, layered tableaux.

ART AND SCIENCE TOGETHER: AUDUBON’S “POSITION BOARD”

Since Audubon did not organize The Birds of America in Linnaean order—a decision buttressed by Buffon’s ideas and his own preference for an organic order closer to that of nature—some individuals have debated his credentials as a naturalist. Ever full of contradictions but eager to learn, Audubon carried with him wherever he traveled a battered copy of Linnaeus’s Systema naturae that had been translated by the English naturalist William Turton (1762–1835) in 1806. Known as the father of modern taxonomy and considered a progenitor of modern ecology, the Swedish botanist, physician, and zoologist Linnaeus laid the foundations for modern binomial nomenclature.
Figure 46
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
White-breasted Nuthatch: Study for Havell, pl. 152, 1822
New York, New York Historical Society

Figure 47
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Pileated Woodpecker, 1814
Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Houghton Library
Though Audubon’s personal volume remains unlocated, he copied and annotated part of Linnaeus’s avian anatomical diagram (Fig. 48) in his “Mississippi River Journal” (Fig. 49) and referred to the Swede’s taxonomy on eight water-colors for *The Birds of America*. JJA drew this diagram in 1820 after his seminal experiences in Cincinnati, where published ornithologies were readily available to him.

Even though he harvested countless birds, Audubon repeatedly stated he preferred to draw from live birds whenever possible, as with the Broad-winged Hawk:

> I put the bird on a stick made fast to my table. It merely moved its feet to grasp the stick...but raised its feathers.... I passed my hand over it, to smooth the feathers.... It moved not.... Its eye, directed towards mine, appeared truly sorrowful, with a degree of pensiveness, which rendered me at that moment quite uneasy. I measured the length of its bill with the compass, began my outlines, continued measuring...and finished the drawing, without the bird ever moving once. My wife sat at my side, reading to me.... The drawing being finished, I raised the window, laid hold of the poor bird, and launched it into the air....

When on his “rambles” or traveling, Audubon toted—in addition to his twin bibles, the *Fables* of the French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695) and Turton’s translation of Linnaeus—his art supplies, portfolios of watercolors, and a tubular tin case for paper. He portrayed this case, monogrammed with an *A*, in his amusing self-portrayal in buckskins as the American woodsman in the background of his Golden Eagle model for plate 181 of *The Birds of America* (Fig. 50). In the end, he wisely deleted it from the print. JJA carried this paper case, together with his gun, violin, and flute, all of which he considered necessities on the frontier, as well as wire to rig up his mounting system.

It was this ingenious, but simple mechanism (Fig. 51) that enabled him to represent birds in natural postures and seemingly alive in a state of suspended animation with uncanny realism. The
device allowed him to focus on anatomical details, which he diligently measured with his compasses and calipers and whose measurements he recorded in the *Ornithological Biography*. Embodying a marriage of science and art, it combined the scientific mounting of specimens with the gridded technique for enlarging and transferring images, which had been known since the Italian Renaissance, was used by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), and was part of the academic curriculum.

Soon after his arrival in Edinburgh in 1826, Audubon first described this drawing board in an article in the *Edinburgh Journal of Science* (1828), and elaborated on it in “My Style of Drawing Birds,” written in 1831 but published posthumously. He also demonstrated his “position board” to the Wernerian Society in Edinburgh in 1826 and to other ornithologists, who were enthralled. Preferring to sketch from live or recently dead birds in life-like attitudes rather
than from flat, simple skins or skins placed over models of wood or cork, he employed a board scored with a grid of horizontal and vertical lines and spiked with wires perpendicular to it on which the specimen could be impaled. The bird was probably manipulated further into position by “skewers...and even common pins came to my assistance” so that it appeared to float in space in the precise position JJA had observed it and he could outline its contours.

This drawing device, or “position board,” as he termed it, could be constructed from readily available materials wherever his travels took him. Although none survive, a young assistant, William Ingalls (1813–1903), later described it. The grid coordinates enabled JJA to calculate proportions and foreshortenings and more accurately to transfer onto paper the attitudes of three-dimensional birds, charged with life.

We can see how he used the device when he executed his two pairs of Wood Ducks for *The Birds of America* (Fig. 52). He portrayed them during his favorite time of year, the “love season,” albeit in at least two campaigns. His portrayal—which resembles two scenes from a longer movie—celebrates some of their remarkable feats in the forest and air. In 1821 in New Orleans, he drew the upper male and female courting and billing on a sycamore branch. He also planned at least part of the lower vignette, later completing it c. 1825, when he had obtained the representative bird he wished to depict, by cutting out a flying male that he had portrayed on a separate sheet and collaging it inside the graphite outline below the two lovers. Perhaps feeling sorry for the lonesome male, he added the female and her feathered nest. Alternatively, he may have envisioned this quartet from the beginning, because the lower pair illustrates the outcome of the upper courting ritual and balances the composition, in which all the circular forms allude to nature’s life cycle. Audubon’s visual narrative also dramatizes the magnificent patterns of the Wood Duck’s feathers. With a superlative command of media, he chose pastel for the soft feathers, black ink for the bold and fluid patterned areas with strong contrasts, graphite for
Figure 52

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Wood Duck: Study for Havell, pl. 206, 1821 and c. 1825

New York, New York Historical Society
delineation and smudged effects, and above all a multi-layering of media (watercolor and pastel) for richness and depth. Audubon’s graphite inscription adjacent to the lower male instructed Havell to modify the composition when he engraved the plate: *The circle around the eye, and the upper Mandible as in the Male above*—. He frequently erased these inscriptions either before the engraving, if they pertained to the gestation of the watercolor or to changing avian taxonomy, or after Havell had engraved the copperplate, if they were JJA’s instructions to his master printmaker.

There is no physical evidence of grids on Audubon’s watercolors in the Historical Society because by this late date he was able to transfer the proportions with his eye and with the aid of mechanical drawing tools. Nevertheless, one occasionally finds short lines or X’s to instruct Havell where to reposition birds for the engraving. The partial grids on a few watercolors are related not to this transfer system for birds but rather to their backgrounds. A case in point is the watercolor of the Common Merganser, whose engraving features a view of Cohoes Falls in western New York, which Audubon had sketched in the summer of 1824. Initially, he had intended this landscape for the watercolor model for plate 401, the Red-breasted Merganser—which has a partially gridded background and the inscription, *View of New York waterfall...here*—but it was replaced in the engraving with a pitcher plant he had drawn on another sheet.

Audubon began every watercolor by outlining in graphite the contours of each bird, but no trace of any grid survives. In some cases JJA also outlined contours with a stylus, or in a few instances anatomical structures, perhaps to transfer the designs to the copperplates or to transfer an earlier composition to the Whatman paper. Believing that within twenty-four hours of death a bird’s feathers had lost seventy-five percent of their brilliant color, he commenced drawing, or at least outlining, immediately, and aimed to finish each individual bird within two days, a goal that he did not always meet.

**AUDUBON’S BIRDS TAKE FLIGHT**

JJA’s watercolors for *The Birds of America* represent a synthesis of decades of field observation and study of visual sources, as well as profound innovations with graphic media. They reveal him as a man for all seasons, because he depicted “the feathered race” not just in springtime and summer but in all of nature’s phases, and with profound philosophical glosses. Audubon’s great work was also a swansong, for it was the last major work on birds with illustrations printed from copperplates. By marshalling his observations, anatomical studies, knowledge of avian habits and physiology, and technical mastery, Audubon achieved in *The Birds of America* his goal: life-like animation. His vision and labor-intensive style radically departed from the canon of natural history and conventional approaches. Standing outside the community of organized science, the self-proclaimed American woodsman, through his investigation of avian behavioral interrelationships, contributed high-decibel excitement and technical virtuosity to ornithological illustration. He also led naturalists away from a purely systematic study of the natural world toward the environmental orientation that prevails today. In the process, he transformed ornithological illustration into an exhilarating fine art that captured the life force of each species. And it is in the early avian pastels in La Rochelle and at Harvard that Audubon embarked on this amazing journey.

Roberta Olson is the Curator of Drawings at the New-York Historical Society, New York.

**AUTHOR’S NOTE**

My thanks especially to Alexandra Mazzitelli—for researching aspects of this article and compiling the Appendix—as well as to Guillaume Baron, Chantal De Gaye, Michèle Dunand, Jean-Louis Lavigne, Lowell Libson, Carie McGinnis, Leslie Morris, Robert Peck, Jeffrey Richmond-Moll, Jeremiah Trimble, and Marjorie Shelley, for generously sharing their expertise on various aspects of my research.
**APPENDIX**

**LA ROCHELLE AND HARVARD DRAWINGS OF THE SAME SPECIES**

1a–b  Figs. 30–31

**WOODCHAT SHRIKE (Pie-grièche à tête rousse)**

MHNLNR, series 29, folio 2, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 160 x 230 mm.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 39.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 310 mm.

2a–b  Pastel and graphite; 175 x 225 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, *hirundo apus. / Martinet; at upper center, Pl - 373.; and at upper right, O—8. / S—1 / G—28.*

Pastel and graphite; 230 x 300 mm.

3a–b  Figs. 38–39

**TREE CREEPER (Grimpereau des bois)**

MHNLNR, series 29, folio 8, no. 3.
Pastel and graphite; 145 x 140 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in graphite, *Le Grimperau; and along lower right edge of branch, L. JJA.*

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 43.
Pastel and graphite on ivory paper; 230 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, *the 7 of June 1805. / Near Nantz. / J.J.A / No 97; at lower center, over graphite, *Le Grimperau. de Mr. de Buffon. / the Creep. of Willughby. —; above, in graphite, erased, *Le Grimperau — Buffon... along lower left edge of branch, Le 7 juin 1805.; and at lower right, Le grimpi. T.[?].*

4a–b  Pastel and graphite; 140 x 180 mm.
Inscribed at lower center in graphite, *Le Rossignol; and along lower right edge of grass, L.J.J.A.*

HL, MS. Am 21, no. MCZ 118, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 220 x 290 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, *No. 43. / Near Nantz the 6 of Jully. / 1805. J.J.L.A; at lower center, Le Rossignol de Buffon. / the Nightyngall.; above, in graphite, erased, *Le Rossignol de Buffon / english Nyghty...[illegible]; and along lower left edge of grass, 6 Juillet 1805.*

5a–b  Figs. 28–29

**COMMON REDSTART (Rougequeue à front blanc)**

MHNLNR, series 29, folio 18, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 100 x 180 mm.
Inscribed at lower left in brown ink, *No. 50. / Near Nantz. august. 1805. / JL.JA; at lower center, Le Rossignol de Murailles — de Buffon. — / the Redstard.; and above, in graphite, erased,... gnol de Murailles....*
6a–c
STONECHAT (*Tarier pâtre*), male
MHNLR, series 29, folio 24, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 150 x 130 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in brown ink over graphite, *Le traquet mâle*.; and along lower right edge of branch in graphite, L.J.J.A.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 14.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 34.; at lower center, *Le Traquet. de Buffon*; and at lower right, Près Nantes 1806.

Pendant: MHNLR, series 29, folio 24, no. 1, female.
Pastel and graphite; 140 x 130 mm.
Inscribed at upper left, in brown ink, [trimmed] ula.; and at lower left, *le traquet femelle*.

7a–b
WHITETHROAT (*Fauvette grisette*)
MHNLR, series 29, folio 27, no. 1.
Pastel and graphite; 141 x 163 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in graphite, *La fauvette*; and at lower right of center, L.J.J.A.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 17.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 300 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 39.; and at lower center in graphite, *La fauvette*.

8a–b
REED WARBLER (*Rousserolle effarvate*), female
MHNLR, series 29, folio 28, no. 3.
Pastel and graphite; 165 x 220 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in graphite, *La fauvette de Roseaux / femelle*.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 16.
Pastel and graphite; 230 x 300 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, Near Nantz. 1805. J.J.A. / No 36.; at lower center, *fauxette de Roseaux femelle de Buffon. / Sedge Bird / femelle of Abin.*.; and above, in graphite, partially erased, over earlier graphite inscrip-

9a–c
BLACKCAP (*Fauvette à tête noire*), female
MHNLR, series 29, folio 29, no. 1.
Pastel and graphite; 135 x 175 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in graphite, *femelle de la fauvette à tête Noir*.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 21.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 300 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 49. / Near Nantz. / 1805.; at lower center, *fauxette à tête Noir femelle — de Mr. de Buffon. / the Black-cap femelle —*; and above, in graphite, erased, *femelle de la fauvette / a tête noir — No 1.er — Buffon. / english the Black-cap femelle*.

Pendant: MHNLR, series 29, folio 27, no. 2, male.
Pastel and graphite; 112 x 142 mm.

10a–b
CHIFFCHAFF (*Pouillot véloce*)
MHNLR, series 29, folio 29, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 110 x 150 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No 35.; and at lower right, *petite fauvette / Jn [Jeune?] ou miue*.

11a–b
REED WARBLER (*Rousserolle effarvate*), male
MHNLR, series 29, folio 29, no. 4.
Pastel and graphite; 120 x 145 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, *fauxette de Roseau Male*.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. MCZ 118, no. 1.
Pastel and graphite; 210 x 300 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No 42.
/ Near Nantz. 1805. / J.J.L.A; at lower center, La fauvette de Roseaux Male de Buffon. / the Sedge Bird Male of Albin. - ; and above, in graphite, partially erased and drawn over, L...ffon. / Sedge...bin.

12a–b Figs. 24–25
HAWFINCH (Grosbec casse-noyaux)
MHNLR, series 29, folio 31, no. 1.
Pastel and graphite; 135 x 175 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in brown ink, Le Gros Bec. Buffon.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 3.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 6.; in graphite, in another hand, [a]; and at lower center, in brown ink, Le Gros Bec de France Buffon. / Prés Nantes 1808.

13a–b
RED-BACKED SHRIKE (Pie-grièche écorcheur), adult male
MHNLR, series 29, folio 31, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 145 x 180 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in brown ink over graphite, L'Ecorcheur Mâle.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 36.
Pastel and graphite; 230 x 300 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 86. / Near Nantz. 1805. / Jully. – J.J.A; at lower center, over graphite, La Linotte Male de Buffon / the greater red headed Linnet — Willughby. – page 191 British Zoology.; and above, in graphite, Linot de Vigne male / 4 de Juin 1805.

14a–b
WOODCHAT SHRIKE (Pie-grièche à tête rousse), juvenile
MHNLR, series 29, folio 31, no. 3.
Pastel and graphite on ivory paper; 120 x 190 mm.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. MCZ 118, no. 4.
Pastel and graphite; 230 x 300 mm.

15a–b
LINNET (Linotte mélodieuse)
MHNLR, series 29, folio 32, no. 1.
Pastel and graphite; 110 x 120 mm.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 8.
Pastel and graphite; 230 x 300 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, Near Nantz. 1805. / J.J.A. / No. 14.; at lower center, over graphite, La Linotte Male de Buffon / the greater red headed Linnet — Willughby. – page 191 British Zoology.; and above, in graphite, Linot de Vigne male / 4 de Juin 1805.

16a–b
TREE SPARROW (Moineau friquet), male
MHNLR, series 29, folio 32, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 125 x 140 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in graphite, Le Friquet male.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 7.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower left in brown ink, No. 13. / Near Nantz. 1805. / J.J.A.; at lower center, Le Friquet Mâle de Buffon. / the Sedge Sparrow. —; above, in graphite, partially erased, Le Friquet. / male; at lower right of center, le 13 Juillet 1805.; and below, pinca de Sau le pincalott [? illegible] Dit o. T.[?].

17a–b
LONG-TAILED TIT (Mésange à longue queue)
MHNLR, series 29, folio 32, no. 3.
Pastel and graphite; 150 x 115 mm.
Inscribed at upper left, in brown ink, Pl- 379.; and at lower center, Parus Caudatus.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 310 x 240 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 5. / Le 22 Janvier 1805.; at lower center, La Mésange a Longue queue — de Buffon. / the Long
tailed Mountain tit-mouse.; and at lower right, Triviale [Triviare?] près nantz / La queue de poile.

18a–b

REED BUNTING (Bruant des roseaux), female
MHNLNR, series 29, folio 35, no. 4.
Pastel and graphite; 120 x 160 mm.
Inscribed at lower right, in graphite, L’Ortolan de Roseaux / reed Sparow — Albin.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 11.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, Near Nantz. 1805. / No 22.; at lower center, L’Ortolan de Roseaux femaille. de Buffon. / the reed Sparrow. femelle — of Albin.; and above, in graphite, L’Ortolan de Roseaux femelle Buffon — / reed Sparow — albin.

19a–b

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (Pic épeiche)
MHNLNR, series 29, folio 36, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 250 x 160 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, L’épeiche ou Pic Varié femelle. Buffon.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 44.
Pastel and graphite; 310 x 240 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 98.; and at lower center, L’Épeiche ou le Pic Varié femelle — de Buffon — / the great Spotted Wood Pecker — — British Zoology —.

20a–b

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER (Pic épeichette)
MHNLNR, series 29, folio 36, no. 3.
Pastel and graphite; 150 x 115 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, Picus Minor.; along lower edge, Le Petit Épeiche Mâle. Buffon.; and at upper right, Pl - 422.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 41.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No 94.; above in graphite, Le 8 Mars. 1806. / Près Nantes [es over z]. 12 to the taile.; and below, at lower center, in graphite, woodpeke.

21a–b

GREEN WOODPECKER (Pic vert), juvenile
MHNLNR, series 30, folio 1.
Pastel and graphite; 270 x 230 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in brown ink over graphite, Le Pic Vert.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 42.
Pastel, graphite and watercolor; 440 x 250 mm.

22a–b

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (Chevalier grivelé)
MHNLNR, series 30, folio 4, no. 2.
Pastel and graphite; 160 x 205 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 74.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 32.
Pastel and graphite; 240 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 74.

23a–b

AVOCET (Avocette élégante)
MHNLNR, series 30, folio 7.
Pastel and graphite; 450 x 305 mm.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 51.
Pastel and graphite on ivory paper; 470 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower, in brown ink, No. 117.; at lower center, over graphite, Lavocette de Buffon. Près Nantes.

24a–c

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE (Perdrix rouge), male
MHNL, series 30, folio 15, male.
Pastel and graphite; 330 x 225 mm.
Inscribed at lower right, in brown ink, Perd / Mâ [trimmed].

MS. Am 21, no. 13, “female” [drawn after male in MHNL].
Pastel and graphite; 470 x 300 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 28.; at lower center, over graphite, La Perdrix Rouge femelle.; and below, J.J.Audubon.

Pendant: MHNL, series 30, folio 14, female.
Pastel and graphite; 290 x 230 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, drix Rouge – / [trimmed] elle –.

Figs. 36–37
EURASIAN NUTHATCH (Sittelle torchepot)
MHNL, series 30, folio 17, no. 1.
Pastel and graphite; 160 x 145 mm.
Inscribed under lower left edge of branch, in graphite, L.JJA; and at lower center, La Sitelle ou Le torche pot.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 40.
Pastel and graphite; 230 x 310 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 93. / Near Nantz. 1805. / J.J.L.A; at lower center, partially over graphite, La sittelle ou Le torche pot. / the Nut robber.; continues in graphite, …femelle Buffon; and above, in graphite, Le 9 Juillet / 1805.

Figs. 26–27
SCOPS OWL (Petit-duc scops)
MHNL, series 32, folio 1.
Pastel and graphite; 200 x 170 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, partially over graphite, Le Scops ou petit Duc / Strix – Sops.; and at upper right, Pl - 333.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 54.
Pastel and graphite; 300 x 230 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No 140.; and at lower center, over graphite, Le Scops ou / Petit Duc. Buffon / Little horned owl. / British Zoology —.

Figs. 26–27
BLACK-HEADED GULL (Goëland)
MHNL, series 49, folio 7.
Pastel and graphite; 300 x 435 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, Goiland.; and at upper right, Brisson Classe 2. / Ordre 23. / Sectn. 1. / Genre 100. / le Goiland – lans.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 29.
Pastel and graphite; 300 x 470 mm.
Inscribed at lower left, in brown ink, No. 67.

Figs. 26–27
BLACK TERN (Guifette noire), female adult non-breeding
MHNL, series 49, folio 11.
Pastel and graphite; 160 x 290 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in graphite, La Goëlette femelle.; and at right edge of grass, L. J.J.A.

HL, MS. Am 21, no. 98.
Pastel and graphite; 260 x 350 mm.
Inscribed along lower left edge of grass, in graphite, Le 12 Juillet 1805.; and at lower center, La Goëlette femelle.

Pendant: MHNL, series 49, folio 10, male breeding.
Pastel and graphite; 160 x 290 mm.
Inscribed at lower center, in graphite, La Goëlette. Mâle.

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NOTES


2. Washington, DC, White House Collection (White House Historical Association), inv. no. 963.385.1 (oil on canvas; 88.9 x 68.6 cm); see William Kloss et al., Art in the White House: A Nation’s Pride, Washington, DC, 1992, p. 97.


4. The New-York Historical Society assigned accession numbers for the complete watercolor models, all beginning with “1863.17.” and followed by the corresponding Havell plate number, e.g., 1863.17.1 for plate 1 (the Wild Turkey), and ending with 1863.17.435. Moreover, Audubon instructed Havell to incorporate into the plate avian elements from four of the alternative watercolors, which the N-YHS assigned accession numbers beginning with “1863.18.”; inv. nos. 1863.18.11 (Yellow-rumped Warbler) in Havell, pl. 153; 1863.18.28 (a Great Black-backed Gull foot) in Havell, pl. 241; 1863.18.35 (Black-bellied Plover), the immature bird in Havell, pl. 334; and 1863.18.37 (Steller’s Eider), the upper part of the bird in Havell, pl. 429. The Pacific Loon of inv. no. 1863.18.27, an early work from 1820, presents a unique case: JJA cut it out around its contour, but deciding not to collage it, instead consulted it for the juvenile in inv. no. 1863.17.346, the model for Havell, pl. 346. In addition, Audubon had Havell use the plant only from inv. no. 1863.18.12 (Bachman’s Warbler) for Havell, pl. 395.

5. N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.30. Watercolor, graphite, pastel, gouache, white lead pigment, black ink, and black chalk, with selective glazing, on paper laid down on card; 951 x 649 mm; see Olson 2012, pp. 93–95, 346–47.

6. N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.386. Watercolor, graphite, pastel, collage, gouache, white lead pigment, and black ink, with scraping, on paper laid down on card; 616 x 908 mm. There was also an intermediate watercolor study: N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.18.29 (watercolor, graphite, pastel, black chalk, gouache, white lead pigment, and black ink, on paper laid down on card; 648 x 941 mm).

7. N-YHS, inv. nos. 1962.40 (watercolor, graphite, and gouache; 327 x 252 mm); 1962.41 (watercolor, graphite, and gouache, with touches of pastel; 327 x 252 mm); and 1962.42 (watercolor, graphite, black ink, and black chalk; 327 x 251 mm). They were published for the first time in Olson 2012, figs. 514–16. However, this article represents the first discussion of their origin and function. Their botanical elements may have been painted by someone else, as was Audubon’s sometime practice. A similar watercolor of an English Robin by JJA in the Harvard Art Museums / Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA (inv. no. 1941.84; watercolor and white lead pigment, over graphite; 280 x 223 mm), has flowers similar to the botanicals in the N-YHS trio. It is signed by the artist and inscribed, Drawn at Green Bank / 1826. Greenbank was the country house of his early sponsors in Liverpool, the Rathbone family; see ibid., pp. 28–29, 434.

8. N-YHS, inv. no. 1962.41 features a bird derived from N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.135 (watercolor, graphite, pastel, gouache, and black chalk, with touches of black ink, on paper laid down on card; 405 x 267 mm); see ibid., figs. 515 and 242, respectively.

9. N-YHS, inv. no. 1966.42 (Gift of Mrs. Gratia Rinehart Waters). Watercolor, graphite, black ink, pastel, and gouache, with scratching out and selective glazing, on paper laid down on Japanese paper; 979 x 645 mm. JJA executed 435 watercolor compositional models for the 435 Havell plates, all of which the Audubons brought to New York when they returned from England in 1839. Most of them were exhibited at the New York Lyceum that year, although according to the catalogue, there was not enough room to exhibit all of them. Between 1839 and 1863 the models for pl. 84 and 155 were lost, and that for pl. 426 (California Condor) also became separated from the group after this trio had been exhibited; see Catalogue of Audubon’s Original Drawings Exhibiting at the Lyceum of Natural History, 563 Broadway, exh. cat., New York, 1839, pp. 8, 11, and 2, respectively. It is clear that the Audubons wanted to keep the group together, which is why it remained intact, with these three exceptions.

10. For an introduction to Audubon’s study of earlier art and commitment to applying that knowledge to representing birds, see Olson 2012, pp. 48–53.


13. For some of the contradictions in Audubon’s complex character, including those involving the killing of birds, slavery, and his own self-image, see Francis Hobart Herrick, Audubon the Naturalist: A History of His Life and Time, 2


17. See Shelley 2012, p. 130, n. 54.

18. David is documented in Nantes only in 1790, soon after Audubon’s arrival. Perhaps the 1790 visit was such a memorable event for the city and local artists that subsequently everyone studied his works, which were certainly the contemporary gold standard.

19. See Audubon 1831–39, vol. 1, p. viii. Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr. (“Audubon’s Drawings of American Birds, 1805–38,” in New York 1993, pp. 3 and 25, n. 5) stated that there is no record of Audubon going to Paris to study with David, suggesting that he worked with a student or admirer at the École Publique et Gratuite de Dessin. Among the local masters were Rêne Chancourtois (1757–1817) and André Claude Boissier (1760–1833), a follower of David.


21. His future wife’s brother, William Gifford Bakewell (1799–1871), described Audubon’s Mill Grove bedroom: “On entering his room, I was astonished and delighted to find that it was turned into a museum. The walls were festooned with all sorts of birds’ eggs, carefully blown out and strung on a thread. The chimney-piece was covered with stuffed squirrels, raccoons, and opossums; and the shelves around were likewise crowded with specimens, among which were fishes, frogs, snakes, lizards, and other reptiles. Besides these stuffed varieties, many paintings were arrayed upon the walls, chiefly of birds.” See Lucy Green Bakewell Audubon, ed., The Life of John James Audubon, the Naturalist, New York, 1869, p. 27.

22. After Audubon’s return to America, the love birds were married at the Bakewell estate on 5 April 1808. True soul mates, they would endure many struggles and wrenching separations over more than four decades to ensure the success of what became Audubon’s magnificent obsession, The Birds of America.


27. See ibid., vol. 1, pp. vii–viii.

28. Pastel and graphite; 254 x 305 mm. It is inscribed (in graphite unless otherwise noted) directly below the bird, chardonneret mâle; below center (at a later date), Le chardon-ner - Buffon / the Goldfinch, thistle-finch. Willughby; at the lower right, La Gerbe ettiers / Mars 1803 - / J J A; at the lower left, in brown ink (written much later), N° 118; and below, Copied Feb. 15, 1825 / Shippingport. A detail of the sheet was published for the first time in Olson 2012, fig. 31.


30. See Francis Willughby, Ornithologiae libri tres, ed. by John Ray, London, 1676; and idem, The Ornithology of Francis
For works in the Muséum de La Rochelle, see the following three articles that appeared in *303: Arts, Recherches et Créations*, 82, 2004: Yvon Chatelin, “Vivants et morts: Les Oiseaux de Mill Grove” (pp. 16–37); Michèle Dunand, “Des Dessins inédits d’Audubon dans les archives du Musée de La Rochelle” (pp. 11–13); and François Meurgey and Marie Dartige, “Audubon: Les Dessins de jeunesse” (pp. 14–15). New evidence since the original tally of birds in the collection was made (quoted in Olson 2012, p. 43) results in slight adjustments to the numbers.


32. For example, he wrote (Audubon 1831–39, vol. 1, p. xix): “I do not present to you the objects of which my work consists in the order adopted by systematic writers. Indeed, I can scarcely believe that yourself, reader, could wish that I should do so; for although you and I, and all the world besides, are well aware that a grand connected chain does exist in the Creator’s sublime system, the subjects of it have been left at liberty to disperse in quest of the food best adapted for them, or the comforts that have been so abundantly scattered for each of them over the globe, and are not in the habit of following each other, as if marching in regular procession to a funeral or a merry-making.”

33. In the later octavo edition (1840–44), he organized his birds taxonomically and also added sixty-five species that had been identified after the 1838 appearance of pl. 435 in the double-elephant-folio edition.


35. For additional information on Audubon’s media, see Shelley 2012, pp. 108–31.


37. See ibid., p. 763 (“My Style of Drawing Birds”).

38. For further discussion, see Roberta J. M. Olson, “Audubon’s Innovations and the Traditions of Ornithological Illustration: Some Things Old, Some Things Borrowed, but Most Things New,” in Olson 2012, pp. 40–107. JJA also consulted illustrations by other ornithologists for models when there was no specimen available because he believed strongly in drawing directly from nature, not memory.

39. For works in the Muséum de La Rochelle, see the following three articles that appeared in *303: Arts, Recherches et Créations*, 82, 2004: Yvon Chatelin, “Vivants et morts: Les Oiseaux de Mill Grove” (pp. 16–37); Michèle Dunand, “Des Dessins inédits d’Audubon dans les archives du Muséum de La Rochelle” (pp. 11–13); and François Meurgey and Marie Dartige, “Audubon: Les Dessins de jeunesse” (pp. 14–15). New evidence since the original tally of birds in the collection was made (quoted in Olson 2012, p. 43) results in slight adjustments to the numbers.


41. Around forty-four or forty-five species (depending on uncertain identifications) appear in both collections, while twenty-nine sheets are versions of the same subject. Several have large swathes of a preparatory wash applied with a large brush to seal the paper fibers from the oil in the pastels. A few have tea stains, which also appear on some later watercolors by Audubon.

42. Audubon may have adopted this practice from bird snares, as demonstrated in a watercolor of 1767 by Sydney Parkinson (1745–1771), who traveled with Captain James Cook (1728–1779) and Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820); see Jonathan Elphick, *Birds: The Art of Ornithology*, New York, 2005, p. 78, pl. 42. Specimens hung by their bill (ibid., pl. 47) suggest an ornithological convention as well. Alternatively, hanging avian specimens belonged to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European still-life traditions for *natures mortes* and hunting trophies.


44. One of these (Musée d’Histoire Naturelle de La Rochelle [hereafter MHNLR], series 29, fol. 16, no. 2; pastel and graphite; 200 x 85 mm), an Oriole, JJA inscribed vertically at the right in brown ink over graphite, Gold finch. It underscores his uncertainty regarding the identities of some New World birds.

45. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 38. Pastel and graphite; 240 x 110 mm.

46. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 4. Pastel and graphite; 260 x 195 mm. Inscribed at the lower center, in brown ink over graphite, wood Seeker / Ko begin. Another sheet with a woodpecker (series 29, fol. 8, no. 2; pastel and graphite; 250 x 140 mm) is inscribed at the right vertically, in brown ink over graphite, wood poo Ker.

47. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 21, no. 1. Pastel and graphite; 270 x 100 mm. Inscribed at the left vertically, in brown ink over graphite, thrais.

48. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 22. Pastel and graphite; 300 x 145 mm. Inscribed at the right vertically, in brown ink over graphite, bleu Gay.

49. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 10, nos. 1 and 2. Both pastel and graphite; 350 x 145 and 320 x 120 mm, respectively.

50. Inv. no. 13 (oil on canvas; 310 x 235 mm); see Hal N. Opperman, *J.-B. Oudry (1686–1755)*, exh. cat., Paris, Grand Palais, 1982, nos. 1 and 2, repr. In 1830 Audubon painted a similar oil, *Trophy of American Game Birds*, now in the Los Angeles Athletic Club; see Gary A. Reynolds, *James Audubon & His Sons*, exh. cat., New York, Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, 1982, no. 35, fig. 39. Oudry frequently drew rare birds, and for his patron, the Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (1717–1785), he depicted a series of creatures in the ducal menagerie; see Vincent Droguet, *Animaux d’Oudry: Collection des ducs de Mecklenburg-
Audubon also drew as living one shorebird, which has been identified unconvincingly as an American species, the Willet, although from its weak feet and non-specific plumage and markings, it was assuredly modeled after a different species. It is inscribed at lower right, in brown ink, with incorrect references to classifications in Mathurin-Jacques Brisson, *Histoire naturelle: géneral et particulière* (London, 1760, whose plates were in d’Orbigny’s possession. See also C. S. Sonnini, *Paris, 1799–1808*, vol. 55, pl. 175.


MHNLR, series 29, fol. 36, nos. 1–3. No. 1 (pastel and graphite; 250 x 105 mm); for details of nos. 2 and 3, see app. nos. 19a and 20a.


See Guérin-Méneville 1839–49.

MHNLR, series 29, fol. 28, no. 1. Pastel and graphite; 110 x 180 mm; further inscribed below, in graphite, *La Rouquette ou La fauvette des Bois*. The five mammals in *La Rochelle* hung by strings—series 9, fol. 24; 14, fol. 5; 14, fol. 7; 14, fol. 8; 15, fol. 14—are inscribed variously, *Milów, Mille Cooe, Phyladelphie*, and *Phyladelphie*, confirming that his practice in America was to work from dead specimens.

MHNLR, series 29, fol. 6, and series 30, fol. 13. Both pastel and graphite; 185 x 75 and 330 x 140 mm, respectively.

MHNLR, series 29, fol. 27, no. 2. Pastel and graphite; 141 x 163 mm.

Audubon also drew as living one shorebird, which has been identified unconvincingly as an American species, the Willet, although from its weak feet and non-specific plumage and markings, it was assuredly modeled after a specimen and may instead depict a European relative; MHNLR, series 30, fol. 4, no. 1. Pastel and graphite; 234 x 208 mm; inscribed at upper left, in brown ink, with incorrect references to classifications in Mathurin-Jacques Brisson, *Ornithologie, ou Méthode contenant la division des oiseaux en ordres, sections, genres, especes & leurs variétés*, 6 vols., Paris, 1760, whose plates were in d’Orbigny’s possession.

See Note 58 above for MHNLR, series 29, fol. 28, no. 1; see Note 60 above for MHNLR, series 29, fol. 27, no. 2.

MHNLR, series 29, fol. 33. Pastel and graphite; 350 x 300 mm. It is inscribed at lower right, in brown ink, *Cardinal huppé Mâle et / femelle*.

MHNLR, series 32, fol. 5. Pastel and graphite; 825 x 345 mm, irregular.

For the competition to achieve lifesize representations of all the birds reproduced within one treatise, see Olson 2012, pp. 69–98.

There are over a dozen pastels of large birds by JJA in *La Rochelle*, but only two other sheets feature representations of deceased, monumental birds hung by a wing. The first (MHNLR, series 30, fol. 9; pastel and graphite; 640 x 340 mm, irregular; inscribed at the lower center, in brown ink, *Cahier*) is either a European Squacco Heron (*Cahier chevelu*) or more likely, due to its blue legs and beak, the juvenile American Little Blue Heron in its calico phase. Newly arrived in America, Audubon may have conflated it with a *Cahier*. The second (MHNLR, series 32, fol. 3; pastel and graphite; 315 x 170 mm) is the North American Barred Owl.


See Theresa Fairbanks Harris et al., “Papemaking and the Whatmans,” in Theresa Fairbanks Harris and Scott Wilcox, eds., *Papemaking and the Art of Watercolor in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Paul Sandby and the Whatman Paper Mill*, New Haven and London, 2006, pp. 82, 61–119 (for the Whatmans). Because it was handmade by different mills, there are variances and discrepancies in the dimensions for double-elephant-size sheets, ranging from only half an inch to several inches. British sources tend to list it around 40 x 26 3/4 inches (1,016 x 678 mm). While most of Audubon’s watercolor for *The Birds of America* have at one time been trimmed, the largest sheet, the Wild Turkey (N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.1), measures 1,002 x 670 mm. John Knill (*English Artists Paper: Renaissance to Regency*, London, 1987, p. 105) noted that the terms “Elephant” and “Double Elephant” existed in the marketplace by 1809 and quoted a letter of that year: “We are very sorry the Plate Elephant you lately send us is too blue and will not answer for the work.... We must beg of you to make us 5 Rms more of Double Elephant Plate, and 8 Rms of Plate Elephant, not to be bluer than the enclosed piece, but the quality to be better if you can, as it runs speck.” By 1804, J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851), Audubon’s near contemporary, used Whatman double-elephant-size paper; see Peter Bower, *Turner’s Papers: A Study of the Manufacture, Selection and Use of His Drawing Papers*, 1787–1820, London, 1990, p. 67, no. 23, for *Edinburgh from Catton Hill* (London, Tate Britain, Turner Bequest: L X H DO3639 / W 348; watercolor, gouache, and graphite on two sheets of originally double-elephant-size paper, laid down one on top of the other; 660 x 1,000 mm). While there is no visible watermark, Bower believes they were produced by the Whatman Turkey Mill during the time of the Hollingsworth & Balston partner...
ship. In the 1790s continental mills, such as Fabriano, were also making paper this size. A future examination of suppliers’ catalogues may yield additional useful information.

70. Another person who may have influenced the youth is the chemist François-René Dubuisson (1763–1836), who, in 1810, became the first curator/director of the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle de Nantes. He had a collection of taxidermy birds that he may have shown to Audubon; see Pierre Watelet, “Jean-Jacques Audubon et le Muséum d’histoire naturelle de Nantes,” 303: *Arts, Recherches et Créations*, 82, 2004, p. 40. Rhodes 2004, p. 27, suggests that Dubuisson may have supplied d’Orbigny with medicines and JJA with art supplies (e.g., pastels).

71. Today in the library of the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle de La Rochelle.

72. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 9. Pastel and graphite; 300 x 200 mm.

73. MHNLR, series 30, fol. 8, no. 2. Pastel and graphite; 190 x 230 mm.

74. One sheet in the collection John James Audubon Letters and Drawings, Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS. Am 21 (hereafter HL, MS. Am 21), no. 2, is dated 22 January 1805. Leslie Morris (“History of the Harris Collection,” in Rhodes et al. 2008, p. viii) posits that JJA probably drew this European Long-tailed Tit from a “mounted or captive specimen on board the ship Hope” as he waited to sail home to Nantes, whereas a caption in the same volume (opposite pl. 82) states that the artist mistakenly wrote 1805 instead of 1806, a natural habit in January at the start of the year. Furthermore, Audubon’s ship seems to have sailed much later in March, as discussed in Note 96 below. JJA also predated a depiction of a grouse in the Ernst Mayr Library, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter MCZ), MCZ 118, no. 9 (pastel and graphite; 400 x 500 mm). He inscribed it without a day, June 1805, suggesting that he wrote the inscription when he no longer remembered the specifics; the paper is watermarked 1810 (he may have copied an earlier drawing from 1805 and thus inscribed that year); see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 51; and Olson 2012, p. 105, n. 108.

75. Thanks to Alexandra Mazzitelli for this bird count.

76. HL, MS. Am 21, no. 95. Pastel and graphite; 550 x 430 mm; see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 112.

77. A letter to Peale from Abraham B. De Peyster (1763–1801), dated 9 February 1799, in the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, indicates that Peale either had or was considering buying a Casowary or Casowary specimen before 1800; see Peale-Sellers Family Collection, 1686–1963, MSS. B.P.31, Series 1: Correspondence: 1675–1960, “Concerning the sale of a casowary.” Thanks to Alexandra Mazzitelli for finding this citation.


79. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, inv. no. 1878.12 (Gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison [Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection]; oil on canvas; 2.64 x 2.03 m). Sellers (1980, p. 121) reproduces the watercolor study (Detroit Institute of Arts) of the long room in Peale’s Museum, begun by Peale and completed by Titian Peale (1799–1885), which the artist used when painting the background of the oil.

80. JJA must have visited the Peale Museum multiple times, as he refers to it and its specimens, or mentions that he borrowed a specimen from the Peales, in four of the five volumes of the *Ornithological Biography* (all except vol. 2).

81. See Audubon (ed. Irmscher) 1999, p. 793 (“Myself”); see also Rhodes 2004, p. 147; and Olson 2012, pp. 24, 120.

82. HL, MS. Am 21, no. 75. Pastel and graphite; 520 x 670 mm; see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 113.

83. MCZ, Ornithology 335908 (mounted with 335909). Rhodes et al. (see ibid.) suggested the possibility of this same model or, alternatively, that Audubon drew the pair in 1805–6 in France, where they were popular captive birds.

84. See Faxon 1915, pp. 126–27.

85. HL, MS. Am 21, no. 76. Pastel and graphite; 510 x 670 mm; see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 114.


87. N-YHS, inv. nos. 1863.18.40 (pastel, black chalk, watercolor, graphite, black ink, and gouache, with touches of scratching out, on paper laid down on card; 648 x 973 mm), and 1863.17.31 (watercolor, graphite, pastel, and black ink, with touches of gouache, scratching out, and selective glazing, on paper laid down on card; 646 x 973 mm); see Olson 2012, pp. 64–65, 152–53.


90. HL, MS. Am 21, A.

91. For Lawson and his opposition to Audubon, see Bayard H. Christy, “Alexander Lawson’s Bird Engravings,” *Auk*, 43, no. 1, 1926, pp. 47–61. JJA owned two copies of Wilson. The first (John James Audubon Museum, Henderson, Kentucky, inv. no. 1938.830–37) has its initial six volumes inscribed, *John J. Audubon Louisiana 1816*, and is heavily annotated. The second (Rare Books, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, inv. no. 105523) was a gift to JJA from
the Heppenstall family of Upperthorpe, near Sheffield, in 1837. Most of Audubon’s library was destroyed in New York’s Great Fire of 1835.

92. For Audubon’s relationship with Wilson and his work, as well as other ornithologists and pertinent bibliography, see Olson 2012, pp. 40–107.

93. See George Edwards, A Natural History of Uncommon Birds, 4 vols., London, 1743–51. Edwards, who was taught by Catesby, included a large number of North American birds in his study. Linnaeus used Edwards’s descriptions to name around 350 bird species.


95. Willughby worked with the botanist John Ray (1627–93). See George Edwards, A Natural History of Uncommon Birds, 4 vols., London, 1743–51. Edwards, who was taught by Catesby, included a large number of North American birds in his study. Linnaeus used Edwards’s descriptions to name around 350 bird species.

96. For example, Audubon’s pastel of a European Long-tailed Tit in Houghton Library (MS. Am 21, no. 2), which is dated 22 January 1805 (Le 22 janvier 1805), was previously mentioned in Note 74. Through a comparison with its counterpart in La Rochelle (MHNLR series 29, fol. 32, no. 3; see app. nos. 17a–b), which was assuredly executed first, we can prove that JJA dated it incorrectly. We know from a letter written by his father on 12 March 1805 that his son had not yet arrived and, in fact, that he did not even know his son was en route to France (see Herrick 1968, vol. 1, pp. 118–20). Furthermore, it is incomprehensible that he would have drawn this European species prior to the arrival of his ship, the Hope, in Nantes, probably in early April 1805. One suspects that he wrote 1805 by mistake, a natural occurrence at the beginning of a new year, 1806. He also postdated some of his works, for example, the Hawfinch (HL, Am 21, no. 3, a pair with MHNLR series 29, fol. 3, no. 1; see app. nos. 12a–b), which he drew in France and inscribed 1808, long after his return to America in 1806. Audubon’s account of his trip on the ship Hope, minus any specific dates, occurs in his later autobiography (“Myself”), which depended on his now-lost journals. In it, he noted that the Hope, which was based in New Bedford (he does not name its captain), sailed out of New York, only to put in for a week at its home port for repairs, and nineteen days later entered the Loire River and anchored at Paimboeuf; see Audubon (ed. Irmscher) 1999, pp. 779–80 (“Myself”). Rhodes (2004, p. 240) writes that the Hope sailed on 12 March 1805. His source was Ford 1988, pp. 59–60, which states that on 12 March 1805, the Hope was ready to sail, citing the National Archives, Washington, DC, which have now been moved to regional offices.

97. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 31, no. 3, and MCZ 118, no. 4 (for which, see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 78). See also app. nos. 14a–b.

98. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 36, no. 2, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 44 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 93). See also app. nos. 19a–b.

99. MHNLR, series 30, fol. 7, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 51 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 104). See also app. nos. 23a–b.

100. The other two pairs are: MHNLR, series 29, fol. 3, no. 1, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 26; MHNLR, series 49, fol. 7, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 29. For the Harvard examples, see Rhodes et al. 2008, nos. 97 and 101, respectively. See also app. nos. 2a–b and 28a–b.

101. The MHNLR sheets are: series 29, fol. 2, no. 2; series 29, fol. 3, no. 1; series 29, fol. 32, no. 3; series 29, fol. 36, no. 3; and series 32, fol. 1. For the Harvard complements, see Rhodes et al. 2008, nos. 77, 97, 82, 96, and 99. See also app. nos. 1a–b, 2a–b, 17a–b, 20a–b, and 27a–b.

102. MHNLR, series 30, fol. 15 and 14, respectively. See also app. nos. 24a and 24c.

103. HL, MS. Am 21, no. 13; see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 107. See also app. no. 24b.

104. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 31, no. 1, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 3 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 73). See also app. nos. 12a–b.

105. MHNLR, series 32, fol. 1, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 54 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 99). See also app. nos. 27a–b.

106. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 18, no. 2, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 22 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 89). See also app. nos. 5a–b.

107. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 2, no. 2, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 39 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 77). See also app. nos. 1a–b.

108. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 36, no. 3, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 41 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 96). See also app. nos. 20a–b.

109. MHNLR, series 30, fol. 1, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 42 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 95). See also app. nos. 21a–b.

110. MHNLR, series 30, fol. 17, no. 1, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 40 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 80). See also app. nos. 25a–b.

111. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 8, no. 3, and HL, MS. Am 21, no. 43 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 81). See also app. nos. 3a–b.

112. See Shelley 2012, p. 119.
with selective glazing; 430 x 280 mm; see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 41; and Olson 2012, pp. 66–67. One inscription records his perfectionism and frustration with capturing the plumage of the bird:

poor imitation of Colour the natural Bird being extremely Glossy and Rich.

114. N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.26. Watercolor, graphite, pastel, gouache, and black ink, with scraping and selective glazing, on paper laid down on card; 645 x 475 mm; see Olson 2012, pp. 150–51.

115. HL, MS. Am 21, no. 31. Pastel, watercolor, and graphite; 590 x 500 mm; see Olson 2012, pp. 150–51.

116. N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.66. Watercolor, pastel, black ink, graphite, gouache, and white lead pigment, with selective glazing and outlining with a stylus, on paper laid down on card; 972 x 637 mm; see Olson 2012, pp. 75, 182–83.


118. HL, MS. Am 21, no. 28. Pastel, graphite, and watercolor; 430 x 280 mm; see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 19. (JJA's earliest known renditions [1803–5] of a pair of dead male and female of the species really underline how rapidly he developed; MHNLR, series 30, fol. 17, nos. 4 and 5.)

119. N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.152. Watercolor, graphite, pastel, and black ink, on paper laid down on card; 603 x 451 mm; see Olson 2012, pp. 81–82, 246–47.

120. HL, MS. Am 21, no. 33. Pastel, watercolor, and graphite; 550 x 430 mm; see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 29.

121. MHNLR, series 29, fol. 17, no. 1, and MCZ 118, no. 2 (for which see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 90). See also app. nos. 4a–b.

122. HL, MS. Am 21, no. 46. Pastel, watercolor, and graphite; 250 x 340 mm; see Rhodes et al. 2008, no. 16.


124. MCZ, Ernst Mayr Library, Spec. Coll. MCZ F117, p. 2. The reverse of the diagram contains a bracketed line endearingly inscribed, Length of My Lucy’s foot —.


126. Detail of N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.181. Watercolor, pastel, graphite, black ink, and black chalk, with touches of gouache and selective glazing, on paper laid down on card; 968 x 648 mm; see Olson 2012, pp. 50–51, 260–61.


129. The artist remarked (Audubon 1828, p. 50; Audubon [ed. Irmscher] 1999, p. 754 ["Method of Drawing Birds"]) that he had grids of equal dimension “affixed both on my paper and immediately behind the subjects before me.” This probably reflected an earlier practice; later he no longer needed it on the paper.

130. N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.206. Watercolor, graphite, pastel, collage, and pen and black ink, with touches of gouache, scraping, and selective glazing, on paper laid down on card; 967 x 657 mm; see Olson 2012, pp. 266–67.

131. He instructed others to use this system more literally. There is a grid at the lower right on a watercolor of a young raccoon in the American Museum of Natural History, New York (inv. 4797, no. 64), probably for the insertion of another unexecuted study, perhaps by his younger son, John Woodhouse Audubon (1821–1862). The young raccoon of this sheet was not used in the imperial folio edition of The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America (1845–48), but was superimposed on the plate with the adult in the smaller edition.

132. N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.331. Watercolor, graphite, pastel, black chalk, gouache, and pen and black ink, with scratching out and selective glazing; 610 x 937 mm; see Olson 2012, fig. 393.

133. See ibid., fig. 150.

134. N-YHS, inv. no. 1863.17.401. Watercolor, pastel, pen and black ink, graphite, black chalk, and gouache, with scratching out and selective glazing; 638 x 949 mm; see ibid., pl. 106.

135. See ibid., fig. 149.

136. See, for example, N-YHS, inv. nos. 1863.17.19, 1863.17.66, 1863.17.68, 1863.17.70, and 1863.17.76.

137. Audubon’s belief that the feathers of dead birds fade markedly or uniformly after death is not shared by conservators or ornithologists, who hold a more nuanced view (Mary LeCroy, Research Associate at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, personal communication, 2011); see Ellen Pearlstein and Lionel Keene, “Evaluating Color and Fading of Red-shafted Flicker (Colaptes auratus cafer) Feathers: Technical and Cultural Considerations,” Studies in Conservation, 55, no. 2, 2010, pp. 81–94, for recent research on color changes in feathers.